

Ruth 3:1-18

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 31 July 2018

Preacher: David Hills

[0 : 00] Have you ever gotten tired of waiting for God? Waiting for Him to answer your prayers?! Maybe for a job? Maybe for a wife or a husband? Or maybe for some other problem?

An answer to prayer? Have you ever been tempted just to take matters into your own hands, rather than trusting in Him? You know, sometimes there's a fine line between moving ahead in faith and blundering on in our own strength.

Today we continue our series on the Book of Ruth. As we recall from previous weeks, Naomi and Elimelech went to Moab with their two sons, abandoning the promised land during a time of famine. Her husband and sons have died, and she has returned to Bethlehem with one daughter-in-law, Ruth, a Moabite, an outsider. Last week we saw Ruth gleaning in the fields of Boaz.

Boaz, a near kinsman, a possible redeemer who took Ruth under his wing. Now, months have gone by. Naomi has seen God's provision, but Ruth is still living with her.

[1 : 08] In contrast to Naomi's prayer in chapter 1, Ruth still has no rest in the house of her husband. She has no husband and no prospects. In chapter 2, then, we begin to see Naomi's faith is being restored.

Naomi knows that God loves His people, all of His people, including Naomi and Ruth. And she has seen God more providentially, or moved providentially, to bring Ruth into the field of Boaz.

She has seen God's loving kindness expressed through Boaz and His kindness toward Ruth. But Naomi is getting impatient. God is not moving at her pace.

He has not resolved the question of a husband for Ruth. Certainly not to Naomi's satisfaction, not on Naomi's timeline. Naomi has decided that something must be done.

And she's the person to do it. Now, when the children of Israel entered the promised land, God made two points very clear. One about the land, and two about the family.

[2 : 13] First, the land is the Lord's, but it is given as a perpetual inheritance to His people. And secondly, blessing came through the family name.

A name that would be remembered through all generations. So first, let's look at the land itself. The land was to remain within the family. And there were provisions for, and an obligation to redeem the land, to buy it back if it passed out of the family's hands.

Leviticus 25 says, If your brother becomes poor, and sells part of his property, then his nearest kinsman, his nearest redeemer, shall come and redeem the land that his brother has sold.

And there were provisions and obligations to perpetuate the name of a man who died without heirs.

Deuteronomy 25 says, If brothers dwell together, and one of them dies and has no son, the wife of the dead man shall not be married outside the family to a stranger.

Her husband's brother shall go into her, and take her as his wife, and perform the duty of a husband's brother to her. And the first son whom she bears shall succeed to the name of his dead brother, that his name may not be blotted out of Israel.

[3 : 27] You know, it's not clear when this obligation for the brother to marry the widow began. It certainly dates as far back as the time of Jacob, as we see in Genesis with the story of Tamar and Judah.

It may have been an established custom before then, but certainly we see it in Genesis. As you know, Jacob was the son of Isaac, the son of Abraham.

And Jacob had 12 sons by two different wives, Leah and Rachel, and their two servants. Now, most of us know the story of Jacob's favorite son, his 11th son, Joseph.

We know the coat of many colors. We know of him being sold into slavery. We know of him rising to be the ruler of Egypt under Pharaoh. But we hear a lot fewer sermons about Judah, the fourth son.

Genesis tells us that Judah was the brother who convinced his other brothers not to kill Joseph, but to sell him into slavery instead. Some brother. But their father, Jacob, on his deathbed, blessed Judah.

[4 : 32] He established the royal line in Israel through Judah, saying the scepter would not depart from Judah. I'm going to spend a few minutes now, though, on the story of Judah and Tamar because it has a bearing here.

And it has a bearing in the next couple of weeks, as we'll see, because it's part of the blessing that will show up in Ruth 4. And, of course, it has an element in the broader story of the Bible itself.

Judah had three sons. His first son, Er, married a Canaanite woman named Tamar. Er died without a son. Judah's second son, Onan, was to marry Tamar and raise up a son in Er's name.

But he refused. And he died because of that refusal. Well, Judah had a third son. His name was Shelah. But Judah was afraid that he, too, would die.

He wanted to protect him, so he sent Tamar back to her family. But he promised her the third son when the son was old enough to marry. Well, time went by.

[5 : 37] Judah's wife died. Shelah grew up. But Judah never called for Tamar. So Tamar took matters into her own hands. She dressed in her finery and she waited at the side of the road for Judah to come by because she knew on that day he would be going up to shear his sheep.

and she pretended to be a cult prostitute. While not realizing who she was, Judah offered her a young goat in payment. But he didn't happen to have correct change of a young goat on him at the time.

So he left his signet ring and a cord and his staff as a pledge. Basically as collateral. These were, in essence, his identification.

But then Tamar disappeared. Sometime later, word reached Judah that Tamar was pregnant. And Judah sought to have her executed for immorality.

In her defense, basically to prove who the father was, she presented Judah's ring and his cord and his staff. Genesis 38 tells us that then Judah identified them and said, she is more righteous than I since I did not give her to my son Shelah.

[6 : 55] Tamar was deemed honorable in this by Judah, by the Lord through Moses when he wrote the book of Genesis and by the tribe of Judah. She bore two sons, twins named Perez and Zerah who became two of the three family heads in the tribe of Judah.

Now obviously this is a bizarre story. Bizarre at least to us. But it would have been widely known in the tribe of Judah at the time. A woman winning what was rightfully hers.

And this may have given Naomi an idea. Naomi had a number of dilemmas. Ruth needed a husband and yet Naomi was a widow, no money for a dowry.

Ruth was a Moabite, an outsider with few if any prospects of marriage. Ruth and Naomi needed a redeemer. one who could come along and pay the debt.

One who could raise up an heir to Naomi and Ruth. One who would care for them. But who is their redeemer? As Naomi said, Boaz is a redeemer, a near kinsman, but is he the redeemer?

[8 : 09] Boaz possibly had an obligation to redeem the land. He was a near kinsman. And the commandment to redeem the land is given to the nearest kinsman. But then again, what good would the land if there was no one there to work it?

On the other hand, under the letter of the law, Boaz was under no obligation to marry Ruth.

Deuteronomy 25 said, her husband's brother shall go into her and take her as his wife, that the name may not be blotted out from Israel.

Well, both Malon and Kilion were dead and there was no brother to perpetuate the name. Even if Boaz is the nearest kinsman redeemer, what would he be willing to do?

Would he marry Ruth? Would he even act as a matchmaker for Ruth? Boaz had certainly cared for her and protected her in the fields, but that's a far cry from marriage.

And after all, this is the time of the judges, where each man did what was right in his own eyes.

Another dilemma, though, is how do you approach Boaz?

[9 : 16] In that culture, a woman really could not approach a man without it being very awkward. And if either one of them, Naomi or Ruth, went to Boaz, the whole town would know.

They would know, first of all, that she went. They would know why she went. And they would certainly know the outcome of any such meeting. And certainly a public meeting like that would put Boaz in a very awkward situation.

How would he react? Would he feel pressured into marriage? Would the awkwardness push him away from marriage? And how would the village react to Ruth, a Moabitess, an outsider? Boaz said no? How could Naomi or Ruth recover from such a rejection? From the humiliation? From the shame? From the embarrassment?

And certainly how would Boaz, who have been so kind to Ruth over the last few months, treat them after that point? But Ruth needed a redeemer. So Naomi comes up with a plan.

[10:26] She tells Ruth, prepare yourself. Wash up. Splash some perfume on yourself. Wear a cloak. Now, the cloak, is that because it was cold out? Or was it to hide who she was?

Go to the winnowing floor, and after all are asleep, lay down at his feet and await his instructions. And Ruth obeyed her mother-in-law. She went to the winnowing floor, because after all, Ruth needed a redeemer.

So now the scene shifts. The midnight rendezvous. Boaz has been hard at work all day. The harvest is over, the grain is dried, now is the time to separate the grain from the chaff. Last week we talked about Ruth separating the chaff by hand, beating on the grain. Threshing and winnowing are really larger scale operations for a full-size farm.

See, after the grain is dried and is threshed, animals such as oxen are driven across the grain, across the sheaths, and their feet break up the straw and free the grain from the chaff.

[11:38] After the threshing comes the winnowing. That's where the winnowers would take a pitchfork or a shovel and toss the straw and the chaff and the grain into the air. The heavier grain would fall first, and if it was done on a windy day, the straw and the chaff would be blown to one side, separating the wheat from the chaff.

Now, I'm sure you've heard whole sermons written on separating the wheat from the chaff. We won't go into that today. But Ruth does as Naomi commanded.

And when Boaz is asleep, she lays down at his feet. She does not wake him. She does not lay down beside him. But she lays down where a servant would, at his feet.

And she waits. Naomi had given Ruth no further instructions other than simply, he will tell you what to do. Now, what was Naomi trying to do?

Was she telling Ruth to approach Boaz in secret under cover of darkness to avoid an appearance of impropriety or confrontation?

[12:49] Was she trusting Boaz to be honorable and respectful? Or was she trying to copy Tamar? Was she intentionally placing Boaz into a compromising position?

Was she trying to extract Boaz? All of these possibilities have been posed. And the answer is, the text doesn't tell us.

We don't know what the intent was. But in the middle of the night, Boaz wakes. And he's startled to find a woman at his feet. It's too dark to recognize anyone, but suddenly, my guess is he's wide awake.

There's a woman there. You can tell by the perfume if nothing else. And here we begin to wonder if maybe the author is trying to give us a parallel picture to another image from Genesis.

Parallels to a different story that would have been quite familiar to the Israelites, a picture from the Garden of Eden. For Adam, alone in the garden, is contrasted with Boaz, alone in his fields.

[13:56] Adam, lying down surrounded by the bounty of God's garden. Adam, or Boaz, rather, going to sleep next to his piles of grain, symbols of the bounty of God.

Adam, going to sleep alone, waking up to find Eve, the woman specifically designed for him. The one element that he knew was missing in his life. Boaz, going to sleep alone, waking to find Ruth, and of course, in both cases, God knowing that it was not right for man to be alone.

Of course, there are differences between those stories, too. Adam names the woman, immediately claiming her as bone of my bone and flesh of my flesh, knowing that the woman was specifically made for him.

Boaz, on the other hand, doesn't know this. He asks, who are you? And by implication, what are you doing here? And Ruth responds, I am Ruth, your servant.

Spread your wings over your servant, for you are a redeemer, a redeemer, a rescuer, one who could provide what she could not, an inheritance, a husband, the rest.

[15:06] Ruth, remember, needs a redeemer. But Boaz responds honorably and gently. He does not immediately take Ruth as his wife.

He doesn't take advantage of her. He doesn't chastise her for coming to the threshing floor. He does not chase her away, but he listens to her plea, and he praises her, and he blesses her. He calls her a worthy woman, in verse 11. That word again, kail, used in chapter 2 to describe Boaz, a man of worth, a man of value. And now Boaz uses it to describe Ruth in the same way, a woman of worth, an honorable woman, a virtuous woman, as it's translated in Proverbs 31. Ruth had not chased after the young man of the town to seek a husband. She had trusted the Lord. She had trusted her mother-in-law, and now she was trusting Boaz. Apparently, though, Boaz had already researched the situation. He certainly knew the responsibilities of a kinsman redeemer, but he also knew that there was another kinsman who was closer to Naomi, a closer relative.

[16:24] And as such, he knew that this other kinsman had both the rights and the responsibilities to be the redeemer for Ruth. Boaz didn't jump the queue, he didn't claim Ruth as his own, but he promised to ensure that Ruth would be cared for properly.

So he told Ruth to remain until early morning, to leave before it was light enough for anyone to recognize her. He protected her, as it wasn't safe for a woman to be wandering around out in the fields alone at night.

But he also protected her reputation. He said, let it not be known that a woman came to the threshing floor. Now, it was likely that he said this to his workmen that might have been around. If he was saying it to Ruth, I don't think he would have said, let it not be known that the woman came to the threshing floor. And he gave her a promise, a pledge, six measures of barley. Now, a measure is a generic term. Sometimes it equates to an ephah, which we talked about a couple of weeks ago. Sometimes it's an omer, a tenth of an ephah. Now, unless the author was exaggerating for effect, it's not likely that this was six ephah, because that would have been about 90 kilos.

[17:41] You can imagine the picture of her trying to drag 90 kilos down the road. She would have needed a wagon. It's more likely then that it was six omer, or about nine kilos.

Still a lot of grain, and an amount that would fit within her cloak that she could carry and put over her shoulder. Boaz tells Ruth, you must not go back empty handed to your mother-in-law. Now, you have to wonder if this was a message that he was sending to Naomi. You may have gone away full and returned empty, but you're not empty now.

I will see to it that Ruth is redeemed because Boaz knew that Ruth needs a redeemer. Ruth asks Boaz to spread his wings over her.

Now, over and over again in the Old Testament, wings are used to depict God's protection and redemption of his people. God redeemed them from Egypt on eagles' wings, as it says in Exodus 19.

[18:43] And David throughout the Psalms talks about being in the shadow of God's wings, a place of love, a place of refuge, a place of protection. And Jesus in Matthew 23, and repeated again in Luke 13, weeps over Jerusalem, saying, O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the city that kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to it, how often would I have gathered your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, that you were not willing.

But we also think about wings, think about the picture of the Ark of the Covenant. Sometimes called the Ark of Testimony. Covered in gold, this box contained the Ten Commandments, it contained Aaron's rod that bloomed, it contains the bowl of manna, all reminders of God's covenant with Israel, kept in the most holy place in the tabernacle, a testimony of God's grace and mercy.

On either side of the lid was a cherub. Now, when we think of cherubs, what do we think of? Well, normally we think of cute, chubby little baby cubits, right? Well, that couldn't be further from reality. The cherubim, plural of cherub, were the warrior angels. They were the powerful guard angels that stood around the throne of God.

And after the fall, cherubim were placed at the edges of the Garden of Eden with flaming swords to guard the tree of life and to keep out sinful man. On the Ark of the Covenant, two cherubim faced each other and spread their wings over the mercy seat.

[20:23] The mercy seat at the center of the lid, where the grace of God was extended to his people. For every year on the Day of Atonement, the high priest would bring the blood of the sacrifice and pour it out on the mercy seat to cover the sins of the people.

As the cherubim spread their wings over the mercy seat, so God spreads his wings over his people. Providing refuge and protection, reminding them of the promise of a Redeemer who would come, the seed of the woman, who would crush the head of the serpent, who would restore a right relationship between God and man.

At Sinai, God had given the law and the sacrifices to show that sin led to death, that without the shedding of blood there could be no forgiveness of sin, and to act as a reminder that the blood of goats and bulls and sheep was not enough, to teach the people of their need for redemption, for a Redeemer.

In Psalm 19, David refers to the Lord as my rock and my Redeemer. a Redeemer to free us from the slavery of sin, to restore that right relationship.

Yes, Ruth needed a Redeemer, but also we need a Redeemer. And God the Father sent His eternal Son as our Redeemer to live that perfect obedient life, to die an atoning death, to pour His own blood onto the heavenly mercy seat to cover our sins.

[21 : 55] Isaiah 53 says He was pierced for our transgressions. He was crushed for our iniquities. Upon Him was the chastisement that brought us peace, and with His wounds we are healed.

Peace and rest through a Redeemer. Ruth returned home with them with a promise, a promise backed up by a token, the barley itself.

And Naomi sees this as a pledge and says He will not rest until the matter is settled. In the final two weeks of our study of Ruth we will see how Boaz, this kinsman redeemer, fulfilled this promise, but also how this story of Boaz as a kinsman redeemer fits into the overall story of the Bible, of the Lord who provides a true redeemer for us, and how because of His steadfast love and faithfulness we can trust our redeemer.

We can trust that redeemer in our daily struggles, in our waiting, in our wondering what's going to happen next. And we can wait and see how God will work it out.

We can trust that He cares for us. Let's pray. Let's pray. Thank you.