

AGAINST RUTHLESS SOCIETY PARTH 4 O 4: RUTH 4 – BOAZ GETS DOWN TO BUSINESS

INTRODUCTION

The believer seems to be at a horrible disadvantage when doing business today. Committed Jesus followers are encouraged to be meek and giving ([Matthew 5:5, 38-42](#)):

⁵ Blessed *are* the meek, For they shall inherit the earth. ([Matthew 5:5, NKJV](#))

³⁸ “You have heard that it was said, ‘*An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.*’ ³⁹ But I tell you not to resist an evil person. But whoever slaps you on your right cheek, turn the other to him also. ⁴⁰ If anyone wants to sue you and take away your tunic, let him have *your* cloak also. ⁴¹ And whoever compels you to go one mile, go with him two. ⁴² Give to him who asks you, and from him who wants to borrow from you do not turn away. ([Matthew 5:38-42, NKJV](#))



We are to show compassion to our enemies and bless those who curse us ([Matthew 5:43-44](#)). In an ethos of corruption, cutthroat dealings, and self-centered principles, it would seem that the truly devoted Jesus follower can only expect to be exploited. However, with regard to the mission and agenda of God, this is anything but the case. Without compromising our Christianity, we can be courageous, confrontational, cunning, and yet caring. Indeed, the Jesus follower is exhorted to be in the world proclaiming the gospel and promoting the kingdom simultaneously with the gentleness of a dove and the craftiness of a serpent ([Matthew 10:16](#); [Ephesians 5:15](#); [Colossians 4:5](#)). We are to be both wise and full of compassion like our Savior ([Philippians 2:14-16](#)).²¹

Verses The Direct Believers to Be Led by Wisdom

¹⁶ “Behold, I send you out as sheep in the midst of wolves. Therefore be wise as serpents and harmless as doves. ([Matthew 10:16, NKJV](#))

¹⁵ See then that you walk circumspectly, not as fools but as wise, ([Ephesians 5:15, NKJV](#))

⁵ Walk in wisdom toward those *who are* outside, redeeming the time. ([Colossians 4:5, NKJV](#))

In the chapter under consideration Boaz aims to honor God, his family, and the virtuous night visitor by becoming the kinsman redeemer (*goel*) for Naomi. Such a business transaction is really a long shot and at first glance does not look good. He has admitted that he is not the nearest kinsman ([Ruth 3:12](#)) and must do the right thing in allowing the nearer relative the first opportunity to perform the duty of the *goel* ([Ruth 3:13](#)). It would seem that Boaz will not get a chance to be the redeemer because the deal is too sweet; anyone wanting to become *goel* to Naomi is looking at a very profitable transaction. There are two big reasons why the nearer kinsman could want to be the *goel* for Naomi:

²¹ The reader should not take it as gospel that the verses cited in support of my statement are true. Do your faith a favor and look them up. However, be sure to read them in context. Text without context is pretext.

- *She is broke* – What an opportunity for an opportunist. The best time to buy is when the seller is going out of business due to bankruptcy. The land has already been sold and thus is being redeemed from foreclosure. The nearest relative was obligated to buy back the land for the family (Leviticus 25:25-28). She has nothing and thus cannot help reimburse the relative.
- *She is barren* – Naomi is beyond the season of bearing children (Ruth 1:11-12). Since she cannot produce an heir whatever land is purchased by the *goel* will eventually go back to the buyer. Ultimately Naomi cannot keep the things belonging to her late husband.²²

If Boaz is compelled by his reverence for God to allow the nearer relative the first right of refusal, the deal would seem to be dead for him. However, in the face of these odds Boaz confronts the nearer relative and stands ready to do what the other man has not.

THE BUSINESS MEETING AND OFFER, RUTH 4:1-4

¹ Now Boaz went up to the gate and sat down there; and behold, the close relative of whom Boaz had spoken came by. So Boaz said, “Come aside, friend, sit down here.” So he came 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 close relative, “Naomi, who has come back from the country of Moab, sold the piece of land which belonged to our brother Elimelech. ⁴ And I thought to inform you, saying, ‘Buy it back in the presence of the inhabitants and the elders of my people. If you will redeem it, redeem it; but if you will not redeem it, then tell me, that I may know; for there is no one but you to redeem it, and I am next after you.’ ” And he said, “I will redeem it.”

RESERVING THE CONFERENCE ROOM

Boaz went up to the gate of the city and sat down there for the business meeting. It was unnecessary to fire off an e-mail requesting the presence of the **close relative** because he regularly passed the gate anyway. (Also, e-mail servers would not be invented for another two thousand years.) The **behold** summons the reader to pay special attention to what is about to happen. “Watch this!” Boaz recognizes the opportunity to discuss what is on his mind and says, “**Come aside, friend, sit down here.**” The word *friend* is literally “somebody somebody” or *so and so*. The person’s name is intentionally kept out of the narrative. More about why names have been changed later.

Having called aside the nearer relative Boaz also secures enough **elders of the city** to make any legal transaction binding (Ruth 4:2). At this point the story begins to reveal the poor quality of character in the nearer kinsman. The family member with the greatest opportunity to help was content to allow the old widow’s condition to keep going on as it did. Boaz calls him onto the carpet and tells the man to do what he should have done earlier. “**Buy it back.**” Note the way Boaz handles the matter:

- *His summary* – Boaz demonstrates his understanding of the matters at hand. Those who would become helpful must be mindful of the need to have the facts straight. Failure to clearly articulate the problem or being inept in describing an injustice has caused many crimes to go unhandled. Boaz says that the problem is a family matter:

Here is the deal... (1) **Naomi**, our widowed sister-in-law **has come back from the country of Moab**. (2) **A piece of land which belonged to our brother Elimelech**, her deceased husband, has been sold. (3) **There is no one but you to redeem it.**

²² In the year of Jubilee unpaid debts are cancelled out and property is returned to the heirs. If this special year is near whatever is purchased for her will revert back to the buyer since there is no heir (Leviticus 25:28).

- *His sarcasm* – Where none of the commentaries I have read say that Boaz was being sarcastic, I say that it is obvious. The matter concerning Naomi is common knowledge (Ruth 1:19; 2:6, 11-12; 3:11). And yet Boaz says that he **thought to inform** him. The passage literally says he thought to *uncover his ear*. I believe that this passage might be paraphrased as follows: “In light of what is happening in our family your failure to act could only be explained by ignorance. So, in the interest of helping you do the right thing I thought it would be good if I helped you get current.”
- *His summons* – With a boldness that borders on being brash Boaz tells the man *exactly* what to do. But understand, his confrontational disposition is not rooted in arrogance; it is moored in a sincere compassion for those who are in need of help. I believe that his pluck is like that of a young rabbi losing his cool over the abuse of God’s people (John 2:13-17). **Buy it back** and help our family. Or in other words, “Do your job, *friend!*”
- *His seriousness* – Boaz goes beyond criticism. More important than the discernment to recognize evil and the daring to call someone out is the willingness to become the solution that is needed. It is not enough to diagnose evil. We cannot eviscerate the cancers of callous character and hurtful conduct with the small scalpel of curt words. Someone has to be willing preach in words and works. To say what others won’t. To do what others will not.

Believers that are really following Christ must take note of Jesus’ example. He willingly set aside His glory to right the wrongs in the world. Boaz (*in him is strength*) makes it clear: If you will not do something about our widow’s plight, please step aside and let me take care of it.

Believers like Boaz humbly point out the problem, with a readiness to right the wrong themselves if necessary.

Shamed into considering the matter, the nearer kinsman recognizes that it is a good deal. Although he will have to buy the land, for at least two reasons it will end up belonging to him. First, Naomi cannot produce an heir. Second, she cannot reimburse him and thus cannot try to earn it back. The nearer kinsman is being forced to deal with the matter but... at least he will end up expanding his possessions.

THE LIGHT SHINES BRIGHTLY (RUTH 4:5-10)

⁵ Then Boaz said, “On the day you buy the field from the hand of Naomi, you must also buy *it* from Ruth the Moabitess, the wife of the dead, to perpetuate the name of the dead through his inheritance.” ⁶ And the close relative said, “I cannot redeem *it* for myself, lest I ruin my own inheritance. You redeem my right of redemption for yourself, for I cannot redeem *it*.” ⁷ Now this *was the custom* in former times in Israel concerning redeeming and exchanging, to confirm anything: one man took off his sandal and gave *it* to the other, and this *was* a confirmation in Israel. ⁸ Therefore the close relative said to Boaz, “Buy *it* for yourself.” So he took off his sandal. ⁹ And Boaz said to the elders and all the people, “You *are* witnesses this day that I have bought all that was Elimelech’s, and all that *was* Chilion’s and Mahlon’s, from the hand of Naomi. ¹⁰ Moreover, Ruth the Moabitess, the widow of Mahlon, I have acquired as my wife, to perpetuate the name of the dead through his inheritance, that the name of the dead may not be cut off from among his brethren and from his position at the gate. You *are* witnesses this day.”

I’ve often asked myself why it is that Boaz did not point out the matter concerning Ruth at the beginning of the discussion. Most commentaries say that Boaz skillfully handles the transaction but do not say why. Almost all

point out that he did this on purpose to gain some advantage but do not explain the reason it was better for the business deal.²³

Boaz had a carefully planned strategy. He unfolded the elements in the case step by step. First, he explained that **Naomi** (and Ruth; cf. v. 5) had a field for sale **that belonged to Naomi's late husband**. No information is given as to how she came to possess it. Her poverty apparently required that she sell it. But if possible the land should remain in the family (cf. Jer. 32:6-12).²⁴

Can it be that unveiling *The Ruth Clause* later would somehow be better for the deal? It may be that the selling price, though high, would not be looked on unfavorably because the purchased land would inevitably go back to the near kinsman. If the near kinsman was still willing to purchase after finding out about the levirate duty to Ruth the price would have already been set. Thus, perhaps he unloaded *The Ruth Clause* later to avoid revealing news that would have produced less revenue for the widow. I find this line of thinking difficult in light of the fact that nothing is said concerning price in a book that is careful to discuss numbers as they relate to measures. In this scenario, even if he does not get a chance to marry Ruth, Boaz has brokered the deal in such a way as to make it most profitable for Naomi.

I have another view. It seems to me that presenting the complication of buying **from the Moabites** at the beginning would have produced the same outcome. Again, nothing is said concerning the price. (I speak as a small business owner.) By arranging the matter so as to elicit a positive response in the beginning and then a refusal at the end, Boaz has exposed the uncaring character of the nearer kinsman. Indeed, because the change of heart has to be explained what was suspected and alluded to in the aforementioned sarcasm is now confirmed:

⁶ And the close relative said, "I cannot redeem *it* for myself, lest I ruin my own inheritance. You redeem my right of redemption for yourself, for I cannot redeem *it*." (Ruth 4:6)

Ah, so now we have it. The close relative is really not that close at all.

Elimelech had a right to an heir. Ruth the Moabite, his daughter-in-law, was still living, and the man who bought the field had the duty of raising an heir for the dead man through her. If a son were born, the land would revert to him and Elimelech's property would remain in his family. The kinsman would then lose what he had bought and would have another family to keep, hence his reply, *I cannot do it*.²⁵

Whether he was indifferent or ignorant concerning Naomi's situation is now irrelevant. We are now witness to the fact that he cannot be counted on to help Naomi if it is not good for him. This is not a *Win Win*. This is why he remains nameless; *Uncle So and So* was not worth mentioning (Ecclesiastes 9:5). In the same way that he would not sacrifice so as to **perpetuate the name of the dead** the nearer relative has been intentionally forgotten (Ruth 4:10).

God preserves the remembrance of those who remember Him.

²³ I cannot help but think that the failure to find good explanations is in part because most commentators are well-trained theologians... not business professionals. Better commentary would be produced by careful consideration of the world of commerce before writing.

²⁴ Walvoord, J. F., Zuck, R. B., & Dallas Theological Seminary. (1983-). *The Bible Knowledge Commentary : An exposition of the Scriptures* (Ru 4:3). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.

²⁵ Carson, D. A. (1994). *New Bible Commentary : 21st century edition* (4th ed.) (Ru 4:1-12). Leicester, England; Downers Grove, Ill., USA: Inter-Varsity Press.

THE SUCCESSFUL OUTCOME, RUTH 4:11-17

¹¹ And all the people who *were* at the gate, and the elders, said, “*We are* witnesses. The LORD make the woman who is coming to your house like Rachel and Leah, the two who built the house of Israel; and may you prosper in Ephrathah and be famous in Bethlehem. ¹² May your house be like the house of Perez, whom Tamar bore to Judah, because of the offspring which the LORD will give you from this young woman.” ¹³ So Boaz took Ruth and she became his wife; and when he went in to her, the LORD gave her conception, and she bore a son. ¹⁴ Then the women said to Naomi, “Blessed *be* the LORD, who has not left you this day without a close relative; and may his name be famous in Israel! ¹⁵ And may he be to you a restorer of life and a nourisher of your old age; for your daughter-in-law, who loves you, who is better to you than seven sons, has borne him.” ¹⁶ Then Naomi took the child and laid him on her bosom, and became a nurse to him. ¹⁷ Also the neighbor women gave him a name, saying, “There is a son born to Naomi.” And they called his name Obed. He *is* the father of Jesse, the father of David.

THE BLESSING ON RUTH (RUTH 4:11)

As God has been honored in the dealings of Boaz he graciously answers the prayer of the people. They requested that Boaz wife be unto him **like Rachel and Leah**. These two women bore Jacob many children... especially sons. While the text does not say that Ruth bore many sons to Boaz it is known that her descendants became the line through which the Messiah and his posterity would come. In fact, because Jesus gives many the right to become children of God (John 1:12), Ruth has effectively given Boaz many sons. Also, it seems that Ruth, prior to her marriage to Boaz, had been barren. In her second marriage divine intervention is to be credited: **the LORD gave her conception, and she bore a son** (Ruth 4:13).

As Boaz has stepped out to step up God has stepped in to provide what is needed to succeed. Are you willing to be Boaz for those who need someone to step up in Jesus' name?

THE BLESSING ON BOAZ (RUTH 4:11)

They also asked God that Boaz would prosper and become famous in Bethlehem. This prayer was also answered. God has given this man a name that will not be forgotten. He will forever be remembered as a hero because he is recorded in the word of God.

CONCLUSION

Are you living in such a way that your name will be worth mentioning in years to come? As long as we do business according to the ways of the world we are destined to be forgotten; this world is perishing and will eventually be replaced by the things that God likes. Be like Boaz and stand on the word of God, stand up for those who need help, and stand in the gap when others fail to do the right things. Above all, so that our works do not become monuments unto us, be like Jesus in unconventional compassion for others and do that in Jesus' name.

SMALL GROUP QUESTIONS

- What stands out in your mind as the best-handled confrontation that you have ever seen? That is, share how someone dealt in a good way with injustice or wrongdoing.
- Why did it take Boaz so long to take action? (Ruth 3:10-12) Why did it take the close relative so long to say that he would help? (Ruth 4:4-6)

- Where are you with regard to things that need to be dealt with in society? Make a list of people that need help? (e.g., orphans, widows, foreigners, infirmed) What can you do to promote their wellbeing in Jesus name?
- Are you living in such a way that your name will be worth mentioning in years to come? Why or why not?
- How did God step in when Boaz stepped up? (Ruth 4:1, 13)