

INTRODUCTION

This is the sixth message in the series, "Ruth: The Romance of Redemption." This message is entitled, "Redeemed, Rescued and Rewarded."

As we come to the final chapter of Ruth, I want to give you an overview of the entire story because I know some of you may be hearing this for the first time. Here's my 100-second synopsis: A long time ago, in a galaxy far, far away...I mean in a country far, far away, an Israelite family left Bethlehem in search of food. They traveled to the pagan land of Moab. The father's name was Elimelech and Naomi was his wife. It was supposed to be a short trip, but they ended up staying 10 years. The two sons married women from Moab, which was forbidden for Jews. Tragically, Naomi's husband, and then her two sons died. After three funerals, Naomi decided to return to Bethlehem. She urged the two young widows to stay in Moab. Orpah stayed, but Ruth committed herself to Naomi and to Naomi's God and returned with her to Bethlehem.

When they returned, they were so poor that Ruth had to become a beggar. She went into the field of a farmer named Boaz to pick up leftover grain. Boaz was so impressed with Ruth's diligence and character that he instructed his workers to leave extra grain for her.

Naomi knew Boaz qualified to be their Kinsman-Redeemer. This meant if Ruth married Boaz, they could legally reclaim the land that formerly belonged to Naomi's husband. Naomi used her matchmaking skills to coach Ruth on how to approach Boaz. One dark night at the threshing floor Ruth courageously asked Boaz to be her kinsman redeemer and her husband. And Boaz said, "¡Sí, señorita!"

But there was a problem: Another man was a closer relative and he had the first right to redeem the land. This other man wanted the property, but when he learned that a bride came with the deal, he said, "Never mind!" This allowed Boaz to marry Ruth and become her Redeemer.

God blessed them with a son named Obed, who turned out to be the grandfather of King David himself! God redeemed Ruth from a life of poverty and loneliness and made her a woman of honor who became one of the human ancestors of Jesus. This is also a love story of how God redeems our lives.

When we finished the story last week, Boaz had told Ruth he would marry her, but first, he had to give this other relative a chance to redeem her. Like any good short story, this detail creates tension in the story. We all want the marriage to take place, but this obstacle could ruin the love story. I've always imagined this other relative as old, fat and ugly—and we don't want him to claim the fair young Ruth! On the other hand, I've always pictured Boaz as a strong, middle-aged guy, good-looking in a rugged kind of way, clean-shaven, with silver hair. Of course, I could be wrong.

Ruth 4:1-13. "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. Boaz took ten of the elders of the town and said, 'Sit here,' and they did so. 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. 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.

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.'

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.' (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.) So the kinsman-redeemer said to Boaz, 'Buy it yourself.' And he removed his sandal.

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. 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!'

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. 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 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.'"

In this drama about love and redemption, there is a crisis that must be overcome before Boaz can marry Ruth. This is also a story of God's love for us and our redemption. In much the same way, there are some issues that must be settled in our understanding of salvation before we can fully accept Jesus as our Kinsman-Redeemer. So, I want to talk about the rival redeemer, the real redeemer and the redeemer's reward.

1. THE RIVAL REDEEMER: He would not redeem Ruth because he only cared about himself

This closer relative is never named, but since he loses his sandal in the deal I'll call him Barefoot Bob. When heard the details of the redemption he refused saying, "Then I cannot redeem it because I might endanger my own estate." (Ruth 4:6)

Naomi didn't own the property in the sense that she occupied it. But because she was the widow of Elimelech, it was like she held a second mortgage on the property. Based on the law of the goel, she had the right to sell it to a qualified kinsman. Barefoot Bob jumped at the offer of the

property. If you were hearing this story for the first time, your heart would sink as you thought, "Oh no! Boaz and Ruth won't be married! Curses, foiled again!"

In Barefoot Bob's thinking, he only wanted the property but didn't really care about helping out a couple of widows. Then Boaz reads the small print of the contract. He said, "Quantities are limited; this offer not valid in all 50 states; some assembly required; use only as directed; void where prohibited by law...and if you buy the land you have to marry Ruth, who just happens to be a Gentile from Moab. So deal or no deal?" This guy was probably thinking, "Hmm. I know Moses commanded us that we were forbidden to marry Moabites and didn't I hear that Naomi's sons broke that law, and look what happened to them—they BOTH died! Umm, let me rethink this." Then he said, "On second thought, no deal. You go ahead."

The exchange of a sandal seems strange to us, but it goes back to when God told Joshua, "Wherever the soles of your feet walk, that shall be your land." To us, it would be like giving the keys to a house once the closing has been finished. But there is a spiritual truth here.

TAKE AWAY TRUTH: The Old Testament Law can never redeem us because it is based on performance

We have a rival redeemer as well, the Old Testament law. And just as Barefoot Bob couldn't redeem, keeping rules and regulations can never redeem you. The biggest lie Americans believe is that you can earn your way to heaven. Stand on the street corner and ask the average American how to get to heaven and they'll say, "By doing good or being good." But the truth is that nobody can EVER be good enough.

The Bible says, "For what the law was powerless to do in that it was weakened by the sinful nature, God did by sending his son in the likeness of sinful man to be a sin offering." (Romans 8:3)

The reason God gave the Jews the law was to prove to them that they couldn't keep it! Rules maintain order and we shouldn't just ignore the Ten Commandments and the principles of the New Testament. I suppose theoretically you could go to heaven if you never once had a sinful thought or committed a sinful deed, but does anybody qualify? God's standard is perfection, so we since we don't qualify, we have to depend on a perfect sin offering—Jesus.

2. THE REAL REDEEMER: Boaz paid the full price to rescue Ruth from her poverty and past

When Barefoot Bob reneged on the deal, Boaz jumped in to pay the price. He said, "Today you are witnesses that I have bought from Naomi all the property of Elimelech, Kilion and Mahlon. I have also acquired Ruth the Moabitess, Mahlon's widow, as my wife." (Ruth 4:9-10) He used a different word for buying the property and acquiring Ruth. The second word meant he accepted her as his wife.

I've got to say a word about Boaz's integrity. As we hear about another goel, we're tempted to say, "Don't tell the other guy. Just marry the girl and take the land. He probably won't even

know. Don't blow the deal by talking to that other goel!" But Boaz played by the rules—he followed the book. Integrity is doing the right thing in the right way even if nobody is looking. A building that has structural integrity means it doesn't have any weaknesses or flaws. A person with integrity doesn't cut corners especially when it comes to God's Word. Boaz was entrusting Himself to God and His Word, and God blessed his integrity. He followed God's Word and paid the price to redeem the property and to receive Ruth.

TAKE AWAY TRUTH: Jesus paid the full price to rescue us from death and destruction

Like Ruth, we're all born into the wrong family. We had a couple of wicked ancestors who gambled away our inheritance. Adam and Eve sinned against God and introduced sickness, death and destruction on God's creation. They gambled away paradise. But Jesus came to restore paradise. He came to redeem us.

Let me give you a couple of illustrations to help you understand redemption. When I was growing up, my mother used to receive S&H Green Stamps when she shopped at the Piggly Wiggly grocery store. How many of you remember green stamps? Stores used to give green stamps to create customer loyalty and it worked! I'm sure there were times my mother bought stuff we didn't need just so she could get more stamps to fill a book. I can remember licking those nasty-tasting stamps and putting them into those books. At the height of their popularity in the 1960s there were three times as many green stamps printed as U.S. Postage stamps. The first thing I remember us redeeming with those stamps was a shiny new electric toaster. I thought, "This is a good deal! We just take stamps in and we take stuff out." Actually, the company still exists online and you can redeem what are called greenpoints at www.greenpoints.com. And if any of you have any old books of green stamps, you can still redeem them! For instance if you have 1,200 points in green stamps, the current company will give you \$1.20 for those stamps!

Here's a current illustration of redemption. Today when someone gives you an iTunes card, you can log on to the iTunes website and redeem that card for music or videos. A card that hasn't been redeemed won't do you any good. It has to be redeemed to be of value. In the same way, our lives become valuable when Jesus redeems us.

Those illustrations are simplistic ways of understanding that Jesus paid the ultimate price to buy us back from the damage caused when humanity lost paradise. The Bible says, "Jesus, who gave himself for our sins to rescue us from the present evil age...Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us, for it is written: 'Cursed is everyone who is hung on a tree.'" (Galatians 1:4; 3:13)

Someone had to pay the price, and that's what Jesus did for us. When I was growing up in L.A. (Lower Alabama) I loved playing all kinds of sports. We had a pretty large yard so it seemed like our yard was the neighborhood football field or the baseball field, depending on the season. I experienced a pretty good growth spurt in the sixth grade and I was bigger than most of my buddies. I loved baseball and about that time I got a new Louisville Slugger bat. And I discovered I could hit a baseball a lot farther than my friends. In fact, one afternoon my buddy, Spud, was pitching and I was up to bat and I really connected with his fastball (that wasn't very fast to begin with). I watched as the ball soared into the sky, and I could tell it was the longest

homer I'd ever hit. It would have been over the fence if we'd had one. I was standing there staring at the ball as it started descending right toward the front window of our neighbor, Mrs. Vaughn. And it wasn't just any window—it was one of those large "picture windows." For a second I thought the ball would miss, but it scored a direct hit and the window shattered. All my friends turned and ran, but I just stood there, knowing my world had just ended. Mrs. Vaughn, who was the neighborhood little old, mean lady, came rushing out holding my baseball making a direct line toward me. So rather than stand there and confront her, I turned and ran into the house and slammed the door. My mother said, "What's wrong?" I said, "Nothing! But if someone rings the doorbell, don't answer!" She did, and I was in trouble.

Later that day, my dad examined the damage and put a tarp over the window and told Mrs. Vaughn he would have it repaired. It was going to cost the astronomical amount of about \$25! Then my dad told me, "David, since you are responsible, you are going to pay the full price." I worked around the neighborhood doing yard work, and I collected drink bottles, and devoted my allowance for several weeks until I earned \$25." I took the money to my dad and said, "Here it is." He said, "Son, I already paid to have the work done, and instead of you paying me back, just keep it. I think you've learned your lesson about being careful where you play ball." Wow! That was one of my first experiences with grace. I was guilty, and I thought I had to earn redemption, but somebody else paid the price for me. The older I get, the more I realize I am totally guilty of sinning against a Holy God. But unlike the broken window, there's no way I can earn the enough for the required payment. But the full price has to be paid. Jesus stepped in and said, "You're guilty, but I paid your price." I have redeemed you.

3. THE REDEEMER'S REWARD: Boaz blessed Ruth by giving her himself

I love stories with happy endings and verse 13 introduces the beginning of the happy ending:

"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." (Ruth 4:13) I'll talk more about their marriage and son next week, but for now, notice Ruth and Boaz are finally together as husband and wife. What Ruth got in the deal wasn't just a piece of property; in fact, she probably never even lived there, Naomi did. Ruth got something much better; she got a husband!

Boaz had Ruth in his heart from that night at the threshing floor, and now he brings her into his home. Once we place our faith in Jesus, He is in our heart and we are in His heart. And one day, we'll join Him in His heavenly home!

Over the past weeks, I've received lots of good comments on this series from Ruth. I received a sweet note from a single gal last week. She said she has been looking a long time for her Boaz, but all she found so far are Bozos, without the funny hair and oversized shoes. But she said she was going to wait for her Boaz. I like her attitude. So guys, we need to step it up; we need some more Boazes. I'm speaking to both single and married men, we need you be like Boaz—a spiritual leader who will treat your wife and future wife with honor and respect. And gals, we need more Ruths. She worked on being beautiful on the outside, but her main focus was on inner beauty: She was a smart girl and a woman of character and courage.

Did you notice the blessing the elders spoke over Boaz and Ruth? They said, "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 your family be like that of Perez, whom Tamar bore to Judah."

TAKE AWAY TRUTH: The greatest gift God gives us is a loving relationship

Like Ruth, our greatest reward is NOT forgiveness or even heaven, it's Jesus Himself. Some people think the greatest reward for a Christian is going to heaven. If that were true the best thing that could happen to you would be to die as soon as you accept Christ! No! The best part of the Christian life is knowing Jesus. Before He met Jesus, Paul was one of the most legalistic religious Jews who ever lived. He had the right pedigree and behavior. But once He came to know Jesus he considered all of his human goodness to be worth less than a pile of garbage. In fact, he wrote: "What is more, I consider everything a loss compared to the surpassing greatness of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things. I consider them rubbish, that I may gain Christ." (Philippians 3:8)

Do you know Jesus? I'm asking if you know facts about Jesus. I'm not asking you if you know people who know Jesus. Do *you* know Jesus? Salvation is all about having a loving relationship with Jesus. Some people still think religion will get them to heaven. But when you get married you don't get a marriage, you get a spouse. When you are saved you don't get the Christian religion, you get Jesus. It's all about knowing Him and having a relationship with Him.

CONCLUSION

Dr. A.J. Gordon was a famous pastor in Boston during the late 19th century. One day he met a little tough street boy who was carrying a rusty cage containing several small birds fluttering about. Dr. Gordon said, "Son, where did you get those birds?" He said, "I trapped them in a field." "What are you going to do with them?" The boy said, "I dunno. I'll play with them a while, and then I'll feed 'em to my cat." Dr. Gordon said, "Son, will you let me buy those birds?" He replied, "Mister, you don't want these birds, they're just little wild birds—they can't even sing." Dr. Gordon said, "Well, I'll give you \$2 for the birds and the cage." The boy said, "Okay, but you're making a bad deal!" After the money was exchanged, the boy walked away whistling with his newfound riches. Dr. Gordon walked out into a field and opened the door of the cage, and coaxed the little birds out into their freedom. They were frightened at first, but soon they all flew away into the sky.

The next Sunday he took the empty birdcage into his pulpit to illustrate his message about how Jesus paid the price of His precious blood to set us free. And he added, "The little boy told me those birds couldn't sing, but when I released them and they winged their way heavenward, it seems to me they were singing, 'Redeemed, redeemed, redeemed!'"

At one time all of us were in bondage to sin, captured by our own selfish, sinful nature. But Jesus purchased our freedom and set us free and our song should be, "'Redeemed! How I love to proclaim it! Redeemed by the blood of the Lamb! Redeemed through His infinite mercy, His child, and forever, I am!"

OUTLINE

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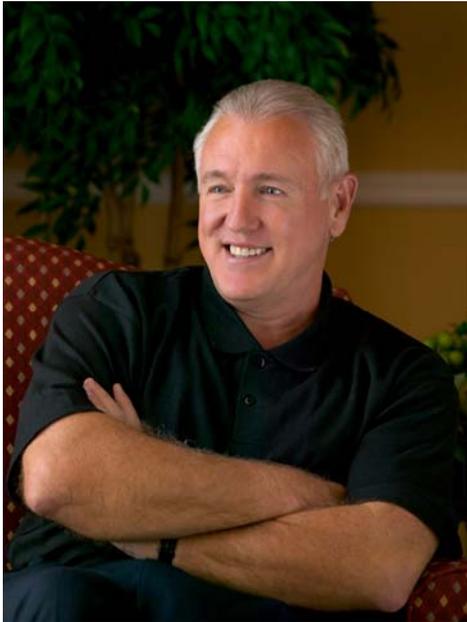
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For the Joy...
Pastor David Dykes