

Sealed with a Sandal

When Fairytales Come True – Part IX

Ruth 4:1-12

Introduction

Warren Wiersbe began his exposition of Ruth chapter 4 with these insightful words:

The book of Ruth opens with three funerals, but closes with a wedding. There is a good deal of weeping recorded in the first chapter, but the last chapter records an overflowing of joy. Now, not all of life's events have a happy ending; but this little book reminds the Christian especially, that it is God who writes the last chapter.ⁱ

And in this particular book, the last chapter could not be more dramatically different than the first chapter. When the curtain rose on this drama, there were three funerals and three widows. It will close with a wedding scene and a baby boy.

Now, when we began our study through the book of Ruth, I referred to the fact that most dads have spent quite a bit of time reading fairytales to their little girls. These old fairytales are the best. And if you recall what you read, eventually the prince would have to do something heroic. Whether it was climb a tower, or search throughout his kingdom, or slay the dragon, eventually the prince had to take charge.

I can remember frequently sitting with my daughter on my lap before bedtime and she would want me to read her a story from one of her large, colorful books. Tired from my day, I would say, "Tell you what, I'll make up a fairytale tonight."

She would break into a big smile at the thought of a homemade tale. And I would say, "Once upon a time . . . the end."

I would then lay my head back on the chair as if I was going to sleep.

"Daddy, that's not a real story! You can't have once upon a time and the end, you gotta have something in the middle."

I am afraid we, especially older Christians who have read all the stories before, tend to treat the Bible like this.

- Do you remember when Esther became the queen? Yes, and she saved her people. What happened in the middle?
- Do you remember when Daniel was thrown into the lion's den? Yes, he survived. What happened in between?
- Do you remember when Jesus went to the cross? Yes, and He rose again. What happened in the midst of all of that?

Do you remember the story of Ruth? Yes, she was a widow and Boaz married her – great.

This is like saying, "Once upon a time . . . the end." Not so fast – we still need to see the prince take charge.

One of the most intriguing scenes in this drama is when Boaz challenges the other redeemer in a strategic battle of wits – and Boaz wins.

Thus far, in our study of the book of Ruth, there has been three months of courtship and a midnight proposal. Boaz and Ruth have whispered of their love out there on the threshing floor.

We have, however, discovered a problem. There is another prince, who has legal right to the princess. This is when it gets even more interesting!

It is no wonder that J. Vernon McGee once said that the book of Ruth reads like a novel [a fairytale], but it is not fiction.ⁱⁱ

This actually happened, once upon a very long time ago. This fairytale is about to come true.

First, however, the prince must win his bride.

Boaz Wins His Bride

Look at Ruth 4:1-2.

Now Boaz went up to the gate and sat down there, and behold, the close relative of whom Boaz spoke was passing by, so he said, “Turn aside, friend, sit down here.” And he turned aside and sat down.

He took ten men of the elders of the city and said, “Sit down here.” So they sat down.

Now, let us set this scene for what will happen next.

The city gate was literally the open area inside the town entrance where business was generally transacted.ⁱⁱⁱ

It was at the gate that elders sat and heard legal cases and passed legal judgment. It was at the city gate that civil plans were discussed. What was decided at the gate was the final word.^{iv}

This, by the way, illuminates what Jesus Christ meant when He promised His disciples in Matthew 16:18,

“. . . I will build My church, and the gates of Hades will not overpower it.”

In other words, Jesus is saying, “All the plans, schemes, decisions, and even the final word of hell will not be able to overpower My church.”

Now notice that Boaz has invited ten elders to sit down and hear this matter. Ten elders were the minimum needed to fill a quorum for a legal proceeding, so as soon as he has ten, Boaz is ready.

At just this moment, as verse 1 informs us, the other kinsman redeemer just happens to walk by. Obviously, the author of this little love story wants us to know that God is providentially arranging the details behind the details that Boaz has thought through.

Notice verse 3.

Then he said to the closest relative [literally, the “Goel”; the kinsman redeemer], “Naomi, who has come back from the land of Moab, has to sell the piece of land which belonged to our brother Elimelech.”

Most believe the word “brother,” in this context, is a broad term indicating clan relation, rather than an immediate family member.

So these are the opening lines of Boaz. “Hey, you know that piece of land Naomi has inherited from her deceased husband? You know, she can’t do anything with it on account of the fact that her sons also died. You’re the next in line, if you want it. You ought to redeem it.”

Now if Boaz were a poker player, he would win at every hand. Talk about a “poker face” – he was cool and undisturbed.

Not that I know anything about playing poker, just for the record. I cannot even play Rook that well. My daughter loves to beat me every chance she can get. When I get a good card in my hand, everyone can read delight all over my face and my hands even quiver; everyone knows I just got a match.

This is not the case with Boaz. He is as cool as a cucumber.

Look at verse 4.

So I thought to inform you, saying, “Buy it before those who are sitting here, and before the elders of my people. If you will redeem it, redeem it; but if not, tell me that I may know; for there is no one but you to redeem it, and I am after you.”

Can you imagine how fast his heart is beating? “Hey, I just thought I’d let you know that Naomi has a piece of land for sale. If you want it, go ahead and buy it, since you’re first in line, but if you don’t want it, well, I might as well buy it.”

You may have tried to mask similar emotion as you interviewed for a job that you really wanted. It offered twice the pay, three times the vacation, and a company car. You acted cool and composed during the interview, but on the inside, you were down on your knees saying, “Please give me this job.”

Then, when they say, “We’ll hire you. When can you start?” you say, “Well, let me check my calendar and financial obligations,” rather than, “I’ll start today!”

Inside, Boaz is on his knees saying, “Please don’t redeem this property.”

The truth is that Boaz knows the man will want to. This is why he starts with the land and not with the two widows. He wants the last news to be negative and more likely to overpower the positive news, instead of the other way around.

This is the reason that when someone says, “Do you want the bad news or the good news first?” we normally say, “Give me the bad news first.” We know that no matter how bad it is, it will be followed by good news that will more than likely compensate for the bad news.

Boaz is starting with the good news. He shrewdly knows that the following bad news will probably obliterate the good news and render it meaningless.

“Hey, a piece of land just came on the market and you’ve got first dibs on it. Are you interested?”

The man answers in verse 4b.

... *And he said, “I will redeem it.”*

You had better believe it.

I am sure Boaz’s heart skipped a beat, but from studying his strategy, I believe he fully expected it.

Now watch this – in verse 5.

... *“On the day you buy the field from the hand of Naomi, you must also acquire Ruth the Moabitess, the widow of the deceased, in order to raise up the name of the deceased on his inheritance.”*

This is classic!

Evidently, this potential kinsman redeemer has not heard about Ruth.

Notice the way Boaz eliminates any enthusiasm this man has at the thought that he has just stumbled upon a great deal, by adding one negative thought upon another. Look at verse 5 again, a little slower.

- *“On the day you buy the field from the hand of Naomi, you must”* – note this, “you must”;
- *“also acquire Ruth”* – “Who is she?” – *“the Moabitess”* – our ancient enemies;
- *“the widow of the deceased”* – it could have been the cooking!
- *“in order to raise up the name of the deceased”* – in other words, “have a child” – why?
- *“to raise [him] up on his inheritance”* – in other words, “so you can give the child this same piece of land that you just purchased as their inheritance.”

Boaz says, “Oh, by the way, if you redeem the land, then you have to marry a Moabitess who never had a child, and give her a child, and raise him, and then, when he reaches independence, give the land back to him as his inheritance.”

In other words, “Whatever you buy, you’ve got to give it away later! Just wanted you to know that, friend to friend.”

So, as quickly as this guy said, “I’ll buy it,” he is now looking for the fire escape.

- He has to raise a child.
- He has to purchase land.
- He has to care for Naomi.
- He has to marry a foreign woman from Moab.
- He has to give away the land later on.
- He will lose whatever he has invested in this piece of property.
- And the son he might have with Ruth will not have his name, but the name of the mother’s deceased husband.

Who would want to do such a thing as this? Only one person – the man who happens to be in love with the widow! This overrules everything.

Look at verse 6a.

The closest relative said, “I cannot redeem it for myself, because I would jeopardize my own inheritance. . . .”

This is a long way of saying, “I can’t afford to do all that.”

This relative says, “I don’t want to jeopardize my own financial standing with a purchase that becomes a debt. I can’t potentially sully my clan with mixed Gentile and Jewish offspring, especially a Moabitess. I can’t afford to do that.”

This man goes on to say the words that Boaz is hoping upon hope to hear. Notice in verse 6b, he says,

“. . . Redeem it for yourself; you may have my right of redemption, for I cannot redeem it.”

The Hebrew text records, “And Boaz says, ‘Yeeha!’”

This is the second time “yeeha” has appeared in the Hebrew text. You will have to take my word for it!

Now notice verses 7-8.

Now this was the custom in former times in Israel concerning the redemption and the exchange of land to confirm any matter: a man removed his sandal and gave it to another; and this was the manner of attestation in Israel.

So the closest relative said to Boaz, “Buy it for yourself.” And he removed his sandal.

What an interesting custom this is.

In the Old Testament, shoes and feet symbolized ownership and possession. The Lord gave mankind the rule over creation. David the psalmist put it this way,

. . . You [God] have put all things under his feet (Psalm 8:6b)

The people of Israel were told by the Lord,
Every place on which the sole of your foot treads shall be yours [as an inheritance] . . . (Deuteronomy 11:24a)

In fact, the reverse was just as meaningful. In Exodus 3:5, when Moses met with God at the burning bush, God had Moses remove his sandals as a symbol that Moses owned nothing and that God was sovereign ruler alone.^v

So when this near relative took off his sandal and gave it to Boaz, it was a symbol that the man was not going to own the land. He would surrender his right to claim Ruth and the land as his possession.

The sandal transfer indicated this transfer of power. This relative was literally saying, “Boaz, you can walk in my sandals; you can have my right as your own; you can walk in the path in my place.”

Look at verses 9-10.

Then Boaz said to the elders and all the people, “You are witnesses today that I have bought from the hand of Naomi all that belonged to Elimelech and all that belonged to Chilion and Mahlon.

“Moreover, I have acquired Ruth the Moabitess, the widow of Mahlon, to be my wife in order to raise up the name of the deceased on his inheritance, so that the name of the deceased will not be cut off from his brothers or from the court of his birth place; you are witnesses today.”

This is legal language which Boaz wants in the minutes. He has a quorum of elders and witnesses from among the people who have gathered around. He does not want any misunderstanding, so he repeats every possible detail, including all the names of the parties involved.

Can you imagine what the other kinsman redeemer is thinking now? He knows that Boaz had this all planned.

It does not matter to him, however, because he did not want his name or family inheritance jeopardized!

By the way, do you happen to know the name of this barefoot redeemer?

No. No one does.

The man who did not want to jeopardize his name through connection with Ruth; who wanted to protect his name so much that he avoided the divine right of law that was his – his name has been forgotten.

Did Boaz ruin his name? Not on your life.

Years later, in fact, after Boaz and Ruth had died, when Solomon built the massive temple to God’s glory, two bronze columns stood freely on the outer porch and every man or woman who walked between them could see the names of two men etched into the columns – one name on the left column and one name on the right column. These were names whose meanings represented the character of God; names of men who had lived out godly character. One of the names etched into these two columns was the name, “Boaz”.

Who was the other barefoot redeemer? We do not know. But throughout history, we have been told the story of a prince named Boaz and a princess named Ruth.

Now all the people respond with prophetic precision in verse 11.

All the people who were in the court, and the elders, said, “We are witnesses. May the Lord make the woman who is coming into your home like Rachel and Leah, both of whom built the house of Israel; and may you achieve wealth in Ephrathah and become famous in Bethlehem.

They have no idea how their words will come true.

Ruth will become the great grandmother of King David. Boaz and Ruth will continue the line through which our Lord Jesus Christ will come – the great Kinsman Redeemer.

Now, Ruth chapter 4 does not give us any details of the wedding; the wedding garments, the feasting, the celebrating. It simply tells us that the bride and groom were together at last.

The prince has rescued the princess in the end. This fairytale has had a happy ending.

However, why would this godly Jewish man be open to and interested in this foreigner? Why would a godly man risk jeopardizing his good name by

mixing it up with a Moabitess; by having children that are half-Jew and half-Gentile? Why would he want to risk having his name whispered about when he rode into town that this was the man who married a former idolater? Why would this prince risk his reputation?

We are not told.

Let me suggest the reason. Boaz trusted Ruth's commitment to Israel's God. She had not converted for position, money, or advantage. In fact, following after God had meant that Ruth walked away from every possible source of security. The virtue of her testimony was to him, *the* appealing factor.

Ruth also reminded Boaz of someone. He already knew the testimony of a Gentile woman who had left her country, her heritage, and her idols to follow after the God of Abraham – his own mother.

Boaz's mother had followed after Israel, converting from idolatry to faith in the true and living God after the walls of Jericho fell before the Israelites. Later, a Jewish man by the name of Salmon married his mother, a foreign Gentile. And they will both be listed in the genealogy of Jesus Christ in Matthew chapter 1.

Boaz was willing to do the very same thing his father had done years before.

In addition, Boaz was not deterred by Ruth's past. He knew the testimony of his sinful mother who left her sinful life and devoted herself to the laws of God's holiness and purity. He had heard this

testimony from his own mother's lips as she explained that she had been known throughout the city of Jericho as one of the resident prostitutes named Rahab. He knew the pain this caused her and the gratitude she felt for God's grace.

Boaz also knew that his father had been willing to risk his good name by marrying a woman with a past. But more importantly, he had married a woman with a present devotion to God. Like father, like son.

Think of it – Boaz is not afraid to trust his future children to the care of a former Gentile idolater because he had been a child raised by a former Gentile idolater.

God had prepared Boaz's heart to see the potential in Ruth by having him raised by a former prostitute who had given her life to God. Boaz's mother was a woman who would be known throughout history, and even to this day, as "Rahab, the harlot". But she was a woman who would be listed centuries later in Hebrews chapter 11 for her great faith.

Jesus Christ redeems sinners – people with a past – and it has not sullied His name yet. It demonstrates His great love, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us (Romans 5:8).

Christ not only redeems sinners, but makes them a part of His bridal party; members of His family – and then, uses them to stand as testimonies of what His grace can do!

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ⁱ Warren W. Wiersbe, Be Committed (Victor Books, 1993), p. 51.

ⁱⁱ J. Vernon McGee, Ruth: The Romance of Redemption (Thomas Nelson, 1943), p. 14.

ⁱⁱⁱ A. Boyd Luter and Barry C. Davis, God Behind the Seen (Baker, 1995), p. 67.

^{iv} Stanley Collins, Courage and Submission (Regal Books, 1975), p. 33.

^v Robert L. Hubbard, The Book of Ruth (Eerdmans, 1988), p. 251.