

March 9, 2008

“Jesus Christ, Our Kinsman-Redeemer”
Ruth 3:1-18

FCF: Feeling God to be at a distance

PROPOSITION: (magnet) The LORD has been and continues to be our “kinsman-redeemer.”
(anchor) Thus, we can trust and follow Him in all aspects of our lives.

SCRIPTURE INTRODUCTION:

I didn’t watch much of it but it was “80’s Week” on “American Idol” this past week. Which meant that the current crop of contestants were crooning tunes from my formative years. Thankfully, none of them sang Bette Midler’s “From a Distance” (which, come to think of it, may have been early 90’s). Perhaps you remember the song. The thrust of it is there are so many troubles down here. But not to worry. We can take comfort in the fact God is watching us – from a distance. I’ve never understood the appeal of that song. It’s certainly not the vocals. And it’s certainly not the lyrics.

God watching us from a distance? What comfort is that? Thankfully, the song has it completely wrong. God is not distant, far oft removed. He is here, now, with us.

SCRIPTURE READING: [Ruth 3:1-18](#)

PRAYER FOR ILLUMINATION

SERMON INTRODUCTION:

Here’s where we are. Chapter 1 – Elimelech took his wife, Naomi, and sons from Bethlehem to Moab. There he died. His sons took Moabite wives. Then they died. Naomi is bitter, a childless widow in a foreign land. She heads home. Her daughter-in-law, Ruth, goes with her. In chapter 2, Ruth sets out to find food. She “chances” to meet a relative of Naomi, a man named Boaz. And Naomi begins to see the kindness of the LORD expressed to her through Boaz. Light begins to dawn. Hope is being restored.

Which brings us to chapter 3. Naomi is becoming concerned for Ruth. Will she find a home, a husband of her own? The harvest is now over. Several weeks have passed. Whatever hope Naomi had that Boaz would intervene further is diminishing. So she comes up with a plan to move things along – the plan we read of just a moment ago.

What we’re going to look at this morning is the way this man Boaz foreshadows our Lord Jesus. I’m sure many of you are aware of the Old Testament prophecies verbally predicting His work. But there other ways we see this as well. Think of it this way. In her book Mystery on the Desert, Maria Reiche describes a series of strange lines made by the Nazca in the plains of Peru, some of them covering many square miles. For years, people assumed these lines were the remnants of ancient irrigation ditches. Then in 1939, Dr. Paul Kosok of Long Island University discovered that their true meaning could only be seen from high in the air. When viewed from an airplane, these seemingly random lines actually form enormous drawings of birds, insects, and animals.

People often think of the Bible as a series of individual, unconnected stories. But if we survey the Scriptures as a whole, we discover that they actually form one great story of redemption – from the opening scenes of Genesis to the final chapter of Revelation. Weaving through all the diverse strands of the Bible is a divine story line, an overarching story of God’s sovereign grace and purpose to send a Savior into this world – not just prophesied but also anticipated in the persons, events, and institutions of the Old Testament. And one of those anticipations comes in this man, Boaz – a “kinsman-redeemer” – showing Jesus Christ to be our “kinsman-redeemer” and encouraging us to trust and follow Him in all aspects of our lives. How? Let’s look at it together.

I. JESUS CHRIST, OUR KINSMAN

First, how is Jesus our kinsman? And how does Boaz help us see that? Let's look at the counsel we see Naomi giving to Ruth here in vv.1-5 (READ Ruth 3:1-5).

A) *Ancient Customs*

Naomi is thinking of ancient customs. Boaz is a kinsman, their "relative."

1. Explanation of the levirate marriage

What Naomi had in mind was the "levirate marriage." The idea was this. If a man died without children, the name of the dead man was perpetuated through the widow's marriage with another man and through her then having children "for" the dead man.

2. Implications

The implications being this – the great importance of the family name.

B) *Unfolding Events*

That's the background for this plan and the events leading up to it. You may recall earlier, Naomi prayed for Ruth to, in fact, marry again (READ Ruth 1:9a). In the LORD's providence, this plan will prove to work towards the answer of that very prayer.

1. The specificities of plan

The plan is straightforward. Harvest season having come to an end, it was time to thresh the barley, a task comfortably done late in the day. Ruth is to go down, looking and smelling her best – not rushing or initiating too soon but waiting until the right moment.

2. The vagueness of the plan

But for all the straightforwardness, there is a vagueness as well. There are ambiguities here, some double entendres. What does Naomi mean by "uncovering," his "feet," and the need to "lie down" beside him? And all at the threshing floor, a place known for illicit liaisons? Given how these words are used elsewhere, it could be taken as a bit risqué. Then there's the risk – both to Ruth's safety as well as to her reputation.

What's going on here? A few things. First, we see not just Naomi's concern for Ruth in coming up with this plan but Ruth's devotion to Naomi in going along with it. But then this as well – the grounds for the plan resting on Boaz's status as their kinsman. He is a *kinsman*-redeemer (READ Ruth 2:1, 20; 3:2a). It is the pedigree of Boaz that qualifies him to perform this role as a *kinsman*-redeemer for Ruth and Naomi.

Application:

The connection? It is Jesus' pedigree that qualifies Him to perform that same role for us (READ Hebrews 2:14-18). Our hope is through our Kinsman, our *kinsman*-redeemer, His relationship to us – the Son of God having come into this world as a man.

Which then gives us confidence and courage in being kinsman for each other. Think with me. For followers of Christ, the bonds now go beyond just the extended family to the covenant community. Having a *kinsman*-redeemer, we are freed, impelled, and enabled to be kinsman to one another. To rejoice with those who rejoice, to weep with those who weep. To share one another's burdens. To ask, "*How are you?*" really wanting to know. To ask "*How can I help?*" really committing to come alongside. Having a *kinsman*-redeemer frees, impels, and enables us to do that, to take such steps, such risks, to be kinsman. For we can rely upon Him and go to Him, even when it's hard.

Illustration:

Let me illustrate this. I was reading an article on George Washington this past week. The author made the point that we tend to deify such men, envisioning them as somehow super-human. Which really then makes them unrelatable. But it was not that Washington literally "could not" tell a lie. To whatever extent the man was honest, he

was *choosing* not to tell a lie. What's interesting is some of the background of his reputation for such self-control and integrity. It came about because of his very real struggles and his hard-won successes in facing temptations – women, power, influence.

Look, Washington can help us by his example. But that's as far as it goes. How much more a living Savior – tempted like us yet without sin? Jesus is our Kinsman. He knows and can relate. He rules and can help. We can trust and follow Him all the more.

II. JESUS CHRIST, OUR REDEEMER

Yet Jesus is also our kinsman-*redeemer*. And we see this foreshadowed in Boaz as well. Look with me at the dialogue between Ruth and Boaz (**READ Ruth 3:6-13**).

A) *Ancient Customs*

Here again, we have to consider the backdrop of some ancient customs.

1. Explanation of the role of the goel

Boaz is referred to and knows himself to be a “redeemer,” a GOEL. This was one within a family charged with the redemption of property that had been sold by a poor relative, the redemption of persons who had been sold into slavery, the avenging of the blood of a murdered relative, and even serving as a trustee for payments due to wrongdoing.

2. Implications

The implications of all this was a sense of family solidarity and community, a duty to care for and protect each other. All in the context of covenant loyalty – with the LORD and one another. The theme being one of redemption, setting things right. And at a cost.

B) *Unfolding Events*

Such is the background for these events as they continued to unfold.

1. Ruth – what she did and said

Which brings us to Ruth and what she said and did. We need to take care not to read any more or less into this than we should. What does the author actually say? Remember the critical role of dialogue in Hebrew narrative. Most likely, given everything we know about Ruth and Boaz, she simply uncovered his legs and then lay down beside them. When he awoke, she then made her desires clear – not a night of passion but a promise of marriage. Such was what was behind the allusion to “spreading his wings” – an image of betrothal and an answer to his own prayer from back in chapter 2 (**READ Ruth 2:12**).

In any case, Ruth's request is a bold one. Boaz is not under legal obligation for there is this other man. And Ruth's position is weak. She is speaking as a woman, younger, and a field hand – all strikes against her in that culture. All of which points to her HESED, her faithful loving-kindness, all the more. Naomi wanted a husband for Ruth. Ruth wanted a child for Naomi, an heir. Which is why she appeals to Boaz as she does.

2. Boaz – how he responded

And he knows that. And is overwhelmed by it. He greatly praises her. And makes great promises to her. Boaz demonstrates HESED here as well, taking on the cost of caring for a widow, raising a child, and then later giving up the land he had redeemed to that child.

Again, all at great cost to himself. But it was deemed to be worth it all.

Illustration:

In the spring of 2001, Ken Waters slept in his own bed for the first time in 19 years. Nineteen years before, he had been sentenced to life in prison after being convicted of first-degree murder. Devastated, his sister, Bette Anne, was convinced of her brother's innocence and refused to accept the outcome of the trial. A single mother of three, she then went to law school for the express purpose of overturning her brother's conviction.

After studying past convictions overturned by DNA evidence, Bette scoured the courthouse to see if any such evidence was available from her brother's trial. Her heart was pounding as she awaited the response from the courthouse clerk. Within minutes she was informed that the DNA evidence was still intact. There was only one more question. Would the evidence exonerate her brother? The testing that followed clearly showed this was not Ken Waters' DNA. He was a free man. It was an emotional scene as Ken's mother and sister, Bette Anne, wept and embraced him. Bette's devotion had freed her brother – though at great cost to herself. But it was worth every bit of sacrifice.

Application:

That's how Boaz viewed his role as the kinsman-redeemer for Ruth and Naomi. And how Jesus views His for us – worth every bit of sacrifice. Boaz was called upon to redeem, to preserve the family land and line. And Jesus? (**READ Galatians 4:4-5**).

Our hope is not just in a kinsman but a kinsman-*redeemer*. A hope that sustains in all struggles, that brings confidence and courage in all crucibles. Let me encourage you, let me urge you to take this to heart. Does He know your struggles? Yes, He is your Kinsman! He is related to us, one of us, feeling for us. But does He care? Yes, He is your Redeemer! He did not just risk for us but He died for us (**READ Romans 5:8**).

Make this the grid, the template, the lens through which you see. Apply it to every arena, every struggle. Jesus is your kinsman-*redeemer*. And He can be trusted.

CONCLUSION:

Truth be told, as charming as it is, this is really not the love story of Ruth and Boaz. And, while a case could be made that the main character is more Naomi than Ruth, it's really not the story of Naomi either. This is the story of the LORD's HESED, the faithful loving-kindness of God for His people. He has shown it in His providential preserving and governing all things, His provision for our needs. And He has shown it in His Son – in the humiliation of the Incarnation and in the excruciation of the cross. For Jesus did not just risk His life for us. He gave it. Why? (**READ John 3:16**) As part of that "world" for which He came, that should move us to trust and to follow Him.

I spoke of Washington. Perhaps it's fair we balance that with a story of Lincoln. Some of you have heard me tell this before. It's said that President Lincoln once went to a slave auction. There he saw, standing bravely before the crowds, a beautiful young woman about to be sold. Her future was precarious and uncertain. And so, after the bidding began, Lincoln bought her. He then said to her, "*You're free.*" She had no concept of what that meant. Her whole life had been lived in bondage. Freedom? "*What do you mean?*" she asked. "*I'm setting you free. You can go.*" She still struggled to understand. "*You're free to go wherever you want with whomever you want.*" The words began to sink in. And, as the light dawned, she said, "*Then I choose to go with you.*"

There is such an opportunity set before each of us even now. God is not "at a distance." He is with us, for us, alongside us. He is not at a distance. Jesus is our "kinsman-redeemer." Go with Him. Acknowledge your need of Him, His work for you on the cross, and the benefit of that work is then yours. He then welcomes you into the family. And you then are an outcast no more. His love for us is so great, He has been long at work preparing the way even through events such as this, even through the imagery of a man like Boaz and what we learn through his life. Jesus has been and forever will be our "kinsman-redeemer." And we can trust and follow Him even now.

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