

# From Empty to Full

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[ 0 : 0 0 ] today. A special welcome if you're a visitor with us. We're glad you're here. And we're glad you're here not because we're interested in just filling seats, but we're glad you're here because we believe that as we're following after Jesus, that there's no one so good that they don't need God's grace. And there's no one so bad that they can't have it. And so we're glad you're here because we're all trying to learn from Jesus and follow after him, and we believe that he has something to offer to every single one of us. If you've been with us for the last, now almost two months, you know that we are going through the book of Ruth. And I have to say, personally, I'm a little bit sad because we're almost at the end. We have two more sermons left in Ruth, and it's been a delight for me to go through this book with you and just a joy. You know if you've been with us that Ruth is a book about suffering, and it's a book about suffering because it's a book about people who live in a country where they weren't born, and because it's a book about widows. But you also know that it's a book about redemption because it's about God sustaining and providing and caring for his people even in the middle of that very same suffering. And even more than that, we've talked about the fact that this is about God's chesed love. Remember, chesed is that Hebrew word that means God's never stopping, never giving up, unbreaking, always and forever love. And we've seen that love as we've gone through the book from God to his people, but we've also seen it from God's people to each other. That it's a love that comes from God through his people to his people. And that's part of what we looked at last week. As we come to the end, remember at the very beginning, we talked about stories. I asked those of you who are kids why it was that your parents read stories aloud to you.

And there were many reasons, but one of them was that we would become wise. That God as a loving Father wants us to know what's ahead of us. He wants us to know how to handle suffering in our lives.

And now we're at the very end. We're in the last chapter. And so there's something else that happens with stories. And that is, how do we handle endings? There's at least two kinds of people when it comes to endings. And I learned this growing up because my mom is one of those kinds of peoples. My mom has to know the ending of a story before she starts it. And so she'll skip to the very end and read the last chapter. Because if she doesn't know the end, she can't enjoy the rest of the story. She wants to watch how it all comes together. And then there are others of us who will tell friends if we're reading a new book that's just come out, hey, I'm just reading this book. You cannot tell me the ending because you'll spoil the rest of it for me.

We have a little bit of a teaser. Remember we saw last week that Boaz was going to go and see if he could redeem Ruth. And yet there's a closer redeemer. And so we're not sure how the story is going to end. Now last week we also saw that there were three words repeated in chapter three that we had seen earlier in the book. And we're not done. We have one more word in this chapter. Now this is the word that's going to appear not for the second time, but for the third time. So I'm going to tease you with that a little bit. And so our question is, how is this story going to end? Some of you at this point know how the story is going to end. So you might think, well, I have nothing else to listen to at this point. I've read Ruth before. And yet if this is a story that God has given us to become wise, it's not just a question about how does this story end. But how do all of our stories end when we walk and work with God? Because this is not just a book about Ruth. It's not just a book about Naomi, but it's a book for us and about us. It's a book about God's people that he's given to his people. And so the ending here for these characters is in some ways the ending for us as well.

So what happens? How is the story going to end for anyone who walks with God and works with God?

[ 4 : 29 ] And whether you like it or not, you're going to be like my mom this morning because we're going to talk about how the story ends for each and every one of us. With that, we're in Ruth chapter 4. We're in the last chapter. We're starting at verse 1. Remember that this is God's word.

And God tells us that his word is more precious than gold, even the finest gold, and that it is sweeter than honey, even honey that comes straight from the honeycomb. And so we're going to turn to it now. We're in Ruth chapter 4, starting at verse 1. Please read with me.

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.

And he took 10 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 has belonged to our relative, Elimelech. Verse 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. Verse 5.

[ 6 : 03 ] 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.

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. Verse 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. So when the Redeemer said to Boaz, buy it for yourself, he drew off his sandal. Verse 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 Malon.

Also Ruth, the Moabite, the widow of Malon, 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. Verse 11.

[ 7 : 20 ] 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 Ethraphah and be renowned in Bethlehem. 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. Verse 13. So Boaz took Ruth and she became his wife. And he went into her and the Lord gave her conception and she bore a son. 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. Verse 15. He shall be a restorer to you of life and a nourisher of your old age. For your daughter-in-law who loves you, who is more than more to you than seven sons has given birth to him. Then Naomi took the child and laid him on her lap and he became his nurse. 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.

Please pray with me as we come to this portion of God's word. Dear father in heaven, we thank you that you are a good and loving father who longs for us to know more about you and your ways. And so you've given us your word. We ask that you would help us to understand what you've given us. That everything that is written about you, we would hear and see and know and believe. We ask these things not because we have earned it, but because your son has.

And so we ask it in his name, in the name of Jesus. Amen. We're jumping in at a high point of tension here because as you remember from last week, we are not sure exactly what's going to happen. Ruth has proposed that Boaz would be her redeemer by marrying her. And yet there's a complication because there's a closer redeemer. Now we've learned before that the redeemer was someone who was related to a person in their family who was in a very bad situation. Maybe someone had been sold into slavery because they were in debt. Maybe they'd had to give up their land due to an unforeseen circumstance. But for whatever reason, this person was very dire circumstances. And so a redeemer was someone who would come and they would buy them back out of slavery or they would buy that land back so that they could have it, so that they could restore them to fullness. And so a redeemer, in a sense, is someone who makes an investment but never gets to see the return. They make an investment for someone else's sake. And as we saw last week, a redeemer can also marry a widow who has not had children. And the idea of marrying the widow who has not had children is to carry on the name of the man who died. We see that in this passage in verse 5 and 10, Boaz talks about the necessity of carrying on the name of Elimelech. The purpose for this in God's plan for his people of the Old Testament was that the family was the core of society, family, number one. And so he wanted the family name to continue. But number two, God wanted to protect his people from the tragedy of having the haves and the have-nots. And so he wanted to prevent the death of a man without an heir from causing that heir's inheritance to transfer to someone else in the family. In other words, he didn't want one man to begin to amass large amounts of property while other people had no property to work with. And so this idea of land and marriage are all tied together. And we come upon that very issue in this chapter because we have a surprise. We expect that

Boaz is coming here to marry Ruth. He takes action. He shows up at the city gates. And yet, for some reason, he doesn't want to talk about marriage at all. Did you notice that? He wants to talk about land.

[ 11 : 30 ] He says in verse 3, by the way, this redeemer, this closer redeemer that he's trying to talk to just happens to pass by at the right time. And so we continue to see what we learned a few sermons ago, that there are things that just happen. But really, it's God's providence blessing his people as they follow after his mission. So Boaz takes action. On the one hand, he's not passive, but God meets him at the same time. He brings him to the right place at the right time. And Boaz is talking about land, not marriage. So we have a surprise here in verse 3. He says, Naomi, who has come back from the country of Moab, is selling the parcel of land that belonged to our relative Elimelech. 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'll redeem it, redeem it. Now, this doesn't just raise a surprise for us why he's talking about land rather than marriage, but it also raises another question about the previous three chapters.

If Naomi has this plot of land, why has she been so destitute this whole time? She came back looking for food, and Ruth had to glean for them. And yet it turns out that she's had property all along. Well, the book doesn't answer this question for us directly, so we have to piece a few things together. Presumably, the original audience would have known exactly what was going on because they were familiar with the customs at the time. But the best that we can figure out that happened is this. When Elimelech and Naomi left, it was impossible to permanently sell your land if you lived in the land of Israel. And so what they most likely did was they sold the rights of use to the land to someone else. This is a typical practice to sell the rights of use for a time. In fact, if you were in a dire strait financially, this is something you might do to regain money, something you might do to pay off the debt. And that's part of what a redeemer would do. A redeemer would buy back the land so that you could have the use of it again. They would buy back your livelihood. So the most likely thing that happened is that Elimelech and Naomi left for Moab, and they sold someone the rights to the land. And for whatever reason, when Naomi came back, she wasn't able to buy back the rights.

And whoever had the land had no interest in helping her. And so there's someone that's been using her land this whole time, and she's been unable to repossession it. And this is the very situation for which a redeemer is needed. The redeemer comes back and gets the land back for the person who can't afford to buy it, so that they can once again have the family plot, the family land. And so that's what this man is suggesting here. He's saying, would you like to buy back the rights of this land? But remember, he doesn't mention the name Ruth at all. Why is that?

He says, would you like to buy back the land of Naomi? Well, this redeemer seems very eager to buy back the land until Boaz's brilliance comes through in verse 5. He says, oh, by the way, this redeemer said he's going to redeem it, right? He's eager for this deal. It's interesting, he's at the city gates. He hasn't taken any time to think about it. He doesn't need to go back and check his bank accounts or his investments to know if he can afford it. He jumps at this opportunity until verse 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. Then the redeemer said, I cannot redeem it for myself, lest I impair my own inheritance. Take my right of redemption for yourself, for I cannot redeem it. Why does this change the deal so much? You see, when this redeemer first heard about this opportunity, he thought it was an opportunity just tied to Naomi. And so he would be able to perform the rights of a redeemer by the letter of the law. But remember, Naomi is an older widow. He's probably not going to have to produce an heir. And so if he does this, most likely he is going to be able to take this land for his own.

[ 15 : 52 ] Now he'll have to support Naomi while she's a widow, but he'll do that from the proceeds of the land. And then when Naomi passes away, instead of it going to the heir of Naomi, it's going to go to him. And so he has a wonderful business opportunity in front of him. He can look great. He can come in and play the part of a redeemer. He can buy back the land. He can support Naomi. And he can also end up getting a great business deal. And so this redeemer is not interested at all in redemption.

He has no interest in actually helping the foreigner. He's not interested in making an investment that someone else is going to see the profit for. And so when he hears that Ruth goes along with it, he realizes that if Ruth comes with it, there might also be an heir. And if there's an heir, this land that he buys is going to go to that heir. It's going to go to Ruth's first son. It's not going to go to him. And so we find out that this redeemer actually has no interest in redemption.

Because a redeemer is someone who's willing to save someone else at great cost. This man looks and realizes that it's going to cost him something.

It's interesting because if we look at the pattern of redeemers like this in the Bible, it usually involves them trying to get out of their responsibilities. This happened with Judah and Tamar, who we're going to talk about in a little bit in Genesis 38.

It happened another time in Genesis as well. That the redeemers are always trying to figure out a way to not have to redeem. Because it's very expensive to be a redeemer. Very expensive.

[ 17 : 39 ] And so this man pulls out completely. Verse 6, I cannot redeem it. I'm not willing to pay the price for someone else. I'm only willing to pay the price if I can actually do what God's intention was not to happen.

If I can accumulate more and more property for myself. And of course this is what Boaz had planned all along. We see his brilliance here that he waits until verse 5 to suddenly turn the tables on this man.

And show him that this is a real opportunity for real redemption. And of course that's something that this quote-unquote redeemer has no interest in. And so Boaz quickly seals the deal.

He's brought in 10 elders. We saw that at the very beginning to make sure that this is done in all the right legal proceedings. He does it with witnesses so it can never be undone. They follow an ancient custom of exchanging sandals.

And then they have all the witnesses in verse 11 who bless them. And so this redeemer highlights for us what Boaz is doing.

[ 18 : 47 ] Remember I said last week we were going to see that Boaz was also going to pay a great price. The fact that this redeemer, this nameless redeemer backs out, underscores the sacrifice that Boaz is willing to make.

This redeemer, in a sense, serves as a foil for Boaz. Highlighting and underlining and accenting the ways in which Boaz is a true redeemer.

He is willing to sacrifice, to give up, to buy land that he's not going to see his investment come back on. Because he's only going to keep this land until Ruth's oldest son is able to take it for his own.

So he's never going to see the money come back. He's making an investment for someone else's sake. Remember we started by asking, how does the story end when we walk and work with God?

The first way that the story is going to end is sacrifice. If we walk and work with God, whether we're suffering or someone else is suffering, we will end up giving a lot.

[ 20 : 13 ] We'll end up sacrificing a lot. In fact, if we walk with God and work with God, we will end up giving up everything. Because God's heart is towards the marginalized.

And it's towards the foreigner. You notice the other thing that Boaz did in verse 5? He gave Ruth her full name. Ruth the Moabite. You're not just redeeming someone.

You're going to get to redeem a foreigner. And this land that you invest in is going to go to someone who does not have pure Israelite blood. But Boaz here models for us the sacrifice that will happen.

That if we walk with God, if we follow after Jesus, it is going to cost us tremendously.

It might cost us, like it does Boaz here, it might be a financial cost. Boaz is using his resources not for his own fulfillment, but to save those around him.

[ 21 : 23 ] To save a foreigner. It might not be a financial sacrifice. It might be a sacrifice of time. As we do the things that Boaz and Ruth have shown us here, as we commit to people who are suffering.

It's going to involve a sacrifice of our comfort. Sometimes of our happiness. But it might just lead to joy.

And it also doesn't end with sacrifice. Because that's only the first answer to our question. Remember we've talked before about how important names are in the book of Ruth?

There's not many people who aren't given a name. I think the only other character I can think of is Boaz's servant in chapter 2. We didn't find out his name.

In verse 5 and verse 10, Boaz reminds us what he's doing. Did you notice it? In verse 5.

[ 22 : 38 ] You acquire Ruth the Moabite, the widow of the dead, in order to perpetuate the name of the dead in his inheritance. That Elimelech's name is going to continue. And then we hear that in verse 10 when he tells everyone what he's done.

Also, Ruth the Moabite, the widow of Malani, 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. What was the Redeemer unwilling to do?

He was unwilling to perpetuate the name. He was unwilling to raise up someone else's inheritance. And in the Old Testament, the punishment fits the crime.

And so this Redeemer has no name. The one who would refuse to raise up someone else's name also loses the chance to have a name.

When we know the names of everyone else, this is the man who's cut out. And as we'll see next week, it's Boaz's name that's going to continue.

[ 23 : 52 ] It's Boaz who's going to show up in Matthew chapter 1. And here. Because he was willing to raise up the name.

And so we're not just left with sacrifice. Verses 11 and 12, we see the blessing that everyone asks for, for Boaz. In verse 11. In other words, you're from the tribe of Judah.

And may you be considered just as great as the founders of your tribe because of what you've done. May the Lord bless you for your sacrifice. And we see immediately that that blessing begins to take place in the very next verse.

In verse 13, Boaz took Ruth and she became his wife. And he went into her and the Lord gave her conception and she bore a son. This is only the second time in the entire book of Ruth that something has been explicitly ascribed to God.

The first time was in chapter 1 when the Lord visited his people with food. And now he visits Ruth and Boaz with his special blessing. If you remember from chapter 1, it was interesting that Ruth had been married for 10 years.

[ 25 : 14 ] And yet there was no heir. And it's not stated, but we can only assume that she and Orpah were unable to have children. And now God extends his blessing to her and Boaz.

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. He shall be to you a restorer of life and a nourisher of your old age.

This blessing is not just going to be for Boaz and Ruth. But as we saw last week, it's going to bless the rest of God's people too. And so Naomi is going to have a blessing.

And here's the word. Here's the third occurrence of the word. Verse 17. And the women of the neighborhood gave him a name saying, A son has been born to Naomi.

We haven't seen the word son since chapter 1. And when we saw it in chapter 1, it referred to Naomi's sons who died.

[ 26 : 22 ] Remember at the end of last chapter, we saw the first problem solved. That Ruth came back with lots of food from Boaz so that Naomi would not be empty-handed. And here, Ruth solves her second problem.

She comes back with a son. And so the question that was started at the beginning of Ruth, all the way when we started at the beginning of July, what's going to happen to Naomi because she has no sons and no food?

It's because of Boaz and his sacrifice that now Naomi is going to be able to go all the way from empty to full.

She's been restored, not just with food, but with a son. And it's interesting that they say this son has been born to Naomi because of course we know that Naomi didn't give birth to the son, right?

But it's God's restoration here. And so what happens when we walk and work with God? It's not just tremendous sacrifice, but it's also great reward.

[ 27 : 37 ] Because God delights to bless and reward his people who walk with him, who follow his path of sacrifice.

God delights to do what he does just here. He visits Ruth and Boaz. He blesses them. He uses them to restore Naomi. And so when we walk and work with God, the story ends with sacrifice, but also great reward.

Because God delights. He delights to bless and reward his people. And yet if we were to stop there, it would be in some ways trite.

Because if you have been through suffering, if you've lived in Ruth chapter 1, you know that this is not complete fullness. Naomi is still a widow.

There are perhaps still going to be times that Naomi wakes up at night and realizes that Elimelech is not with her. Perhaps as she holds a grandchild, it will remind her of her own children who aren't with her.

[ 28 : 54 ] Remember that Boaz and Ruth have a great gap in age. That most likely Boaz is a generation older than Ruth.

And as they have this great marriage that's been blessed by God, there will probably be times when they have struggles. Ruth will realize the truth of what Boaz said when he said you could have gone after younger men, whether rich or poor.

And Boaz perhaps will come to realize some of the challenges of marrying someone much younger than him. And so while we see a restoration of Naomi, they still live life in this world.

The ends are not all tied up. Not everything is brought back. No one is going to come back from the dead. Elimelech.

Milan. Chilean. That this is not some trite and sappy story about God taking someone and giving them back everything they had.

[ 30 : 07 ] It is about God restoring and blessing. And yet in this life, we never experience complete fullness. We'll never experience complete restoration.

And that's where the end of Ruth is going to point us. We'll talk more about this next week, but we see it a little bit here. Remember, a son has been born to Naomi.

They named him Obed. And then we find out some things. He was the father of Jesse, the father of David. Remember, we talked in chapter one that this would happen during the time of the judges.

That there was tremendous political turmoil happening. And so they're not just looking for restoration as a people, but as a nation. And David is going to bring that in part, but he's going to point forward to someone else.

We talked last week that God brings his power and his presence through real people in real time and real space. And he's going to do that through a descendant of David.

[ 31 : 15 ] He's going to do that through Jesus. And he's not going to do that through Jesus the bumper sticker. He's going to do that through Jesus the real man. He's a Jewish man. He's born in a village, not a town.

He's born in Galilee called Nazareth. He's going to live a real life. He's going to serve as a builder. He's going to walk with people and he's going to teach them.

But he's also going to be more than a man. He's going to be the only one who can bring complete fullness. And while Elimelech is not going to come back from the dead, Jesus is going to raise the dead.

We discussed when we went through the book of Matthew the fact that Jesus' miracles are meant to show us what true and complete fullness will look like. It will look like the dead being raised and the sick being healed.

And so while there's partial fullness here for Naomi, the end of this book points us to full fullness. It points us to the fullness that Jesus is going to bring in real time and real space.

[ 32 : 28 ] And Jesus is going to follow this pattern of suffering and reward. Remember that the Redeemer is someone who helps a person who's related to them.

And yet Jesus is going to take that pattern and he's going to break it and fill it even more. Because he's going to come for people who are estranged from him. Who are not his blood.

He's going to come and he is going to pay the price for someone else to see the reward. And his sacrifice will be his reward. Because his sacrifice is for you and me.

And that is what he longs for. For that to be the reward. And so what happens when we walk with God and work with God?

We follow after the same pattern that Jesus did. We follow after the pattern of sacrifice and reward. And just like Boaz for us, the reward is worth it.

[ 33 : 29 ] It is worth everything. One of my favorite stories is about Steve Jobs.

I'm fascinated by Steve Jobs. I probably wouldn't want to be his friend because he was quite the character. But I would love to at least be able to sit down with him and talk for a little bit.

And probably my favorite story about Steve Jobs happened when he was 26 years old. When Steve was 26, it became clear that he did not have the maturity to run Apple. And so while he was the founder and the starter, the board told him, you are not going to be able to do this.



We need to bring in some adults. And so, but they told him, you can have a veto power over who we bring in as the CEO. And so Steve Jobs, they interviewed 20 people and Steve Jobs said no to all of them. And then they finally identified someone outside of the tech industry.

They brought in John Scully who had been the rock star of Pepsi. He was the one who had first introduced the two liter bottle as well as the Pepsi Challenge. He had taken Pepsi from being a regional brand to a national brand.

[ 34 : 32 ] And he'd moved from driving trucks to Pepsi to being its CEO in a very, very short amount of time, about a decade. When he first showed up at Apple, it was just a few houses. And Steve Jobs had a pirate flag flying from the top.

So he'd come from this great corporate headquarters to talk to this man who was eccentric, strange. Jobs tried to court him over several months and it finally came down to the moment where Scully had to give him an answer.

Whether he was going to stay with Pepsi where he'd been successful, where he was safe and secure, where he could continue on this great trajectory. And of course, Scully realized all of that.

And so he finally had to let Jobs down gently. And he said, Steve, I really like you. I'm willing to be a consultant for you, but I think I need to stay where I'm at.

I think I'm going to stay with Pepsi. I'm not going to come to your pirate flag house. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Steve Jobs paused for a second and then he turned to him and said, John, do you want to sell sugar water for the rest of your life?

[ 35 : 45 ] Or would you like to come with me and change the world? John didn't give his two weeks notice because the following Monday, he started his first day at work.

at Apple. Brothers and sisters, Jesus has come and he's died and he's risen again and because of that he has unleashed the most powerful force in the world and there are many things that we might not want to sacrifice but when we realize that that is what is at stake, there is no way we'll want to continue selling sugar water because that's what Jesus offers to all of us.

He offers complete and full restoration for those who will follow him in sacrifice and reward. And so he asks us to do that, to walk with him to the end.

Will you pray with me? Dear Father in Heaven, we thank you for this book. Thank you for giving us stories to make us wise so that we can learn about you.

Thank you that you were not satisfied with partial restoration, with partial fullness, but that you wanted complete fullness and so you sent your son and he was the fullness of God and yet he was our greatest redeemer who gave up everything not for his kinsmen but for us.

[ 37 : 27 ] We ask that you remind us of it, you'd strengthen us, that we would be able to follow after you paying the price of sacrifice but also following you with the reward.

We ask all these things in the name of your son. Amen.