

Reading: Ruth 4:1-22

Theme: Boaz the Businessman.

When buying and selling a house there is so much paperwork involved. There are land searches, title searches and deeds of covenant may apply. There are numerous letters, emails to and from solicitors. There is correspondence with the building society or bank; there are contacts with insurance companies as mortgage protection, insurances are taken out if needed. As all this is going on, the buyers and sellers are anticipating the day when the sale or purchase is complete and the house is legally transferred from one to the other.

Here at the start of chapter 4 we have the legal transfer, not of a house, but of the right to redeem property and the duties of the kinsman redeemer. This vivid narrative is important in its own right as it is one of the few documents from the ancient world that tells us how a legal process of this kind was carried out. Even at the time when the book of Ruth was written the legal process had moved on and the writer has to put in a note of explanation (v7). We know Boaz was going to meet this nearer kinsman to find out if he would marry Ruth, but he goes about it as if it were a business transaction and includes in it a piece of land that belongs to Naomi. Let us look at it from a business point of view and see 4 things from v1-8:

1. A Business Meeting Called. (v1 & 2)

While Ruth went back to Naomi, Boaz headed to Bethlehem, to the town gate and sat there. It may seem a strange place to go to us, but in OT times and onwards, the gate was the very centre of city/town life. Usually the towns and cities were closely packed with buildings and the largest place was the city gate and so many things went on there. People often met there for conversation (Psalm 127:5); it was a good place to see others and to observe

new people going in and out of the city; it was the place for the administration of justice (Amos 5:10 NIV 'court' = 'gate' in other translations and Hebrew). Because it was a busy place, the poor waited there for help (Proverbs 22:22). The city gate was the place of legal business and transactions - at the city gate Abraham bought the cave and field to bury Sarah (Genesis 23:10). The city gate being such an important place the city/town elders, councillors would meet and sit in it (Proverbs 31:23; Job 29:7-10).

Boaz goes there and waits. When he sees the next of kin, he calls to him. AV says *"Ho, such a one! turn aside, sit down here."* NIV says *"Come over here, my friend, and sit down."* It is likely Boaz used his name, but the author of Ruth either does not know it, or if he does, chooses to leave it out. We see later the man was concerned not to mar his own inheritance and so his name was not lost; so it is ironic then that he remains nameless because he would not carry out his responsibility of taking Ruth as his wife. This man would have no role in the advance of God's kingdom; he refuses to fulfil his covenant obligations. It is if the narrator is saying *"Do you see this man who refuses responsibility? He will have no further significance. He'll remain unnamed, and have no place in the record of God's glorious purposes."*

The man goes over and sits down and Boaz calls 10 elders to meet with them and to witness everything that occurred, so that any transaction was legal and above board; for if Boaz was to gain Ruth as his wife, he wanted no comebacks at a later stage and no legal difficulties. Why 10 elders? We don't know if there was any special significance in this, or if it was a legal requirement, a quorum, or if it was that Boaz wanted a solid body of men to be witnesses. It says something of Boaz's standing that he could get these 10 elders together so quickly at his request.

Boaz planned well for this business meeting and it is called with the intention that he could gain Ruth as his wife. He is determined; he is keen to make sure that he gets Ruth as his wife. Matthew Henry asks why he was so keen; he says she wasn't wealthy, not a woman of standing and then says quaintly "*She was never said to be beautiful; if ever she had been so, we may suppose that weeping, and travelling, and gleaning, had withered her lilies and roses.*" He concludes that Boaz was in love with her for she was a virtuous woman and so she was worth more than rubies in his estimation and he would do all that was in his power to do to gain her as his wife.

Boaz was concerned that all was done legally and correctly. In all our dealings with all people, they must be legal and correct - morally and judicially correct, both in our private lives and in our business lives. We can also see the Lord's Providence in this matter, in that while Boaz is sitting in the city gate, the nearer kinsman happened to come along! AV uses the words "*behold, the kinsman of whom Boaz spake came by;*" this "*behold*" is the author's way of saying that we are to take note of God's providential activity once again that this nearer relative should just "*happen*" to come along! This was not just a chance happening, but a divine Providence. Great things are often brought about by the seemingly smallest of circumstances. Our God is in control of even these small circumstances - both here in the life of Boaz and Ruth, and in our lives also, but so often we fail to see and recognise them as they occur and they are only often observable as we look back on them.

2. A Business Proposition. (v3 & 4)

Boaz tells this man about Naomi and her return from Moab and that she is selling a piece of land that belonged to Elimelech. This is a new factor and one we've not been aware of. It shows us that Boaz has been in contact with Naomi and this land is used in his

plan. It is likely Naomi had this land in guardianship for her two sons and when they died it is hers to dispose of as she wants - for Boaz mentions it was the property of Elimelech, Kilion and Mahlon (v9) and she was selling it through necessity and had the duty to sell it within the family/clan and so the nearer kinsman was to have first refusal.

Boaz puts this to the man. No one questions Naomi's right to sell the land. Boaz holds this out before the man. Usually if a person was in desperate need and they sold their land, it could be redeemed by the family or by the kinsman redeemer for them and it would revert to the original owner's descendants in the year of Jubilee (every 49 years), but Naomi had no descendants for it to return to - no sons or grandsons. So if it was bought by a family member it would be theirs and belong to their family for all time. Boaz dangles this land out before the near kinsman and says it is his right to buy it and if he wouldn't, then Boaz would do so. Here is the proposition - buy the field as your right or if not Boaz would do it.

The nearer kinsman didn't need to think long; for it seemed too good an opportunity to be missed. He'd get the land for himself and also his descendants forever. This was a lovely business proposition, or so he thought! We see:

3. A Business Opportunity Accepted and Then Rejected! (v4-6a)

When he says "*I will redeem it*" - in his mind there is no question about it, it's too good an opportunity to miss. Then Boaz plays his masterstroke, he brings to the nearer kinsman's attention the small print of the transaction, as he points out the legal obligation for the kinsman to act as a levir - to raise up a son by the dead person's widow, to keep their name alive and to keep the property in the family (v5). The approach of Boaz has been careful, meticulous.

He doesn't want the nearer kinsman to buy the land and most certainly not to take Ruth as his wife. So he presents this one with Ruth as the drawback - the drawback he desired, longed to have as his wife though! In my home village, there is a beautiful viaduct spanning the valley. For decades it was up for sale at the princely sum of £5. There was a big drawback with buying it; for it would have cost hundreds of thousands of pounds to do it up or demolish it. In the end when the council couldn't sell it, they have done it up and is part of the national cycleway and it's now possible to ride and walk across it and enjoy the valley's beautiful views from it.

Boaz linked the two together now. If he had presented them as options then the other kinsman may well have chosen the one or the other, but by putting it, legally, in this way, he put the nearer kinsman in a predicament for he realised that he had a responsibility as well as a privilege upon him. When it was a matter of gain alone he thought the price worth it, but now he sees not a permanent gain, but the temporary use of the land, coupled with the expense of a wife and another child or children to feed and clothe. Instead of building up his wealth and estate, he realised he be reducing it, he'd be endangering it and so he honestly says that he chose not to redeem it because he didn't want to endanger his own estate. So he says "*No*". His ready and willing acceptance now becomes a blanket refusal and he rejects this business opportunity.

Many people are like this unnamed kinsman. When they hear something of the gospel, they see that it looks marvellous; it sounds great to have ones' sins forgiven, peace with God, a home in heaven; they hear of the joy and peace they can know; even see of these things in people's lives; they hear of answers to prayer; see how people's lives have been changed, sometimes dramatically changed as they come to know the Lord Jesus and they feel they want the same. Then they read the small print of the

gospel - that God wants and expects them as His child, indeed even before they are Christians, to obey Him, serve Him, love Him with all their hearts and lives. He wants them to live holy lives, because that is the truest test, evidence of our love and life. He wants to be in control of their lives. Sadly some don't want this. They want the plus side - as they see it, but they don't like the idea of denying themselves, of taking up their cross daily, dying to self and sin, following the Lord Jesus wherever He would lead them.

There is a cost to being a Christian and we are told to count the cost. Yet we are to always count it in the light of what we will gain and not what we would lose; for no one is a loser who trusts the Lord Jesus and walks in God's ways obediently. Who'd be reluctant to give up heaps of dung to gain heaps of diamonds? Or be reluctant to give up pain and suffering to enjoy perfect health? Would we give up a life that will end to gain eternal life? Would we be reluctant to give up a tyrant to gain a loving Friend and Father? Surely anyone would give up those worthless things to gain such amazing things. Sadly, many people regard giving up self, self interests and self centred pleasures as more precious than taking the Lord Jesus as their own Saviour and having His love, His care, His help, His eternal life and Him as their Friend. I wonder what some of us here are doing! As CT Studd said "*If Jesus Christ be God and died for me, no sacrifice can be too great for me to make for Him.*" Is such true of us? As I close I want us to see finally:

4. A Business Transferred and Sealed. (v6b & 8)

The unnamed kinsman tells Boaz to redeem it himself and did so in the sight of the 10 elders. Then he did the strange thing of taking off his sandal and giving it to Boaz! It appears this was the method of legalising the transaction of property and rights at that time, as explained in v7. It's a symbolic way of saying "*I have no right to*

walk on this anymore, it's your right." (I assume he was given the sandal back, either that or he went away barefoot or limping!)

At that point Boaz could have thought "*Mission accomplished – or almost!*" Boaz had achieved his aim - to win the right to marry Ruth. We will look at the joy of the wedding and the child born next week, but it is important to note that Boaz did all that the law required to make Ruth his own.

This is an important consideration in relation to our salvation. We are under God's law and condemned by it and God has legally, justly and lawfully to condemn us - because we have broken His laws, His commands, His requirements. But in the Saviour, the Lord Jesus, all the just demands of the Law of God are met and satisfied; all the punishment we deserved was taken and paid by the Lord Jesus. He is the satisfaction of the Law, its demands and its penalty. When God comes to deal with us in grace, He is lawfully able to pardon us, to justify us, to regard us as if we have never sinned and broken His Law and all that is credited to our account forever and so we are acceptable to Him because we are hidden in the Lord Jesus Christ, we are made as perfect, holy, righteous and acceptable as He is to God. The word "justified" has been included in a sentence to help us grasp its fullest meaning: it reads that God regards me *just if I'd* always been as perfect and as righteous as the Lord Jesus.

This great legal transaction happens when we trust the Lord Jesus as our Saviour. God not only cleans us up and out, but our legal standing in the courts of heaven, in God's reckoning is eternally fixed as justified. There is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus - now or ever will be! There are no legal reasons why God will not accept us into heaven. God's salvation provided through the Lord Jesus Christ is all legal and above board, even

when scrutinised by God's absolute purity, holiness and perfect justice.

The question is do we know that such a wonderful salvation is ours? If so then we are to rejoice that [CH2: 605v1 A debtor to mercy alone] *“the terrors of law and of God with me can have nothing to do; my Saviour's obedience and blood hide all my transgressions from view.”* We all need to question has this heavenly business transaction occurred in, been sealed and legalised in our life? If not it needs to be. If it has happened with us, then we can rejoice because we are forever the possession of the Lord of glory, part of the Bride which He gave His life for and the time is coming when He will present us to Himself as part of His radiant Church, without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, but holy and blameless. That which is ahead for us is absolutely, staggeringly, awesomely and mind blowingly more marvellous than we could ever imagine at this moment. Yet it is secure, legally secure for us through the Lord Jesus Christ and it's all because of what He's done for us when He sorted the business of our salvation out – not at the city gate, but outside the city wall, where the dear Lord was crucified and died to save us all if we believe in Him.

Jesus would have us as His people – be safe in His salvation, embraced, surrounded by His love, secure in His care and keeping and have the prospect of fulness of life here and now, also a home in heaven which is kept, reserved for us and we kept I all things to inherit that and know pleasure forever more. This is not a transaction to be missed – all the blessings and benefits are secure for us and Jesus will never ever let us down but He will hold us fast and secure.