

# Ruth 3

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[ 0 : 00 ] It's a 3,000 year story. I hope you've got into it the last few weeks. It's a strange story. There are interesting parts to the story!

Okay. The book of Ruth is a real page-turner. We're about three months on from the end of chapter 2. And at the end of chapter 2, we're told that they lived.

She lived, didn't she, Ruth, with her mother-in-law. She'd been gleaning with the barley and the wheat harvest. It's three months later. The barley harvest is over. The means of support is disappearing and drying up.

Someone has said that marriage is a woman's way of calling a meeting to order. And I don't know who said that. But marriage is a woman's way of calling a meeting to order.

Well, the meeting took place in chapter 2. And now in chapter 3, Naomi, who is Ruth's mother-in-law, is going to call this meeting to order. You mustn't think of her, as you read this, as an interfering mother-in-law.

[ 1 : 19 ] She's not like that. But we will see, I think, that she's something of a schemer. We see that in verse 1, don't we? Where she says, Then Naomi, her mother-in-law, said to her, My daughter, should I not seek rest for you, that it may be well with you?

Leave it to me. I'll see you settled. I'll see you married off. But it's interesting, isn't it, the words she uses. Can you see that word? Should I not seek rest for you?

I'll find rest for you. That's literally the words. And there's an echo, isn't there, in the prayer of chapter 1. Where, with very mixed emotions, and under huge pressure, she seeks to persuade her daughters-in-law to go back to Moab.

How are we doing, little man? Second lap. Go for it. I can see his dad's just standing at the back now. And so, in chapter 1 and verse 9, can you see?

Then the Lord grant that you may find rest, each of you, in the house of your husband. And again, it's that word rest that is used, and the word resonates with meaning.

[ 2 : 31 ] It's an echo of the Garden of Eden. So do you remember after God created the world? He created the world in six days by the world of his power, and it was all very good. But on day 7, what did he do?

He rested. And he proclaimed a Sabbath rest to be kept. And it's that same word that's used here. It's a significant word. We started our service with that word.

Do you remember? Remember, Jesus said, come unto me all you who labor and are heavy laden, who are weary and heavy laden, and I will give you rest. It's the word that's used to describe the promised land.

When Abraham is promised, isn't he, you will go to a land that is flowing with milk and honey. And it says they entered into the land of rest. That's how it's seen.

And so it was seen as God's answer to their prayers. It was seen as God's fulfillment of the covenant that he made with Abraham. And when they got to that place, they were entering into God's rest.

[ 3 : 35 ] You go to the New Testament, the writer of the Hebrews says, there is a rest that remains now for the people of God. In the new heavens and the new earth. And so the word rest doesn't mean just taking your shoes off and putting your feet up.

It's a salvation word. And that's the word that's being used here. That's what Naomi wants for her daughters-in-law. That's what she wants for Ruth. She wants her to experience the salvation that God has promised to his people Israel.

She's got her priorities right. She wants the very best for her. Not so much a big house and a large family. But she wants Ruth to come to know the big God of the Bible.

And the big promises that he's made to Israel. So she takes practical steps now for it to happen. And that in itself I think is interesting. Because up until now, what you've seen in the book of Ruth is really a great lesson in the sovereignty of God.

The sovereign providence of God. It's something that stood out, isn't it? So we've seen the narrative says, as it happens, as it happened, it so turned out.

[ 4 : 46 ] And the writer has been telling us that things don't just happen. There is a God who's working out the circumstances of all our lives. There's a sovereign God working in this little family.

Working out his will. Working out his purposes. So things just don't happen. And yet on the other hand, we do have a responsibility to make things happen. We believe in the great salvation plan of God.

And yet there is also a responsibility to do things. And here's what's happening here. She says to Ruth, come on, let's make this happen.

Time is going on. Time is at a premium. I'm going to find this rest for you. And so she draws up a daring and a dangerous plan. And that's the first thing I think we see in this chapter.

We see Naomi's plan. Look at verses 1 to 5. My daughter, should I not seek rest for you that it may be well with you?

[ 5 : 45 ] Is not Boaz our relative? With whose young women you were. See, he is winnowing barley tonight at the threshing floor. Wash yourself. Put perfume on. Stick your best dress on.

Go down to the threshing floor. Do not make yourself known to the man until he's finished eating and drinking. But when he lies down, observe the place where he lies. And then go and uncover his feet. And lie down.

And he will tell you what to do. And Ruth replied, All you say I will do. As I said, she's not matchmaking.

She's not playing the part of the interfering mother-in-law. It is the accepted practice. Then, as it is today, in many parts of the world, in many cultures, for marriages to be arranged by the parents. And so here is Naomi. She's not acting out of place according to the conventions of her day. She's taking parental responsibility for a daughter-in-law. Her intentions are good.

[ 6 : 41 ] But Boaz is the answer to all their problems. As we saw last time, he happens to be their next of kin. And the technical term in the law of Israel is he is their kinsman-redeemer.

And so if Ruth were to marry this man, Boaz, their future would be secure in Israel. The family name, the family line would continue amongst the people of God. If Ruth married Boaz, the debts would be paid.

Their land would be returned to them. And if Ruth were to have a child, the family line would continue. There's a lot at stake. But time is of the essence.

Three months on now. And Boaz hasn't made his move. I don't know what's wrong with him. We don't know. Perhaps he's shy. Perhaps he's a shy bachelor. Perhaps he's far more conscious of the age difference between them.

Ruth is probably late teens, early twenties. Boaz is at least 10 or 20 years older. And it seems, reading between the lines, that we pick up on some of the things he says about the younger men.

[ 7 : 51 ] We don't know exactly why there's this delay. But it certainly builds up the tension in the story. Time is going on. The clock is ticking. And something has to be done.

Before the opportunity is lost. And Naomi hitches this little plan. Look what she says in verse 2. She says, Boaz is our relative.

And he's winnowing barley tonight in the threshing floor. Wash therefore. Anoint yourself. Put on your cloak. Go down to the threshing floor. Do not make yourself known to the man until he's finished eating.

But when he lies down, observe the place he lies. And then go and uncover his feet. And lie down and he will tell you what to do. The female of the species is more deadly than the male.

And this poor guy, he doesn't stand a chance, does he? But is it right? Is it right? I've got no doubt about Naomi's motive and her intentions.

[ 8 : 50 ] But I can't help thinking she is skating on thin ice here. She's taking a very big risk. And she is putting Ruth in a potentially compromising situation.

A cornfield at night full of young men. Many of them full of drink. It's bad enough in the daytime. We've seen that in chapter 2. Let alone in the middle of the night.

And Naomi is telling me, put your best clothes on. Spray yourself with perfume. Spend the night with Boaz. What are we to make of it? And it gets worse, doesn't it? Uncover his feet, she says. That is very clever. If Boaz is suddenly startled out of his bed by an intruder, he might very well sound an alarm or cry out and wake up the entire workforce.

It's almost as if, Ruth 3, he's sleeping in a dormitory. And by this way, he will be woken up gradually. You know, it's like when your wife takes the bedclothes from you and your feet stick out the duvet and suddenly wake up with cold feet.

[ 9 : 50 ] You wake up not suddenly but gradually. You wake up without any commotion. And when he wakes up, she says, before he's got time to wipe the sleep out of his eyes, propose to him.

It's a pretty daring plan. It's a risky sort of thing. What are we to make of it? Is she being manipulative? Is she trying to force things? Is she going beyond what she really should have done? Is she taking matters into her own hands and trying to force things? It's been three months since the end of the last chapter. Three months since the barley harvest.

And nothing seems to be happening. And life quietly goes on. And waiting is difficult, isn't it, at the best of times. It's doubly difficult at the worst of times. When you don't know when your next meal is coming from.

And that's the situation these women are in. And that's when waiting can easily turn into questioning. Where is God? Has he forgotten about us?

[ 10 : 51 ] Has he abandoned me? And sometimes God seems to disappear completely, doesn't he, into the tapestry of life. And we just assume he's forgotten us.

And that must have been how these women had felt. Without husbands. Without heirs. Literally facing a bleak future. Living from hand to mouth. And so it's a very tense situation.

And yet there is one ray of hope. And he's a man called Boaz. He's the next of kin. The kinsman redeemer. He's a close relative who can marry the widow. Buy back the land.

Have children. Ensure a future for the family. And that's all enshrined in Deuteronomy 25 and Leviticus. And Boaz is the man. He's the kinsman redeemer.

The close relative to the family. And Naomi, is she going to let this opportunity slip through our fingers? Her fingers. But what are we to make of it?

[ 11 : 48 ] Is this the sort of advice you'd give to your daughter? Or your granddaughter? Or to a young woman in the congregation? I'm hesitating to judge Naomi because of what is at stake here.

But I certainly do want to say to you, don't copy Naomi. I don't think what she's doing here is completely right. It's a little bit suspect.

There is nothing improper. There is nothing immoral. And we know that nothing immoral took place from verse 14. They know and we know.

And so that helps us to understand what is going on. Both Naomi and Ruth, they knew that Boaz was a godly man and a God-fearing man. And he proved that to them tangibly by blessing them with all sorts of things.

And by his respect for her and his protection for her in a dangerous environment. So he's a godly man. And we read there, don't we, in verse 14. Let it not be known that the woman came to the threshing floor.

[ 13 : 01 ] She laid his feet until morning and she arose before one could recognize another. She got up before she could be seen by others. The Bible does tell you and I that we are to avoid the appearance of evil.

What do you think Boaz's colleagues, his mates, would have thought if they'd caught sight of Ruth leaving his bedroom in the early hours of the morning? As much as he might protest, they wouldn't believe it, would they?

What do you think the world thinks when Christian young men and women kind of stay overnight in the same place? We say, well, they're Christians, it's not going to happen. Well, you're human beings as well. What does the world think?

The world just assumes. And remember, these were the days of the judges where everybody did what was right in their own sight. So that leads me to my second point.

Naomi's daring, dangerous, risky plan. But as a result of Naomi's scheming, Boaz finds himself, doesn't he, in a real predicament. He's in a real predicament.

[ 14 : 07 ] It's an embarrassing situation, I expect, to wake up in the middle of the night and find the woman of your dreams lying at your feet. And so what does he do? Well, what doesn't he do?

Everyone else is doing it in the days of the judges. Everyone did what was right in their own eyes. That's how the book of Judges ends. We're told that morally and spiritually, it was really just like the kind of beginning of the 18th century.

It's like England in many ways now, but like England then, in the days before the Methodist revival with Wesley and Whitefield. Somebody spoke about the 18th century before the Methodist revival, and they said this, they've taken the knot out of the commandments and put it in the creed.

That was a summing up of how things were spiritually. They've taken the knot out of the commandments, and they've put them into the creed. A time of spiritual and moral anarchy and apostasy.

Everyone did what was right in their own eyes. So why doesn't Boaz behave like everybody else? And the answer is because Boaz fears God. The smile of God matters more to Boaz than the sneer of his employees.

[15:28] And the frown of God meant more to Boaz than the scowling frowns around him. He fears God. And God is real in this man's life.

We see it in the way that he goes to work, don't we? Do you see the way that he greets his workers? He says, The Lord be with you. You don't hear that very often in Ealing.

Here was a man, and God was real in his life, in his conversations, in his interactions with people. The Lord be with you. And he recognizes Ruth, not simply as a foreigner, not simply as a refugee who's come for a handout, but as a fellow believer who's come to take refuge under the shelter of the wings of God.

And so he's a godly man who's trusting God's promises. Look at verse 12. Chapter 2 and verse 12, even.

He says to Ruth in chapter 2, The Lord will pay you for what you've done, and a full reward be given you by the Lord, the God of Israel, under whose wings you've come to take refuge. And that's the key to this man's character.

[16:42] He knows the Lord. He knows the God who's revealed himself to the people of Israel, and that that God is a righteous God. And he says, May the Lord repay you for what you've done. May you be richly rewarded by the Lord.

And that perspective is written into his entire outlook and consciousness. So when he wakes up in the middle of the night and he looks at his phone and there's something that may well lead him into sin, he says to Joseph, How dare can I do this and sin against God?

And when he wakes up in the middle of the night and he finds this woman lying at his feet, How can I do this evil and sin against God? He's not going to be swayed by the moral and the social consensus of the people around him.

He's not going to take that as his guide. He's going to do what is right because he knows God. And he knows that God is righteous. And he knows that there is a day coming when things that have been whispered in the dark and things that have been done in secret will be brought out into the light.

He fears God. And the problem today in our culture is that there is no fear of God in the land. And they've taken the knot out of the commandments and put it in the creed.

[17:55] But you notice something else about Boaz's predicament. He handles this dangerous, sensitive side of things pretty well, but there's a complication. It's a real page turner, isn't it? Guess what?

There's a third party. Look at verse 11 of chapter 3. You didn't see that coming. And now, my daughter, do not fear. I will do for you all that you ask.

For all my townspeople know that you are a worthy woman. And it is true that I'm a redeemer. Yet there's a redeemer nearer than I. Remain tonight and in the morning.

If he will redeem you good, let him do it. Just when you thought the girl was going to get the guy. Just when you thought it was a happy, ever-ending story, there's a cloud on the horizon.

Boaz and Ruth, their Facebook status, turns to it's complicated. There's this other guy. And we've got to do the right thing, Boaz says.

[19:00] There's every indication as you read the book of Ruth that Boaz is head over heels in love with Ruth. But he's even more in love with God and with his word. And even if it means losing Ruth and breaking his own heart, good, he says.

We've got to do what God's word says. And even though it cuts across my desires, I've got to do what God's word says.

And if we say we believe God and fear God and love God, we will have to put God's word first. And leave the consequences to him. We're in a situation like this, aren't we?

I don't know how many times each week living in the UK. And God's will must be done even though it might break my heart and seemingly mess up my life.

Or that my heart's desire might not be met. God's will being done is the most important thing. And I'm sure that's the right way to understand this chapter.

[ 20 : 15 ] I don't think for one moment that Boaz is trying to wriggle out of his responsibility. He's not trying to fob Ruth off onto another kinsman redeemer. Everything that we've read about him so far tells us that is not the case.

There's nothing he would rather do than marry Ruth. But he wants these things to be done rightly according to the word of God. He's saying you can't start a marriage in the middle of a cornfield. In the dead of night, it's got to be done properly. And legally, according to God's word. And as Christian people, we are under the authority of God's word. Jesus said, in the beginning, this is how it was, and this is how it is, a man shall leave his parents and be married to his wife.

That marriage is a covenant between one man and one woman. And it is a covenant voluntarily entered into full life. That is the word of God. That is the teaching of Jesus.

And that means we are under his authority. And so on the issue of LGBTQ+, no matter how much we might really, really like our gay friends, and however powerful and emotive their arguments might be, we have to do what Boaz did.

[ 21 : 38 ] And we have to humbly put ourselves under the authority of God's word. So Boaz, we've seen Naomi plotting and planning.

And we've seen the predicament that puts Boaz into. And the way he re-handles it, he goes to the word of God. Now thirdly and lastly, let's take a closer look at what this is all about.

Let's see Ruth's proposal. Because it is a proposal of marriage, but it's a bit more than that. Look what she says in verse 9. She's there in the middle of the night.

Who are you? He says. She answered, I'm Ruth, your servant. Spread your wings over your servant, for you are a redeemer. It's interesting, isn't it? To spread the corner of your wings, of your garment, it's a little bit like a woman asking for an engagement ring today.

Boaz, she's saying, it's been three months. Are you serious? Spread the corner of your garment over me. But she uses Bible language.

[ 22 : 48 ] She uses the same expression as Ezekiel 16 verse 8 to express God's marriage proposal to his people. Listen to these words. God says to Israel, when I looked at you, he's speaking of his people Israel, he's brought his people Israel out of Egypt, led them through the desert.

When I passed by you again and saw you behold, you were at the age for love. And I spread the corner of my garment over you and covered your nakedness. I made my vow to you and entered into a covenant with you, declares the Lord God, and you became mine.

I spread the corner of my garment over you and you became mine. It's the same expression. It's a proposal of marriage. But it's more than that.

The same word is used in chapter 2 and verse 12 to describe the wings of God. And so do you remember, Boaz talks about Ruth.

Ruth, he says, you've sheltered under the wings of the Almighty. It's the same word. And Ruth is saying, spread your wings over me. Take me under your wing, Boaz.

[ 23 : 55 ] It's got an awful lot to say about Christian marriage. In fact, it's saying exactly what the Apostle Paul says in Ephesians.

Do you remember what he says? He says there, doesn't he? Husbands, love your wives, and wives, submit to your husbands. Incredibly politically incorrect. For a start, wives, submit to your own husbands as to the Lord.

It's not saying, your husband is your Lord and Master. It's not saying that. You don't submit to a man just because he is a man, just because he quotes the Bible at you and abuses his position. She has come and taken shelter under the wings of the Almighty. And now here is the godly man, Boaz, and she can do the same with him. That's the picture. She can come and shelter under his wings.

She can come to him for provision and protection. And that's what a godly husband does to a wife. What does the godly husband look like? He nourishes her. He cares for her.

[ 25 : 01 ] Husbands, love your wives. Love them like a redeemer loves his wife. Love them as Christ loved the church and gave himself for it.

I'm not naive. I am aware that this can be and this has been terribly abused. I'm not sure I've ever talked about it before from the pulpit, but I don't want to pretend that domestic violence does not happen in churches like ours because stories come out.

And sometimes there's an awful lot of pain and anguish because people are not willing to share that story. It's embarrassing in a Bible-believing church like this. But I want to say very, very clearly this morning that where there is domestic violence, that is a denial of the gospel.

It is a wicked thing. And it is a denial of the gospel. And if you're in that situation, I would plead with you to share that with someone.

But I want you to see in this scene with Ruth that she is proposing. And look at how she understands this marriage to Boaz.

[ 26 : 17 ] She understands that in marriage, she comes under the shelter of his wings. Take me under your wings, she says. So this proposal of marriage, it is that, but it's more than that. Marry me, she's saying to him.

You can't say Ruth is backward in coming forward. She's very bold. She's invoking this law. The kinsman redeemer.

What's she doing? She's exercising faith. Let me finish with this. She's exercising faith. Martin Luther defines faith as a living, daring confidence in God's grace.

That's what faith is. It's a living, daring confidence in God's grace. She knows him. She knows the character of this man. She knows that this man has got the key to a future.

She knows that this man has got the right and the power to redeem her. She knows that this man has got the wherewithal to do it. He's able. He's a rich man of standing in the community.

[ 27 : 16 ] And she knows all of that. And so she lays hold of his willingness. Isn't that what faith is? You see, Boaz is God's answer to the needs of this family.

And forsaking all others, she could have run after the young men. He's really impressed that she doesn't want to run after the young men. They're more her age than I am.

But forsaking all others, she lays hold on Boaz's willingness to save her. She's got a living, daring confidence in God's grace.

Let me apply this to you. Faith is risky. It wouldn't be faith. This isn't the reckless risk of a kind of teenage joyrider.

It's the calculated risk of someone who knows what they're doing. She knows her God. She's got a relationship with God. She enters into that cornfield knowing, trusting.

[ 28 : 19 ] She goes to that threshing floor in the middle of the night, sheltering under the wings of the Almighty, trusting that she's under his protection. She's heard the promises of God.

She's experienced something of the kindness of God, the gracious provision of God. And all the signs are looking favorable. But 100% success is not guaranteed, is it?

She doesn't know beforehand that it will definitely work out. And that's where faith comes in. There's a sense in which you have to gamble on grace. There's a sense in which you have to push the boat out.

And you may be here this morning with all sorts of baggage, perhaps wondering whether God could ever accept you into his family. Perhaps you've looked into the Christian faith for a while, and it seems to make sense, but you cannot be absolutely sure, and you want all your questions answered, and I'm here to tell you they won't be.

You'll still be answering questions 10,000 times 10,000 years from now. Because we're talking to the God, the infinite, eternal God who has made the universe.

[ 29 : 28 ] And so if you're waiting for all your questions to be answered, you will wait a very long time. And you may be thinking you're counting the cost, that if I become a Christian, what will my life be like then? What about if I come out into the open as a follower of Jesus?

There's going to be some big changes. I'm sure that similar things will have passed through Ruth's mind. As she slowly made her way to that field that night, would that friendship be formed?

Would that marriage be entered into? Any venture cannot be made without that element of risk.

When you got out of bed this morning, there was no absolute guarantee that nothing was going to

go wrong.

And so it is with the most important relationship of all, the relationship with God. He has given us enough light in his word to trust him. He's revealed his character and his purposes, not only in the Bible, but he sent his son, the Lord Jesus.

Jesus. I've said it before of night, there is nothing un-Jesus-like about this God. You read the Gospels and you think, well, if this is God, I can trust him. And Jesus is our kinsman redeemer.

[ 30 : 41 ] He has come in our flesh and blood. He's voluntarily and deliberately become human in order to save us. And he's not ashamed to call us brothers. And he's taken on flesh, that in flesh he might bleed and die.

And so forsaking all others, will you take him to be your redeemer? And if you've never done that, why not do that today? Forsaking all others, will you take Jesus to be your redeemer?

Will you fall at his feet and tell him how much you need him to be your savior? Because that's what you must do. You take the place of a sinner before him.

And you fall at his feet like Ruth did before Boaz. And you put your case in his hands and you entrust himself to you. And you can be assured, look at the end of verse 18. Wait to my daughter until you learn how the matter turns out, for the man will not rest.

But we'll settle the matter today. And I think those of us who've been Christians for a while, we would say this man, this proper man, this authentic man fights for us.

[ 31 : 58 ] This authentic man, the Lord Jesus Christ, will never rest until he settles things for you. And so come you sinners, poor and wretched, weak and wounded, sick and sore.

Jesus ready stands to save you. Full of pity, joined with power. He is able. He is able. He is willing. Doubt no more. Let's sing. Let's sing. Let's sing.