

Ruth Chapter 3 - Rest

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[0 : 00] am i on well good morning everyone it's a pleasure to be back with you i think this is our second time here and uh well it's always a pleasure to see see people's faces people coming to church well uh as you know we've been coming regularly we are in a series in the book of ruth and this morning we found ourselves at chapter three which you will find on page 209 of the church bible if you're going to do that and the uh well we last looked at ruth last sunday and i don't know if you've noticed or you may recall that the theme which keeps running over and over again in the book of ruth is there's this tension between the sovereignty of god in the lives of people and people's actions and in chapter one we found that everything had been lost naomi had nothing no fortune no husband no sons she returns to bethlehem after her years in moab and she tells her people when she comes home empty she says don't call me naomi anymore call me mara which means marred because the lord has dealt bitterly with me and the one positive thing however appears to be naomi's relationship with ruth her daughter-in-law who in the process of her life had come to trust in the god of naomi she had come to trust in the god of israel yahweh and in chapter one it ended with naomi and ruth arriving in bethlehem we're told as the harvest was starting a small detail but it's going to have a significant influence on the story and then in chapter two the story began to look up ruth met boaz whom we are told was a worthy man who had taken a specific interest in ruth and we found that he was an upstanding godly man and you'll recall that ruth told naomi about his exceptional generosity and you'll also remember that as luck would have it ruth found herself working in the field of boaz but just before boaz arrived there himself to meet ruth now their meeting appeared to be an event of coincidence or chance but one might even say it was just an accident of good fortune and the idea of an apparent coincidence or happenstance occurs many places in the bible however by the end of chapter two we had discovered that in fact god was in charge and that he'd actually worked out those events in the field in order to advance his own purposes and it's true that something may appear to be good fortune or coincidence might even appear to be bad luck but we should remind ourselves that everything comes from god and in the end well there are no real accidents in life the french have a great saying which i like quite like they say coincidence is simply an event in which god wishes to remain anonymous think about that i think that's very good now the doctrine of god's sovereignty is actually an important doctrine to us and it's illustrated and developed throughout this whole book of ruth but as naomi listened to ruth talk about boaz naomi's heart began to fill with hope that boaz actually might be the answer to her prayer and she says to ruth and there in chapter 2 verse 20 that boaz is a close relative he is one of our kinsman redeemers and that term kinsman redeemer is from the old testament mosaic law under mosaic law

kinsman redeemer was responsible for the economic welfare of the family when all or part of the family became distressed for example by paying the family's debts the kinsman redeemer could ensure that the family's property would actually remain in the family or he might secure the freedom for members of the family who had been sold into slavery and from the point of view of naomi well she and ruth are both widows not to mention the financial distress of their circumstances so it's no wonder that naomi returns to ruth right at the start of chapter 3 and she says my daughter is not boaz our relative noemi is starting to put two and two together she's recognizing the providence of god and that by chance boaz had come into the field where ruth just happened to be gleaning and then she adds into it the principle of the kinsman redeemer and there she has it the answer to her prayer in verse 9 of chapter 1 that ruth would find rest in the home of a second husband and that brings us to where we are this morning of chapter 3 so let me uh let me pray for us and then i'll read chapter 3 heavenly father we come to you this morning with your word open in our laps and we thank you that holy men of old wrote as they were carried along by the holy spirit and we need your help now as we read and seek to understand your word we ask that it would affect us deeply in our hearts and in our souls so that we might not only be hearers of the word but that we might also be doers and we ask this in jesus name amen always bring my big print of these things so that i can never read those little bibles i'm afraid so ruth chapter 3 beginning of verse 1 then naomi her mother-in-law said to ruth my daughter should i not seek rest for you that it may be well with you is not boaz our relative with whose women you were see he is winnowing barley tonight at the threshing floor wash yourself 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 then go and uncover his feet and lie down and he will tell you what to do 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 ruth came softly and uncovered his feet and lay down at midnight the man was startled and turned over and behold a woman laid his feet he said who are you 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 excuse me you have made this last kindness greater than the first and that you have not gone after young men whether rich or poor 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 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 not be known that the woman came to the threshing floor and he said bring the garment you're wearing and hold it out so she held it out 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 that will settle the matter today may the lord bless the reading and the hearing of his word this morning well it's a we reached a very critical point in the story at verse one there where she says my daughter should i i not seek rest for you remember as we noted naomi had prayed in chapter one that the lord would grant ruth rest in the home of another husband but here naomi is not only praying for ruth but she's actually offering to go out herself and find ruth a husband who would love and care for her and in naomi's culture that day it would not have been unusual for her to look after ruth's welfare by attempting to arrange a marriage for her and then we look at the what naomi has in mind in verse two and following there and surprising is an understatement my daughter boaz will be winnowing barley on the threshing floor tonight wash yourself put on your best perfume then put on your coat and go down there don't let him know you're there until he's finished eating and drinking then go and uncover his feet and lie down with him you know when you read this you think is this really the word of god i'm reading here this morning i mean is this naomi the mother-in-law the mentor the guiding hand in the life of ruth really telling her daughter-in-law to get washed up perfumed dressed up in your nicest clothes and go down to the threshing floor in the middle of the night to lie at the feet of this man boaz i mean obviously all these steps are designed to make ruth more attractive as attractive as possible and to gain boaz's interest in her as a possible wife i mean the bath the perfume the dress are all meant to make ruth more desirable and you get the sense that naomi is trying to turn up the temperature on this relationship between ruth and boaz i mean it is her heart's desire for them to marry but is naomi confused is it possible that she is maybe panicked i mean maybe it struck her that the harvest is ending and she has not heard anything more from ruth about this relationship with boaz going forward the harvest began in mid-april with the cutting of the barley and it was threshed in early june so it's been two months since that first meeting in the field two months with no further advancement in the relationship that naomi had harbored so much hope for and today was the last day of the harvest the grain was in has the relationship stalled for some reason is boaz just too timid or afraid to take

the initiative well whatever the reason tonight he will be winnowing barley on the threshing floor and naomi says to ruth wash yourself perfume yourself put on your best clothes and go down there i mean this is a bold plan but obviously naomi feels it's worth taking this calculated risk i mean she must also be confident that there is some reason to expect that boaz will respond favorably to the offer after all if he isn't going to act naomi feels like she has to do something and in her own mind this is the best way to proceed however i think it's worth just taking a moment to think about what this means from ruth's point of view i mean she is acting in faithfulness to her mother-in-law but at some point she must have wondered if this was really a sound plan or maybe a plan that was likely just a blow up in her face still following naomi's instructions ruth is prepared to carry out naomi's plan and approach boaz on the threshing floor in the hope that he would fulfill the role of kinsman redeemer and also the role of her husband i mean there are a number of things we could say here but by the time you get to verses six and seven you realize that as a result of naomi's initiative and ruth's obedience ruth has placed herself in a position of extreme risk i mean look where she is she's in a barn the barn is filled with men she is washed up she's perfumed she's dressed up i mean she is smelling good and she is dressed to kill and she's hiding in the bushes she's waiting for the men to fill themselves with food and drink before slipping out of the darkness and lying at a man's feet and asking him to spread the corner of his garment over her and notice naomi's concerned that ruth be certain where boaz lays down it's dark i mean these kind of places are no ambient light it will be pitch black and once the men have gone to sleep ruth is going to appear from the shadows and wake up boaz by uncovering his feet and naomi is specific about this because if there's one thing she doesn't want it's ruth uncovering the wrong feet i mean that could lead to all kinds of things that naomi would rather not even think about in fact the more i thought about this plan the less i actually like it i mean there are other numerous pointers in the narrative that that make us apprehensive about naomi's judgment here firstly why didn't naomi just go speak to boaz herself about his position as the kinsman redeemer i mean he was her relative after all and if she felt the need to ascertain his intentions or ensure the relationship going forward well she could have met with boaz somewhere in the daytime and spoken with him about it and notice that the narrative begins in the daytime as naomi anticipates the evening activities my daughter should i not seek rest for you it's not boaz our relative he is winnowing barley tonight and as the story proceeds we realize that naomi's plan can only be executed in the darkness it can only be secretly executed under the cover of night yet you may remember when ruth first went to work back in chapter one they'd arrived in in town and they were starving and ruth says naomi i'm going to go out and glean in the fields well naomi was concerned for her welfare that ruth might be assaulted in the field by the harvesters being on her own and chapter 2 verse 22 it's naomi said to ruth it's good that

you go out with his young women lest another field you might be assaulted so keep close to these young women and now isn't it interesting how all that seems to be thrown out the window and she sends ruth to the threshing floor in the middle of the night and finally there's the secrecy verse 3 go down to the threshing floor but do not make yourself known now there is something in me that wants to commend ruth for her obedience i mean she is acting in faithfulness to her mother-in-law but at some point she must have wondered about how sound this plan was i mean we have to remember that ruth is not an innocent young maiden i mean she has been married before she knows what all this is about and the more i studied this section the more i kept hoping ruth might just turn around to naomi and say are you kidding you want me to do what you want me to get washed up and shave my legs and put on my best perfume and go down to the threshing floor with all those men find boaz and cover his feet and climb into bed with him have you gone mad you see the more i think about this the less i like it this is not the kind of advice i would have given to either one of my daughters and what if the plan had failed i mean had naomi even thought about that i mean this could have ended very very badly i mean what if boaz had been offended what if he had reproached her condemned her right there on the threshing floor in the middle of the night in front of everyone or what if his character had been less than what naomi had assumed it was and the darkness of the threshing floor of boaz could have easily taken advantage of ruth without any fear of recourse see there was a lot that could go wrong here and also think about how highly irregular this situation is in jewish culture a woman proposing to a man a younger woman propose proposing to a much much older man a foreigner an outsider a moabite a non-jewish woman proposing to an israelite and a field worker who's allowed to walk around and pick up the crumbs at the edge of the field proposing to the owner of the entire farm i mean even as we read the final part of the instructions to ruth it's clear that naomi has not fully thought this out because she says to ruth i'd cover his feet and then he'll tell you what to do after that see naomi's plan in the hands of ordinary men and women has all the hallmarks of a disaster waiting to happen but having said that when we examine naomi's motives you know i think we find her nothing more than a loving and sincere and she's kind in her desire to find the rest for ruth that that she had prayed for back in chapter one and as i mentioned i think naomi may may have just panicked i mean the first day that boaz showed such kindness to ruth was two months ago at the start of the harvest the idea of a union between ruth and boaz a union that had naomi so excited and enthused at the end of chapter two now seemed to be on the wane and the harvest but it was over and after tonight ruth might not even see boaz ever again and there could be several reasons why boaz had not followed up i mean verse 10 suggests that he may have thought that marriage to ruth wasn't possible because of the huge age difference or maybe boaz was just too shy romantically or simply slow on the uptake

[20 : 24] there are enough married women here to know that sometimes men can be slow on the uptake they need a little pushing forward at times don't they or maybe having been a bachelor all his life it just never occurred to him that a wife would ever come his way we don't know but whatever the reason naomi felt the need to put her scheme in place because i think she senses it's god's will and although her plan appears to be verging on on whatever sort of a desperate move her motives are sincere and she's concerned that ruth's chance just might pass her by and naomi feels responsible for finding ruth a husband and here is the man and here is the moment and both might slip away if she just doesn't do something and i think it's necessary for us to understand that about naomi or we will totally misjudge her i mean naomi's motives are born out of a deep love and concern for ruth but naomi is also a reminder to us that in the bible even good men and women can worry even good men and women can become impatient they can wonder if god has forgotten about them or their situation or maybe their prayers aren't being answered or or maybe they just simply panic and run out ahead of god's timing i mean you can get a bad example from a good person but if it doesn't mean they are but that doesn't mean necessarily if they are a bad person it just means they are they're human and bad examples can often be used as a learning experience for our good especially because god is in control you see it's one thing for us to have a sense of god's purpose but it's also another thing altogether for us to take it upon ourselves to think that we have the right to bring his purpose to pass and naomi having apparently recognized god's purpose failed to submit herself to trust fully in god's sovereignty in god's ability to bring his purposes to pass and so she devised her plan to help things along and the plan begins to unfold at the end of verse 7 ruth sneaks onto the threshing floor she uncovers his feet and she lies down it's the middle of the night and very saint says he turned over and found a woman lying there at first he must have smelled her because he wouldn't have been able to see her and he wouldn't be able to see who was lying there so he asks she answers and notice how she describes herself your servant and then there's a surprise instead of sticking to naomi's instructions ruth improvises look at verse 3 wash and anoint yourself then go and uncover his feet and lie down and then he will tell you what to do however instead of waiting for boaz to tell her what to do she takes the initiative in hand and she tells him what she wants him to do maybe she believed the old adage that you need to start your marriage as you need to continue however instead of waiting for boaz to tell her i mean she just takes the situation in hand and she says to him in verse 9 spread the corner of your garment over me now in hebrew society in this time and place ruse requests means only one thing marry me to spread your wings over was an expression of marriage there are several examples one of the one one of the comes from ezekiel chapter 16 yahweh is talking to the people of israel he's talking to

them about their relationship and he is comparing his relationship to his covenant people like that of a man to his bride and he says i spread the corner of my garment over you i gave you my solemn oath and entered into a promise with you declared yahweh and that is what naomi had in mind as she spoke in verse two and she she's had a reason why boaz might consider ruse requests seriously because he is their kinsman redeemer now at this point it's possible that boaz may have wondered about her method of approaching him but we see immediately that he is favorably moved in fact verse 10 he appears to rejoice in her approach as he speaks to her with love and with understanding may you be blessed by the lord he says he refers to ruth's kindness to naomi and then he calls her actions now towards him and even greater kindness he acknowledges that ruth being the attractive woman that she was might have had her pick of all the younger men but she chose not to engage with him verse 11 boaz comforts her by his words of promise his promise to act 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 notice that he uses the same adjective to describe ruth that was used about him at the start of chapter two worthy as he rejoices in her character however in the midst of this wonderful moment there is a problem in her haste to make a plan naomi either overlooked this point or she hadn't known about it before but in verse 12 we find that there is a kinsman redeemer closer than boaz who has the right of refusal in verse 13 boaz explains if this man wants to marry ruth well he has the first right to do so and here once again we see the true character of boaz in other words ruth he's saying i'm sorry that there is a relative who is closer than i am and he has a prior claim to be the kinsman redeemer i'm not prepared to override the rights of the other man unless he surrenders his rights to me voluntarily i mean what a wonderful fellow boaz is i mean we've seen this from the very moment that he was introduced he is going to settle this issue in the absolutely correct way and verse 13 boaz says in the morning if he will redeem you good let him do it but if he's not willing to redeem you then as the lord lives i will redeem you and then he says what i want you to do is remain here until the morning you see he's motivated by concern for her welfare and also for the welfare of this whole situation sending her home in the middle of the night would not have been the best of ideas and if he sends a servant with her or someone sees him leaving with her to walk her home then others would know and most likely suspect something and boaz is concerned that there will be no misunderstanding about other people here so if you think about in terms of his intentions in the morning boaz wants the night to be kept secret in the mind of the honorable boaz i'm sure his desire that the other kinsmen redeemer should have a fair chance to exercise his option as the kinsmen redeemer and he should be given

a fair chance to make up his own mind without the rumor of boaz already being tampering with the goods so verse 14 she lay at his feet until the morning but arose before enough light came up for people to recognize each other then in verse 15 is a lovely picture i think at his request ruth is holding out her shawl and he is pouring into it an overwhelming amount of grain six measures and the fact that we read he put it on her implies that the weight was so great so heavy that he had to kind of load the shawl onto her shoulders it was too heavy for her to pick up herself and you know i thought this must have been a one heck of a way to have to haul home especially with no sleep and tattered up in your best clothes but he says you must not go you must not go back to your mother-in-law empty-handed it's kind of a strange thing to say in this book now i personally think that boaz is acknowledging to ruth that the idea that she appeared on the threshing floor had naomi's fingerprints all over it i mean maybe he even gave her an annoying wink as he said he can't go back to your mother-in-law empty-handed and as ruth reports these words to naomi there in verse 17 i'm quite sure that naomi understood that it was a sign to her from boaz not to panic not to worry a sign that says i know your need i understand what you were doing now be patient god is going to provide for all of us naomi knows what boaz intends to do now chapter three began with naomi planning to act but now it is time for boaz to act and you know one of the bible's themes that is so apparent here in ruth so we mentioned is this tension between the sovereignty of god over every human action in contrast with the freedom of men and women to act in their everyday lives and we see the same tension throughout but we specifically see it right here you see naomi had prayed in chapter one that her daughters-in-law would find second husbands and as we left chapter two there is no doubt that naomi feels that boaz is the answer to her prayer for ruth however boaz took no further action so naomi decided to act she engineered a risky plan to bring about an answer to her prayer and now it's clear that the narrator the writer of the book actually finds naomi's initiative commendable and you may remember that earlier we found ruth's initiative to get up and go out into the fields also commendable and you'll remember that ruth took positive action at a time when there seemed to be no alternative they were starving and they were impoverished and god blessed her initiative and one feels that if ruth had waited for manna to appear every morning on the kitchen table well she and naomi would have starved to death now here the narrator gives us the impression that if naomi had simply waited for the lord to produce boaz at the altar well she would have waited in vain and what we see in the story of chapter three is this relationship between human action and god's divine control in other words we see naomi's planned thoughtful intended action and its relationship to the sovereign rule of god over all action chapter three is a story that appears to turn on naomi's enterprise and the lord blessed her action in a wonderful way

and in this context in this continuation of the paradox that we have seen throughout the story so far on the one hand the absolute control of god over the actions of men and women and on the other the ability of men and women to act freely and independently it's the relationship between a sovereign god and his living people and the bible teaches us that the sovereignty of god is so absolute that it controls even the smallest inane details of human existence like the number of hair follicles on your head or the grains of sand on the beach but in contrast the bible also teaches that a human life is lived so freely by men and women that their choices are accountable for the outcome of history in fact the whole of human history is told in the bible as the accumulated effect of what human beings have done and just think about that throughout the bible we find these opposing principles the paradox of the divine sovereignty of god and human responsibility it may be described as predestination and free will or election or covenant but in the end we are talking about the fact that these are opposing themes and yet they lie side by side on virtually every page of the bible and the integration of these two themes well it's the great question that looms over our understanding of how salvation works in the life of a sinner i mean how is a person saved well god must provide atonement in christ god must regenerate he must recreate the heart so that it will open up to faith then he must give the faith and it's god who must keep the sinner once saved in the way of faith and salvation by his grace and power and all that is emphatically clear in the bible isn't it but salvation is of the lord he provides it he accomplishes it he applies it from start to finish it is nothing but god as jonah says salvation belongs to the lord but the bible also teaches that a man is summoned to believe and he is warned that if he will not repent and he will not believe then he will be held accountable and he will not be saved and furthermore when he believes he is warned that even if he doesn't persevere in his faith that he will not go to heaven the bible makes all of these things very clear but how are these competing statements to be reconciled and harmonized i mean how can we believe both part of the problem is that well throughout christian history the tendency has been not to believe both but to choose one or the other and somehow read the one that you haven't chosen out of the bible one voice always suffering at the expense of the other but of course the problem of reconciling divine sovereignty and human responsibility meets us not only at the point of salvation but at every single point of human life if god is in absolute control of every details in the affairs of men and women and if nothing absolutely nothing ever happens that is not the unfolding of the eternal plan and will of god then how can we speak of the integrity of the human will or the accountability of human beings for the choices they make or how can it be right for the bible in so many instances to show us god treating human beings according to what they have done you see these opening themes represent a paradox that the greatest minds of history have been unable to reconcile and i think the failure of all those great minds

and their attempts should actually impress on us that the bible story is meant to be filled with this tension the bible itself recognizes the tension but it never makes any effort to resolve it it asserts it but it never explains it you may be familiar with paul in romans paul asked the question how can god find fault if no one can resist his will the answer is who are you to question god paul doesn't even give us the answer and so we confess from the heart that every moment of every day in which men and women live on this earth they are part of god's eternal plan we also confess at the same time that these men and women are free and responsible agents whose choices matter for time and for all of eternity and that their actions produce material and meaningful outcomes this is a great mystery to be sure but it is essential to believe both truths you see the problem is really the smallness the limitations of our minds while god sees the harmony of reality we're not able to see this harmony and it's in this context that ruth and naomi and their initiative and enterprise are blessed by the kindness of god the bible's teaching of divine sovereignty never includes a sort of case or our attitude toward life nor does it include an approach that says well if god is in control there's nothing for me to do except to sit here on the couch and wait and the bible certainly never teaches that god as the one in control confines our plans and our actions to the status of a mirage where they're not actually real actions now the bible teaches that god loves the human beings that he has made he's made creatures of intelligence of deep feeling of willpower of enterprise and he loves to see those attributes that he has put in us at work because well we've been made in his image and he loves to work out his purposes through real accountable initiative by human beings you know when one looks at the bible it's teaching of the absolute and unqualified sovereignty of god is impossible to deny nothing ever happens in the world except the plan and the purpose of god but the bible is also profoundly committed to the purposeful and consequential character of human life of human choice of human action in other words god's sovereign providential care is expressed through the outworking of free human choices decisions and responsibilities and ruth reminds us in several different ways that god does lie beyond or behind all of history he is orchestrating events the most obvious is at the end of chapter 4 where we see ruth is placed into the genealogy of david and therefore she's placed into the genealogy of the lord jesus himself unmitigated proof that nothing here has happened by accident but the main focus here in chapter 3 is really the heartwarming outcome that is attributed to a human being a woman who acted cleverly daringly and with purpose neomi's approach was not a fatalistic approach now her plan of action was to pray remember she began praying then she acted and we're going to find in chapter 4 she gives thanks it's simply one of those moments when the bible teaches us

[40 : 31] a highly activist view of human life and achievement even as it teaches us about the unqualified sovereignty of god so as we close what we want to see in neomi is a discerning woman who understood that it was god who put ruth in the field of boaz and we will find in chapter 4 that she knew that it was god who meant boaz to be the husband of ruth but even with that knowledge naomi felt a need to pray and plan and to take action even risky action to produce the catalyst to her prayer her plan was we said it's daring clever enterprising and all the while she prayed and she acted and then she gave thanks prayer action thanks that is really the bible's the bible's theology of human life and action operating under the sovereignty of god i mean paul explains it like this in romans 8 he tells us that the spirit intercedes for the saints according to the will of god therefore he says for those who love the lord all things work together for good for those who are called according to his purpose and as god's people we are called to be doers as well as believers and trusters in god praying acting and giving thanks let's pray shall we heavenly father we thank you for these wonderful pictures that you that you show us of what real life is like living under your sovereignty and being one of your people father we thank you that you are in charge no matter what is going on around us we and how feeble our actions may seem father we thank you we love you we appreciate you and well we just thank you thank you thank you thank you