
Fullness – Of Redemption and Restoration

Ruth 4⁴

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Introduction

So we come to the final episode. I know that some of you are new to our tale and some of you have missed an episode or two. So I want to take a moment to set the stage before we come to Episode 4 – Fullness – Of Romance and Redemption

A Structure of the Story

The story is constructed on a common Hebrew literary device known as a chiasmic structure. Rather than a nested outline like we use, it is a series of parallel structures. It was used as both a verbal and a visible framework.

- A – Devastation of Naomi’s Family
- B – Decisions by Naomi’s Relatives
- C – Return in Bitterness and Emptiness
- D – Meeting of Ruth and Boaz
- C – Presentation in Hope and Fullness
- B – Decisions by Ruth’s Redeemers
- A – Restoration of Naomi’s Family

A Summary of the Story

From fullness to emptiness and bitterness, God’s Fatherly love has directed His severe providences to bring two widows home at harvest. In the midst of destitution and neediness diligence and faithfulness are guided by the hidden providences of God to the fields of a kinsman-redeemer whose godliness and maturity is on grand display. His kindness and generosity provide fullness while his affections begin to attach themselves to the young maid from Moab.

But the case must be presented to this humble man, so a carefully planned programme is put into motion. In the midst of the night, the maid presents herself and her need to the man, to his great surprise and joy. While there is the problem of a nearer kinsman to redeem, Boaz commits himself to see that all is well. In his great wisdom, he sends Ruth home, her garment full to remind Naomi of a fullness to come through this maid and man.

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And so we come to episode four. It is somewhat different in that it has two distinct scenes, each with their own structure. We will tell the story, following that structure.

A Marvelous Redemption

(v.1-12)

The opening scene takes out to the gate of the city of Bethlehem. There the promise of Boaz to redeem his beloved is fulfilled. But of course, the nearer kinsman must have the opportunity to accept or reject this responsibility. As Naomi expected, Boaz sets out that very morning to bring this to a resolution.

¹ Now Boaz had gone up to the gate and sat down there. And behold, the redeemer, of whom Boaz had spoken, came by. So Boaz said, "Turn aside, friend; sit down here." And he turned aside and sat down. ² And he took ten men of the elders of the city and said, "Sit down here." So they sat down. ³ Then he said to the redeemer, "Naomi, who has come back from the country of Moab, is selling the parcel of land that belonged to our relative Elimelech. ⁴ So I thought I would tell you of it and say, 'Buy it in the presence of those sitting here and in the presence of the elders of my people.' If you will redeem it, redeem it. But if you will not, tell me, that I may know, for there is no one besides you to redeem it, and I come after you." And he said, "I will redeem it." ⁵ Then Boaz said, "The day you buy the field from the hand of Naomi, you also acquire Ruth the Moabite, the widow of the dead, in order to perpetuate the name of the dead in his inheritance." ⁶ Then the redeemer said, "I cannot redeem it for myself, lest I impair my own inheritance. Take my right of redemption yourself, for I cannot redeem it."

⁷ Now this was the custom in former times in Israel concerning redeeming and exchanging: to confirm a transaction, the one drew off his sandal and gave it to the other, and this was the manner of attesting in Israel. ⁸ So when the redeemer said to Boaz, "Buy it for yourself," he drew off his sandal. ⁹ Then Boaz said to the elders and all the people, "You are witnesses this day that I have bought from the hand of Naomi all that belonged to Elimelech and all that belonged to Chilion and to Mahlon. ¹⁰ Also Ruth the Moabite, the widow of Mahlon, I have bought to be my wife, to perpetuate the name of the dead in his inheritance, that the name of the dead may not be cut off from among his brothers and from the gate of his native place. You are witnesses this day." ¹¹ Then all the people who were at the gate and the elders said, "We are witnesses. May the LORD make the woman, who is coming into your house, like Rachel and Leah, who together built up the house of Israel. May you act worthily in Ephrathah and be renowned in Bethlehem, ¹² and may your house be like the house of Perez, whom Tamar bore to Judah, because of the offspring that the LORD will give you by this young woman."

The Elders Assembled

(v.1-2)

The scene opens with the gathering the necessary parties. Boaz goes up to the city gates where this sort of official business was conducted. As he is there, *behold* the providence of God for the nearer kinsman wanders by! Boaz greets him and invites him to sit down.

Boaz also gathers 10 of the city leaders (elders) together to make the transaction official. They gather to sit and to adjudicate what is about to transpire. Certainly, there would have been a sense of growing excitement and interest as it is now evident that Boaz is about to do something requiring legal sanction. He has now convened an authoritative

tribunal to witness and make official whatever transpires. And from the narrative itself, there is a growing crowd of interested on-lookers.

The Case Presented

(v.3-4)

Boaz makes the formal presentation to the nearer kinsman. Once again, I think his strategy reflects both his humility and integrity. He first presents the land as the essential issue in the transaction. Naomi has returned without a male heir nor any current prospects, so she is going to sell her land. Before it goes on the market, the kinsman-redeemer can buy it. This would keep it in the family generally, generate income for living and protect it for a future buy-back.

He also is clear that this is a formal request with his own interest and stake presented. In essence, Boaz wants to know if the nearer kinsman is going to exercise his option so that Boaz may proceed if he does not. He wants this man to know that this transaction will be formal and final as it will be done before the council of elders and with the witnesses who were standing around.

The Positive Response

(v.4c)

The nearer redeemer affirms his willingness to redeem the land. We are not told whether he is thinking in terms of his obligation before the Lord or his opportunity for his wealth. He does seem to see both as it unfolds. But initially, he is willing to redeem Naomi's land.

It would be very interesting to know how fast Boaz' heart is beating now. People being what they are, I'll bet the crowd is holding their breath.

The Implications Revealed

(v.5)

Now Boaz plays his trump card. The kinsman-redeemer will not only purchase the land, but he will have a further obligation. Not only is Naomi's inheritance at stake, but so is the family name. The kinsman-redeemer will acquire Ruth, the Moabite with the responsibility to provide for her and to give her children, not in his own name, but rather in the name of Elimelech so that the family name may be preserved.

Here the kinsman-redeemer's second responsibility is brought to the fore. He is obtaining the land to protect it for Naomi's future. And, he will become responsible to father children through Ruth who will not bear his own name, Further, he will be financially liable for Ruth and that child until the child's adulthood.

The Negative Response

(v.6-8)

This responsibility carries very little opportunity with it quite a bit of risk. Since he is already married he cannot put his natural children's inheritance at risk. I am not sure whether he was concerned about his wife's response to all this, but he is emphatic that he will not accept if it entails acquiring Ruth. Thus, he refuses his own right and assigns it to Boaz. He cannot and so Boaz may.

In order to certify that a person has the authority to act in the matter and understands the finality of what is being decided and affirmed, the person was to remove a sandal as they spoke and to give it to the other person. This sandal then became an attestation to the fact of the transaction. The author notes that this was a tradition in the “olden days”. Here is an intimation that the book was written much later in Israel’s history.

So, the nearer kinsman removes his sandal and gives it to Boaz while affirming that he is not interested in exercising his first option as the redeemer.

The Case Concluded

(v.9-10)

Boaz then turns to the council of elders and the crowd standing around and calls on them to be witnesses that he is exercising the right. I imagine that this was not said in a somber, judicial, disinterested tone. This is a shout! This is the beginning of the sweetest providences and unexpected blessings that he could imagine. He has acquired all that belongs to Elimelech. He now holds their property and the responsibility for Naomi.

And Ruth is his as well. All through this episode notice how often Ruth is referred to as *the Moabite*. Yet here he is declaring that he will not only act as the kinsman-redeemer, but he will marry Ruth, *the Moabite*, and perpetuate the name and family of Elimelech. Now you better understand what he is doing here. He is in essence saying that their firstborn son will carry the name and inheritance of another. He will ensure that the name and the inheritance of Elimelech are preserved. Here his love for God in His Law and His love for Ruth intersect with a glad acceptance and affirmation of his standing as the kinsman-redeemer.

The Elders Affirmation

(v.11-12)

All of those around, the elders and the people respond with an affirmation and with a blessing. They will all be witnesses of this great moment, of this great deed of loyalty and love. You can be sure that this story was repeated over and over again down through history. “I was there, that day, you know. I was standing right there on that spot. Boy, you could see it on Boaz’s face when he knew he had won. He was almost beside himself. But you know what a man of dignity he was. Yet we all were thrilled that it had all worked out for him.” This sort of story was repeated over evening fires, generation after generation until in one son or daughter, the Spirit of God moved with sovereign power so that what had been told was put to writing.

But more importantly here is the great hope and blessing that is given to Boaz. There are four major aspects to this blessing.

The desire for Ruth to be a successful mother (v.11a). Rachel and Leah were the mothers of the tribes of Israel. Having 12 sons would have been an extravagant blessing in their minds. So they long for the same for Ruth and Boaz.

The exhortation to act worthily in the entire region surrounding Bethlehem (v.11b). This exhortation is grounded in Boaz's demonstrated godliness, integrity and maturity. May he continue to act worthy of God's name and character.

The expectation of fame and reputation in Bethlehem itself (v.11c). The blessing here is that of having a name or renown, of being someone respected and sought out as one who walks with God and is blessed by God.

The hope for children and family enlargement (v.12). Because of the similarity to the situation of Tamar and Judah where a foreign woman bears a child through a kinsman-redeemer, the blessing here connects them to the history of Israel.

Unquestionably, Ruth is here accepted as one of God's people in full standing. Although Gentile born, clearly she is connected to the national and family lineage. While the structure here may be a typical covenantal and marriage blessing, surely the content is fitted for realities of Boaz and Ruth's union. What a glad day it was when with the joy of all the people, the sheltering wing of Yahweh gathered in a maid of Moab under the sheltering wing of her kinsman-redeemer.

A Joyful Restoration

(v.13-18)

This scene now brings the episode and the book to its climatic resolution. I love the understatement of the Bible. After all this hardship, work, hope and planning, the Bible just simply says, "She became his wife." In that rather simple sentence is great love and loyalty, devotion and delight, union and communion.

¹³ So Boaz took Ruth, and she became his wife. And he went in to her, and the LORD gave her conception, and she bore a son. ¹⁴ Then the women said to Naomi, "Blessed be the LORD, who has not left you this day without a redeemer, and may his name be renowned in Israel! ¹⁵ He shall be to you a restorer of life and a nourisher of your old age, for your daughter-in-law who loves you, who is more to you than seven sons, has given birth to him." ¹⁶ Then Naomi took the child and laid him on her lap and became his nurse. ¹⁷ And the women of the neighborhood gave him a name, saying, "A son has been born to Naomi." They named him Obed. He was the father of Jesse, the father of David.

The Bearing of a Son

(v.13)

So they are married. And God attends their marriage with His divine blessing. Here, our author for the first time, *records* the direct intervention of God. Before, His hard and sweet providences have been subtly alluded to. Now, it is God who gives her conception. It is clear that we are to understand that up till now, with Mahlon, God had withheld her conception. His hidden providences are now made clear. She who was barren now, at this time, in this moment, in this way, bears the son that God has given.

The Blessing upon the Son

(v.14-15)

The women come forward once again to pronounce a blessing. This is (and continues to be) a dramatic device. This is like the chorus in the background of an opera whose singing both comments on the action and carries the theme along. So it is here.

The blessing is announced to Naomi. God has moved on her behalf for the fame of His own reputation. He has advanced His own name through his providences and provision. God has brought this son into her life to bring to completeness her fullness. He will restore and refresh. There is a clever ambiguity here where the intent and blessing of God is wholly mixed with the blessing and bounty of the child. God will restore life and tenderly nourish living in old age through this son.

And there is a rebuke as well. She had not valued Ruth, her love or her loyalty. As one writer put it, “At the beginning of the story Naomi is too consumed by her bitterness to acknowledge Ruth’s presence; here she is too satiated by her contentment.” (Webb, *Five Festal Garments*, p. 50). Yet Ruth was more to her than seven sons. This Moabite maid, married to her late son, now brings out of the emptiness and loneliness of death and destitution, fullness and love. Yes the son who is being born is amazing – but that ought to pale in comparison to the stunning love of Ruth.

You see, the true love story here is not just Boaz and Ruth. The true love story here, the greatest illustration of love in Ruth is Ruth’s love and loyalty for Naomi. While we tingle at the unexpected and humble love of Boaz, I am in awe of Ruth. Now take this the right way – we might be able to love our spouses or our children in this way, but Ruth in this way loves a *mother-in-law*. Here is a selfless, artless, unexpected and fiercely devoted love that gained nothing and gave everything.

The Baby in Naomi’s Arms

(v.16)

Here is ultimate fullness. Naomi’s arms and lap are full of a son. Now we see what has been hinted at through the book. The heart wrenching plight of Naomi is not just death of a husband, loss of her children, poverty in a foreign land and emptiness and bitterness in coming home. She has no heir, no son, no grandchild. And here is the culmination of her fullness – she nurses the child in his infancy who will nourish her in her frailty.

The Naming of the Son

(v.17)

The women who rejoiced at the return of Naomi and the redemption of Ruth, now give this child a name. They call him Obed. Here is where, as one author has written, the “unexpected pathway to joy though shattered dreams.” (Larry Crabb) Here is a son who ends barrenness in Ruth and bitterness in Naomi.

The Significance of the Son

(v.17b-22)

Why the book Ruth in salvation history? Is this more than just a story about a daughters-in-law, mothers-in-law, love, romance and even intimations of kindred redeemer?

¹⁷ And the women of the neighborhood gave him a name, saying, “A son has been born to Naomi.” They named him Obed. He was the father of Jesse, the father of David.

¹⁸ Now these are the generations of Perez: Perez fathered Hezron, ¹⁹ Hezron fathered Ram, Ram fathered Amminadab, ²⁰ Amminadab fathered Nahshon, Nahshon fathered Salmon, ²¹ Salmon fathered Boaz, Boaz fathered Obed, ²² Obed fathered Jesse, and Jesse fathered David.

O, yes. Here is the significance of the son of Ruth and Boaz. He is the grandfather of David, the King.

Can't you see around the flickering firesides of Israel as this story was first told and later read, the delighted sigh at this sweetest providence and sure provision? Ah, David our greatest King was Obed's grandson. The genealogy here is book ended by the sons of kinsman-redeemers born to Gentile women. From Perez to Obed to David, God is powerfully preserving and protecting His people. If God will do this bring about David, what will He do to bring about the Messiah?. And now that our Messiah Redeemer has come, what will God do to bring about the culmination of His promises and the consummation of our hopes?

God will work in the miracles and in the mundane. thus we come to the fullness of the story of Ruth. God has moved in miracles and amazing exhibitions of His power for His people. And God moves in the unexpected love and loyalty of a Moabite maid to accomplish His purpose. How much of the long years of dutiful diligence will be unveiled in glory as the outworking of God's delight in the ordinary of our lives.

We also see, as God is at pains to show throughout the Old Covenant, that His grace is not just for Jews, but for Gentiles as well. Echoing throughout the Old Testament is the constant refrain that "the best is yet to come." The best is yet to come in a full and final sacrifice. The best is yet to come in a high and holy Redeemer. The best is yet to come in the glory of an exalted Ruler. The best is yet to come in grace and gospel to all the people groups. The best is yet to come in a new heavens and a new earth. The best is yet to come to gaze on Jesus' face.

Reflect and Respond

This is a story about God:

This is a story about the God who is sovereign over all, whose providences are working to serve the pleasures of His will and purposes of His glory.

This is a story about the God who is to be glorified in everything, whose greatness and gladness give significance to the ordinariness of life. He is ever working to show us His glories in deaths and in births, in hardships and harvests, in hard work and in resting, in love and romance and marriage, in sons and daughters. There is in all these things something and Someone greater than ourselves.

This is a story about the God of surprises, whose will and power are bent to bring about the man after His own heart, King David, through the unexpected kindness and mercy of a Moabite maid, Ruth.

This is a story about the God who redeems, whose only beloved Son came as the kinsman-redeemer of His people. He paid the price and penalty for their sin, not with silver or gold or human wealth, but with inestimable treasure of His life in His blood.

This is a story about the God of wonders, whose plans and purposes are served by His power for good of His people and glory of His Name. He moves through the bitter and sweet providences to transform the emptiness of our sin into the fullness of our salvation.