

# RUTH



REDEEMED & SET APART

## RUTH 3

3 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? 2 Is not Boaz our relative, with whose young women you were? See, he is winnowing barley tonight at the threshing floor. 3 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 has finished eating and drinking. 4 But 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.” 5 And she replied, “All that you say I will do.” 6 So she went down to the threshing floor and did just as her mother-in-law had commanded her. 7 And when Boaz had eaten and drunk, and his heart was merry, he went to lie down at the end of the heap of grain. Then she came softly and uncovered his feet and lay down. 8 At midnight the man was startled and turned over, and behold, a woman lay at his feet! 9 He said, “Who are you?” And she answered, “I am Ruth, your servant. Spread your wings over your servant, for you are a redeemer.” 10 And he said, “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. 11 And now, my daughter, do not fear. I will do for you all that you ask, for all my fellow townsmen know that you are a worthy woman. 12 And now it is true that I am a redeemer. Yet there is a redeemer nearer than I.

11 And now, my daughter, do not fear. I will do for you all that you ask, for all my fellow townsmen know that you are a worthy woman. 12 And now it is true that I am a redeemer. Yet there is a redeemer nearer than I. 13 Remain tonight, and in the morning, if he will redeem you, good; let him do it. But if he is not willing to redeem you, then, as the Lord lives, I will redeem you. Lie down until the morning.”

14 So she lay at his feet until the morning, but arose before one could recognize another. And he said, “Let it not be known that the woman came to the threshing floor.” 15 And he said, “Bring the garment you are wearing and hold it out.” So she held it, and he measured out six measures of barley and put it on her. Then she went into the city. 16 And when she came to her mother-in-law, she said, “How did you fare, my daughter?” Then she told her all that the man had done for her, 17 saying, “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.’” 18 She replied, “Wait, my daughter, until you learn how the matter turns out, for the man will not rest but will settle the matter today.”

### Ruth 3

In Late Spring 2007 I asked one of the most transformative or even redeeming questions of my life. Asking this question changed everything. Let me tell you this question: "Iniibig kita. Gusto kong makapiling ka magpakailanman. Maaari mo bang ibigay ang karangalan sa akin sa pagiging aking asawa?"

Yeah, that wasn't very helpful was it. Let me give a little more context and you can figure it out. Imagine a warm and clear evening at an island resort, just me and Joy, two people in their mid-20s falling in love with each other and in a little vine covered booth, I kneel down on one knee, hold up a little box with a diamond ring and say: "Iniibig kita. Gusto kong makapiling ka magpakailanman. Maaari mo bang ibigay ang karangalan sa akin sa pagiging aking asawa?"

Now, you might not catch all the words, but you know the intent. This is a proposal for marriage. Marriage often winds up as quite transformative... sometimes for good, sometimes for bad, often a bit mixed... in the best of circumstances it can wind up being deeply redemptive. And that is what we will see in Ruth 3, but Ruth 3 is not written so that all you single people will be motivated to get married. Ruth chapter 3 will give us a picture of how we can live redemptive lives even in messy situations. But to make sense of it, just like with my question, we will need to peel back some layers of language and culture and see how the decisions made in this story of courtship provide principles of redemptive living across the whole spectrum of life.

We will be picking up in the middle of an amazing story. Pastor David has explained that this story takes place in the time of the Judges... in a particularly dark time in the nation of Israel, when people mostly abandoned God's ideas of right and wrong, and lived more and more like the pagan peoples surrounding them. A time when life was often seen as worthless, when exploitation of all sorts was pervasive, and when true godliness was a rarely seen, even among the supposed people of God. If that sounds more and more relevant to our situation in America today... you are not far wrong.

In the first two chapters we saw Naomi go from having a home and married with married children hoping for grandchildren to destitute, husband and children dead, returning home to Bethlehem with one devoted daughter-in-law (Ruth) and bitter from the experience. And through this time we see God give them protection and provision through Boaz's generosity to Ruth. We saw that **God always accomplishes his sovereign plans through regular people and their faith in Him.** Also that **God honors devotion and a life lived worthy of the gospel.** It is here that we pick up the story in Ruth 3.

Ruth 3 is structured just like Ruth 1 and 2 where there is a repeating pattern of beginning and ending story that places the focus on the middle story, and sometimes there is even a middle point of the middle story that is the divinely inspired author's "point" in this passage. Instead of reading the whole thing at once, I'm going to read this in three chunks, the setup, the main event, and the conclusion (that will setup the situation in the final chapter).

## Pursue Life through Godly Means

**Starting with Naomi's Plan: Ruth 3:1-5**

*3:1 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?"*

There is no one who is quite as dedicated and pushy in the realms of pushing a relationship like a mother who is ready for grandkids. When Naomi says "Should I not seek rest for you" the term for rest is *manoach* (מָנוַח). This is used previously in Ruth 1:9 when Naomi sends both Ruth and Orpah back to their father's households. In both, she has in mind the sense of hope each lady has for her desired future. There are many flavors of this, but we all have some sense of the good life we are aiming at when we grow up. Some of us have already gotten there, others are past that point and have accepted the life we have had, others are still looking ahead. But all of us have some idea of the "good life." That is what Naomi is wanting for Ruth, and her version of the "good life" plan is a husband, and land, in the tribe and family unit that will preserve and protect their interests.

So, Naomi is looking for the good life for Ruth. Nothing wrong with that. She is trying to find a situation for Ruth that goes beyond hand-to-mouth daily living. She wants Ruth's life to be happy and fulfilled. It is all good, and we don't see any sign that Ruth is against this desire. But before we see this as a great idea, let's look a bit more closely at the plan.

*3 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? 2 Is not Boaz our relative, with whose young women you were? See, he is winnowing barley tonight at the threshing floor. 3 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 has finished eating and drinking. 4 But 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." 5 And she replied, "All that you say I will do." (ESV)*

The mention of Boaz as a near relative (*modah/מֹדֵה*) means that he is someone who can be trusted and who will treat Ruth appropriately and with respect.

The statement in vs. 3: *3 Wash therefore and anoint yourself, and put on your cloak* has actually a little more meaning than take a shower and get dressed up nicely. We saw in Chapter 2 that the way Ruth was dressed indicated that she was a widow still mourning her husband... not open for relationships... a hard and fast "it's complicated" status on her Facebook page. But now, Naomi tells her to change her clothes from the widow's outfit to a regular or even nice outfit. She is saying... "it's time for you to move on, go ahead and change your status to 'single.'"

The second half of verse 3: *and go down to the threshing floor, but do not make yourself known to the man until he has finished eating and drinking.* The next step in Naomi's plan is to wait for Boaz to be alone, done with the work day. Wait for him to have a nice meal and a glass of wine so that he is in a good mood. All good and normal things. This is pretty much the exact same approach I took when I popped the question to Joy. Until vs 4.

*4 But 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."*

Wait... what? Instead of going and making the request at a normal time when he is in a good mood and alone and can decide and explain or discuss in a normal fashion, wait until he is already asleep. OK this is sounding pretty sketchy. "And go uncover the place of his feet." This rather unique statement (mostly just used here in Ruth)... the wording is literally, uncover the place of his feet or legs. The reason for this is that there is a euphemism here that is being carefully avoided. And I apologize for the directness, the euphemism, uncover someone's feet means to uncover someone's underwear area. The reason we need to know that, is that there is undressing, but it is phrased to make it clear that this is not making someone truly naked. We need to know that because what is planned to happen is in a very tricky area of social nuance. Ruth is being asked to partially undress Boaz in the middle of the night while he is asleep and then do whatever he asks her to do. In doing this she has not actually done anything illicit yet... but she is standing right at that line. This plan is looking really problematic at this point.

In every Hollywood movie, this situation ends in an R-rated scene. The same is true, or even more so in Israel during the time of the judges. In Israel in the time of judges a pretty, vulnerable woman alone in the middle of the night with a partially undressed powerful man might not even be asked her opinion of what happens next. And Naomi has told Ruth to just say yes to whatever Boaz tells her to do. Now we don't know exactly how Naomi is expecting this to work out. But this plan deliberately puts both of them in a compromising position and seems to be more than a little manipulative, putting Boaz in an ideal situation of temptation and setting up Ruth for some kind of claim on Boaz (whatever the ancient version of a shotgun wedding was).

Now, Naomi has grown a lot from the bitter woman in chapter 1 who declared God as her enemy. She has hope, she is seeing God's work in blessings in her life and praising Him for it. But she still has the determined streak of independence and difficulty trusting the work of God through others. She seems to feel like she needs to entrap Boaz for this to work out. This plan is not built on faith in God... the plan is manipulative and compromising. Now, Ruth agrees with it, probably out of respect, but we will see that she has different intentions when she actually does the plan.

But before we move to see how this works out. I want to say that I appreciate the realness, the normalcy of Naomi. When we go from despair, to having the "good life" almost within reach, it is so tempting to just push it over that mark. I think if we are honest, we have all been tempted at times to do "whatever it takes" to get the life we want. Whether it is compromising morals to get the relationship we want. Or saying what people want to hear (regardless of truth) to make the sale. Playing a little dirty politics to get the outcome we want at work. Doing some unauthorized googling during a test in school. All of us have been tempted to pull a Naomi. And many of us (me included) have fallen for that temptation before. We need to own up to that, and realize, as we will see, that these manipulative plans are both an act of faithlessness to God and an unnecessary hindrance to a positive outcome. Even when we don't fail by deliberate compromise we can also fail by wishful exegesis... trying to make God's promises read like we wish they were and then living selfishly while saying "God told me to" (prosperity theology). And sometimes we will just hold onto our own version of "Manoach" and wallow in self-pity and make ourselves and everyone around us miserable until we get that "good life." Trying to emotionally blackmail the world so that we don't have to submit to the will of God who has chosen not to give us what we want right now. These are all ways we pull a Naomi.

## **Main Point -- Pursuing life should not involve compromising what is good or right**

*<sup>31</sup>What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us? <sup>32</sup>He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things? (Rom 8:31-32 -- ESV)*

God does not withhold the "good life" from us because he is mean, but because his plan is better.

# Redeem Messy Situations with Godly Motives

So, let's see the execution of this rather sketchy plan.

*<sup>6</sup>So she went down to the threshing floor and did just as her mother-in-law had commanded her. <sup>7</sup>And when Boaz had eaten and drunk, and his heart was merry, he went to lie down at the end of the heap of grain. Then she came softly and uncovered his feet and lay down. <sup>8</sup>At midnight the man was startled and turned over, and behold, a woman lay at his feet! (Ruth 3:6-8 -- ESV)*

Ruth does exactly what Naomi has asked.

Here is where the situation has such a possibility to turn bad. Boaz wakes up startled. As would anyone. Any single man in that deep sleep produced by a hard day's work, a nice warm meal and a glass of wine... who then went to sleep alone but then wakes up in the dark partially unclothed with a woman next to him... that is going to need a minute to work out what is going on. This is a genuinely messy situation. This is the kind of situation that if anyone walked up on, both of their reputations would be damaged. This is the kind of situation in which people could make lots of bad assumptions about each other. The idea that Ruth was a prostitute would not be unreasonable in that circumstance.

Here is also the center of the center... this is the key passage that unlocks the chapter.

*<sup>9</sup>He said, "Who are you?" And she answered, "I am Ruth, your servant. Spread your wings over your servant, for you are a redeemer." (Ruth 3:8-9)*

At this point Ruth seems to deviate from Naomi's script in the best possible way. Instead of the indecent invitation that this situation might seem like, and instead of just passively accepting whatever interpretation Boaz brings to mind and just going with it... Ruth rather ingeniously presents her situation and request in such a way that her loyal love for both Boaz and Naomi is clear and instead of appealing to Boaz's more natural or physical desires... she appeals to his godliness.

Let's unpack two key terms: "spread your wings" and "redeemer."

When Ruth says "spread your wings" this phrase is a real trouble to translators... let me illustrate:

ESV: Spread your wings over your servant, NASB: spread your covering over your maid, NIV: Spread the corner of your garment over me; NRSV: spread your cloak over your servant. These translations all provide a more literal translation of " (parasata kenape / פָּרְשֵׁתָּ כְּנָפֶיךָ) where kenape can mean wing, cloak, skirt. The tough thing here, is that both ideas are in use. She is quite literally laying down next to him, having unwrapped his cloak and asking him to cover her with it like a blanket. But to lay down like that conveys the context of a more intimate relationship. The terminology of wings conveys the idea of taking someone under one's protection from the perspective of a specific kind of relationship. Boaz actually uses a nearly identical phrasing in 2:12 when he blesses Naomi, saying: *may your kindness be repaid by the Lord God of Israel from whom (or under whose wings Tachat-Kenapay / תַּחַת־כְּנָפָיו) you have sought refuge.* There the relationship is joining the covenant people of God, here Ruth is seeking the covenant of marriage. The commentator Frederic Bush translates this: "give me the protection of marriage" and the NET bible translates it: "Marry your servant." Somehow in one phrase Ruth has used a physical symbol right in front of them, to ask for marriage, make clear that she understands the sacrifice she is asking from Boaz, while at the same time calling Boaz to follow God's example as one who extends protection and provision to the outsider who seeks it. In essence she says: "I have sought refuge under your God's protection, and now I ask you to take me under your protection." Genius. And not at all manipulative. She is direct, humble, asks without seduction or entrapment. And then she finishes the sentence with an explanation of why she has come to ask this of Boaz.

Her reasoning is that Boaz is a Go'el / גֹּאֵל which is variously translated: ESV: Redeemer, NASB: "Close relative", NRSV: "next-of-kin", NIV: "guardian-redeemer", NET: "guardian of the family interests." Also sometimes called the "kinsman-redeemer."

Pastor David has mentioned this term last week and a way to think about it is that it meant the family attorney, avenger or provider. If someone was harmed by another, it was an avenger, if someone was needed to guard the family interests or to provide help for those in financial trouble to not permanently lose the family's land. In this way, Ruth is looking out not just for herself, but for Naomi. Ruth is asking for Boaz to be her husband and their (Naomi and her) redeemer, purchasing Naomi's family land and keeping it in the family while providing for her. An important note at this point is that when Naomi has directed Ruth to Boaz in this chapter, she did not use this term of him. She used a different more generic term for relative. This request by Ruth seems to be Ruth's idea, not Naomi's. So, Ruth asks Boaz to take the role that would involve purchasing and preserving Naomi's property and line and thus providing not only for her "retirement" but removing the shame of her line and part of the land being cut off.

*<sup>10</sup> And he said, "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. <sup>11</sup> And now, my daughter, do not fear. I will do for you all that you ask, for all my fellow townsmen know that you are a worthy woman. (Ru 3:10-11 -- ESV)*

Note how Boaz sees it. Ruth is not simply looking out for her best life. Ruth was younger, probably attractive, and the sort of person who was impressing the people around her. If she was only concerned with herself, she would have other options. But she is also looking out for Naomi. She is making choices from a position of kindness and care for Naomi and Boaz not just herself. Boaz recognizes this, blesses her, and wholeheartedly accepts her proposal. And in doing so, follows the example of God who is our ultimate redeemer.

We should notice, that from a messy situation, Ruth and Boaz have ended up heading towards a beautiful redemptive resolution. The situation was messed up by sin, a sin-wrecked world, and Satan's plans to destroy the people of God. But this messed up situation has gone from the manipulative entrapment or the shameful exploitation that it could have been. And has turned to the redemption of two destitute women as a man of power and wealth submits to the character of the redeeming God. At its heart, in the characters of Ruth and Boaz we see the concept of *Hesed* or loyal love that honors the relationship with God first and foremost, and seeks the good of the other from a covenant love and commitment.

We too can follow the example of our great redeemer when we bring others to him, (like Ruth was brought to God) and when we live out the little redemptions by entering the messy situations of our lives with a motive of loyal love to God and others. This may be the little redemptions of providing dignity to a person who is scorned by the world due to poverty or addictions. The little redemptions of visiting the sick and providing the comfort of presence in their hard time. The little redemptions of showing attention and showering affection and building up our children who also have a heavenly father who provides for all their needs. The little redemption of being the one person in the office who won't backstab their co-worker to get ahead but will actually help. The little redemption of being the one person in the school who will actually listen to a hurting classmate and not mock them. These little redemptions glorify God as we live out in small ways what he accomplishes in ultimate ways.

Now returning to our story... there is still a problem.

<sup>12</sup> And now it is true that I am a redeemer. Yet there is a redeemer nearer than I.

<sup>13</sup> Remain tonight, and in the morning, if he will redeem you, good; let him do it. But if he is not willing to redeem you, then, as the Lord lives, I will redeem you. Lie down until the morning.” (Ruth 3:12-13)

The problem is that for the role of Go'el (family guardian) it is supposed to be handled by the nearest relative. Boaz wants to fill this role but he will have to get approval from the designated Go'el to do it. Note the statement "as the Lord lives" means that he is really committed to this. You might wonder about the "lie down until morning." If the goal was to avoid temptation why stay together? Well, as it is in most of the world, it is not safe for a young woman to go out by herself at night, and even if Boaz was capable on his own to protect her, it is not wise for Boaz to go with her and leave all of his harvest unattended to be stolen. So, despite the awkwardness of the situation the right call was just to sleep there. And Boaz phrases his direction to Ruth in such a way as to avoid any suggestion of impropriety... it really is just sleep here until morning.

# Trust Wholly in God's Deliverance

Finally we will see the debrief... letting the redeemer redeem.

*<sup>14</sup> So she lay at his feet until the morning, but arose before one could recognize another. And he said, "Let it not be known that the woman came to the threshing floor." <sup>15</sup> And he said, "Bring the garment you are wearing and hold it out." So she held it, and he measured out six measures of barley and put it on her. Then she went into the city. <sup>16</sup> And when she came to her mother-in-law, she said, "How did you fare, my daughter?" Then she told her all that the man had done for her, <sup>17</sup> saying, "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.'" <sup>18</sup> She replied, "Wait, my daughter, until you learn how the matter turns out, for the man will not rest but will settle the matter today." (Ruth 3:14-18)*

Ruth and Boaz get up at dusk (while it is barely light enough to walk), and in an effort to preserve both of their reputations and dignity Boaz not only sends her home but gives her something to bring home. Boaz does this in particular to make clear his intentions to Naomi. This is not a "lets spend the night together... i'll call you..." sort of situation. The Hollywood version of this story involves a one-night stand and then an empty promise that is never fulfilled. But Ruth and Boaz kept to their pure intentions and did not compromise to get the "good life." And Boaz's promise to resolve the situation is proved by sending Ruth home again with a large amount of food. The point of this is to make clear that he is not doing this just for himself, or himself and Ruth... this is to indicate to Naomi that he is working to redeem her situation as well. This is made especially clear because Boaz seems to use Naomi's words in 1:21. There she says that she left for Moab full but returned "empty-handed" and here Boaz tells Ruth not to return to Naomi "empty-handed." This seems to be something of a call-back to let Naomi know that she will not be abandoned but that she will be redeemed as well.

Verse 18 we see again a little of the motherly voice and wisdom showing up. Naomi tells Ruth to pretty literally, sit there and do nothing... "your job is done... let the man work... trust me... he's got it." Anyone who has been with someone in this phase of life knows that Naomi is right. I can remember another guy with a similar motivation... a friend of ours who knew that one of Joy's many talents was making jewelry. We get a call in the early evening. it turns out that this guy was trying to get engaged but something had happened so that the engagement ring would not be ready. So he calls us up, clearly working the problem, and asks if there is any way that Joy can make him a "stand-in" engagement ring. He is a good friend and we were happy to oblige. Joy found a nice pearl, made a ring and had it ready for him by late that evening. But I guarantee you, if we had not been able to do so, he probably had five other plans already forming. This is what Naomi is talking about... Boaz is a man on a mission, and he is the kind of guy that gets the job done. **Just let the redeemer, redeem.**

This winds up being the last time Ruth and Naomi directly speak in this book. From this point Boaz speaks and acts and the story is told about them, but they are recipients in this. This is how God's redemption works. It may take multiple tragedies to get our attention off our own efforts (Naomi and Elimelech had a solution that didn't involve God and they wound up far from him and empty-handed... like the prodigal son), and then it may take months and an entire community to make us realize that deliverance is actually available (look at the patience of God with them, think about the patience of God with the apostles, think about how many times each of us had to hear the gospel before we responded to it), and finally, in an act of true vulnerability we have to ask for help for redemption. No deals, nothing that we bring to the table, we simply go to God and ask for deliverance from our sins, for salvation from their penalty, for a rescue from the brokenness of this world. And when that happens, we can sit down, we can stop working to solve our own salvation... Jesus has it... let him work... trust me... he's got it. Stop trying to earn God's favor, stop fearing that the next sin will make God regret his choice of you, and live in the redemption that he offers. We are not called to good deeds to earn God's love, we are given God's love and out of our love for him we obey and do what is good. That order is incredibly important don't mess it up or you will find yourself drowning in self-righteousness and fear. **Let the redeemer, redeem.**

We have seen in the three principles in the three acts of this chapter:

**Pursue Life through Godly Means**

**Redeem Messy Situations with Godly Motives**

**Trust Wholly in God's Deliverance**

Let's say no to Naomi's temptation. Let's not compromise to get the good life, instead let's follow Jesus' command: "Seek first His [the Father's] kingdom and His righteousness, and all these things will be added to you." Let God's priorities be our priorities and trust that the good life that he provides will be ultimately better than anything we could have gotten on our own.

**Let's stop self-sabotaging, and pursue life through godly means.**

We see secondly that we can redeem messy situations with godly motives. It is so easy to give up on a person with a messy history, or with a long-term sin issue, or a person with needs that we can't fix with a 10 minute conversation and a reasonable cash investment. But when we live out God's loyal love we will see God work in some of the people we might have thought the most unlikely. Just look at Jesus closest disciples and friends... the people that he would tap to lead and support the church included a corrupt exploiter (Matthew), a couple of scruffy fishermen mostly known for getting into fights (the sons of Zebedee), a prostitute (Mary Magdelene), and a terrorist (Simon the Zealot). And of course, the one he chose to reach out to the world was a rabidly self-righteous murderer (Paul). God is in the business of redemption. And he calls us to be in that business with him, to be ambassadors of reconciliation with God. So, lets follow Boaz's example and be the little redeemers that follow the example of our great redeemer.

**Let us live out the loyal love of God in messy situations and who He redeems through us.**

And finally, let us all follow Ruth's example of coming before our great redeemer with empty hands asking for the salvation that we all need. If you have never before really come to that point where you have been vulnerable before God, bringing nothing to him to earn your acceptance. And asked for his deliverance solely because of what Jesus has done for you. Let today be the day when you do that. This isn't magic, you don't need Ruth's perfect phrasing All that is needed is to ask God to save you because of what Jesus did in his death and resurrection. You could pray a prayer like this. "Gracious God thank you for sending your son to die for my sin, to take the penalty for my mistakes, my selfishness. Please save me from my sin. Protect me from the penalty of sin which is eternal separation from you, save me from the power of sin that tries to control my life, and save me from even the presence of sin when I am eternally in your presence. Thank you for your grace to me. Amen." If you just prayed that, or are considering taking this step, come talk to me or to one of the elders or leaders here and we can help you make sense of it.

Now for those of us who have already made this decision, already taken this step of vulnerability before God... hold fast to this. There is so often the temptation after we have become Christian, and seen the Holy Spirit begin His transforming work in our life, and changes from sin and selfishness to love and righteousness, to start to rely on our own goodness for our relationship with God. To move from a reliance on God... a faith that is considered as righteousness (Gen 12) to a self-righteousness that replaces faith. Don't do that... Trust wholly in God's deliverance.

