

"A Woman, A Family, A Nation, A world, and me"
Ruth 4 1/14/95
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Nationally syndicated film critic Michael Medved recently made a speech in which he described the pessimism that has pervaded the American culture.

Children are particularly affected, he said.
They are growing up in a culture that gives them little hope.
Adolescents commit suicide at higher rates than ever before - why?

Over and over again we hear kids lament there is no future.
Marriage and family hold out little prospect because their experiences of marriage and family are painful - their parents divorced and their families are divided.

Our culture is so pessimistic that kids don't think anything will really change - jobs are scarce if available at all, incomes are down, the government is headed toward a financial crash leaving nothing for those who have supported it for years, the end of the cold war has simply resulted in more genocide and deprivation in many more places in the world.
NO FUTURE!

Even adults are affected.

Many of them are afraid that they won't have enough money at retirement - not just for travel but even to keep their homes.

Social Security, Medicare, and Medicaid are perceived as likely to fail - as least few feel they can depend on it.

Many are afraid of the near future and uncertain about the distant future.

With a growing secularism in our culture fewer and fewer truly trust in the ideas of heaven, resurrection, and God.

One of the saddest things that can happen to a culture is when its people stop believing in a future.

And one of the saddest things that can happen to individuals is when they stop seeing a future for themselves.

I remember reading some time back about a prison camp where the commander took the men out of the barracks and gave them instructions to dig a large pit on one side of the grounds.

At first the men seemed to thrive on the activity and the apparent purposefulness of the task - they were accomplishing something.

But no sooner would they finish digging the pit then the commander would dictate that they fill it in again.

As this went on day after day, first digging a pit and then filling it back in - it became apparent to everyone that the work was purposeless.

Not only did men begin to injure themselves to get out of the work but the suicide rate in the prison camp went up dramatically - they had lost hope - life was meaningless.

Men and women can't live long without a future. Without hope, without a future, people die emotionally, spiritually and even physically.

Do you have a future?

Obviously I don't mean do you think you will live a few more months or years.

I'm asking if your life is tied to a future that positively shapes your present?

Are you so certain of your future that you can emotionally withstand the pressures, the vagaries, and the disappointments of the present?

Today, I want to finish a sermon series I began a couple of months ago. Next week we will begin a series of sermons from the book of Hebrews but today I want us to look once again at Old Testament book of Ruth.

The book of Ruth is a great story:

It's the story of a woman named Naomi whose husband and then sons die leaving her alone and destitute in a foreign country.

With a faithful daughter-in-law, she returns to her hometown of Bethlehem bitter and empty.

The daughter-in-law, Ruth, gets a job and the fortunes of these poverty stricken women begin to look better when Ruth meets the apparently single, wealthy and kind owner of the fields in which she's working. His name is Boaz.

At that point we can't help but hope that these two can get together - it would be excellent for both of them.

We aren't the only ones who want them together - Naomi, the mother-in-law devises a plan for Ruth to make herself available to this man and see how he will respond.

We know, from chapter 3, that Ruth goes to Boaz and proposes marriage. He accepts her proposal and we assume all will end well.

BUT AT JUST THAT POINT a clinker is thrown into the story - much to our dismay we learn that there is another man in town who has first right to purchase Naomi's property and take responsibility for the family.

Will the other man marry Ruth? Will Ruth and Boaz be separated even though they obviously love each other?

We come to chapter 4 of the story and we can hardly wait to learn the outcome.

In dramatic fashion, the story ends as quickly as it began - Boaz convinced the other man to back out and Ruth and Boaz are married and a son is born to them.

And lived happily ever after.

But why tell this story? Why is it in the Bible? If all Scripture is inspired by God and "useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness" - what does this story teach?

When I began this short series I suggested there are three major themes taught by the story:

The first two I have already addressed:

1st: The providence of God in every detail of life.

And 2nd: the priority of faithfulness in relationships.

Today I want to address the 3rd and last major theme - and I think the primary theme from the viewpoint of the author of the book.

** And "no" I'm not going to tell you just yet what that theme is - I want you to find it with me - Because this theme is the one that addresses the issues of hope and a future.

What makes this story so appealing?

It is because what begins as tragedy turns into triumph,
what began with sadness ends with joy,
what looks hopeless becomes fulness.

Look with me please at chapter 4 verse 17.

When you look at the names mentioned in this verse what becomes obvious about the time of the writing of the book?

Was the book written during the life of Ruth? No.

It was written either during or even following the time of King David.

I think it is reasonable to assume the author is not just telling a good story - a well written "boy meets girl" love story, he has another purpose in mind. Just as God brought a kinsman-redeemer to save Naomi and Elimilech's family-name so God has brought King David to save the nation of Israel.

It's as if the author says, "look at what God did for Naomi!" And "look at what God did for the family name of Elimilech!"

As certainly as God saved them so God will save the nation.

But there is more here than just an example of God saving people from a terrible situation - What the author has taken great pains to point out is that God's means to accomplish the saving of these people is a person - a KINSMAN-REDEEMER.

Look with me please at chapter 2 verse 20.

After Ruth returns to Naomi and reports that she has met Boaz and worked in his fields - Naomi says something that is the turning point of the whole story: READ

It is not just that Boaz is a good man and might help them.

The author could have simply introduced Boaz to us as the one who would marry Ruth and save the family farm.

But the author introduces him as a "kinsman-redeemer"

In fact, for the next two chapters that description of Boaz stands as central to the whole story.

What is a "kinsman-redeemer?"

Please look in your Bible at Leviticus 25:23-25

The land that God gave to the Israelites was divided up between the descendants of the 12 sons of Jacob - the 12 "tribes" we call them, just like we refer to Indian tribes or native tribes in other parts of the world today.

Within each tribe the land was also divided up between the families.

And each family was to retain that land - they were not supposed to sell it permanently to another family.

READ Lev 25:23-25

A "kinsman-redeemer" is so called because he is a relative (a kinsman) and he is responsible for buying back (redeeming) the land so it stays in the original family.

In other places in the Old Testament we find that a "kinsman-redeemer" was also responsible for buying a poor relative out of slavery, or seeking justice if a relative had been killed or wronged.

Now it seems to me that for a person to act as a "kinsman-redeemer" he has to have three things:

1. He has to be a relative of the person in trouble.
2. He has to have the ability to get the person out of trouble (buy the land or pay the back wages or whatever)
- And 3. he has to have the willingness to do so.

When we come back to Boaz in Ruth chapter 4 we find a man who has all

three - the right relationship, the ability, and the willingness to help.

And so the story ends pleasantly - Boaz buys Naomi's land thus releasing her from poverty.

But more importantly, Boaz marries Ruth and fathers a child thus giving Naomi a grandchild who would care for her in her old age.
READ 4:14-15a

How I can call this a "grandchild" I will explain in a minute.

And so Naomi's story which began in tragedy ends in joy and security - she has a future and once again "hope" characterizes her life.

But it is not only Naomi that is cared for by Boaz's actions as "kinsman-redeemer."

Look please at 4:9-10 READ

Under Old Testament law the first child of a remarried widow became the legal heir to all the first husband's property and also continued the first husband's name in the community.

When the author introduced us to Boaz back in 2:1 and again in 2:3 he twice notes for us, very deliberately, that Boaz is from the family-clan of Elimilech.

Now here in 4:9-10 we find out why that was so important.

When Boaz fathers a child by Ruth, that child carries on the family name and property and place of Elimilech.

By his relationship to Elimilech, and his ability to do something about it (buy the land and father a child), and his willingness to do so, Boaz rescues Elimilech's family name and place from extinction.

And so Elimilech's story ends well also.

What looked like the end of a family name turns out to be a beginning.

Both Naomi's life and the Elimlech family name are saved by a "Kinsman-redeemer".

But I want you again to look at 4:17-22

As I have already noted, the author is not just telling a story.

He is wanting his readers to believe that as certainly as God saved Naomi and Elimilech's family so God will save the nation of Israel.

And get this please: God will do so through a "kinsman-redeemer"- someone with the relationship, the ability and the will to do so.

What point does the author make by adding these verses at the end of the story?

That King David is the direct descendant of this marvelous intervention of God in the lives of Naomi and Elimilech.

That David is the "kinsman-redeemer" that will save Israel.

Look please at 4:11

Here the Elders of the city are blessing Boaz and in doing so they are prophetic, I'm sure without knowing it.

But the readers, later, would pick it up.

The Elders pray that God will make Ruth like Rachel and Leah, the wives of Jacob, and mothers of the 12 clans, families, tribes of the nation of Israel.

They are asking that from Ruth and Boaz would come a leader for Israel.

Look please at the last part of verse 14.

Here the woman of the town likewise unwittingly speak prophetically: "Praise be to the Lord, who this day has not left you without a kinsman-redeemer. May he become famous throughout Israel"

Please notice it is the child that they are calling the "kinsman-redeemer" and that they are praying will become prominent in Israel.

What the author's first readers would understand is that truly through this child came the great "kinsman-redeemer," David.

And so this story is not only about God's salvation of Naomi and Elimilech's family through a "kinsman-redeemer" but it is also the story of God's salvation of Israel through another "kinsman-redeemer" - David.

In a previous sermon I mentioned that Ruth lived during the time of the Judges.

During that time from 1000 - 1400 years before Christ the nation of Israel was in frequent turmoil.

They were a land that makes modern day Yugoslavia - Bosnia, Serbia, Croatia - seem peaceful.

Truly the warfare, the bloodshed, and the brutality was frequent and that didn't count the times that enemies invaded and wreaked greater damage.

The sweet smell of success under Moses' and then Joshua's leadership had turned sour.

The period of the judges is a hopeless cycle of sin, foreign invasions and internecine warfare.

Please look in your Bible at the next book - I Samuel, chapter 4.

I think many of you know that the Ark of the Covenant, that box that the Israelites carried with them throughout the trip from Egypt to Canaan, was symbolic of the very presence of God in their midst.

In a very unique way, God chose to dwell in that Ark.

In I Sam 4:10 we find that the Israelites' arch enemy, the Philistines, defeated the Israelites and captured the Ark of the Covenant.

In verse 18, when Eli, the spiritual leader of Israel at that time, heard that the Ark had been taken, he fell backward off his chair and died.

Eli's daughter-in-law at that point gave birth to a child and in verse 21 she names him Ichabod saying "the glory has departed from Israel."

Eli, his daughter-in-law, and most of Israel had every right to despair that day - There was every appearance that God had finally had it with the nation of Israel.

They had reason to believe that the future of Israel had just died. There was no hope for this nation.

If they were on their own they were as good as finished.

But what does God do?

God raises us a "kinsman-redeemer".
From where?

Please find I Sam 16:1

Many of you know that after Eli's death, Samuel became the spiritual leader of Israel.

In I Sam 16:1 the Lord came to Samuel and told him to go anoint the next king of Israel.

To whom and where does God send Samuel?

To Jesse in Bethlehem.

What did the author of Ruth tell us is the name of Ruth's and Boaz's son?
OBED.

And who was Obed's son? Jesse.

And where did Boaz and Obed and Jesse live? Bethlehem.

And that day, Samuel, at God's command, appointed the next king of Israel. He had the right relationship (he was a true kinsman), he had the ability by God's grace, and he had the willingness.

And David, by the power of the Spirit of God, redeemed the people of Israel from slavery and oppression from foreign invaders, he unified the tribes, he brought peace to Israel.

Under David's leadership the nation had hope, it had a future.

And so the book of Ruth is not only a story about Naomi, about Elimilech's family name but is also a story about the roots of Israel's salvation - the origins of the kinsman-redeemer, David.

Early on in this sermon I asked you to find with me the third and primary theme of this book.

Have you gotten it?

In two words, the primary theme is "kinsman-redeemer".

Please look in your Bible at Matthew 1.

When we think about the application of that primary theme to us we do not only have the perspective of the author of the book of Ruth written during the time of David - We have the perspective of 1000 more years of history. - actually 3000 more years.

How does the chapter begin?

"A record of the genealogy of Jesus Christ the son of David, the son of Abraham."

Starting at verse 2, look at the names:
Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Judah, Perez

Look at v 5 "Salmon the father of Boaz, Boaz the father of Obed, whose mother was RUTH".

Matthew is bringing this whole thing together.

Next we see Obed (that was Ruth's and Boaz's son), then Jesse and then David.

But notice the family tree doesn't stop there.

The names go on until we come to v 16 "Jacob, Joseph, the husband of Mary, of whom was born Jesus, who is called Christ."

Just as Naomi needed a "kinsman-redeemer" to save her from poverty and death,

and just as Elimilech's family needed a "kinsman-redeemer" to save it from extinction,

and just as Israel needed a "kinsman-redeemer" to save it from annihilation.

So, God said, this world, needs a "kinsman-redeemer" to save it from eternal destruction.

After the time of David when the nation of Israel again greatly sinned against God and degenerated into a third-rate power and finally succumbed to slavery again, God through the prophets spoke of himself in the role of Israel's coming Kinsman-redeemer.

And then the gospel writers make it clear to us that Jesus, God the Son, came to this earth as the ultimate "kinsman-redeemer".

In Luke 1:68, Zechariah, John the Baptist's father, proclaims of Jesus, while he was still in the womb of Mary, "Praise be to the Lord, the God of Israel, because he has come and has redeemed his people." - Jesus, the Son of God - the Kinsman-redeemer.

Look please at Romans 3:23ff.

All the other "kinsman-redeemers" (Moses, Boaz, David) were but copies of the great original - The Lord Jesus himself.

The apostle Paul here in Romans 3 and many of the other N.T. writers speak to the same theme:

Jesus was the only one with the relationship, the ability and the willingness to redeem people from their sin and its consequences.

Here's the way Paul says it beginning in verse 23 with my paraphrase and commentary:

"Everyone of us has sinned against God. We rightly deserve eternal death - we are helpless to save ourselves and hopeless - no future.

But we are justified, we are made right with God, we are forgiven and brought back into right relationship with God, freely by his grace.

God has done this by redeeming us through the "kinsman-redeemer" Jesus Christ.

God redeemed us, God bought us out of our slavery to sin and destruction by presenting Jesus as a sacrifice who would suffer God's wrath in our place. His blood was shed for us - His blood, his life was paid to redeem us.

Look at the middle of verse 25:

"God did this to demonstrate his justice - sin will be punished!

From Adam clear through the times of Abraham, Moses, David and Isaiah God did not pronounce the ultimate punishment on his people for their sins - he left those sins unpunished.

He did that to demonstrate his justice at this present time by pouring out that punishment on Jesus.

The punishment for sin is so terrible and so infinite that only the eternal, infinite, perfect Son of God could pay for sins.

And now, because of what the Father-God has done through Christ we realize that God is just (He doesn't overlook sin, he does ultimately punish it) and that at the same time he can declare us not guilty because Christ has

paid for our sin - if we have faith in him - if we trust in him and his death for us.

For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life, through what Jesus Christ our Lord has done.

Naomi wasn't dead yet but she was in serious trouble.

Elimilech's family name didn't have a prayer - he was dead and there were no sons.

The nation of Israel was down for the count.

This world in which we live is operating on borrowed time.

And you and I do not have a chance if we are left on our own.

All of us need a Kinsman-redeemer - someone who is one of us who will get us out of the eternal dilemma we are in.

IN the early 1960s this country had settled into a malaise and John Kennedy brought the nation to its feet by giving them a future to look at.

In 1992 Bill Clinton ran his campaign at least partly on a theme of "hope". He even used his home town by that name to make the point.

Today Lamar Alexander, Republican presidential hopeful, is saying that in contrast to his Republican rivals he is the candidate of the future - a candidate of hope.

But all those offers of a future and hope, while important in a sense, are insignificant in the eternal scope of things.

The only future that truly matters is the one that is guaranteed by a relationship with the eternal God.

It is when you or I are related to the infinite Kinsman-redeemer, Jesus, that we have real hope, that we have a future.

Do you have a future?

Obviously I don't mean do you think you will live a few more months or years.

I'm asking if your life is tied to a future that positively shapes your present?

Are you so certain of your future that you can emotionally withstand the pressures, the vagaries, and the disappointments of the present?

Are you trusting in the Kinsman-redeemer Jesus.

Do you have a future?

Does God-given, God-authorized hope characterize your life?