

Ruth 3

If Ruth was a movie, at the end of chapter two, one image would fade into another as the words “Seven weeks later” appear on the screen. Presumably, Ruth continues to glean in Boaz’s field day after day and presumably, she and Naomi are thankful for a better fate than they feared. Perhaps some of the “wow” factor of God’s provision has faded (how quickly you and I forget God’s provision) even though He is still providing. The story could end here and be a story of God’s care.

But their story is about to get much better.

Then Naomi her mother-in-law said to her, “My daughter, shall I not seek security for you, that it may be well with you? Now is not Boaz our kinsman, with whose maids you were? Behold he winnows barley at the threshing floor tonight.

Chapter two begins with Ruth going to the fields for Naomi. Chapter three begins with Naomi doing something for Ruth. Naomi, who earlier lamented her inability to provide a son who could marry Ruth, has a new matchmaking plan: Boaz.

This is not simply a meddling move on Naomi’s part. She is playing an appropriate role as a mother; she is trying to provide long-term security for her daughter. Significantly, the word for security here can also be translated “rest.” Good marriages provide a place of rest for the husband and wife, and Naomi is confident Boaz could provide that for Ruth.

Note that although Naomi has praised God for remembering kindness towards herself and Ruth, she doesn’t sit around waiting for God’s kindness to magically appear. She will be pro-active and take steps to lay hold of the blessing that God seems to want to provide for them.

Boaz is a legitimate option to fulfill the role of redeemer and the custom described in Deuteronomy 25:5-10. That passage explains that if a man dies and leaves a childless widow, the man’s brother must marry the woman and their firstborn child becomes the heir of the deceased man. (also see Leviticus 25:25-28). Note that Boaz does not have to fulfill that role—he is not the brother—but Naomi realizes he is as good of a chance as they have. And she’s right. He will move beyond the letter of the law to fulfill the spirit of the law.

Wash yourself, therefore, and anoint yourself and put on your best clothes, and go down to the threshing floor, but do not make yourself known to the man until he has finished eating and drinking. It shall be when he lies down, that you shall notice the place where he lies, and you shall go and uncover his feet and lie down; then he will tell you what you shall do.” She said to her, “All that you say I will do.”

Clean up, put on some perfume and your nicest clothes, Naomi instructs, and head down to Boaz's at night. These instructions are not quite as scandalous as they might appear. While she is trying to make herself attractive to Boaz, she is not trying to seduce him. The threshing floor was a public place, something like an open-air pavilion where, at the end of the harvest, individual landowners would sleep by their crop in order to protect it. In all likelihood, a handful of individuals and perhaps families are all sleeping at the threshing floor.

Going at night, however, keeps the conversation quiet. This scenario allows Ruth to talk to Boaz privately but not in so much privacy as , a to invite temptation or legal guilt.

Ruth, for her part, is a model of submission—trusting the wisdom of her mother-in-law. Most of us desperately fight for our independence in making romantic decisions, but the Bible envisions these decisions being made in the context of a healthy community of faith.

So she went down to the threshing floor and did according to all that her mother-in-law had commanded her. When Boaz had eaten and drunk and his heart was merry, he went to lay down at the end of the heap of grain, and she came secretly, and uncovered his feet and lay down. It happened in the middle of the night that the man was startled and bent forward; and behold, a woman was lying at his feet. He said, "Who are you?" And she answered, "I am Ruth your maid. So spread your covering over your maid, for you are a close relative."

As modern readers often recognize, there are sexual overtones here. Not that Boaz and Ruth have sex (again, the threshing floor is more like a public pavilion than a honeymoon suite), but simply that readers recognize the romance and the request being made. It is a highly charged romantic scene that increases the drama of the moment.

Imagine this scene. It is so dark that Boaz doesn't see Ruth at the foot of his bed and can't recognize her when he does. "Who are you?" he says. (They may not have interacted at all in the past two months) She responds with a request.

This request is, in essence, a marriage proposal. Spread your covering over me. It is language that God uses of Israel in Ezekiel 16—"You were at the time for love; so I spread My skin over you and covered your nakedness. I swore to you and entered into a covenant with you." In chapter two, Boaz noted that Ruth placed herself under God's wings, and now she asks to rest under Boaz's wings. "Be the protection that you asked God to provide for me." While not culturally inappropriate, it is a bold request.

We should think of images like this when we think of marriage. The husband is spreading his cloak over his bride. She is vulnerable and he is rough. He offers

protection and she offers beauty. In Genesis, God provided a wife for Adam. Here, He provides a wife for Boaz.

Ephesians 5 also reminds us that when we look at marriages, we should see the relationship between Jesus and the church. What Jesus do for his bride? He cleanses her, beautifies her, makes her his own. He acts with care and tenderness.

How does Jesus relate to his church? We will get a picture of it through watching Boaz here. What is our job as the church, the bride? To recognize our need and wait on him to act. (As a sidenote, some commentators have noted that if Boaz represents the redeemer and Ruth the believer, then Naomi has some interesting parallels to the Holy Spirit, the one who commands us, cares for us, and points us to the redeemer.)

Then he said, “May you be blessed of the Lord, my daughter. You have shown your last kindness to be better than the first by not going after young men, whether poor or rich. Now, my daughter, do not fear. I will do for you whatever you ask, for all my people in the city know that you are a woman of excellence. Now it is true I am a close relative; however, there is a relative closer than I. Remain this night and when morning comes, if he will redeem you, good; let him redeem you. But if he does not wish to redeem you, then I will redeem you, as the Lord lives. Lie down until morning.”

Flattered by Ruth’s request, Boaz still proves the admirable man and determines, as one pastor describes it, not to run ahead of God. He does not shame her for coming, nor does he take advantage of her or overpromise her. He wants to marry Ruth, but he will do it the right way. He is a man of honor and integrity. Life is a series of adult decisions. Boaz doesn’t shy away from one here.

What do we make of this “better” kindness? What could be better than leaving home and people for her mother-in-law? Again, Boaz refers to Ruth’s character (and not her outward beauty) as her most attractive quality. For Boaz, the better kindness is simply that she has not chosen based on fleshly desires, out of lust or desire for riches but because she knows that he is the best choice for her and wants to honor her mother-in-law.

Perhaps Ruth offers a bit of help in 21st century relationships has well. Two thoughts are most evident: 1. Be a Ruth. Put yourself out there a little bit. Don’t wait for a magical moment/person to sweep you off your feet. Risk rejection and get out there; 2. Focus your efforts first and foremost on your character. Worry about becoming the right person rather than on finding the right person.

Boaz promises to take care of the matter. One wonders if Ruth slept peaceful that night or anxious about the future.

So she lay at his feet until morning and rose before one could recognize another; and he said, "Let it not be known that the woman came to the threshing floor." Again he said, "Give me the cloak that is on you and hold it." So she held it, and he measured six measures of barley and laid it on her. Then she went into the city.

Before dawn, Boaz sends Ruth home. If Ruth had stayed sleeping at the threshing floor all night and into the morning, a scandal would have arisen over the matter and made it much more difficult to Boaz to have the needed conversation with the closer relative. 2 Corinthians 8:21 instructs believers to "have regard for what is honorable, not only in the sight of the Lord, but also in the sight of men." Boaz wants to keep this conversation above board. He is committed to preserving her integrity.

Before Ruth leaves, however, Boaz gives her a parting gift of some grain. The term "six measures" either refers to six ephahs of grain (approximately 80 pounds, an overwhelming gift and one difficult to carry home) or six servings by whatever measuring portion was on hand.

Either way, Boaz's gift says something. Practical gifts can say a lot, and this one says, "I'm serious about my commitment and I really do care about you and your family."

When she came to her mother-in-law, she said, "How did it go, my daughter?" And she told her all that the man had done for her. She said, "These six measures of barley he gave to me, for he said, 'Do not go to your mother-in-law empty handed.'" Then she said, "Wait, my daughter, until you know how the matter turns out; for the man will not rest until he has settled it today."

Ruth arrives home in the wee hours of the morning and Naomi is there, waiting for a report. Ruth provides us, the readers, with one new piece of information in that Boaz gave the grain to Ruth in large part to care for Naomi as well. Again, we see Boaz's kindness and level of commitment. He is thinking of caring for the entire family and recognizes Naomi's involvement in this process.

You can almost hear Naomi's sigh of relief and see her smile when she hears this news and sees Ruth's shawl full of grain. Quickly, Naomi moves to confident assurance. Perhaps Ruth is a bit anxious (understandable after the man she knows and trusts says, "I can't guarantee you anything"), but Naomi answers this anxiety. "Wait," she says, "He'll take care of it."

As Sinclair Ferguson reminds us, this moment is a powerful picture of Jesus as our redeemer. In the Word, Jesus has made some incredible promises to us, his church and brothers and sisters—

- "I am preparing a place for you" (John 14)
- We are saved forever (Hebrews 7)

- “He who began a good work with be faithful to complete it.” (Philippians 1)
- He will present us before God holy and blameless and beyond reproach (Colossians 1)
- He will defeat all evil and the enemy (Revelation 20)
- He is coming quickly (Revelation 22)

The list goes on and on. Boaz was Ruth’s redeemer and makes promises to her. Naomi says, “Don’t worry, he will do it.” Jesus is our redeemer and makes promises to us. The message of the Holy Spirit, the Word of God, and the believers who have already died is the same, “Don’t worry. He will do it.” The redeemer is coming. He is good and kind and strong and will do exactly what he said he would do.

Suggested Study Outline¹

- I. Pray
- II. Backdrop—What’s come before (recall last week)
- III. Read Passage
- IV. Exploratory Questions
 - a. What do we see of God in this passage?
 - b. What do we see of man in this passage?
 - c. What’s the most important word in the passage?
 - d. Why is this kindness “better than the first?”
 - e. Do you read this and think there’s anything too shady going on? Is Boaz drunk? Is there sexual immorality present?
 - f. When you hear the word “redeemer,” what comes to mind? How would you define that word?
- V. Application Questions
 - a. How does God call you to action through this passage this week?
 - b. Does this passage speak to the way you should carry yourself in your romantic relationships? How so?
 - c. When do you wait on God and when do you act? What are good rules of thumb in this topic? What open doors do you walk through and what do you walk past?
 - d. Is there anywhere in your life where you are running ahead of God just because an open door seems to be in front of you?
 - e. Boaz and Ruth’s character seems to drive their decision-making moment by moment. Are you facing any decisions today? What role should your character play in them?
 - f. What’s your story of the Redeemer “spreading his cloak” over you?
 - g. Do you think of Christ as your redeemer who is tender and generous to you? What difference should that make for you?
 - h. What is your “role” in this stage of life and how are you playing it?
 - i. Would people describe you as a man (or woman) of your word? If you say you’re going to do it, will it always be done?
- VI. Other questions/thoughts
- VII. So what we’ve seen here is that...
 - a. As humans, we pray *and* act. Naomi makes a plan to provide for Ruth. Ruth boldly asks for what she needs. Boaz responds to Ruth’s act and plans to finish the task the right way. None of them just sit around waiting.
 - b. Boaz is a powerful picture of a redeemer. The redeemer commits himself to protect and provide, acting with tenderness and determining to do whatever it takes to bring the bride into his family and give her what she needs. This is what Jesus has done for us.
- VIII. Pray

¹ The questions here are suggestions. Pick the questions you want to use or create your own. The goal is to: 1) Get at the true meaning of the text; 2) Engage the student; 3) Push the student to apply the truth of the text. In addition, use sessions like this to ensure the student believes the Gospel and could study Scripture for himself/herself.