

Introduction:

- A. *Illus.*: Years ago, while visiting New York, New York, I bought this coffee mug on Broadway. It was back in my song-and-dance days. It says, “*When you’ve got it, they remember your name.*” Unfortunately, I’ve gone through my years hearing, “How do you say your name?” “What kind of name is that?” “Eekloave?” When I go home to my tiny hometown of Britton, SD, people ask me, “*Are you the guy that writes the columns in the paper sometimes?*” “No,” I say with a sigh, “*that’s my kid brother, Larry. I’m Lee.*” “Oh,” they reply with thinly veiled disappointment. Alas, my Broadway dreams have faded.
- B. *Illus.*: My brother-in-law died last February. He wasn’t a very social guy. He had no faith that I could tell. He told his only child, my niece, he didn’t want an obituary or anything in the paper. No funeral. Get some friends together, drink a little, and tell some stories. That’s it. About the same time a pastor friend and mentor of mine, **Howard Madsen**, died. There were so many people at his visitation that I stood in line two hours to get to his family and never made it. We will remember his name.
- C. Remembered names are important in the story of Ruth in the OT. Turn to **Ruth 4**. Last week we left Ruth, who had just proposed to the old bachelor farmer Boaz, excited to hear Boaz’s response. It was not a typical marriage proposal. She asked Boaz if he would be her kinsman-redeemer, to redeem her mother-in-law’s property and to redeem the name of her dead husband, meaning their first child would really be recorded as the son of her deceased husband, Mahlon. It doesn’t sound like that great a deal but Boaz was ecstatic that Ruth wanted to marry him!

Why, at the end of last Sunday's sermon we were all aflutter because we could hear wedding bells! But then Boaz left us with our hearts in our throats because he said to Ruth, *"Although it is true that I am a guardian-redeemer of our family, there is another who is more closely related than I. Stay here for the night, and in the morning if he wants to do his duty as your guardian-redeemer, good; let him redeem you. But if he is not willing, as surely as the Lord lives I will do it. Lie here until morning."*

D. So Jenna is going to tell us what happened next... [4:1-17].

Let's go back to that scene at Bethlehem's gate. As Boaz first presents the kinsman-redeemer deal, it's almost a no-brainer for this guy. He can buy back—redeem—the family land and farm it profitably, even though it isn't really his. He gets to keep the profits. The land would be in the name of Naomi's dead husband, Elimelek, and his next of kin, but of course, there isn't anyone living. So this promises to be pure profit. *"I'll redeem it."*

At which point Boaz says, *"**Ahem...** On the day you buy the land from Naomi, you also acquire Ruth the Moabite, the dead man's widow, **in order to maintain the name of the dead with his property.**"* The subtext here is, *"When she has a son, that boy isn't really your son legally. He's her former husband's next of kin and will inherit the land you redeemed."* I imagine this guy giving the innocent looking Boaz a *you-gotta-be-kiddin'-me* look, maybe even a *you-old-fox* look, and then throws up his hands. *"Then I cannot redeem it because I might endanger my own estate. You redeem it yourself. I cannot do it."* I imagine Boaz gives him this fake-surprise *"Really??"* look. *"Well, if you won't I will."*

This kinsman was an Israelite who did not honor what it meant to be one of God's people. He was at least somewhat aware of God's kinsman-redeemer laws but it was the kind of thing he'd never thought much about. **But now here was a situation where being an Israelite meant taking on personal responsibility for a near relative's land and family line.** He was fine with it when it looked to be to his advantage, but he dropped the matter like a hot potato when he figured out that there was a price to be paid to be a kinsman-redeemer. Boaz explained that marrying Ruth was "*in order to maintain the name of the dead with his property.*" But this guy wasn't interested in maintaining Mahlon's name. Ironically.

I. WE'LL NEVER FORGET WHAT'S-HIS-NAME... WHO CARED NOTHING FOR HIS FAMILY OBLIGATIONS TO GOD'S PEOPLE (4:1-8)

- A. The second most fundamental command is, "love your neighbor as yourself." This guy didn't do that. He didn't care about Naomi or Ruth. There is a parallel in Jesus' story of the Good Samaritan. A guy lies beaten up and helpless by the road and two different Jewish leaders walk by, but having no legal obligation to stop and help (any more than you have to stop at an accident scene), they hurried away. Anyone hearing the story, of course, knew they had a *moral* obligation as human beings and a *family* obligation as fellow Jews to care for the man but they committed no crime. So it was with this kinsman. It was clear what his duty was but if he didn't want to fulfill it, no one could make him.
- B. But he did pay a price. In his effort to preserve his own estate, **the writer of Ruth makes sure we understand that his name is forgotten.** In v.1 where Boaz beckons him over, the writer uses a phrase like, *whatever-his-name-was*. **Since he refused his duty to "maintain the name of**

the dead” his name is forgotten. To have his name expunged was his punishment, a way of saying to all the generations to follow, *those who will not fulfill their obligations within the family of God are soon forgotten.*

- C. These people here in our church family—our brothers and sisters—are our family as sure as the folks are who live at your house. When we drink together of the cup—the “*new covenant in my blood,*” we are all *included together in that new covenant.* When we all partake of the bread together, we recognize that we are *together* one body, just as the bread is the body of the Lord, not only with those here in our church but with Christians everywhere else. They are our family and we have obligations to them as our brothers and sisters. Our brother, **Dr. Younger**, wrote of this passage, “*The very idea of ‘doing hesed [loyal love]’ does not cross the minds of many a church attendee who is more interested in having his or her needs met.*”

Our identity as a Christian is tied to our covenant relationships with God and his people. We’re known by the company we keep. To ignore our obligations to fellow believers—to pray with them and support them, to encourage and help—we are no different than the forgotten kinsman in Ruth’s story. No better than **what’s-his-name.**

So Boaz’s decision is made and it is time to formalize the agreement: **vv.9-11a...** The witnesses here secured the agreement, the way today we might publish a legal notice in the newspaper. But there’s more to it than that. **Those witnesses were seeing something I suspect they might never have seen before—the outworking of God’s kinsman-redeemer plan.** We’re there with them, watching.

II. WHAT DID THE WITNESSES SEE? (4:9-11a)

- A. We see what it is to be the covenant people of God. We see the importance of caring for the helpless, of protecting a kinsman's name, of sacrificing even our own name for the good of our spiritual family. And we see the godliness of it, the nobility, the *hesed*-love. We see something to live for, something that will matter 100 years from now.
- B. We see what *hesed*-love can do. If you haven't been with us before, the Heb. word *hesed* is really what this book is all about. It encompasses all kinds of loving responses; a loyal love; a love that will not let me go. I told you that we could even change the name of this book from the *Book of Ruth* to the *Book of Hesed*.

The witnesses that day at the gate of Bethlehem saw what *hesed*-love can accomplish. Ruth's loyal love had bound her to care for her bitter and defeated mother-in-law, Naomi. Later, when Ruth proposed to Boaz, a man much older than she, he said, "*This hesed is greater than that which you showed earlier [to Naomi]!*" Then there is Boaz's *hesed* love for his people and for God, that he would honor the obligation of the kinsman-redeemer no matter the cost. And then his *hesed*-love for Ruth.

And behind these is the *hesed*-love of God, working so graciously behind the scenes—arranging the divine coincidences, shaping these people, ending the famine and bringing bread and life back to Bethlehem. Boaz acted as he did because he was a man of God, a man shaped by God's covenant with his people. So we can conclude two things:

(1) *God must feel at least as compassionate towards all the Ruths of Moab and of Babylon and of every other land as his creature Boaz felt towards Ruth;* (2) *God*

must actually be a God of redemption, with the desire and the power to redeem all outcasts into fellowship with himself. [G. A. F. Knighted, quoted in *Ruth & Judges* (IVP), p.310]

The witnesses were seeing what God is like, and now when we think of Jesus, our Redeemer, we can look back at Boaz and see a vivid picture of our redemption. **We, too, are witnesses of the redemption and covenant love of God through Jesus Christ.**

In one sense, the end of this story is unique. It was a marriage made in heaven! It could never happen quite this way again. God worked a one-time wonder, in the long line of wonders that would lead one day to the birth of his own Son in Bethlehem, a direct descendant of this very marriage. But there is a message for God's people here, too; for us.

III. COVENANT LOVING GIVES US A HERITAGE THAT WILL LONG OUTLIVE OUR FAMILY TREE (4:11-17)

- A. Notice something with me. Boaz's laser focus was that a kinsman-redeemer needed to marry Ruth ***"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 his hometown."*** He used the same words when he spoke to what's-his-name, ***"So that his name will not disappear,"*** meaning the name of Elimelek's son, Mahlon, first husband of Ruth. Maybe they could put that on a coffee cup: *If you've got a kinsman-redeemer, they'll remember your name.*
- B. But now notice in vv.11-12 the three beautiful blessings that showered down upon Boaz as soon as this arrangement was settled. These are **prophetic blessings**; they weren't simply well-wishes; they would come true!

1. “*May the Lord make the woman who is coming into your home like Rachel and Leah, who together built up the family of Israel.*” Rachel and Leah were the wives of Jacob, renamed Israel and the mothers of the 12 tribes of Israel.
 2. “*May you [Boaz] have standing in Ephrathah and be famous in Bethlehem.*” Ephrathah was his clan, settled in the town of Bethlehem. Boaz is famous, not for heroics on a battlefield, but for his *hesed* love.
 3. “*Through the offspring the LORD gives you by this young woman, may your family be like that of Perez, whom Tamar bore to Judah.*” You can see the family tree of Perez in the last verses of this chapter. It was the family tree that gave rise to such a noble man as Boaz.
- C. **Do you see how Boaz sacrifices his own family identity as a kinsman-redeemer but the blessings upon him honor the son to come as *his* and to honor *Boaz* for his willing role as the kinsman-redeemer.**
- D. All this comes to pass within the next year. **V.13...** When Ruth was married to Mahlon in Moab, she had no children. That, too, was God’s doing. But here, in this beautiful nursery of a new family, God gives the old farmer and the young immigrant a most special child, Obed--*Servant*.
- E. **This story began with broken and bitter Naomi.** She told the women of Bethlehem, “*I’ve come back empty.*” But now the writer brings us back to these same women—The Women’s Glee Club of Bethlehem! **Vv.14-15...** This precious little boy now becomes Nana Naomi’s kinsman-redeemer. He will carry forward her legacy and when he grows up he will care for her—*renewing her life and sustaining her in her old age.* And it isn’t just that Naomi

has this grandson, but that she has in Ruth the best daughter-in-law in the world. *“For your daughter-in-law, who loves you [that’s a word very much like hesed-love]... who loves you and who is better to you than seven sons [in those days, a daughter was never better than a son. Seven sons means perfection. But here Naomi’s daughter-in-law is better than the perfect number of sons (better than her two previous boys, Kilion and Mahlon) who is better to you than seven sons, has given him birth.”*

- F. Since this is really a story about Naomi’s journey with God’s grace, it ends with her: *“Then Naomi took the child in her arms and cared for him. The women living there said, “Naomi has a son!” And they named him Obed. He was the father of Jesse, the father of David.”* David! King David! Here, in this least likely of families formed of a two widows and an old man, is born David’s grandfather.

Conclusion

Do you see that this is a resurrection story? Naomi was as good as dead. Ruth, childless in a foreign land. Boaz, old and unmarried. And a no name kinsman-redeemer that wanted nothing to do with his obligations to his people. Not much life in that story. A hopeless family with no future. That’s how God works.

It is, in a real way, the story of our lives. **Resurrection stories are in our blood!** It is the story of the kind of family we’re a part of in the church. Once Naomi wept that she would never be able to have more sons. But with God, amazing things happen! Prophetic blessings come to pass. Royalty lies hidden. **When we live out our covenant relationships with one another and with God, they’ll remember our name.**