

Ruth 3

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 17 November 2024

Preacher: Nathan Raynor

[0:00] A very good morning to you all. Please join me in Ruth chapter 3. In Ruth chapter 1, verses 1-5, the narrator established for us the conflict for the story.

There we read, In the days when the judges ruled, there was a famine in the land, and a man of Bethlehem in Judah went to sojourn in the country of Moab. This was east of Israel. He and his wife and his two sons. So they flee away to find food. The name of the man, verse 2 says, was Elimelech, and the names of his wife, Naomi, and the names of his two sons were Malon and Chilion.

They were Ephrathites from Bethlehem in Judah. They went into the country of Moab and remained there. But Elimelech, verse 3, right into the story, the husband of Naomi died, and she was left with her two sons.

These took Moabite wives. The name of the one was Orpah, and the name of the other, Ruth. They lived there about ten years. And both Malon and Chilion died.

[1:38] So that the woman was left without her two sons and her husband. So we have these three widows left, and the story is centered at this moment on Naomi, who has just about everything taken away from her.

But she hears that the famine is over in Bethlehem, and she decides to return to her hometown. Her daughters-in-law, who seem to have great affection for her, begin to accompany her.

But she pleads with them to return to their families. And Orpah does so back to her family and to the gods of Moab. But Ruth, in chapter 1 and verse 16, says, Do not urge me to leave you or to return from following you.

For where you go, I will go, and where you lodge, I will lodge. Your people shall be my people, and your God my God. And this is, as I have suggested, perhaps the moment of Ruth's conversion. Maybe it had happened prior to that, but there's certainly this declaration that she will commit herself to Naomi, but also to her people, and of most importance to God, to Yahweh, the one true and living God.

[2:59] I've told you that the overarching theme of this narrative is the providence of God, his sovereign working of all circumstances for the good of his people.

That we get to witness it in the lives of the characters of this drama. And it serves us so beautifully to see it all unfolded, right? We can see how all the details work out, and perhaps it encourages us in our lives.

We see a little hint of God's providential work at the end of chapter 1. Now, remember that Naomi and Ruth have no means of provision, but we see in verse 22 that Naomi returns, and Ruth the Moabite, her daughter-in-law with her, who returned from the country of Moab, and they came to Bethlehem at the beginning of barley harvest.

So, the harvest is coming in. The provision is being collected. And that sets us up for the next scene. At the beginning of chapter 2, Ruth makes a plan and asks Naomi's permission to take advantage of the gleaning laws so that they might have food.

The gleaning laws allowed for people who did not own land to gather what was left behind by the harvesters, right? The little mistakes that were being made, the things that were being dropped.

[4:22] They were meant to be left for those less fortunate. Ruth finds herself in the field of a man named Boaz, who is carefully introduced as a relative of Naomi's in chapter 2 and verse 1.

He takes notice of Ruth, and he generously grants her the ability to continue gleaning his field through the harvest, and he gives her protection.

He feeds her. He invites her to a meal, and even instructs the harvesters to leave plenty for her sake, leave behind things for her to gather.

And Ruth responds in chapter 2, beginning in verse 10 and following, by falling on her face, bowing to the ground, and saying to Boaz, Why have I found favor in your eyes that you should take notice of me since I am a foreigner?

But Boaz answers her, All that you have done for your mother-in-law since the death of your husband has been fully told to me, and how you left your father and mother and your native land and came to a people that you did not know before.

[5:33] Your great kindness has been told to me, and so he's being kind in response. And then verse 12 says, He says to her, The Lord repay you for what you have done, and a full reward be given you by the Lord, the God of Israel, under whose wings you have come to take refuge.

And then Ruth replies, I have found favor in your eyes, my Lord, for you have comforted me and spoken kindly to your servant, though I am not one of your servants.

And then chapter 2 concludes, So she, Ruth, kept close to the young women of Boaz, gleaning until the end of the barley and wheat harvest, which would have been about a two-month period of time.

And she lived with her mother-in-law. So beginning in the final verse of chapter 1 to the final verse of chapter 2, we see that God has provided, He has been providential in His care for Naomi and Ruth.

He has not done so apart from human agency. All three characters, Naomi, Ruth, and Boaz, are presented making decisions and acting, but we ought not fail to notice that God is the primary character that the narrator intends for us to see orchestrating the care of these two widows.

[7:06] Now, they have temporal provision, but how long will this last? How are Naomi and Ruth to be cared for long term?

The space between chapter 2 and chapter 3 should leave us asking this question. It was certainly on the mind of Naomi, as we shall see.

Now, remember, there's nothing for them as widows, right? There's some things in the law that are going to be a help to them. How is it that they're going to survive long term?

It's a question on the table. But now, before we can read the chapter before us, we need to understand a few things about the laws concerning the redemption of property, which you can read about if you'd like to in Leviticus chapter 25, and the laws about leverate marriage, which is a Latin word from which we get the term brother-in-law.

It actually means brother marriage. It's found in Deuteronomy chapter 25. So, redemption of property laws and leverate marriage laws.

[8:25] Now, rather than reading from these two chapters and then me laboring to explain the laws to you myself, I came across a tidy little summary, and so I'm going to read that tidy little summary to you, which I just believe is going to serve us better this morning than my long explanation would.

So, three points, kind of summarizing these two categories of law. So first, when an Israelite family became very poor and had to sell their land to survive, the nearest male relative, the kinsman, redeemer, they were called, had the responsibility of rescuing them from poverty by buying their land back and restoring it to the family.

This was called redemption of property. Secondly, if they'd become so poor that they had to sell themselves into slavery, a rich relative had to rescue them by buying their freedom.

And this, too, was called redemption. You can read about that further in Leviticus 25. Finally, if a man died leaving his widow without children, this is the situation that Ruth and Naomi had found themselves in, their nearest male relative had to step in and marry his widow and enable her to have children so they could inherit their father's property and keep it in the family, which was this third kind of redemption.

So there's a little summary of Old Testament law going on there. Again, Leviticus 25 and Deuteronomy 25, which helps us, sets us up, right?

[10:04] So with that arsenal of knowledge, let's read Ruth chapter 3 and consider it together. Before I read it, let me remind you, beloved, that

this is God's word to us written for his glory and our good.

And so we do well to listen to it in order to believe its promises and obey its commands. 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?

Is not Boaz our relative with whose young women you were? 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 has finished eating and drinking. But when he lies down, observe the place where he lies. And she replied, All that you say, I will do. So she went down to the threshing floor and did just as her mother-in-law had commanded her. 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.

[11:18] At midnight, the man was startled and turned over and behold, a woman lay at his feet. He said, Who are you? And she answered, I am Ruth, your servant.

Spread your wings over your servant, for you are a redeemer. 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.

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. And now it is true that I am a redeemer.

Yet there is a redeemer nearer than I. 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. So she lay at his feet until the morning, but arose before one could recognize another. And he said, Let it be known that the woman came, let it not be known that the woman came to the threshing floor.

[12:28] Important distinction. 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.

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, 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.

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. Well, this chapter largely develops the story for what will happen in the next chapter.

It's really setting us up for this final scene in this narrative. But there are some matters that are worth paying careful attention to this morning rather than piling the two chapters together.

So we're going to do so and we're going to do it in the following outline. I'm a little proud of this outline. Are you ready for it? Number one, a plan. Number two, a proposition.

[13:37] And number three, a promise. Yes, it alliterates. I think preachers are really happy about alliteration because we read a lot of really good commentaries written by brilliant men that alliterate things so we feel like maybe a little smart when we manage to pull it off on our own.

Okay, so number one, a plan. And we see this in verses one through five, right? Naomi says to Ruth, my daughter, should I not seek rest for you that it may be well with you?

So at the end of this harvest period, she asks this question and she has a plan to follow it. I want to take the longest pause from our narrative at this point.

Maybe the most helpful, relevant piece for us today at this point other than just understanding the story for what will happen in the next chapter.

I want us to think a little bit together about rest. Naomi says to Ruth, my daughter, should I not seek rest for you that it may be well with you?

[14:52] When she pleads with Ruth and Orpah to return to their families, this is what Naomi says to them, the Lord grant that you may find rest, each of you in the house of her husband, right?

Implying that there should be another husband for them having been widowed. In the Bible, rest indicates completeness or wholeness.

Think about God resting on the seventh day. The world has been created and it is as it should be, right? Everything is good, good, good, and very good.

Recall Naomi's words upon her return to Bethlehem, right? There are people who are recognizing her. They're saying, isn't this Naomi?

Which means pleasant. And she says in chapter 1 and verse 20, do not call me Naomi, call me Mara, which means bitter.

[15:55] For the Almighty has dealt very bitterly with me. I went away full and the Lord has brought me back empty.

It's a picture of a woman not at rest. So both of them, Naomi and Ruth, as we see them at the beginning of chapter 3, are not at rest.

But Naomi loves her daughter-in-law and doesn't want her to remain this way. Now, I am not here arguing, please hear me carefully, that any unwearied woman cannot be whole.

That's not at all what I'm trying to say to you this morning. You most certainly can and should find your full satisfaction in the Lord. The narrator in recording Naomi's comments is speaking of Ruth's temporal wholeness in a day when her well-being depended on provision and the prospect of progeny, of offspring.

But I believe he is also tapping the larger rest narrative that we find in the Bible. It's so very cool as we read through these narratives to understand that this scripture ultimately has a single author, right?

[17:12] By the spirit, these men are led along with the words that they record for us. And it taps this higher idea of rest. Naomi wants Ruth to find rest.

Where is she going to find that rest? She's going to find it from a redeemer. Typologically, right? We're having things set up for us in this narrative. I do not think that this is the central theme of Ruth. I do want to be clear. I don't think that Boaz as the kinsman redeemer is the primary point, right?

I think the central theme is the unfolded providence of God, but we should not miss what's happening here, right? It is a significant thing that is going on and we'll develop it further next week. A couple of other texts for you just as we stop for a moment and think about this idea of rest, of wholeness, of completion. The prophet Isaiah says in Isaiah 57 and verse 20, but the wicked are like the tossing sea for it cannot be quiet and its waters toss up mire and dirt.

[18:31] The state of the soul of the wicked not at rest. rest. And this theme goes on and on and on in the scripture. We come to the New Testament, Matthew 11, verse 28, and following, Jesus says there, come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you, you know the word, rest.

Rest from what? This life is work. We labor each and every day. Just because we're Christians doesn't mean that we stop working. Of course, there are things to be done.

God's providence comes to us through human agency. We have things to be accomplished. give us, what is resting? Our souls are at rest if we are in Christ.

No longer like the wicked, tossing seas. No longer working to be accepted by God, rather resting in completed work, work that Christ has accomplished for us.

You will find, here it is, rest for your souls. So this theme is picking up in chapter three, and we're going to see it kind of launch out from chapter four.

[19:55] The narrative ought to carry our thinking all the way to the New Testament, and the ultimate and the final Redeemer that is the Lord Jesus Christ.

So practical application for us today. If you are already in Christ, you have this status rest for your soul, you're no longer laboring to be accepted by God, realize the reality of what that means for you, and settle in, and be at rest.

You are God's. You belong to Him because of what Christ has done on your behalf. If you are not in Christ, if you've never placed believing faith in Him, then you are that wicked person being tossed about.

You're not at rest. And you can feel it deep down in. You bear the guilt of your sin. You know that you're not living a life that's pleasing to God.

Flee to Christ. Look to His work. Place your faith in Him and what He has accomplished. And find rest for your weary soul.

[21:10] So we see here in this text, this temporal thing that Naomi is trying to achieve on behalf of Ruth and how it helps us think bigger and broader and more importantly about eternal rest.

rest. So she has a plan. She goes on to divulge it in verse 2 and following. The statement again, which we've seen a couple of times, is not Boaz our relative.

It maintains the possibility that he could be a redeemer. And he is out winnowing barley tonight at the threshing floor.

And this activity was the activity of throwing grain up into the air so it would get separated from that part that was edible and that part that was inedible. And in doing that and tossing it in the air, the wind would carry away the lighter material that was not edible.

And so they're processing this harvest that has been gathered. And we see Boaz as this wonderful man of character. He's been out in his fields in chapter 2.

[22:17] He's paying attention. He's attending to the work that's going on. Here we see him now there in the processing place. He's got servants that are there to do this work but he's there along with them.

It was standard that people would stay. This grain needed to be processed. It needed to be stored safely so that vermin wouldn't get into it. So they're there.

They're going to work long hours. They would often just stay the night there. They're also protecting that grain from being pillaged by others. So he's out there.

He's active. He's with the people. He's working in that place. So she gives a plan to her to wash and anoint herself.

So clean up. Likely anoint with perfume. Put on your cloak. This would have been a warm garment and go down to the threshing floor.

[23:12] But do not make yourself known to the man until he has finished eating and drinking. So she's there amongst the hubbub of what's going on in the dark.

But when he lies down, you're going to note where he lies down. Remember, it's dark. And you're going to go and uncover his feet and lie down. And then he will tell you what you are to do.

This is an interesting chapter. I think it makes a lot of us scratch our heads. What is going on in this chapter? I found two explanations for why Ruth was instructed to do this.

In either case, we ought not think this act as a salacious act. As both Ruth and Boaz have been and will be presented as upright in character.

This thing that's going on is in no way kinky. Everything is above board that's happening in this case. There's a lot of talk today about power couples.

[24:12] You may have heard that term. People that can together kick butt and take names. Not to be exemplified, this is a couple for us to look at and to consider and to be more like.

In the Jewish tradition, the book of Ruth directly follows the book of Proverbs and it's often suggested that that Proverbs 31 woman is being exemplified by Ruth as it follows right along behind that final chapter perhaps.

So nothing salacious going on here. The first explanation is that Naomi knew that Boaz was not first in line as a redeemer but because of his expressed kindness toward Ruth thought him the most appropriate candidate to marry her.

Two months has gone by. Maybe they've talked a little about his kindness and maybe some growing affection on Ruth's behalf toward Boaz.

The prospect of Ruth marrying Boaz needed to happen in secret because it was out of the norm. She was circumnavigating the normative thing that would have been done in the seeking of a redeemer.

[25:35] We find out there's another before him. Ruth uncovered his feet and lays at his feet so that he will awaken at some point and they can converse on his terms.

Again, so I'm talking about the first explanation of what's going on here. She uncovers his feet so at some point he's going to get uncomfortable and his feet are going to get cold and he's going to

wake up and she'll be laying! there and he gets to decide what happens.

So an option would have been like who are you and why are you laying at my feet get away is the thing that Boaz could have said. Rather than her going and waking him up in the middle of the night and demanding something of him she rather sets the stage that he wakes up and he can now figure out what to do in the midst of this situation.

An ancient Near Eastern proposal tradition. A pastor I respect immensely said this matter of factly and I looked for supporting evidence with just a few minutes that I had to look for supporting evidence and I couldn't find anything that supported it at all so I like the former possibility simply because it's text driven right it seems to all be found right here in the book of Ruth what is going on here I think this is a bold plan that Naomi comes up with to seek the highest good of Ruth this is a way you can go properly in secret speak to Boaz let him know what you would like to see happen and she replies in verse 5 all that you say I will do so then we see secondly a proposition this is verses 6 through 12 so verse 6 says she goes down to the threshing floor and she did just as her mother-in-law had commanded her right

Boaz eats and he drinks his heart is merry he goes and lies down at the end of the heap of grain he's asleep she comes softly she uncovers his feet and she lays down and at midnight the man was startled I'm assuming!

[27:53] I don't know why for sure but I'm reading into it that his feet were cold and he as we do sometimes sucked his feet up underneath his blanket and startled him awake and there was a woman laying at his feet and it's dark and so he just says who are you and she answers I am Ruth your servant spread your wings over your servant for you are a redeemer Ruth's response amounts to a marriage proposal that's what Boaz would have heard from her exactly what she is suggesting here notice what she does so masterfully she says spread your wings over your servant for you are a redeemer do you remember Boaz's blessing from chapter 2 reason that I read it previously just in case you weren't paying attention chapter 2 verse 12 he says the

Lord repay you for what you have done and a full reward be given you by the Lord the God of Israel under whose wings you have come to take refuge Ruth recognizes God's providence works with human agency she is asking Boaz to be used of God to fulfill the very blessing that Boaz spoke over her it's really a beautiful expression love faith now ladies if you want to use our words against us do it like this this is a really good way to go about that let Ruth set the model for you and his response he says may you be blessed by the Lord my daughter you have made this last kindness greater than the first, and that you have not gone after young men, whether poor or rich. 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. Not only does he know that it's true, but they all know that it's true, a woman worth marrying. It is most probable that Boaz is a generation older than Ruth, which is why he calls her his daughter. We do not know how old Ruth was, but she could have easily been married in her teens, been Malon's wife for 10 years, and still be quite young. So Boaz really may not have been all that old. I think I'm old enough now to say that, and also old enough to consider myself old.

But he sees, nonetheless, her proposition as a great kindness. Boaz is not a married man, and we don't get the details why he certainly seems like a worthy man to be married. But to this date, we have no evidence that he was married. And here, this worthy woman seeks marriage with him. He says that this is a kindness greater than the first, which I suggest to you refers not to her laying at his feet, but to her departure from her people and her devotion to Naomi. Remember again what he says in chapter 2, all that you have done for your mother-in-law since the death of your husband has been fully told me, and how you left your father and mother and your native land and came to a people that you did not know before. I think that's the first kindness. And he's saying, and now that you're here, this is a kindness greater than that one that you would consider marrying me.

So a proposition is made. But an astute listener to my sermon on chapter 1, or just a careful student of the Bible, will recall the commands of God for the Jewish people not to marry foreigners. So what is happening here? Is Boaz breaking God's law if he marries Ruth? It seems that Boaz is concerned about God's law, so I venture to say no, it's not what's going on. But the people of Israel have been commanded not to intermarry with foreigners, but not for ethnic purity, as some have made the case, but rather because of the potential for idolatry. You can read in Deuteronomy chapter 7, verse

2 and following there, God commands, you shall make no covenant with them and show no mercy to them.

You shall not intermarry with them, giving your daughters to their sons or taking their daughters for your sons, for they would turn away your sons from following me to serve other gods. Then the anger of the Lord would be kindled against you and he would destroy you quickly. So a command given for the sake of mercy, right, that your sons wouldn't turn away from worshiping me because then my wrath would be due you. So Ruth, while a Moabite ethnically, was no longer an idolater, but a worshiper of the one true and loving God. We saw that in chapter 1. I think this is why Boaz is able to entertain the idea of marrying her. There is, however, another obstacle that stands in the way of their marital bliss.

[33:52] Verse 12 says, and now it is true that I am a redeemer, yet there is a redeemer nearer than I. So again, Boaz, as a man of upstanding character, cares about God's law and he says, I'd like to do this thing that you've asked me to do, but we must take care of this matter first.

So he makes a promise. This is the third point. Remain tonight, this is verse 13, and in the morning, if he will redeem you, good, let him do it.

And I just love that Boaz sees that as proper and right. If we follow God's law, things will turn out the way they are supposed to turn out, right? He understands God's providence. But he goes on, if he is not willing to redeem you, then as the Lord lives, I will redeem you. Lie down until the morning, right? Boaz's devotion is firstly to God and God's law. So he's obligated to obey it. But Boaz's promise to Ruth is that one way or another, you will be redeemed. He's going to go do the leg work to be sure that this happens on her behalf. So she lays at his feet till the morning, verse 14 says, but she arises before one could recognize another. So it's still dark. It's early, early. It's still dark. And he said, let it not be known that the woman came to the threshing floor. And I take this last phrase as a command to his servants that this unrecognized woman is not to be spoken of. He protects her reputation and his, right? Nothing improper has happened, but he wants to be sure that no one is harmed in the process. The threshing floor could be a place of impropriety. Husbands were away from home for the night. Listen to a judgment uttered against Israel in Hosea chapter 9 and verse 1. This is Hosea 9 verse 1. Rejoice not, O Israel. Exult not like the peoples, for you have played the whore forsaking your God. You have loved a prostitute's wages on all threshing floors. And so it would seem this was a practice and a thing that happened, but not so with Boaz and Ruth. And he wants to be sure that no rumors spread, right? Once again, protecting, caring for her, even though she's not recognized. He is then once again generous toward Ruth and Naomi. Perhaps it's been suggested as a pledge of his promise. We don't know how much six measures of barley are. There's no specific measure being given to us there, but it seems to be a lot. She's had spread out her garment. It's a, it's that cloak more than likely, and it's being filled full. And she's taking it back to Naomi because he says, you must not go back empty-handed to your mother-in-law. And then Naomi gives her this final instruction. But we'll settle the matter today. So the narrator leaves us cliffhanger at the end of chapter 3, right? Tune in next time when Boaz, the Redeemer, the stage is set for chapter 4.

What will happen with Ruth and Boaz and, therefore, Naomi? Now, you likely know the story. It's so much better than any of them could possibly imagine at this point in the narration. You can just read ahead if you would like to. But I do hope you'll look forward to studying its conclusion with me next Lord's Day. And I do hope that between now and then you're resting in the completed work.

[37:59] of Christ. Let's pray.