

CHAPTER 4

In this chapter we have the wedding between Boaz and Ruth, in the circumstances of which there was something uncommon, which is kept upon record for the illustration, not only of the law concerning the marrying of a brother's widow (~~REF5~~ Deuteronomy 25:5, etc.), for cases help to expound laws, but of the gospel too, for from this marriage descended David, and the Son of David, whose espousals to the Gentile church were hereby typified. We are here told,

I. How Boaz got clear of his rival, and fairly shook him off (v. 1-8).

II. How his marriage with Ruth was publicly solemnized, and attended with the good wishes of his neighbours (v. 9-12).

III. The happy issue that descended from this marriage, Obed, the grandfather of David (v. 13-17). And so the book concludes with the pedigree of David (v. 18-22). Perhaps it was to oblige him that the blessed Spirit directed the inserting of this story in the sacred canon, he being desirous that the virtues of his great-grandmother Ruth, together with her Gentile extraction and the singular providences that attended her, should be transmitted to posterity.

~~RODE~~ RUTH 4:1-8

RUTH REFUSED BY HER KINSMAN

Here,

1. Boaz calls a court immediately. It is probable he was himself one of the elders (or aldermen) of the city; for he was a mighty man of wealth. Perhaps he was father of the city, and sat chief; for he seems here to have gone up to the gate as one having authority, and not as a common person; like Job, ~~ROSE~~ Job 29:7, etc. We cannot suppose him less than a magistrate in his city who was grandson to Nahshon, prince of Judah; and his lying at the end of a heap of corn in the threshing-floor the night before was not at all inconsistent, in those days of plainness, with the honour of his sitting judge

in the gate. But why was Boaz so hasty, why so fond of the match? Ruth was not rich, but lived upon alms; not honourable, but a poor stranger. 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. But that which made Boaz in love with her, and solicitous to expedite the affair, was that all her neighbours agreed she was a virtuous woman. This set her price with him *far above rubies* (^{31:10}Proverbs 31:10); and therefore he thinks, if by marrying her he might do her a real kindness, he should also do himself a very great kindness. He will therefore bring it to a conclusion immediately. It was not court-day, but he got ten men of the elders of the city to meet him in the town-hall over the gate, where public business used to be transacted, v. 2. So many, it is probable, by the custom of the city, made a full court. Boaz, though a judge, would not be judge in his own cause, but desired the concurrence of other elders. Honest intentions dread not a public cognizance.

2. He summons his rival to come and hear the matter that was to be proposed to him (v. 1): "*Ho, such a one*, sit down here." He called him by his name, no doubt, but the divine historian thought not fit to record it, for, because he refused to raise up the name of the dead, he deserved not to have his name preserved to future ages in this history. Providence favoured Boaz in ordering it so that this kinsman should come by thus opportunely, just when the matter was ready to be proposed to him. Great affairs are sometimes much furthered by small circumstances, which facilitate and expedite them.

3. He proposes to the other kinsman the redemption of Naomi's land, which, it is probable, had been mortgaged for money to buy bread with when the famine was in the land (v. 3): "*Naomi has a parcel of land to sell*, namely, the equity of the redemption of it out of the hands of the mortgagee, which she is willing to part with;" or, as some think, it was her jointure for her life, and, wanting money, for a small matter she would sell her interest to the heir at law, who was fittest to be the purchaser. This he gives the kinsman legal notice of (v. 4), that he might have the refusal of it. Whoever had it must pay for it, and Boaz might have said, "My money is as good as my kinsman's; if I have a mind to it, why may not I buy it privately, since I had the first proffer of it, and say nothing to my kinsman?" No, Boaz, though fond enough of the purchase, would not do so mean a thing as to take a bargain over another man's head that was nearer a-kin to it; and we are taught by his example to be not only just and

honest, but fair and honourable, in all our dealings, and to do nothing which we are unwilling should see the light, but be above-board.

4. The kinsman seemed forward to redeem the land till he was told that, if he did that, he must marry the widow, and then he flew off. He liked the land well enough, and probably caught at that the more greedily because he hoped that the poor widow being under a necessity of selling he have so much the better bargain: “*I will redeem it*” (said he) “with all my heart,” thinking it would be a fine addition to his estate, v. 4. But Boaz told him there was a young widow in the case, and, if he have the land, he must take her with it, *Terra transit cum onere* — *The estate passes with this incumbrance*; either the divine law or the usage of the country would oblige him to it, or Naomi insisted upon it that she would not sell the land but upon this condition, v. 5. Some think this does not relate to the law of marrying the brother's widow (for that seems to oblige only the children of the same father, ^(~~REVI~~) Deuteronomy 25:5, unless by custom it was afterwards made to extend to the next of kin), but to the law of redemption of inheritances (^(~~REVI~~) Leviticus 25:24, 25), for it is a *goel*, a *redeemer*, that is here enquired for; and if so it was not by the law, but by Naomi's own resolution, that the purchaser was to marry the widow. However it was, this kinsman, when he heard the conditions of the bargain, refused it (v. 6): “*I cannot redeem it for myself. I will not meddle with it upon these terms, lest I mar my own inheritance.*” The land, he thought, would be an improvement of his inheritance, but not the land with the woman; that would mar it. Perhaps he thought it would be a disparagement to him to marry such a poor widow that had come from a strange country, and almost lived upon alms. He fancied it would be a blemish to his family, it would mar his blood, and disgrace his posterity. Her eminent virtues were not sufficient in his eye to counterbalance this. The Chaldee paraphrase makes his reason for this refusal to be that he had another wife, and, if he should take Ruth, it might occasion strife and contention in his family, which would mar the comfort of his inheritance. Or he thought she might bring him a great many children, and they would all expect shares out of his estate, which would scatter it into too many hands, so that the family would make the less figure. This makes many shy of the great redemption: they are not willing to espouse religion. They have heard well of it, and have nothing to say against it; they will give it their good word, but at the same time they will give their good word with it; they are willing to part with it, and cannot be bound to it, for fear of marring their own inheritance

in this world. Heaven they could be glad of, but holiness they can dispense with; it will not agree with the lusts they have already espoused, and therefore, let who will purchase heaven at that rate, they cannot.

5. The right of redemption is fairly resigned to Boaz. If this nameless kinsman lost a good bargain, a good estate, and a good wife too, he may thank himself for not considering it better, and Boaz will thank him for making his way clear to that which he valued and desired above any thing. In those ancient times it was not the usage to pass estates by writings, as afterwards (²⁴²⁰Jeremiah 32:10, etc.), but by some sign or ceremony, as with us by livery and seisin, as we commonly call it, that is, the delivery of seisin, seisin of a house by giving the key, of land by giving turf and a twig. The ceremony here used was, he that surrendered *plucked off his shoe* (the Chaldee says it was *the glove of his right hand*) and gave it to him to whom he made the surrender, intimating thereby that, whatever right he had to tread or go upon the land, he conveyed and transferred it, upon a valuable consideration, to the purchaser: this was a *testimony in Israel*, v. 7. And it was done in this case, v. 8. If this kinsman had been bound by the law to marry Ruth, and his refusal had been a contempt of that law, Ruth must have *plucked off his shoe* and *spit in his face*, (¹⁸²⁰Deuteronomy 25:9. But, though his relation should in some measure oblige him to the duty, yet the distance of his relation might serve to excuse him from the penalty, or Ruth might very well dispense with it, since his refusal was all she desired from him. But bishop Patrick, and the best interpreters, think this had no relation to that law, and that the drawing off of the shoe was not any disgrace as there, but a confirmation of the surrender, and an evidence that it was not fraudulently nor surreptitiously obtained. Note, Fair and open dealing in all matters of contract and commerce is what all those must make conscience of that would approve themselves Israelites indeed, without guile. How much more honourably and honestly does Boaz come by this purchase than if he had secretly undermined his kinsman, and privately struck up a bargain with Naomi, unknown to him. Honesty will be found the best policy.

~~(R01)~~ RUTH 4:9-12

RUTH MARRIED TO BOAZ

Boaz now sees his way clear, and therefore delays not to perform his promise made to Ruth that he would do the kinsman's part, but in the gate of the city, before the elders and all the people, publishes a marriage-contract between himself and Ruth the Moabitess, and therewith the purchase of all the estate that belonged to the family of Elimelech. If he had not been (~~(R01)~~ Ruth 2:1) *a mighty man of wealth*, he could not have compassed this redemption, nor done this service to his kinsman's family. What is a great estate good for, but that it enables a man to do so much the more good in his generation, and especially to those of his own household, if he have but a heart to use it so! Now concerning this marriage it appears,

I. That it was solemnized, or at least published, before many witnesses, v. 9, 10. "You are witnesses,"

1. "That I have bought the estate. Whoever has it, or any part of it, mortgaged to him, let him come to me and he shall have his money, according to the value of the land," which was computed by the number of years to the year of jubilee (~~(R25)~~ Leviticus 25:15), when it would have returned of course to Elimelech's family. The more public the sales of estates are the better they are guarded against frauds.

2. "That I have purchased the widow to be my wife." He had no portion with her; what jointure she had was encumbered, and he could not have it without giving as much for it as it was worth, and therefore he might well say he purchased her; and yet, being a virtuous woman, he reckoned he had a good bargain. *House and riches are the inheritance of fathers*, but a prudent wife is more valuable, is from the Lord as a special gift. He designed, in marrying her, to preserve the memory of the dead, that the name of Mahlon, though he left no son to bear it up, might not be cut off from the gate of his place, but by this means might be preserved, that it should be inserted in the public register that Boaz married Ruth the widow of Mahlon, the son of Elimelech, which posterity, whenever they had occasion to consult the register, would take particular notice of. And this history, being preserved for the sake of that marriage and the issue of it, proved an effectual means to perpetuate the name of Mahlon, even beyond

the thought or intention of Boaz, to the world's end. And observe that because Boaz did this honour to the dead, as well as this kindness to the living, God did him the honour to bring him into the genealogy of the Messiah, by which his family was dignified above all the families of Israel; while the other kinsman, that was so much afraid of diminishing himself, and marring his inheritance, by marrying the widow, has his name, family, and inheritance, buried in oblivion and disgrace. A tender and generous concern for the honour of the dead and the comfort of poor widows and strangers, neither of which can return the kindness (~~☞~~ Luke 14:14), is sure what God will be well pleased with and will surely recompense. Our Lord Jesus is our *Goel*, our *Redeemer*, our everlasting Redeemer. He looked, like Boaz, with compassion on the deplorable state of fallen mankind. At a vast expense he redeemed the heavenly inheritance for us, which by sin was mortgaged, and forfeited into the hands of divine justice, and which we should never have been able to redeem. He likewise purchased a peculiar people, whom he would espouse to himself, though strangers and foreigners, like Ruth, poor and despised, that the name of that dead and buried race might not be cut off for ever. He ventured the marring of his own inheritance, to do this, for, *though he was rich, yet for our sakes he became poor*; but he was abundantly recompensed for it by his Father, who, because he thus humbled himself, hath *highly exalted him, and given him a name above every name*. Let us own our obligations to him, make sure our contract with him, and study all our days how to do him honour. Boaz, by making a public declaration of this marriage and purchase, not only secured his title against all pretenders, as it were by a fine with proclamations, but put honour upon Ruth, showed that he was not ashamed of her, and her parentage and poverty, and left a testimony against clandestine marriages. It is only that which is evil that hates the light and comes not to it. Boaz called witnesses to what he did, for it was what he could justify, and would never disown; and such regard was then had, even to the contemned crowd, that not only the elders, but all the people that were in the gate, passing and re-passing, were appealed to (v. 9), and hearkened to (v. 11) when they said, *We are witnesses*.

II. That it was attended with many prayers. The elders and all the people, when they witnessed to it, wished well to it, and blessed it, v. 11, 12. Ruth, it should seem, was now sent for; for they speak of her (v. 12) as present: *This young woman*; and, he having taken her to wife, they look upon her as

already come into his house. And very heartily they pray for the new-married couple.

1. The senior elder, it is likely, made this prayer, and the rest of the elders, with the people, joined in it, and therefore it is spoken of as made by them all; for in public prayers, though but one speaks, we must all pray. Observe,

(1.) Marriages ought to be blessed, and accompanied with prayer, because every creature and every condition are that to us, and no more, that God makes them to be. It is civil and friendly to wish all happiness to those who enter into that condition; and what good we desire we should pray for from the fountain of all good. The minister who gives himself to the word and prayer, as he is the fittest person to exhort, so he is the fittest to bless and pray for those that enter into this relation.

(2.) We ought to desire and pray for the welfare and prosperity one of another, so far from envying or grieving at it.

2. Now here,

(1.) They prayed for Ruth: *The Lord make the woman that has come into thy house like Rachel and Leah*, that is, “God make her a good wife and a fruitful mother.” Ruth was a virtuous woman, and yet needed the prayers of her friends, that by the grace of God she might be made a blessing to the family she had come into. They prayed that she might be like Rachel and Leah, rather than like Sarah and Rebekah, for Sarah had but one son, and Rebekah but one that was in covenant, the other was Esau, who was rejected; but Rachel and Leah did *build up the house of Israel*: all their children were in the church, and their offspring was numerous. “May she be a flourishing, fruitful, faithful *vine by thy house side*.”

(2.) They prayed for Boaz, that he might continue to do worthily in the city to which he was an ornament, and might there be more and more famous. They desired that the wife might be a blessing in the private affairs of the house, and the husband a blessing in the public business of the town, that she in her place, and he in his, might be wise, virtuous, and successful. Observe, The way to be famous is to do worthily. Great reputation must be obtained by great merits. It is not enough not to do unworthily, to be harmless and inoffensive, but we must do worthily, be useful and serviceable to our generation. Those that would be truly illustrious must in their places shine as lights.

(3.) They prayed for the family: “*Let thy house be like the house of Pharez,*” that is, “let it be very numerous, let it greatly increase and multiply, as the house of Pharez did.” The Bethlehemites were of the house of Pharez, and knew very well how numerous it was; in the distribution of the tribes, that grandson of Jacob had the honour which none of the rest had but Manasseh and Ephraim, that his posterity was subdivided into two distinct families, Hezron and Hamul, ^{<0421>}Numbers 26:21. Now they prayed that the family of Boaz, which was one branch of that stock, might in process of time become as numerous and great as the whole stock now was.

^{<0843>}RUTH 4:13-22

THE PEDIGREE OF DAVID

Here is,

I. Ruth a wife. Boaz took her, with the usual solemnities, to his house, and *she became his wife* (v. 13), all the city, no doubt, congratulating the preferment of a virtuous woman, purely for her virtues. We have reason to think that Orpah, who returned from Naomi to her people and her gods, was never half so well preferred as Ruth was. He that forsakes all for Christ shall find more than all with him; it shall be recompensed a hundred-fold in this present time. Now Orpah wished she had gone with Naomi too; but she, like the other kinsman, stood in her own light. Boaz had prayed that this pious proselyte might receive a full reward of her courage and constancy from the God of Israel, *under whose wings she had come to trust*; and now he became an instrument of that kindness, which was an answer to his prayer, and helped to make his own words good. Now she had the command of those servants with whom she had associated and of those fields in which she had gleaned. Thus sometimes *God raiseth up the poor out of the dust, to set them with princes*, ^{<0437>}Psalm 113:7, 8.

II. Ruth a mother: *The Lord gave her conception; for the fruit of the womb is his reward*, ^{<0473>}Psalm 127:3. It is one of the keys he hath in his hand; and he sometimes makes the barren woman that had been long so to be a *joyful mother of children*, ^{<0439>}Psalm 113:9; ^{<2540>}Isaiah 54:1.

III. Ruth still a daughter-in-law, and the same that she always was, to Naomi, who was so far from being forgotten that she was a principal sharer in these new joys. The good women that were at the labour when this child was born congratulated Naomi upon it more than either Boaz or Ruth, because she was the match-maker, and it was the family of her husband that was hereby built up. See here, as before, what an air of devotion there was then even in the common expressions of civility among the Israelites. Prayer to God attended the birth of the child. What a pity it is that such pious language should either be disused among Christians or degenerate into a formality. “*Blessed be the Lord that has sent thee this grandson,*” v. 14, 15.

- 1.** Who was the preserver of the name of her family, and who, they hoped, would be famous, because his father was so.
- 2.** Who would be hereafter dutiful and kind to her, so they hoped, because his mother was so. If he would but take after her, he would be a comfort to his aged grandmother, a restorer of her life, and, if there should be occasion, would have wherewithal to be the nourisher of her old age. It is a great comfort to those that are going into years to see any of those that descend from them growing up, that are likely, by the blessing of God, to be a stay and support to them, when the years come wherein they will need such, and of which they will say they have no pleasure in them. Observe, They say of Ruth that she loved Naomi, and therefore was better to her than seven sons. See how God in his providence sometimes makes up the want and loss of those relations from whom we expected most comfort in those from whom we expected least. The bonds of love prove stronger than those of nature, and there is a *friend that sticks closer than a brother*; so here there was a daughter-in-law better than an own child. See what wisdom and grace will do. Now here,

(1.) The child is named by the neighbours, v. 17. The good women would have it called *Obed, a servant*, either in remembrance of the meanness and poverty of the mother or in prospect of his being hereafter a servant, and very serviceable, to his grandmother. It is no dishonour to those that are ever so well born to be servants to God, their friends, and their generation. The motto of the princes of Wales is *Ich dien — I serve*.

(2.) The child is nursed by the grandmother, that is, dry-nursed, when the mother had weaned him from the breast, v. 16. She laid it in her bosom, in

token of her tender affection to it and care of it. Grandmothers are often the most fond.

IV. Ruth is hereby brought in among the ancestors of David and Christ, which was the greatest honour. The genealogy is here drawn from Pharez, through Boaz and Obed, to David, and so leads towards the Messiah, and therefore it is not an endless genealogy.