



Central Peninsula Church

Catalog No. 1279-4
Ruth 4
Mark Mitchell
September 5, 2004

God's Surprises

SERIES: *Romance and Redemption*

Everyone loves surprises. I was surprised when I found a white Pearl drum set under the tree on my twelfth Christmas. I was surprised when my wife threw a party for me on my thirtieth birthday. My greatest surprise came almost 13 years ago. Lynn was giving birth to our third child. We already had two girls and with Lynn coming from a family of five girls we just sort of figured that we produced girls! That was fine with me. I was happy with my girls. I was never one of those fathers that felt deprived not having a boy. So when Matt was born we were all in a state of shock! We were all jumping around the delivery room saying, "I can't believe it's a boy! The nurses and doctors all thought we were a little strange but we were truly surprised. Aren't surprises wonderful? As we come this morning to Ruth, chapter four, we see surprises of this kind and we learn that our God is a God of great surprises.

Chapter three ended with the whole issue of Ruth and Boaz's marriage up in the air. They were very much in love and wanted to get married, but they also wanted to do things right. Part of the reason they were marrying was out of loyalty to Naomi. They wanted to raise up a child for Naomi and her deceased husband Elimelech so that their family wouldn't be snuffed out of Israel forever. Remember, God made a provision in the law that said a close relative could come along and act as a kinsman redeemer for the family. He could marry the wife of the deceased, or if she was too old, as in Naomi's case, her daughter-in-law. And their first child could be given over to carry on the deceased family's name. Boaz was a close relative of Elimelech's. But, there was one problem. There was a kinsman closer than Boaz. The way these things worked the closer relative had the first right of refusal. This was a real problem. Boaz had said that all his people in the city knew that she was a woman of excellence. Certainly he would want Ruth. So this was a real problem. And we see Boaz confronting this problem in vv. 1-12.

I. GOD'S SURPRISE #1 - A MARRIAGE 4:1-12

"Now Boaz went up to the gate and sat down there, and behold, the close relative of whom Boaz spoke was passing by, so he said, 'Turn aside, friend, sit down here.' And he turned aside and sat down. He took ten men of the elders of the city and said, 'Sit down here.' So they sat down. Then he said to the closest

relative, 'Naomi, who has come back from the land of Moab, has to sell the piece of land which belonged to our brother Elimelech. So I thought to inform you, saying, "Buy it before those who are sitting here, and before the elders of my people. If you will redeem it, redeem it; but if not, tell me that I may know; for there is no one but you to redeem it, and I am after you.'" And he said, 'I will redeem it.' Then Boaz said, 'On the day you buy the field from the hand of Naomi, you must also acquire Ruth the Moabitess, the widow of the deceased, in order to raise up the name of the deceased on his inheritance.' The closest relative said, 'I cannot redeem it for myself, because I would jeopardize my own inheritance. Redeem it for yourself; you may have my right of redemption, for I cannot redeem it.' Now this was the custom in former times in Israel concerning the redemption and the exchange of land to confirm any matter: a man removed his sandal and gave it to another; and this was the manner of attestation in Israel. So the closest relative said to Boaz, 'Buy it for yourself.' And he removed his sandal. Then Boaz said to the elders and all the people, 'You are witnesses today that I have bought from the hand of Naomi all that belonged to Elimelech and all that belonged to Chilion and Mahlon. Moreover, I have acquired Ruth the Moabitess, the widow of Mahlon, to be my wife in order to raise up the name of the deceased on his inheritance, so that the name of the deceased will not be cut off from his brothers or from the court of his birth place; you are witnesses today.' All the people who were in the court, and the elders, said, 'We are witnesses. May the LORD make the woman who is coming into your home like Rachel and Leah, both of whom built the house of Israel; and may you achieve wealth in Ephrathah and become famous in Bethlehem. Moreover, may your house be like the house of Perez whom Tamar bore to Judah, through the offspring which the LORD will give you by this young woman.'"

The first surprise is that when the whole deal is laid out for the other guy, he says, "No thanks." He had a shot at the best woman in town and he turns her down! What a surprise! This clears the way for Ruth and Boaz to get married. By the way, we see something here of the

kind of man that Boaz was. Boaz is one of the most intriguing figures in all the Bible. He's a model of the ideal Christian man. He is the John Wayne of the OT. Men today need models like this. A godly man; a successful businessman; a man who knew how to treat a woman.

We can learn something here from Boaz about the importance of integrity. Boaz had promised Ruth he would take care of the matter the very next day. In 3:18 Naomi said that Boaz wouldn't rest until he settled the matter today. Here we see Boaz doing just that. He was a man of his word. He didn't procrastinate. He didn't stall. He did it the next day just like he said he would. We're called to be people of our word. When we say something we need to do it. And everything he does here is above board. The city gate was the place you did these kinds of things. The elders are to serve as witnesses. When there is something you really want and you can get by cutting a few corners, don't! Do it right. Then if you get it, you'll enjoy it a lot more!

We also see here once again that Boaz was a man of kindness and loyalty (hesed). The other guy (notice his name is not given!) didn't want to jeopardize his own inheritance, but Boaz was willing to sacrifice for Ruth and Naomi. The other guy didn't look at himself as a possible channel of redemption, of blessing; he looked at life in terms of dollars and cents: "What do I get out of it?" But Boaz says he is purchasing Ruth the Moabite "to raise up the name of the deceased on his inheritance (his land) so that the name of the deceased may not be cut off..." Boaz's motives were unselfish. He wasn't just motivated by profit or simply a desire to get the woman he loved. He was out to show kindness to Naomi and Elimelech. He was willing to pay a price; to sacrifice.

But perhaps most surprisingly we can learn something here from Boaz about shrewdness. Instead of offering Ruth to the closer relative, he offered Naomi's land. He told him that Naomi was forced to sell her land and as the closest relative he had the first right of refusal. Apparently, she was forced to do this because she was so poor. When land had to be sold in Israel it was temporary; at some point the land was to be returned to the original family. But if the original family didn't have an heir, then the closest relative had the right to buy it and keep it. And that's exactly what Boaz led this man to believe was the case. Everybody knew Naomi was beyond childbearing years. She couldn't produce an heir. So the man would get the land for a great price and never have to give it up. Of course, the man agrees. He says, "This is my lucky day! I'll redeem it." But then Boaz plays his trump card. He says Ruth is part of the deal. This means that the closer relative has to

support Ruth and any children she has as well. Furthermore, he would eventually have to return the land to Ruth's firstborn so that it stayed in Elimelech's family. So the man declines. It was all too costly. He might lose his own inheritance (land). Boaz is shrewd. He'd thought this thing through and come up with a plan that honored the law but also baited the man. There is nothing wrong with using our heads and being shrewd at times. Most Christians are far too uncreative about these things. Jesus told us to be shrewd as serpents but innocent as doves.

So God's first surprise was that the closer relative turned Ruth down which cleared the way for Boaz. We actually don't read of the marriage until the first part of v. 13. **"So Boaz took Ruth, and she became his wife, and he went in to her."** Here the writer in very simple yet beautiful words tells us that they were married and their marriage was consummated. Notice that marriage involves both a public witness and a private union. People today wonder why they need to get married. Why have a wedding? Why go to all that trouble? Why spend all the money? But we see here that a marriage takes place in the context of a community. Earlier in 3:11 he had said something important to this effect. He said he would marry Ruth because "*all my people* in the city know that you are a woman of excellence." He cared about what all his people thought. He wanted the support of the community. And he got it. In vv. 11-12 we're told that not just the elders but a large a gathering of people who witnessed the event pronounced a blessing on Boaz and Ruth. A marriage is not something you do secretly or quickly. We need the blessing of our friends and family. And they need the opportunity to rejoice and thank God for what he's done in the couple's life.

I just want to offer a footnote here for those that are here this morning and are single. The story of Ruth testifies to the fact that as you are faithful to God in your singleness, he is quite able and quite willing to find you a mate. This doesn't mean that in every case he will, but it does mean that regardless of how remote you think the possibility is, he can do it. I would even go so far to say that in most cases, he WILL do it. I'm sure that in the case of Ruth and Boaz they both had given up hope. But God was causing them to wait for a reason. A reason they never could have dreamed of at the time. A reason that would never even become clear in their own lifetime, as we will see later.

So once again we've seen God's first surprise – God clears the way for Ruth and Boaz to marry and they begin their life together as one. But this still didn't solve another issue. There still wasn't a child that would continue the line of Elimelech and bring Naomi full circle to a place of fulness. And looming in the background is the recollection that Ruth was childless in their first marriage. Would God provide a child for Ruth and Naomi? Let's read on.

II. GOD'S SURPRISE #2 - A CHILD 4:13b-17a

"So Boaz took Ruth, and she became his wife, and he went in to her. And the LORD enabled her to conceive, and she gave birth to a son. Then the women said to Naomi, 'Blessed is the LORD who has not left you without a redeemer today, and may his name become famous in Israel. May he also be to you a restorer of life and a sustainer of your old age; for your daughter-in-law, who loves you and is better to you than seven sons, has given birth to him.' Then Naomi took the child and laid him in her lap, and became his nurse. The neighbor women gave him a name, saying, 'A son has been born to Naomi!' So they named him Obed."

God's second surprise was that a child was born to Ruth and given to Naomi for her to raise as her own. This is one of those rare places in the book where God pops His head up again. The writer says, "*The Lord enabled her to conceive...*" This was God's doing and here the writer gives credit where credit is due. God allowed what had previously seemed impossible to Ruth to take place. Some of you have struggled month after month of infertility and I don't think there is anything more difficult to endure. But God can open your womb and when He does, regardless of whatever means He chooses to use, it's a miracle. And it's a miracle that needs to be respected.

After the child was born the women of the town come to Naomi, most likely with the child in their arms, and bless the Lord for His gift to Naomi and pray for the child. In chapter one it was one of these women who saw Naomi after her tragic years in Moab and said, "Is this Naomi?" Now, those same women who were stunned by her loss are equally as surprised by her good fortune. They pray that this child may become famous in Israel, not just in Bethlehem but in the whole nation. They call the child a redeemer and a restorer of life to Naomi, and a sustainer of her old age. Not only has this child allowed her family line to continue but he would care for her in her old age.

The reason all this has happened is that her daughter-in-law Ruth loves her. It's through Ruth's love and devotion that these things have come to Naomi. Ruth is said to be better to her than seven sons. Seven sons was seen as the ideal in those days. To say that one daughter is better than seven sons is quite a compliment. But Ruth was quite a woman! Isn't it interesting how we put a high value on certain things that we think we need. At one time Naomi probably thought, "If I could just have seven sons..." But God gave her Ruth instead. "What can Ruth do for me?" she must have thought. But God loves to meet our needs in surprising ways. Naomi took the child and the women proclaim, "a son has been born to Naomi!" This is Naomi's child. Ruth, out of her love and devotion to Naomi, gave him to her to raise and to carry on Elimelech's line.

What a tender scene – Naomi clutching this child to her breast. Naomi, who had lost so much and cried so

bitterly to God, has now been made full! *She shows us that God is able to reverse our situation and bring us from empty to full.* No matter how bad it's gotten for you, God can turn it around. Some of you have lost a parent, a spouse or a even child and wonder if you could ever go on; if God could ever give you a reason for living again. Naomi shows us He can. Some of you have lost your whole family through divorce. Or perhaps you've lost your career or business or home. With God, your losses aren't the final word. God can turn it around for you. When he does, he won't always give us explanations for our tragedies, but He will give us a renewed sense of His presence and a renewed purpose for living. Naomi never did find out why God allowed her husband and two sons to die. But God brought some unexpected blessings her way and with that a renewed sense of His presence and His purpose for her. Naomi had a job to do now, she had to raise this boy! To do that she had to surrender her questions and her bitterness, accept God's present gifts and get on with the job at hand. Sometimes we have to do the same thing. We have to choose to go on.

The story could have just as well ended here. We would all be very satisfied. Everything has turned out nicely. God surprised us with a marriage and he's surprised us with a child. What more could we want. Well, as is so often the case, God's plans for us are usually better than we could ever even dream of. He doesn't just give us what we need or want, He goes beyond all that and gives us more. In vv. 17-22 we see another of God's surprises.

III. GOD'S SURPRISE #3 - A ROYAL LINEAGE 4:17-22

"The neighbor women gave him a name, saying, 'A son has been born to Naomi!' So they named him Obed. He is the father of Jesse, the father of David. Now these are the generations of Perez: to Perez was born Hezron, and to Hezron was born Ram, and to Ram, Amminadab, and to Amminadab was born Nahshon, and to Nahshon, Salmon, and to Salmon was born Boaz, and to Boaz, Obed, and to Obed was born Jesse, and to Jesse, David."

The third surprise that we see in this chapter is most amazing – the child born to Ruth and raised by Naomi turned out to be the grandfather of King David. God answered that prayer of those neighbor women: "*His name became famous in Israel.*" We can even take that one step further. His name became integral in the salvation of the whole world! He was not only the grandfather of King David but he was also in the direct line of the Son of David, Jesus Christ. What a mind

blower! Ruth and Naomi and Boaz would never know any of this. They would never see the result of the very small choices of faithfulness that they had made in the days past.

It's impossible to measure the significance of our lives in any given moment in our life. A universal human need is to be significant; to make a difference; to matter. If we don't matter, we shrivel. Sometimes we look at our lives and we wonder how significant they really are. We wonder how much we really matter in God's scheme of things. The world seems so big and our lives seem so small; we wonder if we really are that significant. But this story and its amazing ending teach us that we have no idea how God might use our lives and we might never have an idea. We're encouraged to just be faithful in the small ordinary details in life. God uses everyday faithfulness to do great things that extend far beyond our own lives. We wonder if the everyday choices we make to follow Christ and trust in Him really matter for anything beyond ourselves. But our choices do matter. It mattered that Naomi chose to return to Bethlehem! It mattered that Ruth chose to go out and glean! It mattered that Boaz was willing to be a kinsman redeemer. It mattered in ways they never could have imagined. Our faithfulness matters too! I can't tell you exactly how, but it does, and it does in a way that we'll only know when we stand before the Lord.

CONCLUSION

We've seen three surprises to close this book; a marriage, a child, and a royal lineage. All of these surprises really point to one thing – redemption. That's what this story is really all about. It's about redemption. It's about how God redeems these two widows from empty to full; from insignificance to significance; from bitterness to blessing. The greatest surprise of all is redemption.

This story of redemption connects with an even greater story. It connects with the story of God's plan to redeem us through His Son Jesus Christ. Jesus is our kinsman redeemer. This story foreshadows our redemption in Christ. Christ perfectly fulfilled the role of kinsman redeemer. Three things were required of a kinsman redeemer.

First, he had to be a near kinsman. That fact is repeated over and over again in this story. Boaz was a near kinsman, not the nearest, but still near. When Jesus became a man he became our near kinsman. He took upon himself our humanity. Hebrews says, **“Since the children have flesh and blood, he too shared in their humanity so that by his**

death he might destroy him who holds the power of death — that is, the devil — and free those who all their lives were held in slavery by their fear of death.” (Hebrews 2:14-15). Some people ask, “Why is it so important that God became a man?” It's not just important; it's crucial to redemption. If he wasn't our kinsman, he couldn't represent us on the cross and redeem us.

Second, he had to be willing to redeem. Naomi's other kinsman was not willing to pay the price. It was too costly for him. But Boaz was willing, and not only willing, he WANTED to redeem Ruth. He wanted to because he loved her. Jesus was willing to pay the price to redeem us. Why was he willing? Because he HAD to? Because his Father made him? Because there was something wonderful within us that drew him to us? No! Because he loves us. He wanted to because he loves us. John says, **“We know love by this, that he laid his life down for us”** (1 Jn. 3:16). Jesus said, **“No one takes my life from me, but I lay it down on my own initiative”** (Jn. 10:18). As our kinsman redeemer, it was his choice, and he did because he loved us.

But it wasn't enough just to be willing; he also had to be able. Naomi probably had some relatives in Bethlehem that felt real sorry for her. But they were poor too. It's nice to have someone feel sorry for you, but it's even better to have someone who can write a check that won't bounce! Boaz was that man. Boaz had the means. Remember, he was called a *“mighty man of wealth.”* Over and over the Scripture says that Jesus was not just willing but he was able to redeem us. He was able because he lived a sinless life and he was a perfect offering for sin. Hebrews 7:25 says, **“He is able to save forever those who draw near to God through him...”** He is our great kinsman redeemer who has the means to redeem us.

The question we're left with is this: Has he? He is willing and he is able, but has he redeemed us? Like Ruth, have we sought refuge under his wings? Have we come to him and said, “You're my kinsman. Now redeem me.” That's what it means to become a Christian. It means you put your trust in him as your kinsman redeemer. If you do that, you'll be surprised with the greatest surprise of all.

© 2004 Central Peninsula Church, Foster City, CA