

Ruth 3

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[0 : 00] And our chapter opens this morning with Naomi's intent to find rest for Ruth. Chapter 3, verse 1, My daughter, should I not seek rest for you? And the chapter ends with her saying, Wait, my daughter, until you learn how the matter turns out, for the man will not rest, but will settle the matter today. The rest in view in this chapter is the rest of marriage, the security of a home for Ruth, and the raising up of an heir for Naomi to carry on the family name.

That has been what we've been looking for since the disaster and the pain and the heartache of chapter 1, the discovery of this man, this worthy man, Boaz, in chapter 2. And so, we're getting down to business now in chapter 3, and we're certainly doing that. But the rest that is in view here is a microcosm of the broader biblical picture of rest that is held out to us in the pages there. Peace, contentment, and a wholeness. That's what the Bible story really is taking us to.

That is the picture at the end of history for those who have found their rest in the Lord Jesus. The language in this chapter is of fullness. It's really the language of the story. Naomi, you'll remember, left Bethlehem full. She went to Moab. She returned from Moab empty. And really, she is searching for fullness. She is searching for rest. And that search is something that we share.

If we're honest with ourselves, that is the longing, the desire of all of our hearts. We live in a restless, always-on, never-stopping world. And the vision of the good life that we've been told will deliver involves us getting involved in that restlessness, being busy about chasing peace and contentment through the new, the bigger, and the better. That's the promise that our world holds out to us. There is rest if you find these things, whether these things are success or financial reward or a relationship or whatever it is. But the goal of these things that are held out to us is rest, fullness, peace, contentment, wholeness. The problem is the way that the world says that we can find those things just leaves us anxious and distracted and dissatisfied and restless.

We're constantly comparing ourselves to others, and in the end, we end up lonely, isolated. There must be a better way. There must be a better way. This is the thing that our hearts long for.

[3 : 02] It is something that is real in our experience, except it always eludes us when we follow the stories that the world holds out to us. There must be a better way. There is a better way. And this ancient story shows us that there is. But because it's this story, if you've been with us over these weeks, you'll know that the line is not straight. It is a narrow path. It is a complex tale. And so, in seeking rest this morning, as we go through the chapter, I want us to see, first of all, Naomi's initiative. Naomi's initiative. It's there in verses 1 to 5. Last time, as soon as Ruth, at the end of chapter 2, declared that Boaz was a close relative, Naomi's eyes lit up. Naomi saw an opportunity to secure the Redeemer, to secure the one, the Goel in the original, that these two women so desperately needed. She'd heard about Boaz's generosity. She'd experienced his kindness for herself. You remember all the grain that she was provided with, the food that she was given? She knew what kind of man this was.

She saw her chance. Verse 2, she hatched a plan. See, he is winnowing barley tonight at the threshing floor. Wash, therefore, and anoint yourself, and put on your cloak, and go down to the threshing floor.

But do not make yourself known to the man until he is finished eating and drinking. Once all the crops were gathered, the men would winnow the barley. And once that was done, they would have a party to celebrate the end of harvest. It was a men-only affair, except that was in the Canaanite and other fertility religions of the day. In that case, women would be there, but they'd be there for one thing. They'd be there to serve the men. They'd be there for sex. So we've got men eating and drinking and celebrating. There are no women, except some cases there are called girls. Would you send your daughter into that situation? Fathers, would you do that? Of course, she wouldn't. It sounds ridiculous. We have to say this is a high-risk plan. And there are lots of commentators who

want to say that Naomi is acting improperly here. Old habits die hard, they say. She's not trusting the Lord's timing. The same Naomi that we saw in chapter 1 has re-emerged. She's taking matters into her own hands. She wants to get what she wants in her time, in her ways. And she's even putting Ruth into danger in order to get it. Verse 4, when he lies down, observe the place where he lies. Then go and uncover his feet and lie down, and he will tell you what to do. This language is all highly suggestive. Go into the dark in this situation. Uncover his feet and lie down there. Uncovering Boaz's feet could mean uncovering his legs, or it could mean, in the original, uncovering his genitals. So, the plan sounds highly dodgy. It is X-rated, to say the least. But strange as all that is, and it is, we need to say a few things here. First, we saw last time how Naomi's heart had been transformed. At the end of chapter 2, her bitterness toward God that we saw in chapter 1 was gone, and she was restored to trusting him again. Back in chapter 1, you'll remember Ruth, on that very dramatic episode on the road with Orpah and Ruth, Naomi said, go back to your own people, to your own land, because you'll find a husband there and you can get rest there.

[6 : 39] She held out rest to them in Moab. That's completely changed now. She's seeking it now among the people of God. She's seeking it now with this worthy man who we've seen through chapter 2 that his character is exemplary and he is a faithful Israelite. That's where she wants her to find rest. That reflects, that attitude reflects this transformation. She's now acting in faith. Second, we must see that in telling Ruth to wash and anoint herself and to dress with the cloak, to dress in a particular way, that is not to be seductive. She is telling her to prepare herself as a bride. So, throughout the Bible, those are the steps that a woman takes to prepare for her husband.

So, what she's doing is prepare yourself in such a way that will signal to Boaz that he can take you as his bride and he can raise up a replacement for Elimelech and the family line will continue. This is a marriage proposal. But thirdly, we need to see that it is more than that, because the whole scenario has echoes of an earlier story in the Bible, does it not? The story of Judah and Tamar. Judah, you'll remember, failed to legitimately provide an heir to continue the family line. So, Tamar deceived him by dressing as a prostitute in order that the line would continue. And here we have lots of the same overtones. We're to read this and we're thinking, I've heard this sort of thing before. And we're supposed to think, hang on, I've heard this sort of thing before and it didn't go well. I've seen how this goes. There's deception in the dark. There is sexual sin. Oh no. But the point is that Naomi is suggesting a proper way to pursue these ends, not an improper way. It is to propose marriage and to have a son the right way. The way that the author writes here is supposed to be full of allusion and overtones that are supposed to make us identify with what we've read before to make us in some ways feel uncomfortable. It feels devious. Go at night when he can't see you. It is hazardous, no doubt. What if one of the other men gets hold of her and she gets assaulted? What if Boaz is appalled by her presence when he wakens up and the whole thing backfires? But rogue as it all sounds, and it does, it does. Naomi's goal is to win a godly husband for Ruth with whom she will find rest, and she does all that she does in faith. Now, there are a number of things to say here. The first is this. This is not a strategy that any of you should adopt for finding a spouse. Mothers, while there's nothing wrong with encouraging your daughter to wash, wear perfume, and dress nicely, the Naomi five steps to getting a husband plan is not one that you should follow. Do not send your daughters into testosterone-fueled, all-male environments, and expect it to go well. Don't do that in the dead of night. This is not a plan to follow. I hope that's clear. But that said, I want to commend to you Naomi's example in two ways.

The first is this. When we meet her here in chapter 3, what we see is someone who has replaced victimhood with faith. Only a few days ago, you'll remember, Naomi was locked in a cycle of bitterness at the providence of God. She didn't like what God had done in her life, and she was casting herself as a victim. Remember 1 verse 20, Do not call me Naomi, which means pleasant. I'm not pleasant. Call me Mara, because, meaning bitter, for the Almighty has dealt very bitterly with me. She's saying, I used to be happy, but God has picked on me. God has made my life terrible. God is being mean to me.

But then in chapter 2, we saw that she had her eyes open to God's grace, and she exalted Him by blessing Boaz. And now here, what we see is that she's making plans that serve this God. Now, Naomi, as we've said all the way through, she has experienced terrible loss. And sometimes we will experience terrible loss. Our lives will be marked by struggle and difficulty and pain and hardship.

[11 : 20] But when you are in Christ by faith, that is your identity, and you're not allowed to adopt the identity of a victim. You may have been hurt by another person's behavior, but victim is not who you are. And what that means is, like Naomi, in this chapter, you can refuse to get stuck in the victim cycle that paralyzes so many of us when we choose that identity. And instead, we can trust God, a God who is sovereign over even our suffering, even our worst days, a God who is in control.

So, she's replaced victimhood with faith. Second thing I want us to see is that she has expressed that faith with initiative. It is possible to take matters into our own hands in life rather than waiting on the Lord. It is possible for us to get out ahead of the Lord and be impatient with the way things are. But it is also possible to live with a kind of spiritual paralysis where we just do nothing.

It is where we lean on a shovel and pray for a ditch. We have got the resources, but we do not do anything about it. The Lord has provided for us, but we do not do anything because we have set the terms of what we think it would look like for Him to lead us in life. Naomi here is seeking a righteous thing, and she is doing that for Ruth, and she is doing it for the family line, and she is doing it for the kingdom of God. She has made clear from chapter 1 that she knows that God is in control of her life and everybody else's life, and she is doing all that she is doing here, submitted to Him, and presumably, therefore, trusting Him for the outcome. Later on in the story, when Ruth returns and she says, how did you fare? She is really saying in that situation, well, how did the plan go? Has God answered? Has God been involved in this? This kind of faith-fueled, trust-imbued, hope-driven initiative is what makes plans in life. It pursues someone for marriage. It raises a family in faith.

It leads a household. It starts a business. It gets involved in public service for the good of others. It trusts God and gets after it in life. She left her victimhood behind. She replaced it with faith, and that faith is a faith that takes initiative to get things done in the world. Yes, Naomi's plan sounds strange to our ears. It's supposed to. That's the way the poetry of this chapter has been put together. But Naomi's plan flows from faith. It is aimed at the good, and it is submitted to God.

[14 : 08] And what that means, verse 5, Ruth is prepared to go for it. All that you say, I will do. She meets her mother-in-law's plan with faith of her own. She arrives at the threshing floor, verse 7. The party has come to an end. Can you see the boys are heading off to sleep? Boaz, with a glad heart, lies down beside the grain for the night. Ruth silently tiptoes in beside him and uncovers his feet. In verse 8, the man was startled and turned over. I bet he was.

And behold, a woman lay at his feet. He said, Who are you? Now, of course, he knew who Ruth was. They'd exchanged fellowship at the table only a couple of days ago or a previous day. Who knows? He knows who she is. He can't see. It's pitch dark.

Fright? Maybe. Shock? No doubt. Boaz couldn't believe his eyes because he couldn't see anything except the outline of this woman lying at his feet. Then we hear point number two. If we've had Naomi's initiative point number two, Ruth's invitation. Ruth's invitation. Who are you? Who are you? I don't know how he said it. And she answered, I am Ruth, your servant. Spread your wings over your servant, for you are a redeemer. Ruth tells Boaz, I'm not here for nefarious reasons.

I'm not there to compromise you in any way. I'm here to propose. I'm here to propose. That's the intent of the whole process, the washing, the anointing, the dressing. And now that is given verbal expression with this invitation. Would you like to spread your wings over your servant, for you are a redeemer. The spreading his wings is covenantal language. We saw it back in chapter 2, verse 12. Boaz used the same word to describe Ruth's trust in the covenant God, the one under whose covenant blessing she has come to rest in her putting faith in the God of Israel. And here she's saying, can I now come under your covenant blessing? I'm inviting you to do that. Take up your lever at marriage responsibilities. Be my redeemer. Embrace the covenant of marriage and so provide for her and for her mother-in-law's line. If Naomi's faith led her to take initiative, Ruth still needed to embrace the plan, right? And let's be honest, she was the one who was taking all the risks. It's all very well being the person sitting back here saying, here's the plan. It's a completely different story when you're the one that has to go and follow it. And you're the one who, in order to do the righteous thing, has to risk everything. Do you see that? Ruth is risking everything. Her reputation, her physical safety, her moral integrity. They're all at stake here. And the outcome, do you notice, the outcome rests on the gap between verses 9 and 10. Have a look. Verse 9, who are you? I am Ruth, your servant. Spread your wings over your servant, for you are a redeemer. How long is the gap? She's just invited. She's proposed marriage. She's invited him to be her kinsman redeemer. Does he jump in straight away? Is there a long pause? We don't know. It all hangs on

the gap. What is clear is that Ruth had sufficient faith to embrace the risks, to do the hard, to do the uncertain thing because it was right, and to trust the Lord with the outcome. When did you last take a risk for the Lord? Lots of us would love to see certain things happen in our lives or in the world. We'd like to do things for God and for the gospel again. We'd like to start a business, plant a church, start a Christian school, create a charitable enterprise. The list could be as long as your arm. But we never do it because we aren't willing to take the risk. We aren't willing to make the sacrifices in order to take the risks in order to see it happen.

And so, those things don't ever come to pass. Ruth went to the threshing floor. Verse 6, she did exactly as Naomi had commanded her. She made the risky invitation, and she trusted the Lord. [18:56] Well, however long the pause between 9 and 10, while Boaz rubbed his eyes and got his bearings, here's what he does with the invitation. May you be blessed by the Lord, my daughter.

You have made this last kindness greater than the first in that you have not gone after young men, whether poor or rich. He sees there's nothing inappropriate about her intentions, and he blesses her. Huh, what a relief. As you read the story, at this point, your blood pressure's supposed to be up. Your heart's supposed to be racing. How's it going to go? Thank goodness for that. This could have gone one of many ways, and it didn't. It has gone a good way, it seems. She has added to the kindness of gleaning for her mother-in-law by choosing a qualified man. She could have chosen a younger man to restart her life with. She could have stayed in Moab, remember? That was the offer held out to her in chapter 1. But no, she's committed herself to Naomi, so she wants to ensure that she marries a man who will provide Naomi with an heir. And so, verse 11, like the rest of the townsfolk, Boaz can see she is a woman of noble character. She has repeatedly shown her commitment to the God of Israel, so he promises to do as she asks. And then we see point number three, Boaz's integrity. Naomi's initiative, Ruth's invitation, Boaz's integrity. So, like Ruth, his desire is to do what is right before the God of the covenant. We need to remember at this point that Boaz isn't obligated to act as the kinsman redeemer because he wasn't closely enough related to Elimelech, nor was he obligated to Ruth because she was a Moabite. But he is prepared, he says, to take up this costly role because even though she appealed to him in this weird situation in the darkness of the threshing floor, he can see that Ruth is a woman of profound godliness. So, there we are, the credits roll. Can you feel the love tonight plays, or I will always love you, or something like that. That's a lovely love story. And off we go. That's not how it goes. This book is at it again. There's a twist. There's a spanner in the works. If you're a romantic, you're getting very frustrated. We were nearly there. We nearly had the conclusion that we wanted. Actually, it's Boaz's integrity that could prove to be the fly in the ointment. Verse 11, I will do for you all that you ask, for all my fellow townsmen know that you're a worthy woman. And now it is true that I'm a redeemer, yet there is a redeemer who's nearer than I. Oh, the whole thing, it feels it's about to unravel.

Oh, this isn't in the script. We've seen him. He looks so great in chapter 2. Here he is, random, weird plan. They've got together. It looks like it's all going to come together. And if Boaz is going to be the right guy, actually, in the end, he needs to do the right thing.

And if he's going to keep the law, there is actually someone better qualified than him to be the redeemer for Naomi. So, he is willing to risk losing Ruth to someone else rather than go against God's law. It's incredible, actually. So, we need to park our romantic tendencies at this point, because what we need to see is that in an age when Israel were neck deep in rebellion against God, here is at least one man who is faithful. In the days when the judges ruled, here is one man who is faithful, a true Israelite, a faithful son of the covenant God. So, he makes a plan to do the right thing. And with Ruth's physical protection and her own integrity in mind, verse 13, he tells her how best to make her escape from the threshing floor, and he sends her off with a huge gift, verse 15.

[23:07] Bring the garment you are wearing, hold it out. So, she held it, and he measured out six measures of barley and put it on her. He provided her food to eat. But in doing this, he was also providing a message for Naomi, as she was going to return to Naomi and say, this here is the... well, he's giving her a message of abundance. So, do you see she asked the question, how did you fare? Ruth comes back, how did you fare? How did you get on? It's literally, who are you? That's the question she asks.

She's asking, are you, tell me, still Ruth the Moabite, or are you Mrs. Boaz? Presumably, they could have agreed marriage and consummated that night. She's asking, did the plan work? And Ruth tells her what happens. Verse 17, these six measures of barley he gave to me, for he said to me, you

must not go back empty-handed to your mother-in-law.

Boaz's integrity extends not just to providing for their material needs, not just food for their bellies, but this huge load of grain. It is a message of abundance for Naomi. Despite this glitch in the plan, God has been gracious. Naomi thought that she had returned from Moab empty, but the message from Boaz was that she would remain empty no more. Here is a willing Redeemer who is prepared to bring them to a place of fullness. But we're reading, and we're left in suspense. We've got to wait to see if the other guy is going to step in, this closer Redeemer. Is he going to step in and redeem these women? Will it be Boaz, or will it be the unnamed closer relative? And the way it's written, our author is deliberately drawing our attention to this sense of unfinished business, this sense of incompleteness. That is really important in the story. So when Ruth tells Naomi about the measures of barley, she says, he gave me six. There's actually no mention in the original of measures. That word has been provided. He gave me six. And that's significant because six is a number in the Bible that speaks of incompleteness. Seven is the number of completion. And her only receiving six is supposed to emphasize this lack. She has not yet reached the rest that bookends the chapter, rest that comes on the seventh Sabbath day. And of course, this also explains why all of this plan goes on during the night. One commentator puts it like this, symbolically, the whole old covenant period before Christ happens during the night. In the creation of the world, there was evening, and then there was morning. Then there was a first day. Evening came before morning. In both the Old and New Testament, the coming of Christ into the world is portrayed as the coming of the Son of righteousness, who rises with healing in His wings. Christ also rises from the tomb on resurrection morning just as the sun comes up. Everything else happens during the night. That is why Nicodemus came to Jesus during the night. The reason the text highlights the time of day is because Nicodemus is in the dark, and Jesus has to illuminate him. In this story, this story, the bride is going to have to wait until the daytime for the marriage. If we picture the Old Testament situation, the Messiah is coming in the future, but you have to wait. And this is where Boaz is pointing all of us.

He is pointing us to the one who is the greater Redeemer than Boaz. He is pointing us to the one who is a faithful Israelite, a true Son of the covenant God, who in His great kindness and compassion provides for and protects those on whom He has set His love.

[27 : 13] Our Redeemer is the Lord Jesus, the one who is generous, gracious, kind, and through His life of perfect obedience to God's love. Through His integrity, through His atoning death for our sin and His resurrection for our redemption, we have a Redeemer who has done all that is required to bring us back to the Father, to grant us forgiveness, and to give us eternal life. Here's the question.

Have you found the rest that He offers? Have you found the answer to the restlessness that harasses your soul in the course of this short life that we live? The Lord Jesus Christ, our kinsman Redeemer, says, Come to Me, all who are weary and heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Rest for your soul.

Rest from all the striving. Rest from all the striving after the promises of rest that we follow in our culture. We spend ourselves day in and day out trying to find rest through all of the things that our culture is holding out and saying, Follow this promise. Follow this promise. You're heavy, you're weary and heavy laden. Here it is. Here's your rest. And none of it delivers because it can't. It can't bear the weight of our soul. Only one person can do that. The one who went to the cross for our sins, who rose for our redemption, and who can say, If you come, I will give you rest for your soul. And to those of us who have done that, although we are waiting for the fullness of that redemption, the dawning of resurrection light, we do possess it now. Through our union with Christ, we have been redeemed. We are a new creation. So, yes, we're waiting. We're waiting for the fullness of it all, and it's up there in the future someday. But while we wait, we can be confident that that future is bright and that the light of that future shines back into the present. We don't have to strive after these things that the world offers us because we have already in our possession something much better. And we have an even greater assurance of that than Naomi and Ruth did because we know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ that though He was rich, yet for our sake He became poor, so that you, by His poverty, might become rich. So, in your restlessness, whatever the reason, it's to Him that we must go. Wait on Him. Look to Him and hope in Him, our Lord Jesus Christ. Let's pray.