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Sermon Meta Information

Title:	Kinsman Redeemer	Location:	Brisbane South
*URL:	http://www.prc.org.au/resources/sermons/trevor-marshall/html/tm-20060813.html		
Preacher:	Trevor Marshall	Date:	13 th August 2006
Passage:	Ruth 3:9-18	Series Number:	24
Sermon Series:	Ruth		

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Sermon

Introduction.

- a. When Ruth says to Boaz, *'Take your maidservant under your wing for you are a close relative'*, she is asking him to act as her *kinsman-redeemer*. What is a kinsman-redeemer? A kinsman-redeemer is a close relative who delivers you from a desperate situation because you do not have the means to deliver yourself. If you could not pay your debts and were sold as a slave by your creditors, a close relative could set you free from slavery by paying off your debt. A kinsman redeemer is a family member who pays a price to deliver you from a dreadful situation.
- b. Betty Anne Waters acted as a kinsman-redeemer to her brother Kenneth in an amazing way. In 1983 Kenneth Waters was convicted for the brutal murder of Katharina Brow and was sentenced to life in prison. Kenneth claimed that he was innocent, but he could not prove his innocence. His sister Betty Anne Waters a high school drop out and a mother with two young children could not live with the fact that her wrongly convicted brother would serve a life sentence in prison. She took herself off to college and then worked her way through law school and became an attorney in order to help her brother. Acting as her brother's attorney she hunted down the old blood samples in her brother's case, long-forgotten in a box in the courthouse basement. Betty Anne Waters asked for her brother's DNA to be tested against the old blood sample. The results came back and samples did not match. Kenneth was released from prison; his sister had redeemed him from the false charge and life imprisonment. Betty Anne Waters had acted as her brother's kinsman-redeemer.
- c. Naomi and Ruth needed a kinsman-redeemer to save them from being vulnerable, destitute, without family and without an heir. Naomi believed that Boaz was the one who would act as their kinsman-redeemer as he was their close relative and a man of means who could fulfil the role. Ruth showed herself to be a woman of great courage in going down to the threshing floor at night and asking Boaz to fulfil the duties of a kinsman-redeemer. Boaz's response to Ruth

reveals every quality the Lord expected from a kinsman-redeemer in honouring his law. Boaz dealt with Ruth in a way that was righteous, honourable, gentle, and dignified.

1. Boaz's gracious response to Ruth's plea to him as a kinsman-redeemer. (Verses 10-15)

- a. *Boaz praised Ruth for her attitude towards God's law (verse 10).* Ruth's action in seeking to invoke the law regarding the kinsman-redeemer showed greater kindness towards the family of her dead husband than any other thing she had done so far. Boaz in **Ruth 2:12** had already praised Ruth for leaving her own family and country to accompany her mother-in-law to Israel to be with her and help to care for her. Listen to **Matthew Henry's** comments on this matter, '*She received not the addresses of young men (much less did she seek them) whether poor or rich, but was willing to marry as the divine law directed, though it was to an old man, because it was for the honour and interest of the family into which she had matched, and for which she had an entire kindness.*' Ruth followed God's law rather than adopt other ways and means of securing a husband. Ruth showed a commitment to doing things God's way.
- b. *Boaz pacified Ruth's fears (verse 11).* Listen to the gentleness in his voice, '*And now, my daughter, do not fear. I will do for you all that you request, for all the people of my town know that you are a virtuous woman.*' Boaz did not comfort Ruth simply by telling her not to be afraid; he also made a pledge that he would meet her need. It would be easy to miss the great undertaking that Boaz makes to Ruth; he will see to her marriage under the levirate and kinsman-redeemer laws. Finding a husband for Ruth was no longer in the hands of Naomi, it was now in the hands of Boaz. When Boaz tells Ruth that all the people in Bethlehem *know that she is a virtuous woman*, he is dealing with her fear that she was not acceptable. For a Moabite woman to gain a reputation as a virtuous woman is quite remarkable. It indicates that the perception that Ruth was a *non-kosher* woman had been proven wrong; it was very evident to all that Ruth belonged to the Lord and loved his ways. Ruth was a very poor woman, but a woman with great humility, dignity and virtue. God honoured her and caused the people of Bethlehem to recognise her noble character. God in his grace and providence had ordered things so that Ruth was seen as *above reproach*.
- c. *Boaz spoke plainly to Ruth (verse 12).* Boaz informs Ruth that there is a relative who is closer than he. The news that Boaz was not the kinsman-redeemer must have come as a devastating blow to Ruth. She knew Boaz and perhaps had grown very fond of him. I would not be surprised if she had contemplated what life would be like if she was married to Boaz. The thought that a man whom she did not know and had never seen could be her husband according to the Levirate and kinsman-redeemer law would have been a real test of her faith. Could Ruth go to sleep after hearing this news? I think her mind would have been filled with a million thoughts and she would not have slept a wink.
- d. *Boaz protected Ruth (verse 13-14).* Boaz's protection covered three areas. (i) It was the wrong side of midnight and it would have been very unsafe for Ruth to walk home in the dead of night. Boaz protects Ruth by telling her to stay the night. (ii) Boaz protects her reputation by making sure that she makes her way home as the dawn breaks and no-one would know that she spent the night on the threshing floor. Ruth was known as a virtuous woman and Boaz protected that good reputation. (iii) He protected her by taking upon himself to confront and deal with the relative who was closer than he was. Dealing with the elders at the gate would have been a daunting and nerve-racking prospect for Naomi and Ruth; Boaz knew this and released them from this ordeal. Did Boaz's have an additional capacity to empathise with Ruth because he personally knew something of the pain of being an outsider? The genealogy of Jesus in **Matthew 1:5**, records Boaz's family, it says, '*Salmon begot Boaz by Rahab.*' The prostitute from Jericho who hid the spies sent by Joshua was Boaz's mother. It is very possible that Boaz as a child also endured rejection and prejudice.
- e. *Boaz promised to resolve Ruth's legal claim (verse 13).* If the news that there was a closer relative made Ruth anxious, then Boaz comforted her by the promise he made. Boaz would pursue the matter of the closer relative, and if he did not accept responsibility, then Boaz would fulfil the obligations of the kinsman-redeemer and marry Ruth according to the Levirate law. Boaz had promised that Ruth would have a husband; it would either be the closer relative or Boaz himself. Our English translation gives the impression that Boaz dealt with this matter

in a rather legal way, but the Hebrew text includes a sense of Boaz's personal feeling. In most English translations one response of the closer relative is described as him being *'unwilling or does not want'* to perform his duties. The Hebrew text is much stronger and according to ***lain Duguid*** could be paraphrased as, *is not absolutely delighted*. Boaz saw the fulfilment of the duties of the kinsman-redeemer and levirate law as a privilege and joy rather than a burden. Did Boaz love Ruth and desire to marry her? That could well be the case, but he placed obedience to the law of God above his own desires therefore he would deal with the matter of the closer relative according to the law.

- f. *Boaz provided for Ruth and Naomi (verse 15)*. The provision Boaz gives is six ephahs of barley. Six ephahs would weigh a huge amount. Listen to ***Sinclair Ferguson's*** comments on Ruth going home with this load of barley. *'Try to imagine the scene as Ruth returns. She is coming home as the new day dawns. Does Naomi see the burden Ruth is carrying? Naomi's deepest thoughts are anxious ones, for she surely understands the high risk strategy she has adopted. For all the appearance of being casual, together, in control, she is longing to ask, "How did things go?" Inwardly she is torn by anxiety and fear. Perhaps she has been up all night worrying - a nervous wreck! So Ruth returns, the faintly unpleasant odour of perspiration replacing that of the earlier perfume....Ruth is now perhaps almost collapsing under the weight of the grain she is bringing home! "How did it go my daughter? What has happened?" Are we meant to see Ruth turning to her, gasping, "Boaz said - do not - go back - to your mother-in-law - empty handed"?' The six ephahs of barley would have told Naomi that Boaz would see that both women were well provided for. This action on Boaz's part would have put Naomi's anxious mind at rest.*
- g. ***Bishop Hall*** thus sums up this matter in his contemplations: *"Boaz, instead of touching her as a wanton, blessed her as a father, encouraged her as a friend, promised her as a kinsman, rewards her as a patron, and sends her away laden with hopes and gifts, no less chaste, more happy, than she came."* Boaz displayed amazing godliness in the way he responded to Ruth. The working of God is obvious in Boaz as he seeks to imitate the character of God who comes to his people with armloads of grace, mercy, love and peace. Boaz understood what God expected of him and he sought to fulfil the Lord's requirements. Long after Boaz had died the prophet Micah summed up the strivings of Boaz's heart when he proclaimed, *"He (God) has shown you, o man, what is good; and what does the Lord require of you but to do justly, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with your God?"* Boaz was a godly man whose life radiated the greatness of the God he served. Our response to Boaz's response to Ruth should not leave us thinking, *'Wow, Boaz was a really great man'* but *'Wow, God is wonderful and gracious.'* Boaz was a servant doing his master's will; the glory belongs to the master never to the servant.

2. Responding to the graciousness of the kinsman-redeemer.

- a. As Ruth staggered home carrying the six ephahs of barley many thoughts must have passed through her mind concerning Boaz's response and her future. Ruth knew 3 things;
- i. By God's grace Naomi and herself would be provided for as Boaz had promised to see to the implementation of the levirate and kinsman redeemer laws on her behalf. Life for Naomi and Ruth was about to undergo radical change; they would be part of a family.
 - ii. Ruth knew that she would soon be married under the levirate law.
 - iii. Ruth knew that she could trust Boaz. While these three things were good and ought to have provided a great deal of comfort to her, I have a strong suspicion that her mind was not on these three things. The issue that would have gnawed away in her heart and mind would have been, *'Who is this relative who is closer than Boaz? What is he like? What kind of life will I have under his roof?'* Ruth might even have felt a sense of fear and gloom about the outcome of the work that Boaz had undertaken on her behalf. I would not be surprised if Ruth felt very fearful of the future. We all know that as we pass through any crisis that shakes our sense of security we are inclined to listen to our feelings which usually run to the worst case scenario. Ruth's faith in the

Lord was passing through a time of testing. When she left home and made her way to the threshing floor nine hours earlier she had told herself that she would trust the Lord to undertake for her. Now as she walked home the sin that remained in her would be asking, *'Can you continue to trust the Lord in this matter?'* We need to understand that the sin that continues to live in us always challenges the confidence we have in our Lord. Trusting God and depending upon his grace is not something we do naturally as they are exercises of faith.

- b. When Ruth arrives home, Naomi asks her a strange question. According to the New King James Version Naomi asks, *'Is that you my daughter?'* The New American Bible changes the question to, *'How have you fared, my daughter?'* A literal translation of the Hebrew would make the question, *'Who are you my daughter?'* The literal translation does not quite seem to fit. Naomi asks exactly the same question as Boaz did when he woke up to find Ruth lying down at his feet. Did Naomi not recognize the staggering figure carrying a huge load of barley as her daughter in-law in the dim light of dawn? The answer could be as simple as that. **Matthew Henry** sees the question as asking something much deeper and more profound. Throughout the book the question; *'Who is Ruth?'* has been raised a number of times. Who is this Moabitess? Is she an outsider, an outcast, a person of no significance? Is Naomi beginning to grasp that Ruth is: *one who is better to you than seven sons (Ruth 4:15)*. The question, *'Who is Ruth?'* is really answered in the closing verse of the book which lists her as the great grandmother of King David. Who is Ruth? Ruth is a woman of great significance in the eyes of God who chose her to have a place in his great plan of salvation.
- c. Once Ruth has dumped the load of barley on the floor she tells Naomi everything that happened between Boaz and herself that night. We can imagine Naomi's response to the news that there was a relative who was closer than Boaz. We can imagine her thinking, *'O no, why does there always have to be a problem, why cant things go according to plan?'* Trusting God is difficult because we forget the words of **Isaiah 55:8-9**, *'For My thoughts are not your thoughts, nor are your ways My ways," says the Lord. "For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are My ways higher than your ways, and My thoughts than your thoughts.'* We set ourselves up for a fall when we expect God to do things our way. Trust God for who he is and for his covenantal commitment to you.
- d. What was the most significant thing that happened on the threshing floor between Boaz and Ruth? We might think it was Boaz's godliness or his promise to implement Ruth's claim under the levirate and kinsman redeemer laws, but God's word singles out the words of Boaz, *'Do not go empty handed to your mother in-law.'* Naomi's testimony was that God had brought her back from Moab empty. Boaz's words can be seen as a gentle rebuke to Naomi to rethink this claim. The emptiness she feels is due to the losses she suffered in the past, if she looked at the present through the eyes of faith she would see that her life is full of God's goodness. God's goodness is present in Ruth, in the provisions of his covenant laws, in his sustaining mercy and loving kindness. Perhaps the excessive load of barley was designed to shout out the message to Naomi, *'Your life is not empty God is filling your life, he is meeting your every need, trust him!'*
- e. Listen to Naomi's counsel to Ruth in closing verse of chapter 3, *'Sit still, my daughter, until you know how the matter will turn out; for the man will not rest until he has concluded the matter this day.'* This counsel comes from a restored backslider who has finally grasped that those who belong to the Lord do not need to panic, but need to be still and trust in the Lord. Ruth according to Naomi's counsel must be at peace knowing that God will work out his purpose and that Boaz as God's chosen man will conclude the matter. *'Sit still and trust the Lord'* are the last spoken words of Naomi recorded in Scripture. The broken and bitter Naomi who blamed God for her sorrows and asked others to call her Mara, now comforts, strengthens and encourages Ruth to trust in the Almighty. God had given them a kinsman-redeemer and the Lord will deal with the matter, they must trust the Lord.

Conclusion.

The Lord Jesus Christ is our kinsman redeemer. He is our kinsman by his incarnation. He is a great and mighty kinsman, for he is himself God incarnate. He is a kinsman of great power and wealth. All things belong to him. All the fullness of grace and glory are in him. He is our kinsman and the King of kings. As Boaz loved Ruth, so Christ Jesus loved us without a cause, freely. *"We love him, because he first loved us!"* He says, *"I have loved you, with an everlasting love...I have drawn you with the cords of love."* As Boaz promised to redeem Ruth, so the Son of God promised to redeem us in the covenant of grace before the world began. But, as with Ruth, there was one who had first claim upon us. The law of God held us as its captors. We were law-breakers and in league with the king of law-breakers. The law has claim upon us, not to redeem us, but to condemn us. The law is our condemner, and could never be our deliverer. So the Lord Jesus willingly paid the price of our redemption, the price demanded by the justice of God. By his life of obedience, he magnified the law and made it honourable, and brought in everlasting righteousness for his people. As our substitute through offering himself as the atoning sacrifice for our sins, he fully satisfied the wrath, justice and righteousness of God. Hallelujah what a Redeemer!