

# The Romance of Redemption

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[ 0 : 0 0 ]      Family tragedy, economic despair, uncompromising loyalty, hopeful opportunities, romantic possibilities, divine intervention, joyful resolution.

All the essential limits, ingredients of a great drama are found in the brilliantly inspired story of Ruth. And yet it is a story that serves to contribute to the unfolding of a much larger and more significant drama, the sacred romance that exists between God and his people.

Yes, I said romance. God pursues sinners. When Adam sinned, what did God do?

God came and pursued him and made for him a skin to cover his nakedness. When the world became so violent that the Lord flooded it, he rescues Noah and his family.

When Abraham lied about Sarah in order to save his own life, God came and rescued Sarah from the harem.

[ 1 : 3 7 ]      Twice. When Israel was enslaved in Egypt, God pursued them, redeemed them out of slavery and out of Egypt.

God even sent Jonah to a notoriously wicked Nineveh to call them to repentance.

And when they did repent, God gave grace to these notoriously wicked sinners. God pursues sinners. He pursues them.

Why? Because he loves sinners. We read in the Gospel of John, For God so loved the world that he gave his only son, that whoever would believe in him might have eternal life.

When Israel sinned again and again, God sent prophet after prophet after prophet after prophet to restore them to himself.

[ 2 : 4 2 ]      And finally, God sent his own son to pursue and save sinners. It was a sacred romance. God has wooed us to himself by his love.

God has wooed us to save sinners. So, as we preview this book, I want to just ask a few questions. Why the book of Ruth? First of all, why this book?

Well, you know, I kind of was flipping through the pages of the Old Testament. This one's really nice and short, so that's why I picked it. No, no, no. No, no, no. It is a wonderful, wonderful story.

And I believe in this time when many are fighting hopelessness and the unknown and asking, perhaps asking, where is God in all of this?

Where is this going? The book of Ruth answers these very kind of questions. It's a down-to-earth book. It's deeply moving. Yet, it is recognized by scholars all over and through the centuries as a literary masterpiece.

[ 3 : 5 7 ]      We can empathize with Naomi, her loss, her grief, her despair, even her bitterness. I like Naomi.

I don't know if I'd like being around her, but I like her because she's real. She doesn't hide anything. She's real. And she vents. And she vents against God.

She's still a believer. She's just an angry believer. But we can empathize. Look what she's gone through. We admire Ruth.

Oh, what an extraordinary woman. We see her humility, her courage, her extraordinary loyalty to a bitter woman.

Imagine that. And then we see this Boaz, this older man that comes in and is so gracious. And generous. And moved by the humility of Ruth.

[ 5 : 03 ] So humility meets grace. And good things happen when humility meets grace. It's a great story. We learn much from these people.

But ultimately, this story points us to Christ. You heard the term redeemer, redeemer, redeemer, who buys someone out of their tragedy, out of their ruin, out of their emptiness.

And all through the story, one of the themes we will see crop up over and over is this behind-the-scenes God who is working.

Who is working. His hidden smile behind the dark providence comes through this story. And it helps us to know God is there.

It helps us to know how to look. Where is God in these dark times? So, what's the story about?

[ 6 : 10 ] How does the story of Ruth unfold? It unfolds in four acts. We have four chapters, which are basically the four acts of this story.

As I mentioned, it's a literary masterpiece that has been written and thought out and written down so carefully and measured. It builds suspense.

It brings in complications. It answers issues by the end. And so, it starts in chapter 1, act 1, with Naomi's ruin.

We find in verse 5, in just the first five verses, there's been a famine. And they go away to another country to get food. They're there for 10 years. And while they're there, Naomi loses her husband and her two sons.

She's lost everything. She is left alone without her sons, without her husband, without a provider. She's basically hopeless.

[ 7 : 13 ] And look at what she says to her daughter-in-laws in verse 12. She says, turn back, my daughters. Go your way, for I am too old to have a husband.

If I should have hope. Stop there. If I should have hope. Which means she does not have hope. She is hopeless.

Even if I should have a husband this night and should bear sons, would you wait? Would you therefore refrain from marrying? No, my daughters. For it is exceedingly, watch this. It is exceedingly bitter to me for your sake that the hand of the Lord has gone out against me.

God is against me. She says it again at the end of the chapter, the end of the first act. As she comes to Bethlehem and the women greet her. Is this Naomi?

Her name means pleasant. Is this the pleasant one? Is this the one with the nice countenance on her face? Always the smile and the cheerful.

[ 8 : 16 ] Look, is this Naomi? We're so glad she's home. She says to them, do not call me Naomi. Don't call me cheerful. Don't call me pleasant. Call me Marah.

Why? Because Marah means bitter. I am bitter. Because the Almighty has dealt bitterly, exceedingly bitterly with me.

I went away full and the Lord, look who she's blaming. Not fate. Not bad luck. The Lord.

The Lord has brought me back empty. He sent me out full with a husband and two sons and hope of future dreams. And he's brought me back empty.

The Lord has testified against me. The Almighty has brought calamity, literally evil, on me. So here's the first scene, the first act.

[ 9 : 19 ] The ruin. God has brought bitter life to me. Then act two opens with the movement of Ruth.

Ruth takes initiative. Ruth wants to go out and glean. We're calling this act Ruth's refuge. As she goes out and gleans, she just happens to glean in the field of Boaz, who happens to be the relative, who happens to be a redeemer.

Just happens. She didn't know, in other words, where she was glean. She just went out to glean. Just happened to be in Boaz's field. She finds favor with Boaz. Humility meets grace.

Boaz not only lets her glean, but instructs his workers to pour out, pull out more stuff. Just give her stuff. And don't you dare rebuke her. Pours out more stuff.

Sends her home with lots and lots of stuff. Obviously very generous. Here is Ruth, who has left all and is cleaving to Naomi, who said in chapter 1, where you go, I will go.

[ 10 : 27 ] Where you lodge, I will lodge. Your people, my people. Your God, my God. Now in chapter 2, Boaz interprets what Ruth has done.

In verses 11 and 12, she is humbled before Boaz that he's so gracious to him.

And verse 11, but Boaz answered her, all that you have done for your mother-in-law since the death of your husband has been fully told to me. I've heard the whole story. I heard how you didn't return to your own people, but you came with Naomi.

You clung to Naomi that you would not hear of it, and you came to her. And then in verse 12, he says, Watch this.

Under whose wings you have come to take refuge. That's how Boaz interprets what Ruth has done. It's not simply that Ruth has clung to Naomi and loves Naomi, which she does.

[ 11 : 43 ] Which, by the way, how do you love a bitter woman, right? She loves her. But Boaz says, it's more than that. You've come to take refuge under the wings of the God Almighty.

So her refuge, he recognizes that. Then act three is Boaz's remedy.

When Ruth gets back to Naomi and says, look at all the grain, look at all, and Naomi now kind of comes to life. And then when she hears the name Boaz, boom.

Now, Boaz didn't expect that. Oh, he's one of our redeemers. Now, at the beginning of chapter three, Naomi comes up with a daring plan.

Boaz has been gracious to us, but he's our redeemer. And so Ruth, does she see what he's going to have her do? Verse three, Ruth, wash.

[ 12 : 52 ] Put on some perfume. Grab your nicest dress or robe or whatever they wore in those times. And go down to the threshing floor, and you're going to do something.

I know sounds strange, but just do what I say. And after you do it, he'll let you know what to do. Go uncover his feet, lay down on his feet, and say nothing.

It's an act. It's a proposal. It's a proposal. And so when Boaz wakes up in the middle of the night, and there's a woman there.

Who are you? What are you doing? Ruth says, it's just me. It's just your servant. It's just Ruth. You're my redeemer. To which he says, your kindness is greater now than it was before, that you come after an old man.

You don't go after a young man, rich or poor. You come after me and all. I could have only dreamed such a thing. So his promise, I will redeem you.

[ 13 : 59 ] Except, as the writer says, oh, there's a little bit of a complication. Yes, Boaz is a redeemer. He'd be a great redeemer. Problem is, there's another guy ahead of me.

I have to go through him first. If he'll redeem you good, if not, I will do it. I make the promise. So we come to chapter four, which, by the way, at the end of chapter three, the end of act three, Naomi says, this man will act quickly.

Don't worry. He will take care of it. He will get things done. He is Mr. Speedy. Actually, that's what the name Boaz means, Speedy. And he lives up to his name.

The next morning, he goes to the gate, gets the elders, grabs the other guy who's the redeemer, works out the plan, figures it out, and very craftily, by the way, puts it, oh, land, you want to buy the land?

Land's for sale. Want to buy the land? Yeah, I'll buy the land. Oh, by the way, when you buy the land, there comes a Moabite woman with it, who is not a slave, but to be your wife, and you will perpetuate the name of her dead husband so that he's not left without an inheritance.

[ 15 : 12 ] To which the other redeemer says, I can't do that. So he clears the way. Very crafty, the way Boaz kind of works it there and provides redemption.

So he redeems her. He redeems Naomi by redeeming Ruth. All of it's connected. A story that begins in bitterness ends in blessing.

We see in verse 13 in chapter 4. So Boaz took Ruth as she became his wife. He went into her and the Lord.

Now God's intervention again. Remember, she had been married for 10 years back in Moab and no children. There seems to be a repeat in scriptures about women who can't have children until God says, okay, now you have children.

And the Lord gave her conception and she bore a son. And then the women sing a blessing. Blessed be the Lord who has not left you this day without a redeemer. Remember how Naomi had said when she first came to Bethlehem to the same women, don't call me Naomi, call me Marah, I'm bitter.

[ 16 : 23 ] I've been left by God. I've been abandoned by God. And now the women say, blessed be the Lord who has not left you, has not abandoned you without a redeemer.

He's not left you without a redeemer. And then he will be a restorer of life, a nourisher of your old age. For your daughter who loves you, who is more to you than seven sons.

By the way, she's lost two sons. What does she get in return? She gets Ruth who's worth more than seven sons. So when God takes away, God replaces. When God takes away our dreams, he gives us new dreams that are his dreams, that are blessings.

The story that begins in emptiness comes to fullness. A story that begins with ruin and tragedy ends with restoration. So there's one more question I want us to ask as we come to this study.

And it's an important question as Christians. How are we to read Old Testament stories? How are we to understand? Is the Old Testament still something for us to look at?

[ 17 : 38 ] And as we look at, as New Testament Christians, how are we to read these old stories? Are we just to see them as moral lessons? Are they just kind of examples to follow?

How are we to read them? So let me give you quickly three levels upon which we are to read them and understand them. First of all, on a most basic level, we're to understand Old Testament stories as true life stories about real people and real events.

They're not made up. This is not a myth. These are real stories of real events. It's a historical setting in a historical place at a historical time. It's a book that's called Ruth, but it's really about Naomi.

The story begins and ends about Naomi. Her loss, her restoration. Her ruin, her recovery. We can learn about a lot of things.

We can learn from Ruth about unselfishness and humility and grace and courage and lots of things. We can learn from Boaz, who is the Redeemer, the Christ-type figure here, about his grace and his generosity and his own humility, his own sacrifice.

[ 18 : 55 ] So there's lots of things we can learn through the characters in this book. But it is a mistake to use Old Testament stories exclusively in this way because we miss the greater significance.

We can learn much from these real people, but it's not just about moral lessons. It's not just about be like Ruth. Don't be like Naomi, which I would say would not be a good thing.

I say be like Naomi. Naomi. But anyway, it's not just about what do I learn? How do I apply it today? It's bigger than that. So there's more. There's a second level upon which we're to read the Old Testament.

Every Old Testament story is part of a greater story. It's a chapter in God's relationship with Israel. It tells us the opening verse.

In the days we find in our Bible, the book of Ruth follows the book of Judges. And the very last verse in the book of Judges says that in those days there was no king in Israel.

[ 19 : 58 ] Everyone did what was right in his own eyes. That's what the time was like. That's what people were like. It was a dark time. It was a low point in Israel's history.

They had come out of Egypt into the promised land. The book of Joshua tells us how they inherited the land, how they came in and had victory in the land.

And God had fulfilled his promise of the land. Now we come to the time of Judges, which is where Ruth is, when the victories are done. And now it's kind of people rebel and do selfishness.

And God sends judgment upon them. After a while then they repent. God sends a deliverer. And then they go back and do the cycle all over again. They rebel, repent, restoration, rebel, repent.

So about seven cycles of this rebellion and rescue and recovery. And so it's a time where you kind of ask, well, what's God doing now?

[ 21 : 05 ] What about God's promises? What about, is this the end of Israel? Is this the end of the story? And we find by the end of Ruth, it's real purpose. As we see the name, the last word in the book is the name David.

And with the name David, the whole story just opens up. All of a sudden, it's no longer just a story about this widow and her tragedy.

And this beautiful Ruth who comes alongside. And this generous Boaz who comes along. And just the rescue of this little family. All of a sudden, it's not just the rescue of this little family. It's the rescue of the whole nation.

Because with David, we're learning, oh, wait a minute. I know he becomes king. In fact, he becomes the great king. He becomes the model of Christ, the king. And so this story is not just about one little family.

It's about the whole nation. And in fact, as we take a New Testament view of it, it becomes the story of all of us. Because through David will come Christ. And so we see that.

[ 22 : 15 ] We also see God's sovereign hand dealing behind the scenes. How he provides for someone who thinks God is against her. She finds out he's not against her.

And then finally, in a third level, not only do we have just the story within itself and the lessons there. But that every Old Testament story is part of a greater story.

God's relationship with Israel. On a third level, and this is the ultimate and great level. This is the one that Jesus taught us to understand. Every Old Testament story serves the purpose of telling one great story of the whole Bible.

And if you get nothing else, grasp that we are to read the Old Testament from the New Testament perspective. We are to read the Old Testament from the New Testament perspective.

We're to interpret it from the New Testament view. Notice, not only does it bring up the name David, but did you notice how many times the name Bethlehem came up?

[ 23 : 24 ] The story starts in Bethlehem. They go to Moab. They come back to Bethlehem. The next day, you know, chapter 2, she goes out into a field where Boaz has just come from Bethlehem.

They go to the gate of the city in Bethlehem. It's Bethlehem, Bethlehem, Bethlehem. What's the big deal about Bethlehem? Does anything good come out of Bethlehem?

Well, if we sung nativity scenes, then we know Bethlehem kind of becomes important later, doesn't it? It's important now. So, we see these hints that the story's bigger than just what it is.

It's bigger than just a story about a family where we can learn some good things. It's bigger than a story that's about the nation. It's also a story that leads to Christ. Ruth points to a greater redeemer.

It points to this Boaz who becomes a redeemer for the family, who leads to a David who becomes a redeemer for the nation, who through David comes the great redeemer, Jesus Christ.

[ 24 : 41 ] Remember what Jesus said to his disciples in the upper room. This is why we look at the Old Testament this way. In the upper room, Jesus said to them, O foolish men and slow of heart to believe in all that the prophets have spoken.

Was it not necessary for the Christ, the Messiah, to suffer these things and to enter into his glory? And beginning with Moses, which means the first five books of the Bible, and with all the prophets, which means basically the rest of the Old Testament, he explained to them the things concerning himself in all the scriptures, which would include the book of Ruth.

He said to them, These are my words which I spoke to you while I was still with you, that all the things which are written about me, the Old Testament is written about me, in the law of Moses and in the prophets and in the Psalms must be fulfilled.

Then he opened their minds to understand the scriptures. So what Jesus is telling his apostles in that upper room is that when you read all of these scriptures, what we call from this time the Old Testament, when you read them, realize they're about me.

And they had missed it, remember? They had missed it. They believed him to be a Messiah, but a certain kind of Messiah, they missed that he's supposed to suffer and die. So they had read the Old Testament wrong.

[ 26 : 11 ] And so Jesus is saying, This is how you need to read them. You need to understand that all of them point to me. All of them point to a Messiah, a Redeemer, who will die, who will suffer and rise from the dead and pay the price of sin.

That's what you need to see. And so that's how we're going to read it as well. We're going to look for those clues within the story of Ruth that point us to Jesus. God provides a Redeemer.

We see through the Old Testament this kind of picture of redemption over and over. We see it with Noah. Noah became a Redeemer and a Savior in the ark as he saves the people from the judgment.

Joseph becomes a Redeemer, a picture of a Redeemer who saves the people by his... First he suffered, then he's exalted, and then he becomes a Redeemer.

Moses was a Redeemer. Moses, God used to redeem the people from Egypt. David became a Redeemer. Over and over and over, we see these themes and signs and people, how God works.

[ 27 : 17 ] And it ultimately leads to Jesus. And all of these show us this sacred romance of God.

He is pursuing sinners. He is pursuing sinners. He's even pursuing believers who've become bitter.

He's pursuing believers who have become hurt and despairing. And can't see anything but darkness.

That's what God is doing. Notice, finally, what Paul says about the value of the Scriptures. In 2 Timothy 3, he writes, From childhood, Timothy, you have known the sacred writings.

Talking about all these Old Testament writings. Which, those Old Testament writings, are able to give you the wisdom that leads to salvation through faith, which is in Jesus Christ.

[ 28 : 20 ] He's saying that about the Old Testament. The Old Testament is able to give you the wisdom that leads to salvation through faith, which is in Christ Jesus. And then he says, Anybody here want to be adequate?

Anybody here feel inadequate? The Scriptures can make you adequate. Equipped for every good work.

So the story of Ruth is that we will profit from it. It will teach us, reprove us, correct us. It will train us for righteousness. It will make us more adequate as we soak up its teaching.

The story of Ruth draws us in. It engages us. It hooks us because it's a story. And it draws us to ask, What about me?

Do I have a Redeemer? Is there someone who will rescue me? Is there hope for me? It will draw me to ask, Is God pursuing me?

[ 29 : 35 ] And it will draw us to ask, Is there anything in me that's a bit like this extraordinary Ruth? Am I seeking refuge under the wings of God?

So in the end, This story of Ruth is a story about you. About your need, Your ruin, Your despair.

And it's a story for you. Because you will see the God of Scripture who loves sinners. And though sometimes his providence is in the dark shadows, Always, Always behind the scene, He is graciously working for our good.

And so I want us to grasp the hope of this marvelous book In the weeks ahead. Years ahead? No, probably just weeks. It's only four acts.

So at the most, maybe eight weeks. I don't know. We'll see. No promises. Let us pray, shall we? Father, we thank you for the fact that you are a God who tells stories.

[ 30 : 52 ] Thank you for the stories of the Bible, Because they give us pictures. They help us draw in and sympathize and empathize and feel.

We can feel with Naomi. We can feel with Boaz as he reacts to this extraordinary young woman, Ruth.

So thank you for these pictures that help us match our own feelings And our own failures, Our own difficulties with what you do through these people of Scripture And you're still doing with us today.

So inspire our hope, Encourage our faithfulness, And draw out real, genuine following of you.

We pray in Christ's name. Amen. Amen.