

Marrying into a glorious future

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- [0 : 0 0] Amen. Well, you'll find the reading in the Bibles, it's on page 224, and we're in the last chapter, aren't we, of the book of Ruth. So that's chapter 4 on page 224.
- I'll do the reading as we go through the talk. I'll be reading some big chunks of chapter 4 as we go through. So, Genesis chapter 1 and verse 26. Can you remember?
- God says, let us make man in our image, in our likeness. Now, whatever that means in its entirety, it cannot mean less, listen, than we're made in the image of a relational God.
- And we see this especially as we come to the New Testament. Yet, despite such inestimable privilege, you know, to bear God's image, well, we reject him, don't we, in different ways.
- And friends, it's an awful assault on who we are. Like putting sort of sand into an engine, so we don't live like we're God's created family.
- [1 : 1 5] We live like we're number one, do you know, autonomous. And just before the book of Ruth, do you remember? Do you remember that's how Israel are living, just before the book of Ruth?
- You remember, perhaps, just turn it up, the last verse of Judges. Just turn back a few pages. You'll see, right, the very last verse. In those days there was no king in Israel.
- Well, everyone did what was right in his own eyes. You see, God's edited out, isn't he? It's called sin. And the book of Ruth is about sorting that problem.
- It's about returning, listen, to the family of God. And if you're anything like me, you'll have felt that in your heart. Am I right? You'll have cheered, chapter 1, verse 6, when Naomi sort of just gets up and decides to return back to Bethlehem.
- You'll have wanted to hug Ruth, to encourage her to walk with her as she's sort of loved and adopted into God's family. And the story might have been secretly pulling the strings of your soul, drawing close and speaking to you as you've sort of thought things through and realised, yes, Moab, it's been part of your life.
- [2 : 3 4] And yes, people don't know, but you've been feeling a bit like Naomi, empty. So the book of Ruth moves from, listen, the disintegration of a family in chapter 1, we'll remember that, to its reconstitution in chapter 4.
- And so as we rejoin the story, there's a happy ending in store for us. And we like happy endings, don't we? I hope we do.
- Have a look with me, chapter 4, from verses 1 to 6. Now, Boaz had gone up to the gate, and incidentally, that's where all business transactions seemed to take place, the gate of the city.
- And he sat down there, and soon everyone will be sitting down. And behold, the Redeemer of whom Boaz had spoken came by. So Boaz says, turn aside, friends, sit down here. And he turned aside and sat down.
- And he took ten men of the elders of the city and said, sit down here. So they sat down. 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.

[3 : 42] 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. That's sort of a jury, isn't it? All those people sat down here.

So it's a compilation of a jury. 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, what does he say? I will redeem it. Now, just imagine, if this was televised and Ruth and Naomi were watching this back home on a big screen, well, I'm sure their heads would be in their hands like this, thinking, oh no, what's happening here?

All that romance. Those feet, do you remember, in chapter 3? All those conversations with Naomi. A waste of time. I've got to marry a stranger, shrieks Ruth to Naomi in shock.

But verse 5. Look at verse 5 with me. Then Boaz said, the day you buy the field, it's the Ruth clause, isn't it? 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.

[4 : 57] 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. And now, in the very next two verses, verses 7 and 8, there's a very interesting cultural method of securing a deal.

Just have a look with me at verses 7 and 8 there. Now, this was the custom of the former times in Israel, concerning redeeming and exchanging. To confirm a transaction, listen, the one drew off his sandal and gave it to the other, and this was the manner of attesting in Israel.

So when the Redeemer said to Boaz, buy it for yourself, he drew off his sandal. Isn't that interesting? Just imagine, the man who declined Boaz's offer, well, he walks home with his odd shoes, and the wife notices that he's got odd shoes.

She's thinking, what's he done? Has he sold the house? Has he bought a car? What's going on here? Over tea. Did you have a good day at work? No response.

Doing the washing up. Anything interesting happen today? Anything I should know about? No response. I see you've got odd shoes, she says.

[6 : 16] Well, I nearly bought another wife, he says. But in the end, you know, Boaz, he bought that land, and that Moabite woman, Ruth, I'm sure you'll agree, he says, I've got to put business first.

I didn't want to jeopardise anything, you know, with our pension and our inheritance, our retirement plans. I did, listen, what was right in my own eyes, he says.

He's like the rich ruler, isn't he? In Luke chapter 18, money's pulling his strings. He did what was right in his own eyes. In contrast, friend, Boaz.

In contrast, Jesus. Do you remember Jesus? Not my will, he said, didn't he? Not my will, but your will be done.

And notice here in this passage why Boaz bought the land, and why he's marrying Ruth. Look with me at verse 10. We'll see that in verse 10. Also, Ruth, the Moabite, the widow of Mahalon, said Boaz, I have bought to be my wife.

[7 : 20] Why? Why is he buying? Because she's an attractive younger woman? Is that why? Because she's able to look after him in his older age? No. To perpetuate the name of the dead.

You see that? 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, says Boaz.

So he's bought it, hasn't he? The land to perpetuate the name of the dead, says Boaz. So, listen to this. Boaz's primary reason for marriage is a reason outside of himself.

Do we see that? A purpose other than his own. And so it's the antithesis, isn't it? It's the antithesis of, for example, this self-referencing world that we live in.

The world of judges. And the world of Moab. And Jesus says, that's how to live on my creation. Put self aside.

[8 : 23] Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength. And love your neighbour as yourself. Jesus says, love Ruth. Now, we're getting close to that confetti.

You remember chapter 3, verse 18. And Naomi had said, do you remember the end of chapter 3? The man will settle the matter today. And Naomi's sort of looking up the road in great expectation.

She's probably got those binoculars out. She knows the answer will soon be heading her way. Ruth says, let me see. And Ruth looks through these binoculars. She spots Boaz coming in the distance.

He's sort of got a spring in his step. Something exciting, she thinks. She says to Naomi, she's glued to her binoculars and she says, Naomi, he's on his way but there's something strange about this.

He seems to be wearing odd shoes. Naomi beams. And as Ruth looks through these binoculars, Naomi gets the confetti out of her handbag.

[9 : 27] A knock on the door and verse 13, look there at verse 13. So Boaz took the room and she became his wife. And he went into her.

Isn't that nice? And for those listening in, I'll need to be getting the vacuum cleaner out later. So she became his wife there in verse 13 and he went into her and the Lord gave her conception and she bore a son.

Well friends, what a beautiful crescendo that is, isn't it, to the story of Ruth. And now as we begin to conclude this series, there's three themes from the book of Ruth that I'd like us to be thinking through.

The themes are A, an ordinary family, B, a shocking redeemer, and C, a glorious future. So A, an ordinary family.

And we began this talk, didn't we, by thinking about relationships. And we especially considered our relationship to God through bearing his image.

[10 : 34] Paul says in Acts chapter 17, he made from one man every nation of mankind to live on all the face of the earth. And we've seen both Naomi and Ruth come back into God's family.

Think about this, you know, think about Naomi and Ruth. You wouldn't notice anything strange about them, would you? You know, if Naomi, for example, was sat next to you, there's nothing particularly strange.

She just repented and she'd come back into the family of God. Yes, well, she'd been through quite a lot and she's had her ups and downs, but nothing too strange about her.

Ruth, well, Ruth on the other hand, she was a total outsider. Maybe she's still got a few of those Moabitish traits about her, you know.

You'd probably spot her, she'd look unchurched. Boaz, Boaz, well, he was a mature member of God's family, wasn't he? He was an anchor, an anchor when Israel was disintegrating all around.

[11 : 41] He was steadfast and certain in his God. God's word was the rudder of his life, not his feelings. Do you remember on his field, he used to say, may, the Hebrew word is Yahweh, so he'd be on his field, he'd say, may Yahweh bless you.

And that was the refrain on Boaz's field and the echo of his life. And we can put a song on his lips. May the mind of Christ my Saviour live in me from day to day.

By his love and power controlling all I do and say, that's Boaz, isn't it? And in the church, friends, we have all these folk, don't we? We have Naomi's, we have Ruth's, and we have Boaz's.

Because, think about this, it's God's family, isn't it? And he delights in bringing us together like this, to encourage each other, to prop each other up, to pray for each other, to teach each other.

And if Jesus, think about this, let's extend it a bit further, if Jesus himself was sat next to you, you may not even recognise that. Isaiah said, we esteemed him not.

[12 : 54] Isn't it amazing what God has done? The whole of his purpose is running through an ordinary family here. Listen to what Sinclair says.

There is a broad and general lesson to be learnt here. The explanation for much that takes place in our lives lies well beyond our own lives and may be hidden from us all through our lives.

For God does not mean to touch only our lives by what he does in us. He has the lives of others in view, even those yet unborns. You see the bigger picture there.

Have a look with me at verse 16. Then Naomi took the child and laid him in a lap and became his nurse. The baby sort of belongs to Naomi, doesn't he?

And the wider church family. Little Obed. Just an ordinary family scene. Very much like children in our families, isn't it? You know, nappies being changed.

[13 : 53] I've observed this, wiping the vomit off your right shoulder when you've been caring for a baby. Joseph taught Jesus, didn't he? How to make tables. Just an ordinary family.

But Yahweh, hidden from our sight, is weaving his purposes. And isn't that an encouragement for us all today when we think about our own situations?

B, a shocking redeemer. Now, who would pick these two? Ruth, a total outsider.

She's integrated into God's family. And Naomi, she blows hot and cold. But she's loved by God's family just the same. Friends, your mistakes aren't the end of the world.

God can use them. Yes, he can. He can incorporate them in remarkable ways in his unfolding plans and purposes. Paul says, all things work together for the good of those who are called.

[14 : 55] And behind the scenes, that is precisely what God is doing, isn't he, with Ruth. And as if to shock the graceless, man-made religion of the first century, Matthew thrusts the story of Ruth back onto the headlines of the first century world, chapter one of his gospel, and the genealogy of the Messiah, no less.

Three scandalous and shocking women. Rahab the prostitute, Ruth the Moabite, and Bathsheba the adulteress, and pious Jews and Pharisees back then, they must have been almost traumatised when they read the list.

And the Pharisees are shocked, aren't they, with Jesus as he eats with tax collectors and sinners. What sort of religion is this? And finally, on the cross, Jesus again associates with sinners, doesn't he?

Listen, he has intimate association with all that would keep us from his family. That is all of our sin. He absorbs it and he takes his father's wrath for it.

Friends, this is a shocking redemption, isn't it? And it has to be because he's after the likes of you and me.

[16 : 19] That hymn we've just sung, amazing love, how can it be that you, my God, should die for me? And finally, C, a glorious future.

We teach our children, don't we, at school these days at the cosmos, well, it just made itself one morning out of nothing. And on the school curriculum, the children listen and they're taught that, well, they're just a product of random mutation.

And so the word purpose, think about this, is sucked out of life, isn't it? It's not on the agenda, apart from, well, in respect of the survival of the fittest.

And so, well, what are the consequences? Any wonder why teenagers struck the streets in huds? It's a dog-eat-dog world. Any wonder why addiction has so much power?

The word on the street is, when you're dead, you're dead. Well, life's hard and then you die. A world devoid of any grand purpose or meaning.

[17 : 27] And Ruth came from that world, didn't she? She came from that world and through the love of Naomi, she was able to turn her back on it. And that evocative, poetic prayer of hers, you remember, in chapter 1, verse 16, you might like to look at it, do not urge me to leave you or to return from following you, for where you go I will go, and where you lodge, I will lodge.

Your people shall be my people, and your God my God. She's binding herself, isn't she, to Naomi, and binding herself to God's family. And suddenly, there's great purpose.

Moab didn't have a future promise to it, but God's people do. Yes, friend, God rescues us from our horizontal priorities, those priorities of this 21st century, and he adopts us into his grand and eternal cosmic purposes.

Have you allowed him to do that for you? Has he called you into his family? He can turn the tide of your life, yes he can, your church, Scotland.

Yes, God is active, turning the tide amidst apparent decline. Each day we pray for that, don't we? Forgive us our sins. Each day we pray your will be done.

[18 : 51] And with ourselves, our churches, Scotland, God is busy. And we see it right through church history, don't we? If you look back through church history, Mrs. Luther, she changes the nappies of young Martin, and soon the reformation is bursting forth, isn't it, from Wittenberg.

In China today, millions upon millions of people meet in little house churches. Chapter 4, verse 17. And the women of the neighbourhood 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. David, did we hear David? The angels' ears, they prick up in the heavenly realms, they can't stop talking about it.

Some are learning the lines already. Today in the city of David, a saviour has been born to you, he is Christ the Lord. God's ways, isn't it?

From the chaos of judges to his son, from the fragmentation of a family to his son's family.

[20 : 02] And we'll finish now with a prayer of Jesus. John chapter 17, you might like to look it up. It's about Jesus drawing us into his family.

It's the story of Ruth on the cosmic and eternal scale. It's where we're drawn in. John chapter 17, verse 20, as we finish.

I do not ask for these only, says Jesus, but also for those who will believe in me through their word, that they may all be one, just as you, Father, are in me, and I in you, that they also be in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me.

The glory that you have given me, I have given to them, that they may be one, even as we are one. I in them, and you in me, that they may become perfectly one, so that the world may know that you sent me, and loved them, even as you loved me.

Father, I desire that they also, whom you have given me, may be with me where I am, to see my glory, that you have given me before you loved me, that you have given me because you loved me before the foundation of the world.

[21 : 15] Isn't that amazing there, that prayer of Jesus? That's us being drawn in to God's family through faith in his son, Jesus Christ.

Shall we pray? Dear Heavenly Father, we just thank you so much for drawing us to yourself through your son, Jesus Christ. We thank you for this story of Ruth and how you worked in her life through Boaz, through Naomi, through your people.

And we pray Father that you'd properly integrate us in your family and you'd help us to be useful for your grand and unfolding purposes here in this great city.

Pray you go with us now as we go our separate ways. We lift all these things to you in Christ's name. Amen. Amen.