

FIELD OF DREAMS

RUTH 3:16-4:10

I brought with me this morning a Top Ten List. *You know I like Top Ten Lists.*

Here are **“The Top Ten Signs You’re at a Redneck Wedding...”**: The newlyweds leave for the honeymoon in the bed of a truck. The bridesmaids’ dresses are red to hide the barbecue sauce. The reception includes a turkey shoot. Twinkies are served to the wedding guests. The Groom’s cake says **“Roll Tide.”** The wedding party is dressed in camouflage. The wedding cake features mudding in a four-wheel drive. The newlyweds leave the church in a John Deere. Rather than walking down the aisle, the bride and groom start their new lives together by diving into a mud pit. The theme of the wedding is... **“Git-R-Done.”**

And if ever there was a Redneck Wedding it was the nuptials of Boaz and Ruth. Boaz was a country boy - a farmer. His job was growing barley. Ruth was a poor peasant from Moab. They first saw each other in the rural countryside outside Bethlehem. They met in the fields. The couple got engaged at a threshing floor – where they separated grain from husks. This wasn’t a **Dear John break-up** – this was a **John Deere romance**.

When Boaz first saw Ruth in the wheat fields he asked the foreman **“who’s the gorgeous gleaner?”** Ruth had caught his eye. When they first met among the stalks, Ruth probably said, **“Hey!”** Then Boaz said, **“Hey!”** Ruth was just a gleaner, but Boaz instructs his men to purposely leave handfuls of barley in her path. He goes out of his way to bless Ruth. This was highly unusual. I suppose you could said, **“it goes against the grain.”** Boaz also orders his men not to touch Ruth. They might be barley boys, but they’d better not **sow any wild oats** with Ruth. It was hands-off the girl. In fact, Boaz has his field hands keep an eye on Ruth and ensure her safety. I guess you could call these barley workers watchful **stalkers**.

At the end of the harvest, Naomi, Ruth’s mother-in-law, decides it’s time for Ruth to make a move. In love and war there’s always a risk involved. Ruth doesn’t throw herself at Boaz, but she gets in his way.

Naomi has been **stalking** Boaz. It’s harvest time. Boaz will be overseeing the operation. He’ll be staying at the threshing floor that night. It’s time for Ruth to **harvest a husband**. She tells her daughter-in-law to wait until Boaz finishes work, then eats and drinks, and settles in for the night. Then she should slip up to him, and remind him of his obligation. Boaz is her **“relative redeemer.”** Ruth has a right to expect marriage. And when Boaz finally gazes into Ruth’s eyes, and tells her how pretty she is, the bashful Ruth blushes. I’m sure she whispered, **“Aw Shucks.”**

Everything is going so well! Let’s get ready for a redneck wedding. And the theme for the wedding between Boaz and Ruth was just **“Git-R-Done.”** Boaz was an older fellow. Ruth had been married before. This was her second wedding. Boaz and Ruth weren’t interested in having a big ceremony - a matrimonial extravaganza. They just wanted to **“Git-R-Done.”** But woe! It wasn’t that easy. As we learned last week, **“No wedding ever goes off without a hitch.”** And there was a hitch in these wedding plans.

Here’s the problem with redneck weddings – they can be complicated...

You've got to wait for the father-of-the-bride to get paroled so he can walk his daughter down the aisle... *Or the groom isn't available during deer hunting season...* Or you've got to find a church that'll let a hunting dog be the best man... *Or you've got to work the date around the NASCAR schedule...* The philosophy, *just Git-R-Done*, doesn't always *git-r-done*. And likewise, Boaz and Ruth had a snag in their wedding plans. There was another man in line to marry Ruth. He had first dibs over Boaz.

Remember, there was a custom in Israel called the "**relative redeemer.**" Hebrew culture took "*family*" seriously. Siblings had the responsibility to pick each other up when trouble struck. If a man went upside down financially, and lost his field, his nearest relative would buy it back. In an agrarian society a family's fortune and future – their very survival was tied to the land. If your field was foreclosed on, you lack the means of feeding your family. For future generations, your family lived on the streets A foreclosed family was doomed unless a relative stepped in to redeem.

And that was the tip of the iceberg... It's easy to plop down a little cash and pay the debt on a parcel of land – but the responsibility got more complicated. If a man died without a son, again his nearest relative stepped in to marry the widow and sire an heir to carry on the family name. *A genealogy* was even more vital to a Hebrew than *a field*. All Jews dreamed of Messiah being born from their lineage. That meant if a family died, hope died. It was one less family through which Messiah might come. The law of the "**relative redeemer**" kept hope alive for all families.

Naomi and Ruth thought Boaz was their man, but there was a hiccup. Boaz drops the bomb, verse 12, "**Now it is true that I am a close relative; however, there is a relative closer than I.**" Ruth's family tree had a limb closer than Boaz. Sandwiched in the genealogy was another name. And when Ruth heard of it her heart skipped a beat. She'd fallen in love with Boaz. And Boaz loved Ruth. *How do we know?* Boaz is going to pursue this man in hopes that he'll forfeit his first position. If Bo didn't love Ruth he would've dropped the issue. It wasn't his obligation. Why push it? But Boaz hopes to marry Ruth. His motive is love – not just duty!

In fact, Boaz proves his commitment to Ruth and her mother-in-law in verse 15. The jewelry store is closed. He can't purchase a big rock, but he's got plenty of barley. So before Boaz sends Ruth home, he loads her up with six ephahs of freshly threshed grain – that's **70 pounds of barley**. If you can't buy an engagement ring, some multi-grain flour will do. *You* might not be impressed, but remember this was a Redneck Wedding. Crops work for wedding presents. And Naomi was overjoyed!

Here, Boaz reveals his masculine shrewdness. *Bo knows women!* He understands he's not just wooing a girl. He's also courting her mother. *Single men, please pay close attention!* Can you talk a woman into marrying you, even if her mother doesn't like you? Perhaps... But will you live happily ever after? Absolutely not... A mother comes with a girl. If you create a hostile relationship with your mother-in-law it will sour every Christmas - every Thanksgiving - every Easter - every Mother's Day – every birthday... *for the rest of your life.*

Boaz is no Bozo – he knows the unchanging cosmic principles of the universe – *the sun rises in the East - butter goes on grits - no woman has enough shoes - AND life goes better when your mother-in-law likes you!* And so Boaz goes to work on Naomi. Verse 16, "*When she came to her mother-in-law* (Ruth is coming home from the threshing floor), *(Naomi) said, 'Is that you, my daughter?'* Then she told her all that the man had done for her. And she said, "*These six ephahs of barley he gave me; for he said to me* (he is Boaz), '*Do not go empty-handed to your mother-in-law.*'"

Boaz is a genius. **This is like taking your girl to dinner then sending her home with an extra dessert. “Mom, Reggie just thought you’d like a Triple Chocolate Hot Fudge Meltdown.”** You should go to Applebee’s sometime. Here’s the reaction you can expect. **Your mother-in-law will love you!**

Verse 18, “**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.**” Naomi sees the grain and realizes Boaz means business. Ruth took a big risk going down to the threshing floor. She’s done all she can. Any more would be inappropriate. The ball is now in Boaz’ court.

And Ruth is asked to do the toughest thing any woman is ever asked to do. Naomi tells her, “**Sit still, my daughter, until you know how the matter will turn out...**” Ruth needs to chill - *sit still* - and trust the man in her life. **No more stepping out – no more setting sail – no more taking the bull by the horns. Ruth has done all the maneuvering, and the manipulating, and the controlling of the situation that she can do. It’s now up to the man. And this is the place a lot of wives never visit. They can’t sit still.**

Ladies, if you were here last week you’re well aware that Ruth was far from complacent or inactive. Passivity was not her problem. She was brave enough to take a risk. Ruth stepped out and showed a daring initiative. She didn’t propose to Boaz. But she proposed that Boaz propose... For an oriental woman living in a patriarchal society - that’s plenty gutsy.

In fact, you get the impression Ruth was more of a go-getter than Boaz. Maybe she was a firstborn – a Type-A. Boaz was laidback. Ruth was always trying to make it happen. Boaz was willing to let life come to him. As they say “**opposites attract.**” Over the years I can’t tell you how many high-strung, highly-motivated, success-driven women have come to me complaining about a husband they thought didn’t have enough ambition. I’ll bet Ruth complained to Naomi, “**Why isn’t Boaz more of a leader?**”

But *Naomi knows...* she’s a wise woman... when she saw the barley she said, “**The man will not rest until he has concluded the matter this day.**” She knew Boaz had it in him. He would lead - perhaps not in the way that Ruth wanted - but in the end Boaz was man enough to **Git-R-done**. Ruth needed to “**sit still...**” – turn loose - and learn to trust her man.

A few months after Kathy and I got married we had a visitor. A guy I met at the CC Bible College tracked me down. He said he’d heard about Kathy and I were starting a church. He’d come into a sizeable sum of money, and wanted to bless us. He would help us with a down payment on a house. Kathy was overjoyed. At the rate I was headed it was going to take years for us to get into a house. I was happy, but I had some reservations. I recall Kathy saying, “**If God wants to bless us why are you resisting?**” We actually went out with Real Estate agent and looked at new houses.

When he saw that we’d taken the bait, he decided to reel us in. He had to go to New Orleans to finalize the paperwork. All he needed was \$500. He’d reimburse us when he returned. I hesitated. It just didn’t feel right... And at the time, \$500 was like \$5000 today. My wife had no problem with \$500... She was already counting on the \$50,000 down payment. Well, our friend left with our \$500, and thirty years later we’re still waiting on him to reimburse us the money... But the lesson learned was worth far more to my marriage than \$500. God taught us a huge lesson. Kathy has never again questioned my discernment. She voices her opinion, but in the end she trusts God to lead us through her husband.

Ladies, it's got to be tough for a wife to *"sit still"* and leave the matter in the hands of a fallen, fallible, error-prone, imperfect man – especially after he drops the ball a time or two. But wives, your husband will never develop into the leader God wants him to be unless he has your permission to lead. Here's how it works... Don't make your support contingent on your husband proving himself. A wife's support is what a husband needs *to prove himself*... Pray for him. Encourage him. Provide him your input. There's a lot a wife can do... but there comes a time when you need to *"sit still."* Here's where you have to take another risk, and **Trust him to lead.**

And here's what's happened in our marriage... Kath's confidence in me drives me to my knees. She trusts me to listen to God and lead our family. And it causes me to shake in my boots – and humble myself - and open my Bible – and get her opinion - and consult with wise counselors – and research the decision – and examine pros and cons – and pray, pray, pray! In the end I make a decision... *but with fear and trepidation*... because my wife has put such trust in me, and I don't want to let her down.

Ladies, some of you have control issues. You won't let go. You undermine your husband's leadership, as you complain that he won't lead. You're *creating* the problem that you're *grumbling* about... Proverbs 14:1 says it best, **"The wise woman builds her house, but the foolish pulls it down with her hands."** All wives influence their husbands, but how? Do you help him *man up* - or do you constantly pull him down?

And let me say, I know firsthand how tough a task it is to *"sit still... until you know how the matter will turn out..."* It's very hard. *And how do I know?* Well, this is the role each of us plays in our relationship with Jesus! So much of my life is beyond my control. I'm like Ruth. I have to *"sit still"* and trust that Jesus *"will not rest until he has concluded the matter..."*

And the Man in my life is the perfect leader. Jesus is flawless. His judgment is impeccable. His decisions are always spot on. He's never let a follower down – ever... And yet I confess, I still find it tough to *"sit still..."* I want to manipulate, and control, and maneuver, and apply my own elbow grease. I live as if I can do a better job working it out than He can. *How arrogant!* We all would do well to heed the advice of the psalmist. In Psalm 46:10 we're commanded, **"Be still and know that I am God."**

Here's the truth about life. None of us are truly in control. Life gets *"out of hand"* for all of us... and how we *handle it* produces *fear* or *faith*. Fear grows when you lose the grip on what you're trying to maintain... But when you voluntarily take your hands-off, and trust God, faith grows. It's all in your approach. Will you *grab hold*, or can you *sit still?*

Chapter 4 begins, *"Now Boaz went up to the gate and sat down there..."* **The gate of an ancient city was equivalent to today's county courthouse. It was the community center. Merchants set up shop in the gate area. Groups gathered. It's where the town judges settled disputes.** *"And behold, the close relative of whom Boaz had spoken came by."* *"So Boaz said, "Come aside, friend, sit down here."* Boaz is being very friendly. He wants to strike a deal. *"So he came aside and sat down. And he took ten men of the elders of the city, and said, "Sit down here." So they sat down."* It took ten elders to render a legally binding decision.

Notice Boaz is transacting business with a brother, but he wants to get it in writing. Too much is at stake to trust this outcome to a mere handshake.

This is good advice for us. Even if you conduct business with another Christian don't assume everything will go well. Unexpected stuff happens even to believers. *Costs rise. Delays occur. Misunderstandings take place. When I do business - with a Christian or a pagan - I do business.* I do it in a business-like manner. Short-cuts in business turn into long detours.

And notice too, *Boaz taking charge*. He's being a leader. He tells his relative to "sit down..." He signs up ten elders, and creates a tribunal... Boaz is stepping up to the plate. He might've drug his feet with the proposal. He needed a nudge from Ruthie. But now he's acting like a man. Boaz is overcoming obstacles and figuring out a way to *Git-R-done*.

"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.*" Here's the first we've heard of this news. Times had gotten so tough Naomi put her field on the auction block. She'd already passed title. And apparently, this was the first time the relative had heard of it too. What kind of a deadbeat brother was this guy? Naomi was probably a cousin. Ruth a niece. These girls had fallen on hard times, and he doesn't even know. This guy has no sense of any family obligation whatsoever. You'd think he would've at least stopped by to check on them...

Notice the three type of men represented in the book of Ruth... First, there's **Elimelech**. He cared about his family. He was proactive. He saw trouble on the horizon, and he took matters into his own hands. Elimelech researched job opportunities in Moab. Wages were higher and home prices were lower in Moab. *But Moab was not where God wanted an Israeli to live!* Moab was a pagan land. Elimelech leaned on his own understanding. He trusted in his own wisdom, and disobeyed God. And what happened in Moab? Elimelech and his two sons both died. This is what *the Elimelech approach* accomplishes every time – death. Trust in your own wisdom, and love will die, faith will die, respect will die. Husband, you'll disappoint your wife, and turn her into a bitter old Naomi.

The second man in this book is the **nearest brother**. The bucko who neglected his family completely. Apparently, he lived in his own little world. He was oblivious to the needs of close relatives. He was irresponsible. Elimelech made a foolish move. This guy doesn't move at all. He just doesn't care. He's wrapped up at work – or he's on the golf course – while Naomi and Ruth are starving to death. Men, I hope you're not like this guy.

But thankfully, there's a third man in the story who gets it right. **Boaz is da MAN!** He moves... but in rhythm with God, according to God's will. He relies on God's wisdom, and does life God's way. No short-cuts for Boaz! Boaz loved Ruth. He probably could've married her, whisked her away, and never run the risk of this other man stepping up and taking his place. But *Bo knows God's will done God's way in God's timing will never lack God's blessing* – and it's God's blessing that Boaz wants more than anything in life – even Ruth... And God's Law said someone else had first crack at redeeming Naomi's property and marrying her daughter-in-law...

So Bo says in verse 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." I'm sure Boaz' heart sunk. He was madly in love with Ruth, but he was willing to lose her for God's sake. Boaz had already determined in his heart that God's will was best for he and Ruth.

But all hope is not lost. Boaz asks the fellow if he's read the fine print...

“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.” It’s a package. You can’t just redeem *the land* without *the lady*. There’s not only a *mother-in-law suite* on this property. It also comes with a *mother-in-law!*

“And the close relative said, “I cannot redeem *it* for myself, lest I ruin my own inheritance.” In other words, “*What would my wife think?*” Can you imagine walking in the house one night, and shouting, “*Honey, I’m home... And I brought a friend... Her name is Ruth... She’s going to stay a while...*” And I’m sure the conversation would go downhill quickly. I can hear the old boy now... “*Honey, remember when you said you needed some help around the house?*” “*Sweetheart, remember last night when you said you had so much to do you needed four hands instead of two?*” I’m sure there’s really no good way to break this kind of news... Thus, he said to Boaz, “*You redeem my right of redemption for yourself, for I cannot redeem it.*” And that is exactly what Boaz was hoping to hear.

Verse 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.*” Here’s how you signed a contract in ancient Israel. Remember the land was all important in an agrarian society. **And since a man’s sandal was his point of contact with the ground his sandal was a symbol of his ownership.** Passing a sandal was the equivalent of transferring a deed. If you dabbled in Real Estate you’d end up with an assortment of single shoes.

“Therefore the close relative said to Boaz, “Buy *it* for yourself.” So he took off his sandal.” It was official! *The land* and *the lady* belonged to Boaz. “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. Moreover (Literally above all), Ruth the Moabitess, the widow of Mahlon, I have acquired as my wife...*” And I’ll bet it didn’t take the little birds of Bethlehem long to get the news to Ruth. And he says, “*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.*”

Deuteronomy 25:7-10, “The Law of the Levirate,” is the passage that covers this whole procedure. But Deuteronomy is a bit more explicit on what to do with a man who refuses to fulfill his obligation to marry his brother’s wife. The wife is suppose to take his sandal and spit in his face. She declared to the town that he was a no-good, dirty-dog loser. It reminds me of the sign that appeared outside a country store. Talk about a **Redneck Wedding... the handwritten sign read, “Closed September 7, when my one and only daughter marries that sorry, no count, worthless, shiftless John Patterson.” That’s as good as a spit** in the face.

Apparently, Boaz and Ruth decided to forego the spitting in case the threat of public humiliation scared the old boy into doing his duty after all. These two love birds never wanted the rival man to follow through. It’s interesting, what *turned off* Naomi’s relative, *turned on* Boaz. The other guy wanted land. Boaz already had plenty of property. He could’ve cared less about another field. He didn’t need *real estate*, he wanted *Ruth*. Boaz bought the package... **He purchased the field to get the bride.**

And here’s how I want to close. I want to talk to you about Jesus. This is how much He loves you. Jesus bought a field because He loves the bride. In Matthew 13:44 Jesus tells a familiar-sounding parable. **"The kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field, which a man found and hid; and for joy over it he goes and sells all that he has and buys that field."**

In the Garden of Eden God gave mankind dominion and authority over creation. But when Adam sinned he forfeited that control over to Satan. When Satan tempted Jesus, he took Him to a high mountain and offered Him the kingdoms of the world if Jesus bowed and worshipped him. Of course, Jesus refused, but He never questioned Satan's right to offer those kingdoms. Jesus realized that this fallen world belongs to Satan. In John 12, Jesus calls Satan, **"the ruler of this world."**

God is the original and ultimate owner of all creation. At the start God deeded it to man. But man lost it in a foolish transaction with Satan. And that - in a nutshell - is why the world we live in is such a mess. That's why there's illness, and evil, and cancer, and tornados, and riots, and injustice. Man was the custodian of paradise and he let it slip through his fingers. Yet according to God's Law **redemption is always a possibility**. A *relative redeemer* can buy it back. What's lost can always be redeemed.

This is why Jesus joined the human race. He's become our *relative*. On the cross our sinless Brother paid the redemption price. He wipe out Satan's claim and transferred the title deed. Jesus redeemed all creation.

Remember His final words, **"It is finished."** In the original language it's one word - **"Tetelestai."** **This was a accounting term. It meant "paid in full."** When Jesus died on the cross all that needed to be done for the world to be redeemed to God was completed. Nothing else needs to occur - no religious ritual, or good deed, or moral act. Jesus took care of all the complications. He did all what was necessary to retrieve the world for God.

But here's what you need to know. Jesus didn't just spill His blood to redeem a fallen world. **Like Boaz, he's a huge landowner. He possesses billions and billions of untold worlds.** He doesn't need another planet, or star, or universe. He has plenty. **Jesus bought the land to get the lady!** Jesus redeemed this world because He loves you and me. We're the treasure in the field! We're the Ruth!... *And what is our responsibility?* How about **"sit still!"** God doesn't ask us to run around like a chicken with our head cutoff, trying to work up our own righteousness. He wants us to trust Him. *Are you relying on Jesus? Are you learning? Are you leaning? Are you trusting Him to work it out?* If not, why not? Here's good news - our Redeemer lives! Jesus is the man who knows how to *Git-R-Done*.