

Gleaning God's Provision
Outsiders Become Insiders...Fast!
Ruth 4:1-22
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Today we finish our study of Ruth by looking at chapter 4. This ancient story has remarkable relevance, especially for those who've lost loved ones or facing financial shortage. We learned about how God wants to provide people with **spiritual friendship**, so they don't face crisis alone. We saw how these spiritual friendships allow us to **be real** about our disappointments, which helps heal the hurt and draw us closer to God. This healing helps people to **take initiative**, to move on with their lives, as God provides what seems like **opportune coincidences**, God opens doors and puts new people in our pathways, which we discover as we pray. We saw how God's **gracious community** helps to support people taking steps, sometimes giving us **candid coaches**, who help us to be our best.

Today we see the big picture. God not only heals and provides for us individually; in the process, he brings us into his grand work of blessing the world and saving lives. Before I read the first ten verses of chapter 4, let's remember that in the previous chapter a very forward Ruth awakened Boaz as he slept to ask him privately to claim her in marriage. Boaz was delighted, and agreed to marry her, but was determined to honor God's law in the process. So he told Naomi that he would find the kinsman-redeemer who was first in line to marry the widow, and give him the "first right of refusal."

1 Meanwhile Boaz went up to the town gate and sat there. When the kinsman-redeemer he had mentioned came along, Boaz said, "Come over here, my friend, and sit down." So he went over and sat down. 2 Boaz took ten of the elders of the town and said, "Sit here," and they did so. 3 Then he said to the kinsman-redeemer, "Naomi, who has come back from Moab, is selling the piece of land that belonged to our brother Elimelech. 4 I thought I should bring the matter to your attention and suggest that you buy it in the presence of these seated here and in the presence of the elders of my people. If you will redeem it, do so. But if you will not, tell me, so I will know. For no one has the right to do it except you, and I am next in line." "I will redeem it," he said.

Boaz seemed to be expecting that the man would want to buy the land, and then he subtly brought up the matter of Elimelech's widow.

5 Then Boaz said, "On the day you buy the land from Naomi and from Ruth the Moabitess, you acquire the dead man's widow, in order to maintain the name of the dead with his property." 6 At this, the kinsman-redeemer said, "Then I cannot redeem it because I might endanger my own estate. You redeem it yourself. I cannot do it." 7 (Now in earlier times in Israel, for the redemption and transfer of property to become final, one party took off his sandal and gave it to the other. This was the method of legalizing transactions in Israel.) 8 So the kinsman-redeemer said to Boaz, "Buy it yourself." And he removed his sandal.

Apparently this man didn't want to create a situation where his current wife and children had to divide his property with Ruth and the children born to her. Maybe he wasn't too keen on a foreigner having a claim to his property. So he gave Boaz his sandal, renouncing his claim.

9 Then Boaz announced to the elders and all the people, "Today you are witnesses that I have bought from Naomi all the property of Elimelech, Kilion and Mahlon. 10 I have also acquired Ruth the Moabitess, Mahlon's widow, as my wife, in order to maintain the name of

the dead with his property, so that his name will not disappear from among his family or from the town records. Today you are witnesses!"

11 Then the elders and all those at the gate said, "We are witnesses. May the LORD make the woman who is coming into your home like Rachel and Leah, who together built up the house of Israel. May you have standing in Ephrathah and be famous in Bethlehem. 12 Through the offspring the LORD gives you by this young woman, may your family be like that of Perez, whom Tamar bore to Judah."

So thanks to Boaz's skillful maneuvering, Ruth was his to marry. (Some commentators assume that Ruth was a good looking woman, and that Boaz kept her hidden!) That's just speculation. What's clear is that Boaz was impressed with her character, and didn't care that he was bringing a foreigner into his bloodline. What's also evident is that the elders at the gate welcome this union, and gave it their blessing, wishing them many children.

I see an important principle at work in this story; **because God redeems, the covenant family includes.** God is about the business of claiming the lives of people far from him, and God's people welcome those people as their family and their friends. Therefore, in this story, **Boaz claimed Ruth at the gate.** At the place where the town's business happened, at the place the elders gathered, Boaz honored God by making a public commitment, with official witnesses. Perhaps you already see what the Lord is teaching us; before I name it, let's finish the story.

13 So Boaz took Ruth and she became his wife. Then he went to her, and the LORD enabled her to conceive, and she gave birth to a son. 14 The women said to Naomi: "Praise be to the LORD, who this day has not left you without a kinsman-redeemer. May he become famous throughout Israel! 15 He will renew your life and sustain you in your old age. For your daughter-in-law, who loves you and who is better to you than seven sons, has given him birth."

16 Then Naomi took the child, laid him in her lap and cared for him. 17 The women living there said, "Naomi has a son." And they named him Obed. He was the father of Jesse, the father of David.

*18 This, then, is the family line of Perez:
Perez was the father of Hezron,*

*19 Hezron the father of Ram,
Ram the father of Amminadab,*

*20 Amminadab the father of Nahshon,
Nahshon the father of Salmon, [c]*

*21 Salmon the father of Boaz,
Boaz the father of Obed,*

*22 Obed the father of Jesse,
and Jesse the father of David.*

Do you remember, previously Naomi called herself bitter, but as the story ends, she's bouncing a baby on her lap. Technically Obed was not her grandson, yet like so many of you in blended families, you are blessed when you can include children as if they are your own. And Ruth, the **Moabites**,

as Obed's mother, **becomes the great grandmother of David**, which of course, makes her an **ancestor of Jesus**. Isn't that cool, that Ruth the outsider became a Jewish insider, and part of God's plan to save the world.

In having Boaz claim Ruth, God didn't just heal and provide for Ruth and Naomi. God used their redemption to bless the world. And this story became a reminder to Jewish people that God's covenant wasn't just for them. God redeemed the Jews as His people to bring them into His plan to redeem Jews and Gentiles through Jesus.

That's why **the church welcomes everyone**. Anyone who comes into our midst seeking help and healing is accepted into our family. There is no requirement to belong, other than the decision to welcome God's grace, accepting Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord. Celebrating the way that God brought Jews and Gentiles together to form Christ's church, Peter wrote:

⁹But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light. ¹⁰Once you were not a people, but now you are the people of God; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy. (1 Pt 2:9-10)

The church is not like any other organization; the basis for our fellowship is we are sinners who have received mercy. Sharing Holy Communion is a powerful way to remember that we are all here by sheer grace.

The gathering of Trinity's elders is called a Session meeting, that's our "gate." At those meetings we serve as the witnesses and get to hear wonderful testimonies of newcomers claiming God's redemption. After we hear them claim Jesus as their redeemer, we welcome them into God's covenant family, so they can help us share God's mercy with others.

Usually at those meetings we hear about how Trinity church has blessed them, not only the programs or the teaching, but also the warm welcome they have received. But as a summertime project, let me encourage the church to take this welcome to a whole new level. You see, it's possible for us to be a real friendly church here, but not off-campus. It's very easy to get into a rut of not inviting people into our lives. Let me challenge you to ask God to show you how you can help outsiders become insiders much faster, by inviting someone new into your home, into your Life Group, into your circle of friends, into your golf foursome, onto your fishing boat. I can't tell you who to invite to what; rather let me close by reminding you of scripture:

In Romans 12:13, Paul reminds us to *share with God's people who are in need. Practice hospitality.* Yesterday we celebrated Pat Whitehouse's life, her hospitable nature, and the difference it made. I myself have to practice hospitality.

Hebrews 13:2 encourages us to consider that God is always at work through our hospitality: *do not forget to entertain strangers, for by so doing some people have entertained angels without knowing it.*

So as you glean God's provision in your life, allow God to use you in gleaning the lives of the precious people who can be part of God's harvest, as you were gracious, attentive, and hospitable.