

POWER

“. . . the gospel . . . is the power of God unto salvation . . .” (Romans 1:16)

REDEMPTION'S SWEET SONG

Wade L. Webster

From Genesis to Revelation, the message of the Bible is that of redemption. With each passing book, redemption's song grows louder until it finally climaxes in the book of Revelation. The book of Ruth is a brief, beautiful verse in redemption's sweet song. The song begins softly in chapter one (*Ruth 1:11-13*) and reaches a crescendo by chapter four. Fifteen times in the final chapter the words "redeem," "buy," and "purchase" appear (*Ruth 4:4-10*).

The book of Ruth is a book about redemption. It is a book about one who needs redemption (Ruth) and about one who is willing to provide it (Boaz). Does this story line sound familiar? It should. After all, this is our story.

As one looks through the window of the book of Ruth, the scarlet thread of redemption is clearly visible. In the third chapter, Ruth asked Boaz to spread his skirt over her (*Ruth 3:9*). Although the night air was cold, Ruth wanted more than a physical covering. She wanted redemption. She was asking Boaz to be her goel or kinsman-redeemer.

Goel is a prominent word in the Old Testament. It appears approximately 118 times. A goel could redeem in four senses. He could redeem a family member sold into slavery (*Lev. 25:47-49*), land sold under economic difficulty (*Lev. 25:23-28; cf. Ruth 4:1-12; Jer. 32:6-10*), the family name by virtue of a levirate marriage (*Deut. 25:5-10; Ruth 4:5, 10; Gen. 38; Lk. 20:27-35*), or a brother's honor by avenging a slain kinsman (*Num. 35:19-27*). Levirate marriage was at the heart of the love story of Ruth.

In addition to the covering that Boaz could provide, Ruth wanted the covering that only God could give. She wanted God to spread His skirt of salvation or robe of

redemption over her (*Ruth 2:11-12; cf. Ezek. 16:8; Mt. 23:37*).

There were three requirements of a goel or kinsman-redeemer. First, he had to have the pedigree to redeem. He had to be a near kinsman. Second, he had to have the power to redeem. He had to have the financial resources to pay the required price. Third, he had to have the prerogative to redeem. He had to be willing to incur the debt of the transaction. As space allows, let's examine each of these things more fully.

The Pedigree To Redeem

The first requirement for being a kinsman redeemer was that a man be a near kinsman (*Lev. 25:25; Deut. 25:5-10*). The book of Ruth makes clear that Boaz met this qualification. Consider the declarations of the three major characters:

- Naomi said, "*The man is near of kin unto us, one of our next kinsmen*" (*Ruth. 2:20; cf. 3:2*).
- Ruth said, "Spread therefore thy skirt over thine handmaid; for *thou art a near kinsman*" (*Ruth 3:9*).
- Boaz said, "*And now it is true that I am thy near kinsman: howbeit there is a kinsman nearer than I*" (*Ruth 3:12; cf. 4:4-6*).

Clearly, by the admission of all, Boaz met the first requirement. In like manner, in order to be our goel or kinsman redeemer, Jesus had to be a near kinsman. Did Jesus meet this qualification? Is He closely related to us? The writer of Hebrews declared plainly that He is. We read,

"Forasmuch then as *the children are partakers of flesh and blood, he also himself likewise took part of the same;*

that through death he might destroy him that had the power of death, that is, the devil; And *deliver* them who through fear of death were all their lifetime *subject to bondage*. For verily he took not on him the nature of angels; *but he took on him the seed of Abraham*" (*Heb. 2:14-16; cf. 2:9-11*).

Clearly, Jesus met the first condition. He had the pedigree to redeem.

The Power To Redeem

Ruth and Naomi were too poor to redeem themselves. They came back to Bethlehem "empty" (*Ruth. 1:21*). They needed a kinsman with the ability or power to help them. Boaz had the resources to redeem. He was "*a mighty man of wealth*" (*Ruth 2:1*). In like manner, the price of our redemption was very high. Furthermore, like Naomi and Ruth, we were powerless to pay the price demanded. God alone had the power to pay. He too was mighty in wealth (*Isa. 9:6; Eph. 3:8*). Unlike Boaz, the price demanded of Him was not silver or gold, but His only begotten Son (*1 Pet. 1:18-19*). Furthermore, it was not a widow that needed redemption, but the whole world (*John 3:16; Rom. 3:23*).

The Prerogative To Redeem

The third requirement of a kinsman redeemer was the prerogative to redeem. If you know the rest of the story of Ruth, then you know that not everyone who had the pedigree and the power to redeem had the prerogative to do so. The kinsman who was nearer than Boaz was unwilling to redeem the property of Elimelech when he learned that redeeming it included marrying Ruth and raising up seed to Elimelech (*Ruth 4:1-6*). He was willing to redeem the land but not the lady, the dirt but not the damsel, the ground but not the girl. Warren Wiersbe observed that "it's

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worth noting that the nearer kinsman tried to protect his name and inheritance; but we don't even know what his name was or what happened to his family." Boaz and his family we know well (*Mt. 1*). Boaz was willing to redeem Ruth. He declared, "And now, my daughter, fear not; I will do to thee all that thou requirest" (*Ruth. 3:11*). He would do the part of a kinsman to her (*Ruth 3:13*). Why was Boaz willing to incur the cost of redeeming Ruth? It seems clear that it was because he loved her and wanted to make her his wife (*Ruth 3:10*). Naomi picked up

on his interest immediately (*Ruth 2:20-22; 3:16*). Where had Boaz learned such sacrificial love? Perhaps, he had learned it from the love that his father had for his mother Rahab. Perhaps, you know her best as Rahab the harlot (*Mt. 1:5*). Like Boaz, Jesus had the prerogative to redeem us. He willingly laid down his life for us (*John 10:11, 15, 17-18; cf. Isa. 53:12; Phil. 2:8; Tit. 2:14; Mt. 20:28*). Unlike the unnamed kinsman, Jesus wasn't worried about marring his inheritance (*2 Cor. 8:9*). Like Boaz, He made us a part of His inheritance (*Rom. 8:17; Eph. 1:11, 18*). Why was Jesus willing to incur such cost to redeem us? Clearly,

He did so because he loved us and wanted to make us His wife (*Eph. 5:2, 25; 1 John 3:16; John 15:13; Rev. 1:5*).

As you can see, the book of Ruth is a wonderful verse in redemption's sweet song. It explains the role of the kinsman-redeemer better than any other book in the Bible. Let's thank God for our goel. Let's give thanks that Jesus had the pedigree, the power, and above all, the prerogative to redeem us.

Wiersbe, Warren W. **The Bible Exposition Commentary: History.** Colorado Springs, Colorado: Victor, 2003, p.199.

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I AM RUTH THINE HANDMAID

Wade L. Webster

When Boaz awoke on the threshing floor and asked who was at his feet, he received answer, "I am Ruth thine handmaid" (*Ruth 3:9*). "Handmaid" means "maid-servant" or "slave girl." Both Ruth's position at Boaz's feet and her plea for him to spread his skirt over her demonstrate that she possessed a servant's heart. In the book, Ruth willingly made herself a servant of Naomi, Boaz, and God. As individuals today who are supposed to be the servants of God and man, it behooves us to study the story of this great servant.

A Faithful Servant

Three times Naomi attempted to get Ruth to turn back to Moab (*Ruth 2:8, 12, 15*). Although the temptation to go back to her homeland must have been strong, Ruth refused to leave Naomi. In fact, Ruth's words to Naomi demonstrate a kind of faithfulness so admired that they have often been used in marriage ceremonies (*Ruth 1:16-17; cf. Rom. 7:2; Mt. 19:9; Mal. 2:16*). As you know, marriage is about leaving, cleaving, and weaving (*Gen. 2:24*). How sad it is that some have changed the "till death do us part" of the traditional marriage vow to "as long as love shall last." These individuals know nothing of the faithfulness of Ruth. Ruth's statement to Naomi can be broken up into three parts:

- **The plea** "Intreat me not to leave thee, or to return from following after thee."
- **The promise** "For whither thou goest, I will go: and where thou lodgest, I will lodge: thy people shall be my people, and thy God my God: Where thou diest, will I die, and there will I be buried."
- **The punishment** "The Lord do so to me, and more also, if I ought but death part thee and me" (*Ruth 1:17*). Ruth's commitment to Naomi was so strong that she bound herself under a curse.

Clearly, Naomi took Ruth's promise seriously. After all, when she saw that Ruth was "steadfastly minded to go with her," she left off speaking to her (*Ruth 1:18*). "Steadfastly" means "strong." Ruth was strongly minded to go with Naomi. Baker and Carpenter suggest that the word means "to persist in an activity." Although Naomi could persuade Orpah, one of her daughters in law, to turn back, she could not persuade Ruth. We read, "Naomi returned, and Ruth the Moabitess, her daughter in law, with her and they came to Bethlehem" (*1:22*).

What about us? Are we faithful servants? Are we as steadfastly minded to walk with Christ as she was to walk with Naomi? How easily are we persuaded to turn back? Will we go on even if those closest to us turn back?

No doubt, we want to one day hear the words, "Well done, thou good and faithful servant" (*Mt. 25:21*). However, to hear these words, we must steadfastly continue in the

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apostle's doctrine (*Acts 2:42*) and faithfully abide in Christ until death (*Rev. 2:10*). Unlike Orpah, we must not turn back (*John 6:66; cf. Lk. 9:62; Heb. 10:38; 2 Pet. 2:20-22*). Like Ruth, we are bound under a curse if we turn from the promise that we have made (*2 Pet. 2:21; Lk. 12:47; John 15:22*). William J. Reynolds, in the song, "I Have Decided To Follow Jesus," perfectly captures the faithfulness which must be displayed by servants of God. Please consider the words with me:

*I have decided, to follow Jesus,
I have decided, to follow Jesus,
I have decided, to follow Jesus,
No turning back, no turning back.*

*Though I may wonder, I still will follow,
Though I may wonder, I still will follow,
Though I may wonder, I still will follow,
No turning back, no turning back.*

*Though none go with me, still I will follow,
Though none go with me, still I will follow,
Though none go with me, still I will follow,
No turning back, no turning back!*

*The world behind me, the cross before me,
The world behind me, the cross before me,
The world behind me, the cross before me,
No turning back, no turning back!*

*Will you decide now, to follow Jesus,
Will you decide now, to follow Jesus,
Will you decide now, to follow Jesus,
No turning back, no turning back!*

It should be noted that there are several versions of this song. I like this version because it so closely fits the events recorded in the book of Ruth. As in the song, Ruth three times made the decision to go with Naomi. No doubt, as in the song, Ruth wondered and had many questions as she left her homeland. Yet, she did not let these questions stop her from following Naomi. Furthermore, as in the song, Ruth returned even though Orpah wouldn't go with her. Finally, as in the song, she put Moab, the only world she had ever known, behind her.

A Fervent Servant

Not only was Ruth a faithful servant, she was a fervent servant. When Naomi and

Ruth arrived back in Bethlehem at the beginning of the barley harvest (*1:22*), Ruth came to Naomi with the request to go and glean. She said, "Let me now go to the field, and glean ears of corn" (*Ruth 2:2*). Please note that Ruth requested to go and glean. She was not commanded to do so. Like the ant, she needed no overseer to drive her (*Prov. 6:6-9*). Ruth was eager to go to work. Please notice the little word "now." There was a fervency or urgency to Ruth's request. Also, please consider the action associated with Ruth in the text "And she went, and came, and gleaned" (*Ruth 2:3*). In addition to getting up and going to work, Ruth stayed at work all day (*Ruth 2:7, 17*). Again, this shows fervency.

Are we as fervent in the work that we have been given to do as Ruth was? Are we self-starters? Do we stay at it as long as she did? To the saints at Rome, Paul wrote, "Not slothful in business; fervent in spirit; serving the Lord" (*Rom. 12:11*). "Slothful" means "tardy" or "indolent." Are you familiar with tree sloths? Did you know that they move very little? In fact, they can spend their whole lives without moving from the tree in which they were born. Paul did not want the saints at Rome to be so stationary and sedentary. He did not want them to be slothful servants or lukewarm laborers (*Mt. 25:26; Rev. 3:15-16*). He wanted them to be "fervent." "Fervent" means "boiling." He wanted them to be zealous of good works (*Tit. 2:14; cf. Col. 4:12-13; 1 Pet. 1:22*). Like Ruth, we must not grow weary and quit. We must stay in the field from morning to evening (*Gal. 6:9*).

A Fearful Servant

When I describe Ruth as a fearful servant, I am using the word fear in the sense of respect and obedience. Obviously, there is a kind of fear that is condemned in servants (*Mt. 25:24-26; Rev. 21:8*). The fear that is condemned in Scripture is a fear that keeps us from obeying God (*2 Tim. 1:7*). The fear that is commanded is a fear that motivates us to obey God (*Ecc. 12:13*). When Naomi decided to seek "rest" (a home) for Ruth, Ruth humbly submitted to Naomi's plan (*Ruth 3*). Please consider two things that show her submission:

- **Ruth's promise** - "All that thou sayest unto me I will do" (*Ruth 3:5*).

- **Ruth's performance** "And she went down unto the floor, and did according to all that her mother in law bade her" (*Ruth 3:6*).

Ruth's promise declared and her performance demonstrated great fear or respect for Naomi. To better see this fear in Ruth's promise, please consider some parallel statements from the life of Noah:

- "Thus did Noah; according to all that God commanded him, so did he... And Noah did according unto all that the LORD commanded him" (*Gen. 6:22; 7:5*).

- "By faith Noah, being warned of God of things not seen as yet, moved with fear, prepared an ark to the saving of his house; by the which he condemned the world, and became heir of the righteousness which is by faith" (*Heb. 11:7*).

As you can see, Noah's doing "all that" God commanded him demonstrated his fear or reverence for God. The same holds true in Ruth's case. Although Ruth wasn't a little girl and Naomi wasn't her mother, she showed great respect.

What about us? Do we show the same fear or respect toward Christ that Ruth showed to Naomi? Do we do all that He has commanded us to do (*Mt. 28:20; John 2:5; 15:14; Acts 3:22*)? If we want to be acceptable to God, then we are going to have to show great fear. Paul wrote, "Wherefore we receiving a kingdom which cannot be moved, let us have grace, whereby we may serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear" (*Heb. 12:28*).

A Fruitful Servant

Throughout the book we find Ruth bringing fruit to Naomi.

In the second chapter, she brought her a part of her lunch (*Ruth 2:14, 18*) and "about an ephah of barley" (*Ruth 2:17*). An ephah would have been about a bushel and would have lasted for about a week. In the third chapter, she brought Naomi

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Deuteronomy 5:32

Wade Webster, Editor

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"six measures of barley" (*Ruth 3:15, 17*). Six measures would have been about twice what she gleaned the first day in the field (*Ruth 2:17*). Six measures would have been about eighty pounds and would have sustained Ruth and Naomi for about two weeks. Ruth did not come "empty" to her mother-in-law (*Ruth 3:17*). Interestingly, "empty" was the very word that Naomi used to describe her situation when she arrived back in Bethlehem (*Ruth 1:21*).

Although the grain was great, the fruit that Naomi most wanted was a son to carry on the name of her husband and sons (*Ruth 4:5, 10*). As you know, she would not be disappointed. God granted Ruth conception and she bore a son (*Ruth 4:13*). By the book's end, Naomi has the child in her arms (*Ruth 4:16*).

What about us? Are we fruitful servants? Do we come to God "empty" or are our hands full of gifts for Him? Repeatedly, men under the Old Testament system were warned not to appear before Him empty (*Ex. 23:15; 34:20; Deut. 16:16*). Amazingly, even the pagan Philistine priests knew this much (*1 Sam. 6:1-3*). Although God made allowances for the poor under the Old Testament system, such as a pair of turtledoves instead of a lamb, all were to bring something (*Lev. 12:8; Lk. 2:24; Psa. 96:8*). Obviously, if men under the Old Testament system were not to come to God empty, then it makes sense that under a far greater system we must not do so. As His servants, God wants us to bear fruit. Jesus said, "Herein is my Father glorified, that ye bear much fruit; so shall ye be my disciples" (*John 15:8; cf. 15:16; Rom. 7:4; Col. 1:10; Heb. 13:15*). We are not to be unfruitful (*Tit. 3:14; 2 Pet. 1:8*). Of course, the fruit that God most desires is someone to wear the name of His son (*Rom. 1:13*). He wants individuals to be born into His family and to keep the name of His Son alive in the earth.

Are we a servant to our Redeemer as Ruth was to hers? Have we placed ourselves humbly at

his feet submitting to His will? Are we faithful, fervent, fearful, and fruitful?

¹James Strong. *The Strongest Strong's Exhaustive Concordance Of The Bible*. Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan, 2001, p. 1473, #519.

²Ibid., p. 1473, #553.

³Warren Baker and Eugene Carpenter. *The Complete Word Study Dictionary: Old Testament*. Chattanooga, TN: 2003, p. 71, #553.

⁴Broadman Press (Admin. by LifeWay Christian Resources), 1959, CCLI song #4369512.

⁵Strong, p. 1516, #3636.

⁶Ibid., p. 1614, #2204.

DAVID: THE MAN WHO HAD THE HEART TO BE KING

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