

FIVE FORKS BRETHREN IN CHRIST CHURCH
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SCRIPTURE: Ruth 4

DATE: March 28th, 2021

LOCATION: Auditorium (Bill)

SERMON: "Rescued"

(Acknowledgement to Carolyn Custis James for her book, The Gospel of Ruth; and The Bible Project for their overview of Ruth)

Good morning! This *is* a special morning, Palm Sunday, the beginning of what is referred to as Holy Week, culminating with the Church coming together a week from today to recognize the most important event in history...the resurrection of Jesus.

This morning as Holy Week begins, we come to the end of our sermon series called **A Page Turner**...which is how we describe a book – a story - so compelling that you can't put it down. The story of your life can be a page turner – filled with incredible memories of faces and places and experiences – if you are willing to get on board with God and join in on the work He is doing.

As most of you know, we're watching this play out in the book of Ruth...3 individuals, Naomi, Ruth and Boaz...who are actively participating in the work that God is doing. Through them, we've been able to see what happens when **God's Purpose** and **Human Decisions** come together.

Go ahead and open up your Bible, get out your device, or follow along on the screen as we turn our attention to Ruth, chapter 4.

This morning's message is titled **Rescued**...and as usual, we'll watch a short video sketch that will give us some idea of **What's Happening** here in chapter 4. Then we'll look at

What We Don't Want to Miss.” Finally I will ask you, **What's Your Next Step?** What step or steps is God asking you to take in order to join Him in the work He is doing?

Last week, we saw Ruth ask Boaz to marry her and thus fulfill the role of a kinsman-redeemer. By doing so he would purchase the land belonging to the estate of Naomi's deceased husband Elimelech, keeping that land in the family....and most importantly, along with Ruth look to bring a son into the world that would **rescue the line of Elimelech**.

Boaz is willing, but things are never easy, are they? When we stopped last week, we learned from Boaz that there is someone else who is “first in line” when it came to the role of kinsman-redeemer.

So let's see...

1. WHAT'S HAPPENING

...now that we arrive in the 4th and final chapter of Ruth.

VIDEO

It all comes together, it all looks so neat and clean...but it really isn't. None of us get to live a fairy tale, and these folks don't either. So let's take time to look at...

2. WHAT WE DON'T WANT TO MISS

Let's start by taking a look at this...

A. Business at the City Gate

The first half of chapter 4 is all about business...it's real estate and finances...and we say *“Boring! Let's get on with the wedding and the baby.”*

But there is a lot of intrigue that takes place here at the city gate. It begins when Boaz arrives there and takes a seat, waiting for the kinsman-redeemer to come along. When the kinsman-redeemer approaches the city gate, Boaz beckoned him and said, *“Come, have a seat.”* Then Boaz calls together ten elders and tells them to take a seat. Once

everyone is where they're supposed to be, Boaz immediately lays it out there on the table...the matter at hand deals with the Elimelech family. He says to the kinsman redeemer:

Ruth 4:3b “Noami, who has come back from Moab, is selling a piece of land that belonged to our brother Elimelech.”

And so the first order of business is about land...one very important aspect for any kinsman-redeemer. Because land is incredibly valuable. When the Israelites entered the Promised Land, the land was subdivided, parceled out according to tribe and family.

And then each family's parcel of land would become the centerpiece of the inheritance a father would pass on to his son, or sons. And now this kinsman-redeemer is being given the opportunity to perhaps double his estate.

When he got up and about on this particular morning, he would not have seen this coming...he surely has known for some time now that Elimelech's land is his to redeem, but only when he's good and ready. But here is Boaz, and he's forcing the issue. *“Act now...or I will.”*

What's interesting here is that Boaz refers to it as if it's Naomi's land...this was not how it worked back then. Widows would not inherit their husbands land...it would go to his sons, and if there were no sons, it would go to his brothers. In that culture land would never go to the widow.

But nobody calls Boaz on it. Maybe his reputation is so strong that nobody speaks up to challenge this. At any rate, the kinsman-redeemer is being asked to decide whether he wants to redeem the land or not, and it appears to be a no-brainer. Who wouldn't leap at the chance of being able to double one's estate...it means there will be more land to pass on to his sons. *“Where do I sign?”*

But hold on, not so fast.

Ruth 4:5 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.”

Suddenly, we see it’s not just about land. Boaz is saying, “*When you buy the land, Ruth comes along with it.*” And the reason is clearly given: “*in order to maintain the name of the dead with his property*” which you do by raising up descendants for Elimelech. In short, **this man is to rescue the line of Elimelech.**

Oh. And he backs out immediately saying...

Ruth 4:6 “Then I cannot redeem it because I might endanger my own estate. You redeem it yourself, I cannot do it.”

You wonder what’s going through his mind, don’t you. Why might this endanger his estate? Maybe he’s thinking... “*I want the land, but if I also raise up sons for Elimelech’s line...this land - my inheritance - will have to be cut into smaller pieces.*”

Let’s say he has two sons now. They each get **half of the pie**. What if he ends up having a number of sons with Ruth? How might his land, his inheritance, be divided up at that point? Is he thinking, “*More land, but also more sons...maybe my sons will end up getting a smaller slice of my inheritance.*”

Whatever he’s thinking, this kinsman-redeemer has no interest in risking his estate, and so he tells Boaz...“*It’s all yours. She’s all yours.*”

And this is his right. Just as Orpah had the right to return home to Moab, he has the right of first refusal. And so he does. And it’s time to seal the deal.

Now today If I were to come to an agreement with someone, I might seal the deal by sticking out my hand for a handshake. In Israel at that time, to redeem and transfer property, one party would take off his sandal and give it to the other.

Ruth 4:8 “So the kinsman-redeemer said to Boaz, “Buy it yourself,” And he removed his sandal.

And this man went down in the pages of history without anyone ever knowing his actual name. And then, after taking the man's sandal, Boaz made a formal announcement to the 10 elders and others who had gathered...*"You all are witnesses that I have bought the property of the Elimelech family."*

Ruth 4:10 "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."

I think a lot of people read "Ruth" and think that it's a nice love story about Boaz and Ruth. It's so much more than that...Boaz is committed to rescuing the line of Elimelech.

Now that the business has been conducted, next comes...

B. The Blessings

These are just fantastic, almost mind-boggling. Even though Ruth is not present here at the city gate, the elders begin by praying a prayer of blessing for Ruth...

Ruth 4:11b "May the LORD make the woman who is coming into your home like Rachel and Leah, who together built up the house of Israel."

This is incredible! They are praying that a Moabite outsider... a poor widow...a common gleaner...would be like the two matriarchs of the Israelite nation...Rachel and Leah. These two women played significant roles in building the foundation of the nation of Israel. Just as they had many descendants, the elders pray that Ruth will be a nation builder as well.

Think about how unlikely any of this is...a woman from Moab, being welcomed, embraced, and through this prayer of blessing, connected to two of the most prominent women from Israel's history. Simply incredible.

And then the prayer of blessing shifts to Boaz...

Ruth 4:11b "Through the offspring the LORD gives you by this young woman, may your family be like that of Perez, whom Tamar bore to Judah."

Perez was an ancestor of Boaz...an ancestor of Elimelech...an ancestor of the kinsman-redeemer just got done handing Boaz his sandal. Virtually everyone living in Bethlehem is a descendent of Perez. Just as Perez had many descendants, they are praying that Boaz and Ruth will as well.

Now things begin to move quickly. First, Boaz takes Ruth as his wife...

Ruth 4:13b ...the LORD enabled her to conceive, and she gave birth to a son.

And now the women of Bethlehem gather around Naomi and offer a prayer of blessing of their own...

Ruth 4:14b “May he become famous throughout Israel! 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.”

As Naomi took this boy in her lap, the women said...

Ruth 4:17b Naomi has a son.”

I always read these words a figurative...not literal...I mean, this baby belongs to Ruth, right? This baby that Naomi is holding is actually her grandson, right? Again, not so fast. According to levirate practices, this baby boy will carry on Elimelech's name and is legally regarded as the son of Elimelech and Naomi.

What this means is that Ruth was willing to act as a surrogate mother, offering herself to potentially bear a son that would rescue the line of Elimelech. And so it happened.

Ruth 4:17b And they named him Obed.

Obed. Which brings us to the last thing we don't want to miss, and that is...

C. The Line of Jesus

Throughout this series we've been talking about the line of Elimelech...and how it looked like it was coming to an end. We've spent the last few weeks looking at how God worked through Ruth and through Boaz to play a part in rescuing Elimelech's line.

We all have a line that we come from. I can trace my lineage back about 250 years to a man by the name of **John Schenk** who lived in Lancaster County. As you can see on the screen, it goes from...

John Schenck (born ?)
Christian Shank (born 1778)
Frederick Shank (born 1817)

Christian Shank (born 1849)
Abram Shank (born 1872)
Amos H. Shank (born 1896)
William E. Shank (born 1938)
William A Shank (born 1960)

This is my line. And you know what? I'm not the only one here at Five Forks that comes from the line of this man, John Schenk.

Some of you know Eldon Showalter, he and his wife Jean have attended here for many years. And some of you know Matt Nolt, he and his wife Rochelle have also been attending Five Forks for many years. Eldon, Matt and myself can trace our line back to this man **John Schenk** who lived in the 1700's.

And for several generations, we share common ancestry...all three of us can trace our lineage from **John to Christian to Frederick**. Frederick had a number of children and the three of us descend of different ones. And so it's at this point that our lines go off in 3 different branches.

I said earlier, we all have a line, and Jesus does as well. The line of Jesus is actually recorded in the first chapter of Matthew, a list of 46 names with Jesus' name coming at the end...

Matthew 1:16 ...Jacob, the father of Joseph, the husband of Mary, of whom was born Jesus, who is called Christ.

Among the 46 names there are some that are more recognizable than others, especially where the line of Jesus begins. His line begins with...

Abraham (who had a son...)

Isaac (who had a son...)

Jacob

Now Jacob had 12 sons, and through these 12 sons a family becomes a nation, just like with Eldon, Matt and myself, at this point it goes off in different branches, 12 to be exact. Here's a question for you: "*Which branch – of the 12 - does Jesus come from?*" The line of Jesus will continue through Jacob's 4th son...

Judah

Perez

...and will continue through Judah's son **Perez**, whose name is not all that recognizable, except it is for us, since he was mentioned earlier in the blessing over Boaz, remember?

Of all the names that remain in this list of 46, perhaps the most recognizable would be **David**...we spent 5 weeks looking at some events in the life of David last August during our Make or Break sermon series.

So let's go to Matthew's list of 46 names and locate David's name...it's found in **verse 6** (...*King David. Matthew 1:6b*). And humor me for just a minute. Is there anybody here who can tell me the name of David's father? (Jesse). Yes, right here it is, verse 6...

Matthew 1:6 ...and Jesse the father of King David.

Is there anybody here who can tell me the name of Jesse's father? (Obed). Yes, again right here in Matthew's list...

Matthew 1:5b Obed the father of Jesse...

And Obed's father and mother? (Boaz and Ruth)

Matthew 1:5b Boaz the father of Obed, whose mother was Ruth.

Boaz and Ruth to Obed to Jesse to David...and eventually to Jesus.

This baby that Naomi is holding in her lap will not only rescue the line of Elimelech...the line of Jesus will come straight through him. And all of the sudden, these seemingly ordinary events that we've been looking at these past 5 weeks are woven into God's grand story of redemption for the whole world, right down to you and I.

Back during the first week of our series we talked about this spot on the road between Moab and Bethlehem, when Ruth made the decision to continue on with Naomi...she also made a choice to follow Naomi's God. And this was the quote that we looked at...

The choices made on this historic spot will not only shape the very souls of all three women, they will alter the course of Israel's history and advance the redemptive purposes of God."

And now we see how.

The choices that we have seen made by Ruth over these past few weeks, and also the choices made by Boaz...we've seen them **take risks**...we've seen them **display loyalty**...we've seen them **show kindness**...we've seen them **pour themselves out** for each other. All the while, they had no idea what role they were playing in carrying out God's plan. **They just lived the gospel.**

Just as you and I are called to do. And so let's close by thinking about what might be...

3. THE NEXT STEP

...that God is prompting each of us to take. I think it's extremely likely that God is prompting one or more in here or some watching out there to **take that initial step towards Jesus.**

I said back in the very first week, we *all* come to this place on the road where life altering decisions are made. And the easiest thing to do is simply to return to or continue on with what is familiar. But just because it the easy choice doesn't make it the right choice.

Sometimes, many times in fact, the right decisions are the hardest ones. To take a risk, and take a step towards Jesus. As I've said before, you simply join those of us who are already following Him...spend time with Him, listen, watch and learn from Him. We're here to help. Talk to us about your concerns...the habits that you feel you just can't break...the reactions of friends or family...your lack of understanding when it comes to any of this.

We get it, because we've all been there, in fact, we're still there, still learning, still growing. And as we're walking with Jesus, following Jesus, we sure would like to have you walk with us. Reach out to me, and we'll talk, and either myself or someone I think you would connect with will come along side of you and support you in whatever way you need.

Now for those of you who are already walking with Jesus, maybe in light of what we've been looking at for these past five weeks, your next step is to **Recognize The Far-Reaching Impact of Your Choices.**

Years ago I made it a point every year at Christmas, to watch that movie called **"It's a Wonderful Life."** Jimmy Stewart has the lead role, played a guy named George Bailey. George is a good guy, but at some point in the midst of the movie when things are falling apart all around him, he becomes convinced that it would have been better if he had never been born.

He contemplates taking his life, but an angel named Clarence shows him how the lives of his friends, his family, in fact the entire community would have turned out so differently – far worse – if he had never been born. The positive impact he had made in their lives was significant. And he had no idea.

I got to thinking about how history would have been altered if this had happened on the road between Moab and Bethlehem, where Naomi said to Ruth...

Ruth 1:15 "Look...your sister-in-law is going back to her people and to her gods. Go back with her."

"And Naomi and Ruth wept and clung to each other one last time, before Ruth turned and ran to catch up with Orpah."

What would have happened if **Ruth** would have made what seemed to be the sensible choice, and returned to what was familiar?

Perhaps, as Naomi had suggested, she would have been able to *“find rest in the home of another husband.”*

Naomi would have entered Bethlehem alone, and joined the ranks of poor, impoverished widows, living out her days empty and bitter towards God...before disappearing from sight.

Boaz would continue to obey God’s instructions, allowing foreigners and orphans and widows to glean in his fields, but perhaps never being challenged to consider God’s intent behind this instruction. He would have kept the letter of the law, and perhaps missed out on the spirit of God’s law.

And **the kinsman-redeemer who was “first in line”** would be walking around town knowing that Elimelech’s land was his to redeem when he was good and ready, feeling good knowing that his sons would be the recipients of a pretty nice inheritance one day.

And...

“A different branch of Judah’s family tree would become Israel’s royal family and enjoy the distinct honor of producing the Messiah, for God will not be stopped by cautious image-bearers.” (Carolyn Custis James)

Jesus would come...it’s just that His line would look different.

There’s no doubt that the choices we make – significant and yes, seemingly insignificant – will have more impact than we will ever know...on our family, our friends, our community.

And so we can follow the natural inclination of our hearts to put ourselves first, and possibly end up living a pretty good life, and yet missing out on “what might have been.”

On the other hand we can make choices and decisions that we know would align with God’s Purposes...that is, take risks at times, display loyalty, show kindness, pour ourselves

out for others...just live the gospel by following Jesus...and live out our days with no regrets.

Because if there is one thing we can take from this series, it's that we have no idea how far reaching our choices and decisions are. If my daughter Olivia were to someday have children of her own, I would hope to impact their lives in a very real and very tangible way.

If Olivia's children were to have children, I will not be around to see them. But I would hope to still have an impact on their lives, by the way I am living my life today. The impact would come through Olivia and through her children, and what they see in me while I am still alive.

I would just like to encourage you that at the beginning of each day this week, remember that the decisions you make will impact the lives of others in ways you will never know. If you're living the gospel by following Jesus, you'll be joining Him in whatever work He is doing in your family, among your friends and in your community. In the short term, and maybe well into the future.

One last suggestion for a possible next step that we will look to take right now...and that would be the step of observing **Communion** together.

This morning we've been talking about the birth of a baby boy in this little town of Bethlehem. Naomi is completely unaware that the baby she is holding will play *a part* in God's purpose...to redeem us and bring us into a relationship with Him.

You see, Elimelech's line was not the only thing that needed rescued, we *all* need rescued because of choices we have made...choices that have caused separation between ourselves and God.

In order for this rescue to happen, another baby boy would be born in Bethlehem who would grow up not to play a part, but in order to be our actual Redeemer. But before *that* could happen, Jesus - our Redeemer - had a hard choice, an incredibly difficult decision to make.

He found Himself alone at night in the garden of Gethsemane with a decision that would alter the course of history. He could return back to His Father, back to the familiar....or He could choose to advance the redemptive purposes of God by giving His life for ours.

And because He willingly died for us, we willingly – gratefully - live for Him. For all of those here this morning and all of those out there watching who are followers of Jesus, we will take time now to reflect on the price that Jesus paid for us, by participating in this time of Communion.

The Scriptures tell us that...

The Lord Jesus, on the night he was betrayed, took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and said, “This is my body, which is for you; do this in remembrance of me.” In the same way, after supper he took the cup, saying, “This cup is the new covenant in my blood; do this, whenever you drink it, in remembrance of me.” (1 Corinthians 11:23b-25)

PRAYER