

When Barren Longings Have a Future

Ruth 4:1-22

Pastor Johanan Justin

An unfulfilled legitimate longing leaves a hole in our heart.

Our Unfulfilled Longings

1) The Obstacle to fulfilled longings

v1a – The city gate area was an open-air courthouse for the city. It was a place where legal transactions and disputes were settled. Boaz arranged a court session with the closer redeemer (v1b) to settle the dispute of redeeming the parcel of land that belonged to Elimelech (v3). Boaz's chance of redeeming the land would only come if the closer redeemer rejects to purchase the land (v4b). The closer redeemer agrees to redeem the land without hesitation.

Boaz then tells of the second part of the legal deal – the acquisition of Ruth the Moabite as his wife and the need to produce an heir (v5). A redeemer's role was not just to keep the land within the family; it was also to keep the family line going. This heir would eventually take over Elimelech's inheritance. The closer redeemer rejects his right of redemption; he decided that it was not worth the trouble to redeem both Naomi and Ruth.

The obstacle to our fulfilled longings is our **misplaced faith** in commercial redeemers. Our longings become unfulfilled because we were never worth someone's trouble, and their longings were never worth ours. Don't put your faith in the world's idea of a commercial redeemer!

2) The Payment for fulfilled longings

The commercial (closer) redeemer looked to Boaz to take on the unprofitable responsibility of redeeming Naomi and Ruth. He handed his sandal (a formal act of confirming a transaction) and his right of redemption to Boaz (vv7-8). Boaz, the new redeemer, proved himself to be a covenantal redeemer by declaring that he would pay the price necessary to redeem this unprofitable family – he would buy all that belonged to Elimelech (v9b) and also pay and bare the costly price of acquiring Ruth as his wife; he would absorb Ruth's disgrace and history as a Moabite woman, take the risk of dying, and sacrifice his name (v10a). Boaz also promised to fulfill not just the longings of those alive, but also the dead (v10b).

The elders and witnesses showed their affirmation and approval of Boaz's redemption and blessed Ruth and the household of Boaz with the mention of Rachel, Leah and Tamar (v12). All three women had sons that were important to the history of Israel and they all had stories of unusual and tragic longings. The elders knew that this new family would be a complicated one, and that was how much Boaz was risking, shouldering and absorbing. Someone else needs to sacrifice to pay for our longings. We need a redeemer who would sacrifice and pay for our longings.

3) The Satisfaction of fulfilled longings

v13 – The satisfaction of both Boaz and Ruth's longings were fulfilled through their marriage and the arrival of a son. The same women that Naomi had lamented to before now celebrated and rejoiced with her (v14). She had been redeemed by Obed [*'a servant' in Hebrew*] (v15a). Like Ruth who loved and covenanted to Naomi, so would Obed (v15b). Naomi nursed the child (v16) who would remind her of Ruth's hesed love towards her. Each of Naomi's longings were finally satisfied. God, who had seen every instant of suffering, had redeemed it with joy. The redeemer not only sacrifices, the redeemer also satisfies!

Our efforts are never beyond hope! The story of Ruth pointed to one that would save a nation: king David (vv21-22). He points to the coming of the greatest of all redeemers and saviours: Jesus Christ! He had come once before to absorb our disfunctions and sins, and He is coming once again, this time to satisfy and redeem every unfulfilled longing. We are never beyond hope!