

How Will You Finish the Story?

By Pastor Greg
Thanksgiving Eve

Ruth 4:9-10

Bunkertown COB

There is an Old Testament law which states that if there was poverty or hardship, a person may sell their land with the option of buying it back later (Leviticus 25:25-28). A person's land, in the early days of Israel, was their inheritance from God.

Now since all the land belonged to God in the first place (Leviticus 25:23), every 50 years there was a "Year of Jubilee" where the land would be returned to the original family. The problem though, was if a family had no children, there was no one to receive this land; this inheritance.

So a second law stated that a childless widow (a lady with no children and whose husband had died) should become the wife of her brother-in-law or the nearest relative of her deceased husband. The child she would bear would then receive the land which belonged to her deceased husband. That way the land of their inheritance would remain in the family and this widow would not be left orphaned and homeless.

Now I know this all sounds a bit confusing; widows marrying brothers-in-law and the whole land thing. But there is a wonderful story in the Old Testament which sheds incredible light on things.

In the book of Ruth we read about a man named Elimelech. He was from Bethlehem and was married to a woman named Naomi. As the story unfolds, we find that a famine in Bethlehem causes him, his wife, and his two sons to move northeast to the land of Moab. But they never sell the land they owned back in Bethlehem.

While in Moab, Elimelech dies and Naomi, now a widow, stays in Moab with her two sons. Now although her husband had died, the land still belonged in the family because her two sons were still alive to receive the inheritance when they returned home.

Soon the boys marry. But the tragedy is that both boys die before they can have any sons to carry on the family name and receive the family inheritance. So here you have Naomi and her two Daughters-in-law living in Moab, and unless they

were to marry a close relative, there would be no one to inherit the land back in Bethlehem.

Naomi considers her plight, and decides to move home, back to Bethlehem, but her daughter-in-law Ruth insists on traveling with her.

When they get back to Bethlehem, God intercedes in their life and directs Ruth to meet Boaz; is a distant relative to Elimelech. Boaz, who knows God's laws quite well, sees that the family needs a redeemer. Now although he was willing, there was another relative who was closer to Elimelech than he was. And according to God's law this other fellow should be the one to redeem the family name. But here's what happens; this man was willing to take the land off of Naomi's hands, but he was unwilling to marry Ruth. This other relative knew that if he did, the son born to Ruth would inherit the land back in the next year of Jubilee, and he probably wanted it for his side of the family.

So Boaz offers to be the redeemer. That way not only is the land kept in the family but a child will be born who will receive the inheritance God gave the family years before (see Ruth 4:9-10).

Here's where it gets interesting. Elimelech was from Bethlehem. His land was located just outside of the city. Because of Boaz, he and Ruth have a son named Obed who could live in the land of his inheritance; the land near Bethlehem. Obed gets married and has a son named Jesse. Later, Jesse had a son named David who would become King of Israel. Little David would have been tending sheep in the family's land because Boaz had been the family redeemer.

The only other time Ruth is mentioned is in Matthew 1:5. As Matthew unfolds the genealogy of Jesus, we find that this little parcel of land would have been the land of Joseph's inheritance; Joseph, the husband of Mary who gave birth to Jesus.

So when Caesar Augustus took a census and people were required to return to their own land, Joseph and Mary needed to travel back to that parcel of land outside of Bethlehem because Boaz had redeemed the family name.

Does anyone else find this incredible? Just think about how God worked and crafted events throughout history so His will, His plan, and His purpose might be fulfilled. It's no surprise that 700 years before Jesus was born God could speak

through the prophet Micah and indicate the Messiah would be born in Bethlehem. He had planned it long ago.

You may be tempted to look at this story from the book of Ruth as just that; some obscure story from long ago. But it is not just a story; it is a revelation to us of how intricately God works and moves in peoples lives to bring about things that glorify and honor His name.

God provides for a redeemer so that a person would not be left as an orphan, and that they would receive an inheritance. Is any of this starting to sound familiar? The word redeemer is defined as “one who frees or delivers another from difficulty, danger, or bondage, usually by the payment of a ransom price”. Well, long ago, God began working through people and events so that today you might have a redeemer; someone to pay the cost so that you might be adopted into God’s family. Think about that for a moment. God has been orchestrating events so that you might find yourself standing here today with a choice. A redeemer has offered to release you from the bondage of sin and will provide you with a land of inheritance in heaven.

This isn’t just a story about Ruth or Naomi or Greg. It is a story about you as well. So how will you finish the story? How has God been at work in your life to bring you here today?