

Ruth 3:1-18 // From Ruin to Redemption

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[0 : 00] Note the place where he is lying. Then go and uncover his feet and lie down.! He will tell you what to do. I will do whatever you say, Ruth answered.

! In the middle of the night, something startled the man.

He turned, and there was a woman lying at his feet. Who are you? he asked. I am your servant, Ruth, she said. Spread the corner of your garment over me, since you are a guardian-redeemer of our family.

The Lord bless you, my daughter, he replied. This kindness is greater than that which you showed earlier. You have not run after the younger men, whether rich or poor.

And now, my daughter, don't be afraid. I will do for you all you ask. All the people of my town know that you are a woman of noble character.

[1 : 18] Although it is true that I am a guardian-redeemer of our family, there is another who is more closely related than I. Stay here for the night, and in the morning, if he wants to do his duty as your guardian-redeemer, good, let him redeem you.

But, if he is not willing, as surely as the Lord lives, I will do it. Lie here until morning. So she lay at his feet until morning, but got up before anyone could be recognized.

And he said, No one must know that a woman came to the threshing floor. He also said, Bring me the shawl you are wearing and hold it out. When she did so, he poured into it six measures of barley and placed the bundle on her.

Then he went back to town. When Naomi came to her mother-in-law, when Ruth came to her mother-in-law, Naomi asked, How did it go, my daughter? Then she told her everything Boaz had done for her, and added, He gave me these six measures of barley, saying, Don't go back to your mother-in-law empty-handed.

Then Naomi said, Wait, my daughter, until you find out what happens. For the man will not rest until the matter is settled today.

[2 : 38] This is the word of the Lord. Ruth, thank you for reading that. And it would be a help to me if you could keep your Bibles open at Ruth chapter 3.

It's on page 269 of the Church Bibles. And if you find it helpful, there's an outline inside the notice sheet just to show where we're going as we look at this great story together.

But let's ask for God's help as we turn to His Word. Let's pray. Heavenly Father, we thank you for this opportunity and the gift of your Spirit.

We ask that He will open your Word to our hearts this morning and open our hearts to your Word.

For we ask in Jesus' name. Amen. Well, you might be someone quite unfamiliar with the Bible.

Maybe you're here as a guest, maybe because of the baptism or just looking in on Christian things.

And you hear this story from 3,000 years ago and you're thinking, well, it's a nice story, but what do I do with this?

[3 : 40] Is this Christian dating advice? What is going on? What's it got to do with me? And what's it got to do with God? But as we get into it, I hope we'll see that this is a really profound story for us to engage with.

We all have questions and two fundamental questions that we might ask in our lives are what would it look like to trust God? And is God worth trusting?

What would a life look like for me to trust Him? And is He worth trusting? In fact, whenever we consciously do what we're aware that the Bible would say we shouldn't do or we don't do what the Bible says we should do, it's because we don't trust God in those moments.

Whenever we sin, we're believing something about God that He's not trustworthy. We're creatures of desire and deep down we tend to think in our hearts that living God's way will not make us happy.

We don't always desire to live God's way. Not least in areas that are very important to us, areas like money and sex and power where ideas like purity and faithfulness with our sexuality and sacrificial giving with our money and humble servanthood of others with our power, they might sound virtuous but for us we doubt that they really are the way to joy and fulfillment in our lives.

[5 : 09] So can you really trust God that living His way is the pathway to joy? Well this book Ruth can help us because we see people on a journey with God from ruin to redemption, from emptiness to fullness and on that journey we see them making good choices, people making good choices, doing things God's way, by God's word and what we see is the outcome of those decisions is a beautiful life, a joyful life, trusting God and enjoying His provision.

There's a verse in a psalm written long after Ruth, Psalm 37 verse 4 and it says this, take delight in the Lord and He will give you the desires of your heart.

Take delight in the Lord and He will give you the desires of your heart. And long before those words were written here in Ruth we're meeting people who stepped out in faith and believed that and they give us a picture of what it might look like in our lives.

So let's pick up the story so far in Ruth. I'm just going to do a quick recap whether or not you are here. We're in the Old Testament and God's people are living in the promised land, the land that's now around Jerusalem.

But it's the time of the judges which was a terrible time in the history of God's people. It was not a safe time. There was no king who loved God and led the people to follow God. So they all just did what was right in their own eyes.

[6 : 39] Israel was a dangerous place. It was under judgment and we know it was under judgment because at the beginning of Ruth chapter 1 we heard there was a famine and that was a way of God withholding blessing from the land because people had turned from him.

And then we met Naomi and her husband Elimelech at the beginning of chapter 1 and they left Bethlehem in the famine and they went out of the promised land to a country called Moab which was away from the people of God.

So they set up life away from God's people and away from worship of God. And their two sons marry pagan women, Moabite women. And then Elimelech and Naomi's two sons died.

So Naomi was left with two daughters-in-law Orpah and Ruth and the message of chapter 1 was return to God. When you find that your life is empty without God return to Him.

And so we saw that Naomi resolved when she heard that there was blessing back in Bethlehem to go back to the land which is her way of going back to God in faith. And as she did that of her daughters-in-law Orpah made the sensible choice and said I'm going to go back to my family in Moab.

[7 : 46] But Ruth made a decision of faith and said where you go I will go and your people will be my people and your God will be my God. So Ruth goes to the land with Naomi and they arrive in Bethlehem.

So chapter 1 was about returning. Last week chapter 2 was about what you find when you return to God. And we saw that what you find that God provides for you is a redeemer. Ruth went out one morning looking for grain to glean leftover grain in the harvest fields and she finds herself in a field and behold it's owned by this righteous man Boaz.

And we met him last week he's the dude of dudes he arrives at the field and righteousness just flows out of this man. And he greets his workers in the morning the Lord be with you and as someone said last week suddenly Ruth got very Anglican because they all responded they said the Lord bless you and also with you and then Boaz they didn't say and also with you and Boaz meets Ruth and he protects her and he praises her and he sends her home to Naomi with as much grain as she can carry and Naomi her mother-in-law is astounded at the kindness of God that they found grain.

We saw a man who doesn't see God's law as onerous like paying your taxes and you've got to do it but you know what have I got left over to enjoy myself? Here is a man who sees God's law as something to go above and beyond with and he's overflowing generous.

He's the man you want to be and you end up wishing by the end of chapter 2 if only Boaz owned the whole of Israel everyone would be safe and that's the backdrop to what we find in chapter 3.

[9 : 26] So our first point this morning is Naomi's ambiguous start as she sends Ruth to the threshing floor. You see Naomi's concern in verse 1 have a look at chapter 3 verse 1 One day Ruth's mother-in-law Naomi said to her my daughter I must find a home for you where you will be

well provided for.

So Naomi hatches a plan in verse 2 she remembers that Boaz is their relative and he's going to be at the threshing floor tonight and they would go to the threshing floor with the barley that they'd harvested and it was the place where they extracted through treading the barley and using animals to tread the barley and sometimes tossing it in the wind they got the kernel out of the barley that was the valuable thing and they got the straw for the animals and they got rid of the chaff that's what the threshing floor is they're late at night they're working but they're happy because they brought the harvest in remember they'd had a famine they're in high spirits and it was a place where the men celebrated and they slept there to guard the harvest it was also a place known for prostitution we know that from Hosea chapter 9 men in high spirits drinking their bellies money to spend not a safe place for a woman to go but Naomi decides to send Ruth there to see Boaz and look at verse 3 she says wash put on perfume and get dressed in your best clothes then go down to the threshing floor but don't let him know you were there until he's finished eating and drinking when he lies down note the place where he is lying then go and uncover his feet and lie down he will tell you what to do what's going on we don't know

I'm a bit dubious about Naomi's plan here the more I've thought about this week the more dubious I've got the narrator though doesn't tell us that Naomi is being inappropriate in her favour let's remember she returned to Bethlehem seeking the Lord's help and at the end of chapter 2 she was thrilled by the Lord's kindness and here she's sending Ruth not just to any man she's sending her to Boaz who she knows is their relative and as the relative there comes obligation duty and there's cultural background to that so we learnt last week that Boaz is not just a relative he is a relative redeemer a kinsman redeemer what's going on there is that for Israel at that time there was a law called the Leveret Law that if a couple got married and the man died before they had children and he had an unmarried brother it was the duty of the brother to marry the widow and the firstborn son that they have would inherit the name and the land of his uncle who had died before he could have children now I know that sounds really weird to many of us but for them at that time the land is very closely tied for them with the relationship they have with God he's rescued them from slavery he's given them the land and so it was vital that for a family where the man died young somebody carried on the name so that the inheritance of the land that was apportioned for them could be passed on to future generations so it was to protect the families and protect the widows and provide for them now we don't understand fully what duty

Boaz would have had for that because he's clearly not the brother of Elimelech Naomi's husband who died he's a more distant relative but clearly there's some hope that he has some kind of obligation for that and Naomi is sending Ruth to the threshing floor to a man who under God's law can redeem them she's looking for God's kindness in her life that's okay at the same time it is a bit questionable isn't it what Naomi does if this was just about family duty why couldn't Ruth ask Boaz in the field in the daytime with other people around why couldn't Naomi have gone to see Boaz and asked why send Ruth to Boaz at night washed and dressed to impress and with perfume on where she won't be recognised in the dark to a place known for prostitution and the story gets told with these shady details uncover his feet well that's ambiguous we're not sure whether how much of his legs are being talked about there and she says lie down he will tell you what to do there's a lot of lying down in this chapter which is a euphemism in the bible and yet we know through the chapter that nothing untoward goes on ultimately so it's ambiguous what Naomi is trying to do here the question

I think it's reasonable to ask is in her anxiety for Ruth and her to be provided for is she trying to give God a helping hand she's creating a situation that could have gone really wrong and it means we now accompany a young Moabite woman a young Moabite widow on the most tense and perilous night of her life so our second point is Ruth's crucial request as she makes her intentions clear so in verse 5 Ruth says to Naomi I will do whatever you say and she heads to the threshing floor verse 6 and she does what Naomi asks she waits for Boaz to finish his dinner and have a drink his heart is merry though that doesn't mean he was drunk he's in good spirits and it's harvest time and in verse 7 he goes to lie down at the far end of the grain pile and then look at verse 7 Ruth approached quietly uncovered his feet and lay down verse 8 in the middle of the night something startled the man he turned and there was a woman lying at his feet it's actually you know behold if you were here last week remember we had

[15 : 57] Ruth's working in the field and behold look there's Boaz and here Boaz is asleep and something starts him he wakes up and behold there's a woman lying at his feet behold the woman who are you he asked verse 9 I am your servant Ruth she said spread the corner of your garment over me since you are a guardian redeemer of our family and so I take it what Ruth is doing here is everything they only asked her to do but in what she says there she completely redeems the situation she says spread the corner of your garment over me he's got garment to spare she's uncovered his feet but the same phrase is used elsewhere in the Bible for will you marry me and more than that it's the same phrase that is translated in chapter 2 about spreading your wings over me and Boaz used that phrase of Ruth about her attitude to God he said he prayed he prayed about Ruth may you be richly rewarded by the Lord the God of Israel under whose wings you have come to take refuge now Ruth is giving him his phrase back she's saying you know that prayer you prayed for me that the

Lord would reward me as I took refuge under his wings well you can be the answer to your own prayer if you let me take refuge under your wings through marriage there are great moments in life aren't there where you realize you can be the answer to your own prayer praying that a friend or a family member would meet a Christian who would tell them about Jesus and then realizing I can tell them about Jesus or praying that someone in church who you know is lonely praying they would have a friend and then thinking I could be that friend or praying that the Lord will raise up more workers for the harvest field and draw more people into ministry and then thinking would it be appropriate for me to answer that prayer myself and explore stepping into full time gospel work well Boaz here is being invited by Ruth to be the answer to the prayer he prayed in chapter two by marrying her could he spread his wings over her so that the

Lord is providing for her through him and from Naomi we had all that ambiguity in setting the scene but Ruth here ensures that nothing improper is to happen at the threshing floor on her account she wants Boaz to fulfill all righteousness and marry her does Naomi need to learn something from Ruth here about what it looks like to trust God's sovereignty that you don't need to force God's hand you don't need to do things that are under hand you can trust God that he will do things in his timing the right way at the same time Ruth is this great model of trusting God she doesn't just stay at home and pray I presume she did pray for the Lord's provision but she steps out in faith doing things right by God but pushing on doors to see if God will sovereignly ordain things to provide for her will he move the heart of Boaz to redeem her she's not the most attractive proposition she comes already with a mother-in-law not even her mum what will

Boaz do she wants to be righteous and now we turn to Boaz in the dead of night a powerful man has woken up to find a defenseless woman in her best clothes with perfume on lying at his feet and nobody else knows that she's there will he share Ruth's purity of motive well that's our third point Boaz's magnificent promise as he resolves to be righteous just think about the opportunity that Boaz has here in the time of the judges there are no laws you do whatever you want in Israel he's wealthy he's powerful he's on his home turf and we see in our culture what men do who are wealthy and powerful with women who are vulnerable everyone works for Boaz around him Ruth is lying next to him she's a younger woman she's come in her best clothes she's wearing perfume does she want to seduce him it's dark enough that he can't see who she is which presumably means it's dark enough to get away with whatever he likes he's had a drink there's no me too movement in Israel and this is a foreign woman this is a woman with very little status most of us in our life need to go out of our way to avoid temptation that doesn't even come close to this a fraction of this temptation we need our own personal legalisms personal legalisms that we we don't impose on other people and look down on them because they don't follow our rules to avoid temptation but ones that are sensible and helpful for us

I think of a friend who dropped by his girlfriend's flat one evening and when he went round unexpectedly his girlfriend was at home on her own he didn't realize and she invited him in innocently and he said no no no I won't come in because no one else is there and she said well it's fine just come in and he said you don't know how sinful my heart is and he wouldn't go in personal legalisms to avoid a fraction of this kind of temptation well for Boaz here he's been put in a situation where there is obvious opportunity how magnificent is it to see a man just do the right thing look at verse 10 the Lord bless you my daughter he replied this kindness is greater than that which you showed earlier you have not run after the younger men whether rich or poor and now my daughter don't be afraid I will do for you all you ask all the people of my town know that you are a woman of

noble character and then he adds in verse 12 which gives tension to what's going on that though he has a certain right to be the redeemer and step in and marry her there is another who would have that right first in other words by resolving to do things

[22 : 33] God's way and not their own way Boaz and Ruth at this point have no guarantees that things will work out how they would like them to go and yet they still trust God so in verse 13 he says tomorrow I'll see if he will redeem you and if not as surely as the Lord lives I will redeem you lie down until the morning so nothing untoward happens and verse 14 she lay at his feet until morning but got up before anyone could recognize could be recognized and he said no one must know that a woman came to the threshing floor so he ensures she's got no disgrace and that he's beyond reproach it's such a good moment isn't it he has covered himself in glory it's just so good when people do the right thing when people see that God's word is good and people want to be remembered and known for being uncompromising about being godly and just keeping

God's word whatever anyone else is doing just keep God's word and we see the goodness of God's word don't we in the way that it means people are protected and provided for but is God worth trusting in all of that he's promised for us that he promised for them that there would be a redeemer in the land we'll see that in a moment he's made promises for us that Jesus will return and make all things right in the future and he calls us today to trust Jesus and live our lives depending on him and waiting for him is he worth trusting we'll have a look at point four Ruth's departure from form as God begins a better story well we looked at this chapter last week as a staff team and we were asking what is going on here in the bigger plan of God's redemption of his people we know that Naomi and Ruth are in need but this is the time of the judges and the people of God are in need as well they've been waiting for a promised one who would come and through this promised one not just the people of God will be blessed but all peoples on earth will be blessed through him and he will be the seed of Abraham he'll be a descendant of Abraham and he'll be in the line of Judah Abraham's great grandson and he's going to lead God's people into blessing and yet things are so bleak for the people of God and then come along this godly couple and in their stories through this ordinary couple Boaz and Ruth God starts putting right the complete mess that humanity has made so let's look at Boaz here we know the redeemer that God will send is meant to come from the line of Judah but in one of the most horrible episodes in the book of Genesis not one in the children's Bible we just gave to Asher Judah had a son and he married a woman Tamar and then he died and Judah through a long story wouldn't provide one of his other sons to be the redeemer and marry Tamar to provide a child for her and to expose what a hypocrite Judah was Tamar dressed as a prostitute and went and met Judah and he slept with her so Judah would take the opportunity as a powerful man to have sex with a prostitute but he wouldn't provide a redeemer for someone in his family and now we've got Boaz here descended from Judah and he has a woman in this story whom he calls his daughter whom he doesn't recognize who comes to him at night at the threshing floor and he says no to the opportunity to abuse his position for sex and he says yes to providing her with the kinsman redeemer that she needs here's a fresh start for the people of God and then you've got Ruth she's from Moab and in Genesis 19 you get one of the other worst chapters in the history of people in the origins in Genesis Abraham's nephew Lot fled from Sodom and lived in a cave with his two daughters and his two daughters were fearful because they had no husband and they had no children and concerned about that they decided that the solution would be to get their dad Lot drunk and the eldest daughter went in and slept with him and she became pregnant and she called her son Moab and he became the father of the Moabites and now here is Ruth descended from that woman from Moab concerned like that woman was that she has no husband and no children and sent by her mother-in-law to lie with an older man who's had a drink who calls her his daughter and instead she maintains her purity and she invites him to be righteous and marry her and all that Lot's daughter got so wrong here is God putting right through this young Moabite woman and as God with these two people gives a fresh start there are these echoes of Eden as a lonely man wakes up and finds that

[28 : 12] God has provided him with his perfect match verse 11 Boaz says Ruth is a woman of noble character and in chapter 2 verse 1 we heard that he was a man of standing and it's the same phrase they are a worthy man and a worthy woman could it be as we hear that that God could use this union of these two people who each give their people a fresh start could he use them to bring a fresh start for the world to bring into the world his promised redeemer the Christ we'll see next week

that's exactly what he's doing in chapter 4 as we see that Christ David will be descended from Boaz and Christ Jesus will be descended from David as though this story is saying it's dark times in this world but in these dark times the time of the judges the terrible times let's just hone in on one family and let's see how

God is intricately carefully at work to give a fresh start to put things right that have been put wrong and provide his promised redeemer and through that redeemer there'll be a fresh start for everyone Ruth and Boaz's descendant the Lord Jesus he's the one that we're called to trust today stick with him and wait for him and Naomi needs to learn to wait for God as well so that we come back to our fifth point Naomi's lessons in faith as she waits for God's redeemer to provide so Boaz sends Ruth home with six measures of barley that's a ridiculous amount of barley hard to carry he fills her garment with it he puts it on her back to struggle home with and Naomi hears Ruth say in verse 17 why she has it with her that Boaz has a message for her that he said don't go back to your mother-in-law empty-handed in other words trust God's provision from his redeemer she said she was empty in chapter 1 but here is a man from God who wants her to hear that God will fill her emptiness and she has learned not to force things from God but to wait verse 18 Naomi said wait my daughter until you find out what happens for the man will not rest until the matter is settled today and at the beginning of the chapter she said she wanted to find rest for Ruth but now she knows that she can tell Ruth to rest because she knows God's man won't rest until he's resolved everything let's just wait and let's trust him so let me ask could we look at Ruth and Boaz and be inspired by this picture of doing things right by God and trusting him we've seen Ruth stepping in to be this instrument of God's kindness for her mother-in-law and trusting that if she does things right by God step by step gleaning asking seeking that God will provide and we've seen Boaz what's Boaz doing here he's effectively he's saying to God which any of us could say he's saying to God God I want to submit my own desires to whatever is your will for my life because I trust that your will is truly what's best for me and the way I'm going to do that is by showing your kindness in this situation that you've put before me and trusting that you will lead me into the future whatever that looks like and we see from Naomi that God is worth waiting for she's on a journey to trust him and by verse 18 she's the one urging Ruth to wait let's just wait he'll do it she can rest in God because God's redeemer won't rest take delight in the Lord and wait patiently for him and he will give you the desires of your heart let's pray together just a moment of quiet to reflect on how God's been speaking to us personally through these verses we praise you gracious and mighty heavenly father that you could be at work even in the midst of dark times to make all things right we praise you that you are good for your promises and that your promises for a man after your own heart who would come from the line of Judah and rescue your people were fulfilled and here in Boaz and Ruth we have this glimpse of you putting all things right we thank you that we're not bound by our ancestry or our past mistakes and that in Ruth and Boaz we have this wonderful picture of obedient trust heavenly father would you inspire us and would your spirit be at work in our hearts that we would live lives that acknowledge that you are good for your promises and would you help us to live by your word knowing that it is good for we ask in Jesus name amen