

- Christ, our Goel, like Boaz for Ruth, was not just able **but willing** to redeem and He accepted to redeem the Gentile nations -which **He didn't have to do** as He was to **the lost sheep of the House of Israel**. Cf Mt 15:24
- The author wants us to contemplate Boaz as the figure of the kinsman/redeemer so that we will contemplate what Christ has done for us individually and collectively, paying the price for our liberation in the sight of the nations on calvary; taking us into the new family of God and giving us an eternal future of hope and joy with Him as His bride. He is the one who makes us fruitful spiritually to create a future full of hope for the rest of humanity also.
- For Naomi and Ruth, Boaz held out a future for them. How much more wonderful to have **a future in Christ** our Redeemer! Through Jesus **our name** will **be carried into an eternity of joy**, so we join Naomi's exclamation **Blessed be he by the lord who does not withhold his kindness either from the living or the dead! Amen!!**

### Naomi's Initiative: 3:1-5

- Naomi was not one of those who sit back to let God do everything. No. She acted according to a much later rule: 'to pray as if everything depended on God, and act as if everything depended on you'!
- The reality is that we must do what we can order to let God intervene and do what He can – and nothing is impossible to God.
- It seems that Naomi was not aware that **another man** is a closer relative than Boaz – otherwise she would not have suggested the present plan to Ruth, but the author has made **the reader** clear about this so that we realise that Boaz' action **was not out of necessity but out of charity and generosity**. Jesus has made it clear to mystics that He didn't have to do all that he did either. It was out of His infinite Love and mercy that He redeemed us by paying for each one of our sins.
- Naomi was clear that there was an opportunity for Ruth **to ask Boaz to act as her levir**, and she was anxious that the young woman would find a new home and security for herself. She expressed this in 1: 11 when she asked the two daughters-in-law to go home and find new husbands for themselves.

- Since Boaz has already shown kindness to Naomi through Ruth in providing their needs she now decided **to ask him to be their protector.** Would he be willing to enter a Levirate marriage with Ruth and father a son for Naomi's dead husband Elimelech?
- This was a tall order since the child would not belong to either Boaz or Ruth!! It would **be Naomi's child** through Ruth. This would also require considerable love and generosity on Ruth's part, for the child of her womb would belong to Naomi.
- Marriages were arranged by parents in those days, so Naomi – **acting as parent to Ruth** - works out how to get Ruth into a private meeting with Boaz with no onlookers. This would be difficult at harvest time when the reapers slept in the fields at night. They didn't return home until the full harvest was reaped. This was partly due to difficulties in travel in those days, so harvest time became community time and celebrations occurred Cf Is 9:2: **they rejoice in your presence as men rejoice at harvest time....**
- Naomi instructed Ruth to wash and anoint herself and use a heavy mantle to hide her identity from the reapers ... in other words to approach Boaz to ask him **to marry her for Naomi's sake!** Ruth is to watch Boaz to find out where he will sleep; then approach when he is asleep and lie at his feet having uncovered his mantle. This was a clear request for redemption.

### Ruth's Courageous Loyalty: 3:6-9

- Ruth obeyed Naomi not considering her own feelings in the matter, but it is not spelled out what her motivation was, apart from her loyalty to Naomi. As Boaz admitted, she could have gone after younger men who might be more attractive than an older bachelor: 3:10
- But Ruth has come to appreciate **the importance of land inheritance** among God's chosen people... also that Naomi is too old to remarry and have children.... and since Orpah has returned to Moab the duty falls to Ruth to save the family from extinction.
- Ruth herself is now part of Yahweh's Covenant family and wants to obey His laws, so her **obedience, loyalty and humility** characterise this woman.
- Harvest time was a time for rejoicing among the people who stayed in the fields until the crop was completely harvested and prepared for eating.
- Night was the time for drinking, storytelling and sleeping in the fields. After Boaz lay down to sleep Ruth kept vigil until he was asleep before lying down at his feet – the

place of humility and supplication. Her courage was amazing. She didn't even consider what would happen if she was repudiated as a foreigner!

- At midnight Boaz awoke, saw the woman at his feet and asked who she was.
- Ruth identified herself and made her proposal of marriage: **spread your garment over your maidservant, for you are next of kin.** Cf. Ezek 16:8
- **Boaz understood the gesture.** Ruth was asking Boaz as her **goel** to act as her **levir**.
- This was not only **a very delicate move on Ruth's part, but it was also very risky.** She was placing herself in extreme vulnerability where an unscrupulous man could take advantage of her. Naomi must have known that Boaz was indeed an upright person who could be relied upon to do God's Will. Otherwise, she could not have put Ruth into such a situation.
- That Ruth put herself in such a painful situation showed **the heroism of loyalty and faithfulness.** **She desires nothing for herself – just an heir for Naomi and Elimelech!**

### **Boaz' Gracious Generosity: 3:10-18:**

- Boaz blesses Ruth for her **hesed** to Naomi: **May you be blessed by the Lord my daughter; you have made this last kindness (hesed) greater than the first....** Ruth has put aside what would have been the expected preference for a younger man aside....in favour of family obligations.... So, his first reaction to her is admiration and blessing.
- In Gal 5:5-6 St. Paul tells us that **Christians are told by the Spirit to look to faith for those rewards that righteousness hopes for, since in Christ Jesus Whether you are circumcised or not makes no difference – what matters is faith that makes its power felt through love.** This is how Ruth is living here.
- Boaz then tells Ruth that the townspeople have been talking about her and that the discernment is that **she is a woman of worth.....** Cf proverbs 31:10-31, therefore a **woman worth marrying!**
- Boaz understood perfectly that Ruth was asking for levirate marriage and he promises **to help that very day...there will be no further delay.... her prayer is heard: I will do for you all that you ask.**
- Naomi had told Ruth in 3:4 that Boaz **will tell you what to do**

- Remember Cana of Galilee: Jesus' Mother told His disciples to **do whatever he tells you** Jn 2:5 Jesus Himself **Ask and you will receive, seek and you will find, knock and the door will be opened to you** Mt 7:7
- Ruth experiences this under Moses' Covenant because she has the humility to ask and the love to serve which comes from her relationship with Yahweh Himself.

**Complication:** There is a kinsman closer than Boaz!

- The 'other' kinsman has more right than Boaz to be the levir, so if he wants to exercise that right Boaz can do nothing!
- While the levirate marriage was laid down in the Law it could only happen with a man **who was willing** to make such a sacrifice....
- The two widows trust Boaz. He understands that the request is coming from them both, and that they can only expect him to act if he shows the Covenant Heseled – which he does. Boaz is willing, but the case of the other man has to be cleared, so Boaz' love for God is highlighted also.
- Boaz showed his heart when he loaded Ruth with gifts for herself and Naomi. 1x measures of barley was a huge gift – about 88 pounds – a heavy load to carry, but **you must not go back to your mother-in-law empty-handed!**
- This gift – and all of his actions – indicated Boaz' feelings for both women, for marriage with Ruth means having the mother-in-law also.

NB: Naomi is now in the opposite position than what she was in on her arrival home to Bethlehem: 1:21 **I went away full, and the Lord brought me back empty**. Those empty days are gone now for **those who sow in tears will sing when they reap!** Ps 126:6

- When Naomi sees the gifts of Boaz she knows it won't be long before everything is sorted between the kinsmen.
- NT: Boaz is a pale image pointing to Christ, our nearest Kinsman/Redeemer, who graciously accepted a Gentile Bride, poured out all His love upon her, loading her with spiritual gifts and paying the price for her redemption, so as to take her into His House and make her His heir to the KOG.

- It is in Jesus that we see the father as **the God of all comfort, who comforts us in our afflictions** 2 Cor 1:3-4; 2 Cor 1:5

## Ruth Chapter 4

- **Boaz' Masterstroke: 4:1-6:** Decision by the city gate.
- It was the custom in Israel for the administration of justice to take place at the city gate where there would be the most witnesses coming and going.
- There **the poor** waited for help: Prov 22:2 **business** was transacted: Gen 23:10; 34:20, there **the elders met** in council: Prov 31:23; Job 29:7 etc
- Boaz met the **nearest of kin** at the city gate and began to bargain with him... then he called the elders to act both as judges and witnesses – which included everyone else there also who would be fascinated with Boaz' case.
- Boaz introduces **a new element into the story** – all by himself – as a good businessman. He said that Naomi **was selling her land** which had belonged to Elimelech. (Maybe he spoke to Naomi privately that this was the only way to eliminate the rival to Ruth?)
- The first refusal to the land was held by the nearest kinsman – who was willing to buy the land for money – until Boaz added that **Ruth went with the deal!** You have to take both! Levirate marriage and the land go together! So, the man refused and left the privilege to Boaz – which is what everyone (including the readers!) wanted.
- It is only at this point in the story that we realise **that Boaz wanted to marry Ruth**, so he manoeuvred the rival out of the equation!

### The unnamed rival's problem:

- If he bought the land he would be poorer for a while but would own the land (which shouldn't be sold under the Covenant anyway!) But if he has to marry the widow and have a son by her – who would not be his – and the inheritance would go **to this son** – then he loses the money and the land in the end.... the fact that he might be dead before that son inherited the land was not considered!

- What this illustrates that to act as goel **was costly** for the man, and many refused. All of this simply highlights Boaz' virtue and the **hesed** he extended to both widows. It went **beyond Law to Love**, but it is the love for God in Deut 6:4-10 that we are dealing with.
- The right of redemption was formally and legally handed over to Boaz in the public square where everybody witnessed the transaction, so there would be no kickback afterwards.
- **To sum up:** the kinsman/redeemer had to be related to those in need, and has to be able to help – hence we were told in Chapter 1 that Boaz was wealthy. He has to be willing to sacrifice in order to redeem... he is under no obligation. **His action is an act of love only...** that's what makes it so great. It fulfils the Law Mt 22:40.

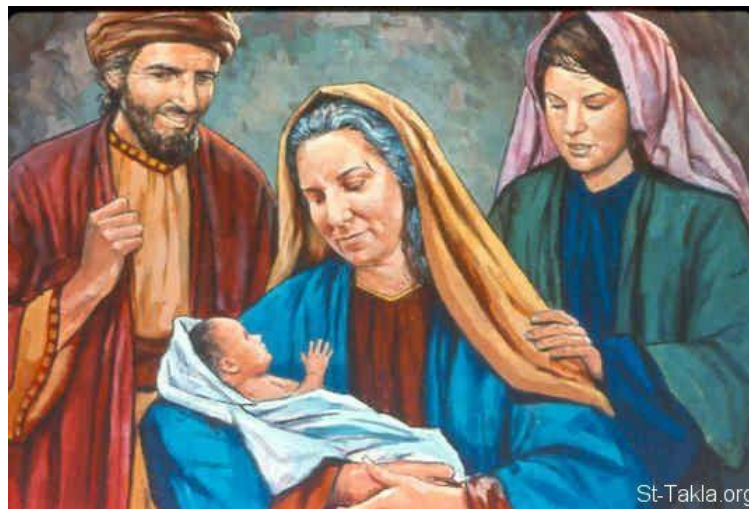
#### **Witness a Marriage: 4:7-10** Boaz marries Ruth!

- The sign of the casting off of the shoe had different meanings traditionally. The oldest tradition is in Deut 25:5-10. There the brother of the dead man refuses to do his duty as levir so he is taken out into the city gate.... **the widow** accuses him before everybody and **she removes the shoe** (takes away his right to act as levir) and spits in his face because he would not serve God in this way.
- In Ps 41: 9 we read **even my bosom friend in whom I trusted, who ate of my bread, has lifted his heel against me.** This is an act of contempt.
- Even in Mt 10:14 disciples are told to shake the dust off their shoes as evidence against some town which rejected their testimony.
- In the Book of Ruth it meant taking one's feet off the land that was to be redeemed – that is renouncing ownership.
- Boaz marries Ruth in public so that society can rejoice that more new life will come to the community.
- The people rejoice for Boaz, Ruth AND Naomi for the Lord has provided for them all

#### **The People's Blessing on their Marriage: 4:11-12**

- The people witness Ruth becoming established among the Chosen people and they are glad. We were told earlier that they respected her.

- They bless the new couple and pray that they will prosper like the house of **Perez**, Boaz' ancestor.
- Perez was one of the twins whom Tamar – the foreigner – bore to Judah when she forced him to be her levir (by pretending to be a prostitute - thus putting her life on the line) Gen 38.
- They also pray that Ruth will be like Rachel and Leah **who together built up the house of Israel**. They do not realise what they re praying, for Ruth will also build up the house of Israel by becoming part of the ancestry to Kind David first, and then the messiah later. So Ruth like Rachel and Leah would have family who are part of God's plans for His Chosen people.
- They also pray that Boaz will be enriched in Ephrathah - the territory where Bethlehem was the chief city - by becoming famous – which he did!
- Since it seems that Boaz was a bachelor, the people pray that he will have children to inherit from him – only the first would belong to Naomi! People had large families in those days because of child mortality.



**Fruitfulness for Boaz and Ruth:** 4:13

Their love bore fruit immediately.

- The arrival of a son was the gift they sought from God because he would be the heir. The fact that daughters are not mentioned does not mean they didn't have more children. They just emphasise the carrying on of the name into the future.
- **The Lord gave her conception** is a message that society today needs to hear. God is the Author of life. Jeremiah confirmed this in Jer 1:5 **Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, and before you were born I consecrated you; I appointed you as prophet to the nations**. Paul in Gal 1:15 also acknowledged his call from birth and in Ps 139 we have that beautiful description of **being knit together in my mother's womb**.

**From Bitterness to Joy: 4:14-17**

- The story again reverts to Naomi. She can live again because Mahlon, her dead son, has a levirate son by Ruth, his widow, and Elimelech has an heir. A future full of hope had just opened up for them all. Family solidarity has been restored.
- They called the child OBED meaning 'servant'. He was called to be the servant of the Lord through the Covenant.

**A Place in History: 4:18-22**

- The author wants us to see that ordinary events can have extraordinary outcomes that can change history. The meeting of Ruth and Boaz in a barley field when she was poor and hungry and he was rich and lonely meant that the ancestry of King David had a wonderful event in its ancestry.
- Our everyday decisions to love God and neighbour are used by God in extraordinary ways.