

“True Wisdom in Gain & Loss”
Ruth 4 (Part 1)
October 11, 2020
Faith Presbyterian Church – Morning Service
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We will consider the Book of Ruth two more times together – this morning and next Lord’s Day. Both times we will be looking at chapter four.

To re-cap the story up to this point: In Ruth chapter one, Elimelech and Naomi left the Promised Land with their two sons Mahlon and Chilion, to travel to Moab during a famine. Elimelech and his sons died, leaving behind Naomi and the widows of her sons: Orpah and Ruth. When Naomi returns to Bethlehem, Ruth comes with her, pledging herself both to Naomi and to the Lord – to Yahweh, the God of Israel.

In chapter two, Ruth and Naomi are living together, and Ruth goes out to glean – to harvest from the edges and remains of the fields of landowners. By God’s providence Ruth comes to the field of Boaz, who treats her with extraordinary and personal grace.

Boaz, it turns out, is a close relative to Elimelech, and was therefore a possible redeemer of Elimelech’s household. While Ruth was free to marry whomever she pleased, as she sought a husband, she also wanted to serve Naomi. According to the Law of Moses, if she married a kinsman-redeemer – a *goel* in Hebrew – that kinsman-redeemer would not only be Ruth’s second husband, but their first son would be considered part of the household of Ruth’s first husband and an heir of Naomi. This would ensure that Naomi was provided for, and that the family inheritance of Naomi and Elimelech stayed in their family line. Other children would be considered part of the second husband’s household. We spoke at more length last Lord’s Day about how this role worked, but in short, it was a provision available to widows in a time and place where there were not many resources for widows.

Ruth approaches Boaz in chapter three and asks him to enter this kind of kinsman-redeemer marriage with her. Boaz was not legally compelled to agree, but he still responds with enthusiastic desire to help Ruth and Naomi, and to marry Ruth in this way.

But there is a problem. Boaz, we suddenly learn, is not the next-in-line kinsman-redeemer. So Boaz says to Ruth that if she wants to pursue a kinsman-redeemer marriage, then that man must be approached first. Boaz agrees to approach this other, closer kinsman-redeemer, and if that man declines to fulfill the role, *then* Boaz will be next in line in the order of succession, and he will enter into a kinsman-redeemer marriage with Ruth and provide for them in this way.

And so, as we come to chapter four, we need to remember that some level of resolution for Ruth and Naomi has already been reached. Ruth has chosen to pursue a kinsman-redeemer marriage. Boaz has said that if the closer relative will not do it, then he will. And so, either way, Naomi and Ruth will be redeemed. The question is: who will be the one to marry Ruth and redeem them? [Lusk, 70]

At this point we are all rooting for Boaz – and it seems clear that Ruth and Naomi are as well.

With all that in mind, we turn to Ruth chapter four.

Please do listen carefully, for this is God's word for us this morning.

^{4:1} Now Boaz had gone up to the gate and sat down there. And behold, the redeemer, of whom Boaz had spoken, came by. So Boaz said, "Turn aside, friend; sit down here." And he turned aside and sat down. ² And he took ten men of the elders of the city and said, "Sit down here." So they sat down. ³ Then he said to the redeemer, "Naomi, who has come back from the country of Moab, is selling the parcel of land that belonged to our relative Elimelech. ⁴ So I thought I would tell you of it and say, 'Buy it in the presence of those sitting here and in the presence of the elders of my people.' If you will redeem it, redeem it. But if you will not, tell me, that I may know, for there is no one besides you to redeem it, and I come after you." And he said, "I will redeem it." ⁵ Then Boaz said, "The day you buy the field from the hand of Naomi, you also acquire Ruth the Moabite, the widow of the dead, in order to perpetuate the name of the dead in his inheritance." ⁶ Then the redeemer said, "I cannot redeem it for myself, lest I impair my own inheritance. Take my right of redemption yourself, for I cannot redeem it."

⁷ Now this was the custom in former times in Israel concerning redeeming and exchanging: to confirm a transaction, the one drew off his sandal and gave it to the other, and this was the manner of attesting in Israel. ⁸ So when the redeemer said to Boaz, "Buy it for yourself," he drew off his sandal. ⁹ Then Boaz said to the elders and all the people, "You are witnesses this day that I have bought from the hand of Naomi all that belonged to Elimelech and all that belonged to Chilion and to Mahlon. ¹⁰ Also Ruth the Moabite, the widow of Mahlon, I have bought ["acquired" is probably a better translation [See NASB, NIV, Block, 202, 211]] to be my wife, to perpetuate the name of the dead in his inheritance, that the name of the dead may not be cut off from among his brothers and from the gate of his native place. You are witnesses this day." ¹¹ Then all the people who were at the gate and the elders said, "We are witnesses. May the LORD [may Yahweh] make the woman, who is coming into your house, like Rachel and Leah, who together built up the house of Israel. May you act worthily in Ephrathah and be renowned in Bethlehem, ¹² and may your house be like the house of Perez, whom Tamar bore to Judah, because of the offspring that Yahweh will give you by this young woman."

¹³ So Boaz took Ruth, and she became his wife. And he went in to her, and Yahweh gave her conception, and she bore a son. ¹⁴ Then the women said to Naomi, "Blessed be Yahweh, who has not left you this day without a redeemer, and may his name be renowned in Israel! ¹⁵ He shall be to you a restorer of life and a nourisher of your old age, for your daughter-in-law who loves you, who is more to you than seven sons, has given birth to him." ¹⁶ Then Naomi took the child and laid him on her lap and became his nurse. ¹⁷ And the women of the neighborhood gave him a name, saying, "A son has been born to Naomi." They named him Obed. He was the father of Jesse, the father of David.

¹⁸ Now these are the generations of Perez: Perez fathered Hezron, ¹⁹ Hezron fathered Ram, Ram fathered Amminadab, ²⁰ Amminadab fathered Nahshon, Nahshon fathered Salmon, ²¹ Salmon fathered Boaz, Boaz fathered Obed, ²² Obed fathered Jesse, and Jesse fathered David.

This is the word of the Lord. (Thanks be to God.)

"All people are like grass, and all their glory is like the flowers of the field; the grass withers and the flowers fall, but the word of the Lord endures forever." [1 Peter 1:24-25]

Let's pray ...

Lord, you are our hiding place and our shield,
we hope in your word.
Help us to turn from all false ways,
and keep instead the commandments of you, our God.
Uphold us according to your promise, that we may live,
and let us not be put to shame in our hope.
Hold us up, that we may be safe
and have regard for your statutes continually.
For we know we will one day stand before you and give an account,
and so, with that in mind, help us now to attend to your word.
Grant this in Jesus's name. Amen.
[Based on Psalm 119:114-117, 120]

INTRODUCTION:

Our passage this morning begins by telling us, in verse one, “that Boaz had gone up to the gate.” And it's important that we recognize what is going on here, because it frames the episode that then plays out.

The gate was so much the place of official business in the ancient world, that the phrase “go up to the gate” meant to “go to court.” [Block, 204].

Boaz is not just gathering some men for a discussion – he is calling the town's court into session.

One commentator explains – he writes: “In early Iron Age Palestine, town gates were complex structures with lookout towers at the outside and a series of rooms where defenders of the town would be stationed on either side of the gateway. But these gateways also served a secondary purpose, as a gathering place for the citizens of the town. This was the center of public life and the place where official administrative business was conducted.” [Block, 204]

By coming to the gate, sitting down, and asking others to sit with him as he does, Boaz is formally beginning a legal proceeding in the town courthouse. [Block, 205]

Once Boaz, the other man, and ten of the elders are present, the court is in session, and the case will play out.

And as it does, in verses one through ten we get three portraits held before us. We get a portrait of this closer kinsman-redeemer, we get a portrait of Boaz, and then we get a portrait of how Boaz executes this business.

I want to consider those three things together this morning.

THE PORTRAIT OF SO-AND-SO:

So first, let's consider the closer kinsman-redeemer.

Boaz speaks to him in verse one – the ESV translates Boaz's words to him as: "Turn aside, friend; sit down here."

Only, according to many commentators, that's probably not the best rendering of the Hebrew. The Hebrew phrase translated "friend" doesn't really mean "friend."

The phrase is two words which have no obvious meaning. Some suggest that they are nonsense words. What then is their significance here?

Well, we get something of a clue from the only two other books that use the same phrase. In First Samuel [21:3] and Second Kings [6:8] the same phrase is used to refer to a location whose name is being withheld. In those cases the ESV translates it as "such and such a place." Which has led one translation and a number of commentators to translate the same phrase here as "So-and-So" [Block, 205-207; Ferguson, 111; Mckeown, 61; Miller, 141]

Boaz's words then become "Turn aside, So-and-So, sit down here."

Now ... clearly Boaz knows this man's name – he knows he is a closer relative to Elimelech, which means he must also be a relative of Boaz, and Boaz recognizes him on sight. Almost every speaking character in the Book of Ruth is named by the narrator – so why not this man?

Well ... hold onto that question – we'll come back to it.

In the meantime, we must simply refer to him as "So-and-So."

What can we note about So-and-So?

The first thing we should notice is that he seems completely ignorant about Ruth and Naomi's situation. This is odd since he is the closest relative, and as Boaz knows, the responsibility to care for them falls onto him. Yet ... he seems oblivious to their needs.

Boaz was aware of their situation weeks ago, at the beginning of chapter two. In chapter three we were told that "all" the townsmen knew of Ruth and that she was a worthy woman [3:11]. But So-and-so seems completely unaware of her.

And that is actually what Boaz expects. He introduces the matter in a way that anticipates So-and-So's unawareness of Ruth and Naomi's needs ... so this is not a fluke occurrence. This is what everyone knows So-and-So is like. [Miller, 143]

So-and-So is not a man who proactively seeks out information about, or opportunities to help, those in need. In fact, his ignorance here displays a decided disinterest in the needs of others.

And that becomes more clear as the case proceeds.

In verses three and four Boaz lays out Naomi's situation, and the situation of Elimelech's land. Commentators differ on the details [Block, 208-211], but the big picture either way is that Naomi as an older widow cannot maintain and cultivate the land, she also has serious economic needs and may need to sell it to survive, and so the closest kinsman-redeemer was called on to acquire the land from Naomi and provide for Naomi's needs.

In verse four, So-and-So says he is willing to do that.

But then, in verse five, Boaz introduces Ruth to the mix, and says "The day you [acquire] the field from the hand of Naomi, you also acquire Ruth the Moabite, the widow of the dead, in order to perpetuate the name of the dead in his inheritance."

And now, So-and-So's attitude changes. He replies "I cannot redeem it for myself, lest I impair my own inheritance. Take my right of redemption yourself, for I cannot redeem it."

Why the about-face? Why the sudden change?

Well actually, the presence of Ruth drastically changes the situation for a kinsman-redeemer. Without Ruth, So-and-So could acquire the land, take on the responsibility of caring for Naomi for a few years, and then once Naomi died, the land would become So-and-So's forever.

And that's a big deal. In Israel land was allotted by family, and it couldn't be sold forever. Every fifty years, the land reverted back to the family it was originally allotted to.

But in this case, if there was no heir to Elimelech, there would be no one for the land to revert to. The land could remain in the family of So-and-So forever.

And so at this point, this looks like a low-personal-cost, high-personal-reward situation for So-and-So.

Until Ruth shows up.

Once Ruth is introduced, everything changes. She is still of child-bearing age. And stepping in as a kinsman-redeemer also means marrying her. That means that now So-and-So would acquire the land, and need to care for Naomi for the rest of her life, *and* he would need to marry Ruth, support her for the rest of her life, support their children even though the first son would take on Mahlon's family name, and in the end the property would revert back to Mahlon's family. Along with that, if Ruth had only one son, then So-and-So would lack an heir and his inheritance could be jeopardized. [Miller, 142; Lusk, 71-73]

The situation has now flipped on its head: it's now high-personal-cost, with little-or-no-personal-reward.

And So-and-So is primarily concerned here with himself. It comes out in his decision and it's emphasized in his dialogue which seems to feature an excessive use of the first-person pronoun. [Block, 217-218]

With that, So-and-So declines to serve as the kinsman-redeemer, and through the ceremony described in verses seven and eight, he legally transfers the role of kinsman-redeemer to Boaz, the next-in-line for the role.

And Boaz makes it easy for him to do that. In fact, with Boaz waiting in the wings, there was probably little or no public shame for So-and-So as he declined.

What then do we make of So-and-So?

What we see in this portrait is that So-and-So is proactive and shrewd in pursuing self-interest.

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Now, let's be clear – So-and-So didn't do anything to hurt anyone. He doesn't harm Ruth or Naomi. He doesn't exploit them. He doesn't abuse them. He does nothing towards them. He's not even really aware of them. And that's sort of the point.

So-and-So is at first remarkably passive – unaware of Ruth and Naomi's needs, even though, as the closest kinsman-redeemer, it was responsibility.

But So-and-So's passivity is not universal. There are things that motivate him.

In verse four he is ready to kick into action when an opportunity to help himself comes up – an opportunity to enlarge his own house and bless his own heritage.

But then when the terms of the transaction change, So-and-So is no fool. He is shrewd. He does some quick calculations. He sees this is no longer in his personal interest. And So-and-So's attitude changes again.

He returns to being passive. He defers his role to Boaz.

So-and-So is proactive and shrewd in pursuing his own interests. He is passive when it comes to the needs of others.

The over-arching concern we see in him is to enhance himself – his inheritance, his household, his family name – that is what he actively seeks.

That is how he lives his life.

And what does he get for it?

Well ... he gets nothing.

In fact, in some ways he gets less than nothing. In some ways he loses.

So-and-So is very concerned to preserve his inheritance – his family line and therefore his family name. The reason he gives for not redeeming Ruth is that it could risk the future of his inheritance – the land associated with his family name.

And what is his family name that he was so set on preserving and promoting?

We don't know.

We're never told.

To us, he's just "So-and-So". And *now* the significance of that phrase should begin to hit us.

This man based his life on protecting and promoting his own interest and his own family name. And that's exactly what he lost. The narrator leaves him unnamed. Everyone else – even Orpah – gets a name. But not this man. He is nameless. He is irrelevant. He is not worth noting. He enters the scene in verse one, he exits in verse nine, and is never heard from again. [Lusk, 73-74]

Why is that?

Jesus explains it in Matthew 16:24-27 – there we read:

²⁴ Then Jesus told his disciples, "If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. ²⁵ For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will find it. ²⁶ For what will it profit a man if he gains the whole world and forfeits his soul? Or what shall a man give in return for his soul? ²⁷ For the Son of Man is going to come with his angels in the glory of his Father, and then he will repay each person according to what he has done.

"Whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will find it."

So-and-So, was, above all else, concerned with saving – with preserving – his life. He would preserve his inheritance, his land, his name. And he was good at it. He could spot a good opportunity to enhance his life and his name and jump at it, as he does in verse four. And he could see a big risk and knew how to avoid it, as he does in verse six.

And he was so good at preserving his name that he lost it completely.

For that is how God rewards those who are proactive and shrewd in pursuing self-interest above all else.

"Whoever would save his life will lose it."

And if we see that rightly, it should make us uncomfortable.

So-and-So wasn't noticeably corrupt. He's not a villain. If he had redeemed the land, we have no reason to doubt he would have cared for Naomi, in exchange for the land he would eventually inherit from her. We have no reason to think he wasn't respectable and likable in Bethlehem.

But he viewed all of life through the lens of self-interest. Self-interest was what drove him.

And we can so often be the same, can't we?

Without even trying to, we can do those same cost-benefit analyses. Without any training we can spring into action when an opportunity for improving our own lives comes before us. And without ever even thinking about it, we can lose all interest in, and easily forget about the needs of others, and focus instead on our own desires.

But Jesus says: "Whoever would save his life will lose it."

And that is what happens to So-and-So.

Are you at risk of living a life like So-and-So? Are you doing it right now? Is your life filled to the brim with concerns to preserve and enhance your name or your household or your standing in the here and now – concerns that have *no* eternal value?

When we look at So-and-So's heart ... we see at least something of our own reflection ... don't we?

That is the lesson that So-and-So has for us.

THE PORTRAIT OF BOAZ:

But thankfully, So-and-So is not the only lesson this chapter has for us. For, sitting across from So-and-So is Boaz.

And in Boaz we see a great contrast with So-and-So.

Where So-and-So is proactive and shrewd in pursuing self-interest, Boaz is proactive and shrewd in pursuing self-sacrificial love.

Now, as we said last Lord's Day, in considering chapter three, there is desire here. Boaz *wants* to marry Ruth. But that desire is not the driving force – it is instead serving and accompanying Boaz's primary concern, which is showing Biblical love to Ruth and to Naomi.

And he is clear about that.

He told Ruth as much in chapter three.

In verse four he states in court his intention to redeem the land if So-and-So declines.

And then, in verse nine he declares his intention and his motivation in all that he is doing. He states that his goal is not self-interest, but redemption. He declares his intention to be a husband to Ruth, a redeemer to Naomi, and one who perpetuates the line of those who have died.

Boaz is doing what he is doing to serve those in need.

It is an act of self-sacrifice for all the reasons why So-and-So chose to decline it. Boaz will invest a great deal of his wealth and his life, not only into Ruth's welfare, but into the continuation and future of the widow Naomi's household. From a worldly perspective, for all the costs he will take on, there are no real benefits.

Boaz commits to decreasing himself, and likely decreasing his household, so that these two widows may be increased. He pursues self-sacrificial love – a path where he would fade into the background for the good of others.

That's what he seeks. And what does he get?

Well ... like So-and-So, he too receives the opposite of what he sought. He seeks to decrease, but instead he is increased. He seeks humble service, and instead he is lifted up.

First of all, thousands of years later, we are still talking about him. Boaz chose a path wherein he would diminish, and his name would be at risk to disappear. But today his name is known to millions. Boaz's name has been perpetuated beyond anyone's imagination.

But that's not just true in the Scriptures. It is also true in the history and the genealogy of God's people.

Boaz is named at the end of this chapter as an ancestor of David, the king of Israel.

Now ... as a congregant pointed out to me last Sunday, that should seem wrong to us. Because remember, according to a worldly, legal perspective, Boaz should not appear in the genealogy. His first son was to be counted as Mahlon's son. And yet, there he is, in verse twenty-one. Though Elimelech and Mahlon should appear as the ancestors of Obed, and Jesse, and David, instead we find Salmon and Boaz. [Block, 255]

And it goes even further than that. Because Boaz appears not only in the genealogy of David, but also in the genealogies of Jesus – both in the Gospel of Matthew and the Gospel of Luke.

Boaz is counted as a forefather of the King of the Universe.

His name, and his household is perpetuated on the throne of God forever.

Why is that? Why did Boaz become great?

We return again to the words of Jesus in Matthew 16:

²⁴ Then Jesus told his disciples, "If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. ²⁵ For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will find it. [...] ²⁷ For the Son of Man is going to come with his angels in the glory of his Father, and then he will repay each person according to what he has done.

This is the economy of God's kingdom. It is not according to man's reasoning or man's custom's but according to God's ways.

By all human accounts, Boaz should have diminished and vanished from the genealogies of David and of Christ. But by God's account his name was lifted up. He was named as an ancestor of David, and eventually as an ancestor of Christ.

Boaz sought self-sacrificial love, and what he received was a name above so many others. He was willing to lose his life, and in Christ he found it.

And Jesus promises the same for us. Maybe in this life, but most certainly in the next, Jesus promises that all who deny themselves, and follow him, and love others as he has loved us, will be rewarded and lifted up.

But when we hear that, we tend to be discouraged. Which is why it is so important to understand *why* Boaz was rewarded for his sacrificial love here.

Boaz was not rewarded because his deeds were perfect. He was rewarded because his deeds were done in the context of God's gracious covenant. [See Lusk, 109-123 for some of what follows]

And in some ways, that's obvious. What Boaz did is wonderful. And it may warrant a story. But why is it included in the Word of God?

It's included because it is vitally linked to God's covenant work with his people. We will say more about that next Lord's Day, but for now we must note that everything Boaz does he does in the context of his relationship with God.

Boaz enters the book blessing others in the name of the Lord – in the name of Yahweh. He then treats others according to the commands of Yahweh. When Ruth comes to him, he wants to care for her and Naomi according to the heart of Yahweh, and do it according to the laws of Yahweh. And the results of all this are linked to the future king of Yahweh.

It is Yahweh – the Lord – the God of the Bible who rewards Boaz for his faithfulness.

And he doesn't do it because Boaz is perfect. But within the covenant of grace, God graciously accepts and rewards Boaz's works.

When we consider characters like Boaz and how they were rewarded for their works, we can often get discouraged about ourselves. Which is why it's striking that Calvin claimed that if we rightly understand how God rewards our good works, then we will be encouraged – not discouraged. [*Institutes* 3.15.4 (Quoted in Lusk, 117)]

But how does that work?

The Westminster Confession of Faith – part of our denomination's doctrinal standards, puts it like this.

First, it says: "We cannot by our best works merit pardon of sin, or eternal life at the hand of God." And it goes on to explain why – it says that as our works "are good, they proceed from [God's] Spirit; and as they are wrought by us, they are defiled, and mixed with so much weakness and imperfection, that they cannot endure the severity of God's judgment."

But then, right after that, it says this – it says: “Notwithstanding, the persons of believers being accepted through Christ, their good works also are accepted in him; not as though they were in this life wholly unblamable and unprovable in God's sight; but that he, looking upon them [upon the good works] in his Son [Jesus Christ], is pleased to accept and reward that which is sincere, although accompanied with many weaknesses and imperfections.”

In Christ, we are accepted, and we are God's children, and so our good works are also accepted, and even please God, and he rewards us for them.

One pastor puts it like this – he writes: “In the covenant of grace, God becomes a father and a husband to us and so he evaluates our works according to these relational categories. If my young son draws a family portrait of stick figures, I do not judge him for failing to measure up to the standards of Rembrandt or another one of the great artistic masters. Sure, I could give his drawing a devastating aesthetic critique. But because this is the work of my son, whom I love and accept, I hang the picture up on the refrigerator and when I look at it day after day after day, it makes me smile. If you saw the picture, it wouldn't have the same effect, because it was not drawn by your child. It doesn't do anything for you. You just see a stick figure. But I see something that has worth and value because of the father/son relationship. Should I correct my son's picture and try to teach him to draw better? Yes, of course. And God does the same with us. God is easy to please but hard to satisfy. He can give us gentle reproofs and correctives, even as he rewards our efforts to do what is right.” [Lusk, 122]

Or, as Calvin puts it: “God examines our works according to his tenderness, not his supreme right.” [Institutes 3.15.4 (Quoted in Lusk, 111)]

And so, the first thing we must see is that we are accepted by God not because we have merited his acceptance, but out of pure grace, through the work of Jesus Christ. As we place our trust in him, our sins are forgiven, and we are made pleasing to God.

But second, and key for what we are considering this morning: we need to see that the same is true for our good works – our attempts to sacrificially love others. On their own they are imperfect and tainted with sin. But when offered to God in faith, through Christ, their imperfections are cleansed away, and our good works become pleasing to God. And God rewards us for them – just as he did with Boaz.

We should therefore not be discouraged, but be encouraged to seek self-sacrificial love as Boaz did, in the confidence that maybe in this life, but most certainly in the life to come, we will be rewarded for such deeds – we will be lifted up and given a great name then, as we humbly serve and accept a low name now.

And that fact should make us not only willing to do good works ... but eager to.

A PORTRAIT OF HOW TO SEEK TO DO GOOD:

We said earlier, if you remember, that Boaz doesn't just *do* good works. He *proactively* and *shrewdly* pursues good works of sacrificial love.

What does that mean?

In Matthew 10:16, Jesus said to his disciples: “be wise as serpents and innocent as doves.”

Now, in context, Jesus was speaking about how they were to navigate the opposition they would face. But there is a principle in these words that applies to what we are talking about this morning as well.

We are to use shrewd wisdom in how we pursue doing good works.

I don't think we often think that way.

We are careful to be shrewd when it comes to things that concern our welfare. We are careful not to get scammed or taken advantage of financially. We are on the lookout for a good opportunity here or there. We try to be wise and skilled with how we handle our money or our careers or other worldly pursuits.

But what's shocking about Boaz is that he takes that same proactive and shrewd approach, and he applies it to doing good works of sacrificial love.

I mean ... look at Boaz in verses one through six.

Boaz, contrary to how we have seen him with Ruth, is all business here. He is formal and to the point and pursuing what he wants. [Miller, 142]

And the way he does it is highlighted. The author wants us to see that Boaz is being shrewd here – though it is not entirely clear how his shrewdness is playing out. [Lusk, 73] That said, we can note a few things.

First, Boaz knows who he is dealing with. He knows that So-and-So will be unaware of Ruth and he uses that to his advantage.

Second, he presents the situation first as more favorable than it really is, and then he throws So-and-So off by introducing the role Ruth would play in all of this.

Commentators disagree on the exact details of Boaz's strategy, and even how his Hebrew words should be rendered, but it seems overall that by presenting a rosy picture, and then springing the heavy costs of Ruth's presence onto So-and-So, Boaz is making it more likely that So-and-So will decline to serve as the redeemer. If So-and-So had the full picture up-front, he may have weighed the costs and benefits more carefully. But when compared to the first impression Boaz gives him of easily acquired land, the actual picture with Ruth looks bad, and So-and-So pulls out of the whole thing. [Block, 212-217; Miller, 143]

In this Boaz is not being sinfully deceptive, but he is framing the situation shrewdly, to try to influence So-and-So in a certain direction.

We do this in plenty of other contexts. But the shrewd and crafty approach we might pursue for negotiating a good price on a car or some other financial deal for ourselves, Boaz uses here to seek an opportunity to use his wealth and power for the good of those in need.

And *that* is what the portrait of Boaz should ultimately exhort us too. Not just to a willingness to do good works if we have to, not just a general disposition to be civil to people while overlooking their true needs as So-and-So exhibits, but a willingness, like Boaz, to aggressively and even craftily pursue ways to sacrificially love other people.

What would it look like for you to do that with other people? What would it look like to treat your children or your spouse or your parents or your siblings or your roommates that way? What would it look like for you to treat others in our congregation that way? What would it look like for you to treat others in our community that way?

Where might God be calling you to be aggressive and even crafty in how you sacrificially love others?

Where might he be calling you to decrease, and to disregard your own status, in order to lift someone else up?

And as you see those opportunities, and you feel the same hesitancy about them that So-and-So did, can you believe Jesus's promise that he will reward you for what you do – even though your works will be imperfect? Can you value *his* rewards more than the world's rewards?

That is what Boaz calls us to this morning.

But even more than that, it is what Boaz's descendant Jesus Christ calls us to. He says to us:

“If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. ²⁵ For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will find it. [...] ²⁷ For the Son of Man is going to come with his angels in the glory of his Father, and then he will repay each person according to what he has done.”

Amen.

This sermon draws on material from:

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