

FIELD OF DREAMS

RUTH 4:11-22

The world today is full of famous families! There's the **Windsors** of England... Queen Elizabeth, and Prince Charles, and William – and this spring, they'll add a princess named Kate. There's the **Hapsburgs** of Europe, and the **Al-Saids** of Saudi Arabia. America also has its ruling families - there's the **Roosevelts** of New York, and the **Kennedys** of Massachusetts, and the **Bushes** of Texas...

And there are other famous families... The **Skywalkers** from the Star Wars planet, Tatooine... the **Mannings** of the NFL (*Archie, Peyton, and Eli, none of which will play in today's Super Bowl*)... the **Teutels** of Orange County, NY and American Chopper... and the **Gosselins** of Pennsylvania (*Kate plus 8...*) Pray for Kate! She's on a motorcycle with one of the Teutels. Kate has gone nuts! Then there's *your family*. We're going to talk today about *your family*!

This is what the latter half of chapter 4 is about – *a famous family*. In fact, how the book of Ruth ends explains why it was included in the OT canon of Scripture...and why it's become so significant to the Hebrews. The story of Ruth provides us background on the most famous family in Hebrew history. It reveals the roots of King David's family tree.

In fact, the Davidic Dynasty is the most important family in the *history* of humanity – more so, it's the most important family in humanity's *future*. Later in the OT, God will make promises to His servant David... He'll be king over Israel. His descendants will sit on his throne and form a dynasty. A future heir will rule forever. This Son of David – *we know Him as Jesus* - will become an eternal king and establish an eternal kingdom. What an amazing treasure chest of promises... Through the family of David, God gives us a hope and a future - but it harkens back to Ruth...

Boaz and Ruth have a baby boy named, "**Obed.**" Obed has a son named, "**Jesse.**" Jesse has a son – his youngest son - is named, "**David.**" And centuries later, many branches down the trunk of David's family tree a son is born the angel calls "**Jesus!**" He fulfills all God's promises. The love story between Boaz and Ruth – a romance that began in the barley fields outside Bethlehem – ended up effecting a lot more than a lonely Moabite maiden, and a kind landowner, and a bitter mother-in-law. This romance of redemption has left an imprint on every person who's ever lived. The family of Boaz and Ruth left behind the ultimate legacy.

If you've been with us the last four weeks you know the story. A man named Elimelech fails to trust God, and hauls his family to a pagan land. He moves his family to Moab to survive, yet he and his two sons die. His wife, Naomi, becomes a grieving ball of bitterness. She returns to Bethlehem with one blessing – Ruth, a loyal and loving daughter-in-law.

This Ruth was quite a catch, and it doesn't take long for her to catch the eye of a rich barley baron. God's providence steers her into the field of Bethlehem's most eligible bachelor. And for Boaz it was love at first sight. He blesses Ruth with provision, and privilege, and protection. And he's is a relative - a potential redeemer. It's possible he could buy back the field Naomi lost, and provide Ruth another shot at marriage.

But Boaz needs a nudge... At Naomi's direction, Ruth takes a risk. She comes to him at the threshing floor, and proposes he propose to her. And Boaz would love to, for he loves Ruth. But there's a closer relative with first dibs. Ruth has wait on God, and trust a man to work it out. At first, this other relative is eager to buy the land - until he reads the fine print. To purchase the land he has to take a lady. And he doesn't want to wed Ruth. Thus, he passes his sandal of ownership to Boaz, and Boaz jumps feet first. He's happy to marry Ruth. **Boaz is no longer ruthless.**

And that's where we left off last week... Boaz is passing out wedding announcements to the townspeople. Bethlehem is invited to the nuptials! And in verse 11 the town leaders toast the engaged couple – *but notice the blessing they offer?* **“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...”**

These are not the well-wishes you'd expect from relatives and friends... Most of the toasts I hear at weddings are along these lines... **“may you grow old and rich together...” “may you make each other happy...” “may peace fill your heart and home...” “may God fulfill your heart's desire...”** These days you don't even hear anyone ask God to bless the couple with kids and a grandchild or two! It's all about the newlywed's happiness.

I'm sure the townspeople who blessed Boaz and Ruth were not against this couple's happiness, but their sights for them were set much higher. **“Ephrathah”** was the region in which they lived. **“Bethlehem”** was their hometown. Their friends and family wished for them regional influence, and citywide fame. They hope this couple will make a name for themselves. Of the hundreds of weddings I've attended I've never heard anyone toast the bride and groom in this way... **“God, make their last name great!”**

Notice, the townspeople hope that Ruth will be like **“Rachel and Leah.”** Leah and Rachel were sisters married to the same man, Jacob. Along with their two maids they filled up the tents of their husband with kids. Their polygamous arrangement would later be outlawed by God, but at the time it was customary. And the sisters accounted for twelve sons *plus*... For each of those twelve sons had sons of their own. And each of those families grew into twelve tribes of multiple nuclear families. And together all twelve tribes became one nation. They took their father's new name, *Israel*.

Rachel and Leah didn't just birth kids they built **“a house”** - a nation. Today, 4000 years later when you hear the phrase **“house of Israel”** you don't think of the split-level down the street with the two crazy sisters and a bunch of screaming kids... **“House of Israel”** isn't just the bus stop that takes 15 minutes to load up... This **“house”** isn't a single family domicile... The name **“house of Israel”** speaks of a blessed and holy nation... Recipients of God's revelation - chosen from all nations to be God's light to the world - the **“House of Israel”** was an island of orthodoxy in a sea of paganism. This **“house”** was a privileged people with a godly past and a glorious future. In the minds of the elders who blessed Boaz, Rachel and Leah were nation builders, and that's what they hoped was true of Ruth.

Here's my point, after Boaz and Ruth get married the writer doesn't say, **“They lived happily ever after.”** That would be trivial compared to what was at stake. For their marriage wasn't just about Boaz and Ruth being happy. The meaning of marriage is never *only* about a couple's happiness. All marriages are bigger than the personal good times of two people...

The elders have another strange wish for Boaz in verse 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.” This is so bizarre. Imagine, you’re at the rehearsal dinner. You’ve just finished watching the cute, sentimental video of the couple growing up through the years. The baby pictures. The embarrassing – here I am in the bathtub photo - every mom throws in. The nice engagement photos... When the best man stands up, clinks his glass, and says to the wedding party, “May your house be filled with shame, and death, and dysfunction, and sexual perversion, and prostitution, and bitterness, and revenge...” Talk about throwing a damper on the festivities... Yet that’s the storyline the elders reference, “the house of Perez, whom Tamar bore to Judah.”

As Rachel and Leah birthed “the house of Israel,” Tamar founded “the house of Perez.” Perez was a descendant of the tribe of Judah. The tribe that became the royal ancestry through which the Messiah would be born. We read in the genealogy of Jesus, Matthew 1, “Judah begot Perez... by Tamar, Perez begot Hezron...” on it goes all the way down to Jesus.

But understand the sordid background of Perez’ birth. In Genesis 38 Judah has a son named “Er” – it’s spelled “E-R” – but ER didn’t make it to the ER in time. He died, leaving his wife, Tamar, a widow. Judah’s son, Onan, refused to be her “relative redeemer” - and Tamar was left childless. She grew bitter. She blamed her father-in-law for Onan’s resistance. And Tamar sought revenge. In fact, she concocted a scheme. She pretended to be a prostitute and lured Judah into her tent. She tricked *her father-in-law* into siring her a son. And she named “Perez.”

It’s a shameful story! So why did the Bethlehem elders bless Boaz and Ruth by saying, “May your house be like the house of Perez whom Tamar bore to Judah...” If I was Boaz I would’ve shouted, “God forbid!” But here’s where we see families differently than God sees them. When God evaluates a family He looks past the *rough starts*, and the *embarrassing incidents*, and the *shameful moments*, and he judges the overarching course of that family. God sees *our destiny* - not *our detours*.

And family life is full of both... *destiny* and *detours*. Every family has glorious moments when God is praised and the family is honored. But there are other times when a relative acts in a sinful or stupid manner and you’re ashamed to be associated with the same family. The key to enduring the *detours* is to keep your eye on the *destiny*.

Here’s one reason why God created families. To live in a family – *any family* – it takes grace, grace, and more grace! In a family you can’t run or hide. You have to keep dealing with the same flawed and imperfect folks. It forces you to forgive, and show mercy, and not judge, and look past a *brother or sister’s sin*. You have to be willing to give people a new start. And you pray the people in your family will be as merciful to you! Being a part of a family teaches you to love. In a family you can’t control people. They do as they please, yet the same people are a reflection on you. That means in a family you bear other people’s shame, and share their joys, and love relatives even when it doesn’t benefit you to love them.

Throughout this story you could’ve been puzzled at Boaz’ acceptance of Ruth. Boaz was a devout Jew. He loved God and obeyed His law. Why would a man like Boaz get mixed up with a former pagan from Moab? Not too long ago she worshipped Chemosh – a vile idol. She’d been previously married. Boaz could’ve had any of Bethlehem’s young virgins. Certainly, Boaz was impressed with Ruth’s conversion and character, but there had to be more... *and there was...* Let me read you Boaz’ entry in the genealogy of Jesus. Matthew 1:5, “Salmon begat Boaz by Rahab...”

What? Who was Boaz' mom? Rahab the harlot! This was the prostitute of Jericho who took in the Hebrews Joshua sent to spy out the land. She believed God would triumph and cast her lot with Israel. After the conquest, Joshua showed mercy, and brought her into God's family. Boaz was willing to look past Ruth's sordid past, since he had a sordid past of his own. His mom was a madam, yet God showed mercy. How could Boaz not be gracious to Ruth?... This is what you learn being part of a family. Every family is checkered by failure, but it presses on by faith...

This is what the elders of Bethlehem are saying... *Despite Onan's disobedience, Tamar's spite, Judah's immorality* – may the family of Boaz and Ruth be like the house of Perez, for this was a family that prevailed. It accomplished God's purpose. It birthed David and the Messiah.

Here's today's big idea... when we think of family, 99% of the time our eyes are on *me and my happiness - us and our happiness - now and today's happiness*. But me, and us, and today is not all there is to a family. A family is about a long-term impact. It leaves a long wake - a legacy.

Families aren't about wedding days, or birthdays, or even lifespans... A family links together a string of births and deaths. It implants in a people a long legacy. Families don't live in houses. They are the house! A family links together generations. It stands for something bigger than any one person. Some limbs on the family tree aren't as strong or straight as others. That's why you can't judge a family by a single generation. A family is about making a mark on history – and helping to shape the future.

It's interesting to me that from the beginning Boaz and Ruth were all about family. It was never just about them. They started out their marriage as a family. Notice what happens on the honeymoon. *It doesn't take long...* Verse 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."** The old boy, Boaz, comes out firing... He hits the bulls-eye on his first shot... She *walks the aisle and births the child* as close together as was legal.

If you're a married man there are two times in your life when your wife will look most beautiful! **First, is the day of your wedding.** I've seen plenty of ugly women, but never an ugly bride. All brides are beautiful! *They certainly work at it* - lots of effort goes into a bride's dress, and make-up, and complexion... *And it's costly* - depending on her starting point, beauty can set you back a pretty penny... *And wedding day looks are time consuming* - a bride spends hours on her wedding day sprucing up her appearance. The bubble bath alone lasts longer than the ceremony.

But there's another day when your wife will look most beautiful! **It's the day she births your baby.** For her, it's a different experience, but from a husband's perspective she's every bit as gorgeous as on her wedding day. After 20 or so hours of labor a woman is greasy, and slimy, and smelly. Her hair looks like a wet mop. A hospital gown sure isn't a wedding dress – *although it costs about the same*. And when the doctor yanks your kid out of the birth canal, and plops him or her on your wife's tummy – this new mom is suddenly the most attractive female you've ever laid eyes on.

A woman is never more beautiful than when she *walks the aisle and births the child...* And for Boaz just nine months – the minimum amount of time - separated those two big days. From the start, marriage for Boaz was a combo-deal. It was never just him and his sweetheart...

spending time together, getting to know each other, traveling, enjoying their freedom... I'm not saying it's wrong for newlyweds to wait to have kids. To the contrary, that can be wise. But for Boaz marriage meant building a family!

On my wedding day, and for sometime thereafter, *kids were not a goal*. But my wife had this concept down from Day One. Kath got married not just to have me – or because she loved me – she wanted to have a family. Kathy wanted to raise kids... *plural*. When Zach was born it was time to have another one. Natalie came 16 months later. By this point kids were coming pretty regular. *It's what we did*. A third showed up... then a fourth... By that point I was looking for clarification on how many was enough.

And I'll never forget that conversation. At this point, all four kids were under 8. My hands were full. The older two were in Christian School, so I was trying to figure out how to pay tuition. I was the only guy I knew who was looking forward to college *to pay less tuition*. I was overwhelmed. And Kath starts out talking about how much fun it'll be when the kids are grown, and married, and have kids of their own. We'll be able to play with the grandkids. And we'll have everyone over to our house for big shindigs. She couldn't wait for Thanksgiving, and Christmas – when Zach was 8! I never forgot that conversation. *She had a bigger view of family than I did!*

It came up again when we bought our current house. We're walking through this house together. I'm looking for leaks in the roof, and stains on the carpet, and cracks in the floor... and she's talking about the big bedrooms. We can put a double bed in this room and build some bunk beds so Natalie and her family can stay together - and we can do the same in this other room for another set of kids and grandkids. *She had a vision*. And again, at this point in our lives none of our kids were even married. I'm thinking about where to put the Ping Pong table, while Kathy was planning where her grandkids will sleep. She thought generationally.

But this is how more Christians need think. If all a couple wants out of marriage is happiness they'll be disappointed. Happiness comes and goes. But if you're *building a house* – raising kids or loving others – doing something bigger than yourself and your honey – you'll touch future generations. You'll pass down a legacy and leave this world a better place. You'll be happy alright, but you'll be more than happy. You'll be fulfilled. Do you have spiritual goals bigger than you? Remember, *"The family you come from is not as important as the family you're going to shape."*

Verse 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!"* Again, what is this family all about? It's about making a name for itself. This is how we should see our family. Does my family have a reputation? *Does our last name stand for something good and godly?* I've always taught my kids that being an **Adams** is important. Our name means something. My dad had integrity. His dad had integrity. I've tried to walk with integrity. Being an *Adams* is about living with integrity. I've tried to instill in my kids that if you're an Adams' you act a certain way - and talk a certain way - and treat people in a certain way. And if you bring shame, you bring it not only to yourself, but to the name we all bear. Our common name has always been a big deal to our family.

Future World at Epcot Center in Orlando has an entrance that's cluttered with 19 granite slabs. It was a gimmick used by Disney ten years ago called *"Leave a Legacy."* For \$38 you could have a square inch photo etched into one of these granite slabs. Disney sold 550,000 pictures. Today Disney wants to get rid of the slabs. They're like tombstones. Relics of the past aren't appropriate for an entrance into Future World.

The only etching a person can take into the future is what's imprinted on their heart. It's been said, "[An inheritance, is leaving something for others. But a legacy, is when you leave something in others.](#)" Leaving behind a legacy means carving into your family's spirit certain values and beliefs. I think this is what God had in mind when He created families. He wants us all to participate in a spiritual legacy of faith... Call them [family values](#). And when your values are biblical and true, they need to be preserved. I want to send those values into the future - but I'm going to die. *So how can I effect the future if I'm not going to be there?* The answer is a family! I can send a piece of myself ahead. I make my mark on the future by building a family that'll live on, without me, yet still shaped by my influence.

This is why the older you get the more important your family becomes. As you start staring death in the face, you realize the only earthly immortality is through your family. You want to impart wisdom, and explain beliefs, and share values, and convey to your kids what matters most...

People who follow today's population trends are alarmed. Muslims, and Hindus, and Buddhists are multiplying like rabbits. The population in the Middle East swells year by year. Whereas, Western nations aren't keeping up with the replacement rate. Western civilization is becoming extinct. And I think there's a cause... as western nations shed their Christian heritage it diminishes the sacredness of marriage and family. We've lost sight of the godly goal of *building a house and passing on a legacy*. Life is all about us, rather than future generations. If you doubt it, look at our inability to trim the nation's deficit. We'd rather leave our kids in hock. To modern couples marriage means fun, romance, togetherness, sex, friendship - but it should also mean *building a house and leaving a legacy*.

Notice, in verse 15 Naomi's friends continue speaking, "[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.](#)" When Naomi returned to Bethlehem she called herself "[Mara](#)" or "[bitter](#)." But now her new family – Boaz her provider, her faithful daughter (*better than seven sons*), and now a grandson – has put fresh wind in her sails. She's been rejuvenated! *And I'm told this is the way life works...*

As a parent you pour your life into your kids, then they grow up and leave you. It's suppose to create a satisfied feeling – like a job well done. For me, it's the pits. I've spent 30 years working myself into irrelevance. But just about the time you get really depressed because you're no longer needed, a grandkid shows up, and changes your entire outlook. Naomi's friends refer to her grandson as "[a restorer of life](#)" and "[a nourisher of old age](#)." All of life is new again when you see it through a child's eyes. As Naomi cradled that baby, she went *from bitter to blessed*.

Verse 16, "[Then Naomi took the child and laid him on her bosom, and became a nurse to him. Also the neighbor women gave him a name, saying, 'There is a son born to Naomi.' And they called his name Obed.](#)" It's strange to have neighbors come over and name your child. Yet Naomi's friends name her grandson, "[Obed](#)," means "[servant](#)."

Remember this whole story is a spiritual allegory. Ruth is a Gentile bride redeemed by the Lord of the Harvest. A relative purchases the land because he loves the lady who lost it. *This story is really all about Jesus!* This is what Jesus has done for us... He became a man – a relative who could redeem the world that we lost to Satan. That's exactly what He did on the cross. He paid the steep price of redemption. But He did it not because He needs another world. He did it because He loves you and me. He wants us – our lives and our hearts - to belong to Him again.

But there's one more key to unlocking this allegory... The byproduct, the offspring, *the fruit and fallout* of Boaz' union with Ruth is a kid named "Servant." This is what happens inside when Jesus saves. Suddenly, you have the strong desire to love and serve Jesus! You reason, "Lord, after all you've given me, what can I give to You?"

Tonight, the NFL plays the Super Bowl. *Go Packers!* But in the year 2000 the St. Louis Rams won the big game. The Rams were led by MVP quarterback, Kurt Warner. Afterwards, Kurt and Brenda, and their seven kids, came up with a family tradition. They call it "The Restaurant Game." Today, every time the Warners go out to eat, they pick a family in the restaurant, and tell the waitress they want to anonymously pay for their meal. Kurt and Brenda love Jesus. They credit Him with their success. And Kurt is teaching his kids the joy of giving. He's leaving a legacy. This is what happens when you realize how extravagantly God has given to you... *His Son, His love, His blessing, His forgiveness...* And the result is always predictable – it's a heart that gives back to God and others.

The book of Ruth closes with the genealogy that tracks the ancestry of David... Verse 17, "(Obed) *is the father of Jesse, the father of David.*" And it goes further... "Now *this is the genealogy of Perez: Perez begot Hezron; Hezron begot Ram, and Ram begot Amminadab; Amminadab begot Nahshon, and Nahshon begot Salmon; Salmon begot Boaz, and Boaz begot Obed; Obed begot Jesse, and Jesse begot David.*" I love the quirky fact that this book ends with a genealogy...

For here's what a genealogy means... Every one of these names was a real person who made mistakes in their life... He had high points and low points... He caused both honor and shame to his family at different times... But despite what *the individual* did *the family* rolled on. People kept having kids, and overlooking blunders, and loving, and forgiving. They were building a family not just individual lives. They were constructing a spiritual house. And God saw fit to birth Jesus to that house.

If you choose to build a house for God – look past your own pleasure and convenience – gaze beyond one lifespan or two – think of not just your own welfare or the fun you can have... and commit yourself to making this world a better place even after you're dead and gone... God will bless you. Leave a godly legacy etched into the hearts of your kids, and grandkids, and great-grandkids, and I believe God will bless you and your family... I believe *your name will be famous and your God will be pleased!*