

Ruth: The Plan

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[0 : 00] Now can we turn together in our Bibles to the book of Ruth. The Old Testament book of Ruth and chapter 3.

Book of Ruth chapter 3. We've come to this next stage in our story where we think about the plan that Naomi puts in place for Ruth's future.

So Ruth chapter 3. We'll read the whole chapter. 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.

Now Boaz, with whose women you have worked, is a relative of ours. Tonight he will be winnowing barley on the threshing floor. 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 are there until he has finished eating and drinking. When he lies down, note the place where he is lying. Then go and uncover his feet and lie down.

[1 : 13] He will tell you what to do. I will do whatever you say, Ruth answered. So she went down to the threshing floor and did everything her mother-in-law told her to do. When Boaz had finished eating and drinking and was in good spirits, he went over to lie down at the far end of the grain pile.

Ruth approached quietly, uncovered his feet, and lay down. 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 or a kinsman 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. Although it is true that I am a guardian redeemer of our family, there is another who is more closely related than I.

[2 : 22] 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 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.

[3 : 25] Amen. This is God's word for us this evening. Quite likely you have heard it said that home is where the heart is.

But perhaps we recognize in a city, maybe especially like Edinburgh, that it's sometimes a complicated question to find out exactly where we feel home is.

Again, recently last week I was in a coffee shop and listening to someone talk about that, having moved multiple times as a child and then moved around as an adult, moving for study and for work. Where are one's roots?

Really easy question for some of us and a really complicated question for others. I guess instinctively we know that a place that we can call home, perhaps a people that we belong to, that's something that we value, and that's security, that rest.

But as we find as people, we're moving for study and for work, perhaps for marriage, for adventure. The question of where to find that sense of home can be a lot harder for people to come by.

[4 : 34] Well, the idea of finding a home and finding a resting place is one of the dominant themes of the book of Ruth. And here at the beginning of chapter 3, we find Naomi feels responsible to provide this home, this place of rest.

Naomi had already said that in chapter 1, verse 9, her desire to find for Ruth a place of rest, a home for her.

And now she's back to that theme. But standing above Naomi's plan and very much within God's plan is that desire to give Ruth a home from which the royal family will come, from which David will come, ultimately Jesus comes.

So chapter 3, we see home as one of the dominant themes. But there's another theme and it's kind of connected, the idea of the Redeemer. So that was very much in view last week, Ruth chapter 2, here's Boaz and he's the kinsman Redeemer.

And Naomi in this chapter has this plan and it very much brings these two themes together. Her hope and desire is that in Boaz, the kinsman Redeemer, Ruth can find home.

[5 : 44] And those themes we find linked in other stories also. Got me thinking of the Toy Story movies. Boys and girls, if you've watched the Toy Story movies, there are certain themes that keep coming back.

Either Woody or Buzz will find themselves getting lost because of some adventure or other. And then either Woody or Buzz along with the rest of the toys have to come and rescue, always rescuing so that they might be brought home.

Brought home to Andy or brought home to the rest of the toys, whatever it might be. But a Redeemer who brings someone home. And we can find that here. But we can also, I think, perhaps find that in our own hearts as well.

Do we recognize that longing, that looking for a saviour, someone or something that will give us a place of security, someone or something that will provide us with a sense of identity, someone or something who will provide us that rest.

Keith read for us from Luke chapter 15. Tim Keller in his book, The Prodigal God, makes the observation that sin involves looking to someone else besides God for our salvation.

[7 : 06] And Luke chapter 15 in many ways is the classic example of two ways that we can do that. So we find in the prodigal son's story the younger son who wants to find himself by living wild and free and ignoring all the rules.

And then we find the older brother who wants to find his identity by proving himself and being super moral and obedient. And so we find ourselves perhaps as people instinctively looking for someone or something to save us and to say, I have meaning and I have value because of this one or this thing.

And again, the story of Ruth tying in with the story of the Bible said that's God's desire for us. God's desire that we would find our identity, our salvation in the Redeemer, Jesus, that the Father has provided for us.

So that's just to set the scene. Let's get into our text and let's look at the first six verses and recognize Naomi's plan. Before we get there, confession, I am a fan of Pride and Prejudice.

I'm not afraid to say that, especially the BBC dramatization, wonderful effort. I couldn't help but think of Mrs. Bennett when thinking about Naomi.

[8 : 25] She is the biblical version, I think. If you don't know the story of Pride and Prejudice, you meet the Bennett family and Mrs. Bennett is very concerned. Her family once grand estate at risk of poverty because they only have daughters and so much of the story finds Mrs. Bennett trying to find a match for her girls.

Find the right man with the right money with the right estate. There is security. Shame is not going to come. Naomi understands her and Ruth in a very vulnerable position.

There is no security for them to widows trying hard to survive in Israel. And so Naomi takes the initiative in verse 1, My daughter, I must find a home for you where you will be well provided for.

More than just a house, a place of security, provision, family, love. And it's really interesting as the chapter develops this idea that one of the things that a husband will do is to provide shelter.

In chapter 2 in verse 12 Boaz said, May you be richly rewarded by the Lord the God of Israel under whose wings you have come to take refuge. That idea of covering and protection as a gift and a blessing.

[9 : 55] And we see very much this is Naomi's desire. There will be someone who will cover and protect Ruth. She has someone in view. Verse 2 is Boaz. Now Boaz with whose women you have worked is a relative of ours.

So again, if you weren't here, chapter 2, what we find is God in his providence, God in his goodness, bringing Ruth to come to work in the field of Boaz and Boaz coming to the field and desiring to show kindness and favour to Ruth.

And so Naomi is looking at that, recognising here is God's provision, now it's time to act, to seek to find this home from Boaz.

And then we get to verses 3 and 4. And one of the interesting things about the Bible, isn't it, is it gives us insights into the way other cultures work because we have details that seem so perhaps odd to us.

We understand Ruth putting on perfume and getting dressed up, but then the idea of waiting till Boaz falls asleep and then sort of uncovering his feet and lying under the cloak seems unusual.

[11 : 08] To me, anyway, it seems unusual. But it's given us a little insight into the way things were done in other cultures. Then when we worked in Glasgow and we worked in an international cafe, we did one week where we explored together different wedding practices.

And it's really interesting to share cultures. One of the great things about living in cities is now you get to share culture. So I discovered in China, traditionally, rather than white dresses, red dresses would be common, important colour for love and loyalty and those kind of things.

In Uzbekistan, we had some Uzbek students and they had a ceremony where a bride would be, as it were, kidnapped by the family and then the groom would have to go to the house and give some gifts to redeem the bride.

Not so far away from redemption prices that we have here. Well, in Bethlehem, at the time of Ruth, it seems like this idea of being covered by a cloak, by a garment, it was a symbol like, I guess, our engagement ring.

Here is a commitment as she wants Boaz to give that security, that protection, that provision. And Ruth, we learn in verses 5 and 6, is going to obey, I will do whatever you say.

[12 : 31] It's a risky scheme. Here is a woman going at night into the fields, bearing in mind that she is a foreigner, she has no natural claim to Boaz, his heart, or to Boaz, his kindness.

But she's trusting. She's trusting that God is working out his good purposes, and so she's going to act. And one of the things we see as the story develops is behind this bold plan on Naomi's part stands God's purpose, and we've said that all throughout.

God has the desire to give Ruth a home and a place of rest. Because that's something that's dear to God's heart. That's something that he wants to give to his people. That's something he wants to give to you and me.

It's a thread that weaves its way all through the storyline of the Bible. Go back to Genesis 1 and 2, go back to the Garden of Eden, and what do we find there? We find Eden was a home for Adam and for Eve.

It's a place where they knew God's kindness. It's a place where they knew God's presence. It's a place where they were invited into God's rest. God's good design.

[13 : 47] Think about the story of Old Testament Israel. From Abraham onwards, what was the great hope and the promise? It's the land of Israel, the promised land, a place where they would know peace and security and rest if they would obey God.

And then with the coming of Jesus, these themes return. Matthew chapter 11, wonderful words, come to me, all you who are weary, a burden, and I will give you rest.

That rest is found when we take the yoke of Jesus and learn from him. Life with Jesus, learning from Jesus, being a follower of Jesus, is true rest.

True rest comes when we know God and we are living life with God, and that's found in knowing Jesus. And then when we think about the imminent departure of Jesus as he anticipates the cross and he speaks to his troubled disciples, John 14, he speaks to them of his father's house.

My father's house has many rooms, if it were not so, would I have told you? And he says, I'm going there to prepare a place and I'll come back and take you to be with me that you might be where I am. So now, Jesus wants for us when we think about home and rest to think of this is the reality of our future salvation.

[15 : 09] Future salvation is being at home with the Lord and enjoying perfect rest, unbroken rest for all eternity. And that takes us all the way to the end of the Bible, to Revelation 21, and there we have these wonderful words.

Look, God's dwelling place, God's home, is now among his people. God himself will be with them and be their God. heaven is home, the new heavens and the new earth are true home for the people of God.

And the imagery that goes in Revelation 21 is wedding imagery. Jesus is the groom and his church is his made beautiful bride. So Naomi's plan to give Ruth a home and rest is for us a window to see God's greater plan to give us a home and a rest in trusting Jesus and having faith in him and having that hope of future salvation, future joy.

This is God's promise and it's a wonderful promise when we think about the times that we live in, how anxious many people are, how restless so many people are.

There is a home, there is rest. We came across on Netflix, a documentary called Found, which follows the story of three girls who were abandoned as tiny babies in China and ended up being adopted in American families.

[16 : 47] And then these three, it turned out they were cousins, they made this journey back to China to try and find their biological parents. And you know our instinct to find the happily ever after story, you're sort of watching this documentary and you're just waiting for, and then the detective who's hired finds the family.

They never find their family. There's that longing for home and that connection but it's never found as yet. But I wonder do we recognise that sense of restlessness that there often is in our own hearts and then do we see how the promise of the gospel is such good news?

in this life we discover yes there is love but also there is loss. Perhaps we find a place where we really feel that we belong but there are also times where we feel like strangers.

And all the way along we are invited to know and to remember that we were made to be at home with God now and forever. when we're trusting Christ when he has our heart we have that promise of an eternal home of eternal rest that right now we are pilgrims passing through this world is not our home.

Where is our true home? Where do we look to find rest? Are we looking to find our rest? In Jesus so there's the plan and then the middle section is really the plan in action verses 7 to 13 so as we said this is a bold maneuver it's a risky maneuver this is something that happens at night time what do we find Ruth doing in the field?

[18 : 38] She's tracking Boaz's movements she sees where he goes to sleep she creeps by perhaps the other workers she picks up a corner of his cloak she covers herself and she lies down to wait to wait to see how Boaz will react to wait and see how God's going to work it all out and then we get verse 8 in the middle of the night something startled the man he turned and there was a woman lying at his feet and we perhaps know the experience of waking up in the middle of night were a bit chilly because perhaps our feet had been poking out the bed covers but I can almost rest assured that nobody has had this experience so Boaz is startled no surprise verse 9 he asks the obvious question who are you it's very dark listen to Ruth's words I am your servant Ruth spread the corner of your garment over me since you are a guardian redeemer of our family so here is Ruth's request she requests this covering this protection and she couples that with

Boaz you're one of our kinsmen redeemers you put those two things together and what do we have we have Ruth in effect as a servant as a foreigner making a marriage proposal to Boaz what a proposal Boaz never saw it coming Ruth calls herself a servant she knows her only chance of success lies in Boaz's kindness ultimately in God's grace and that's where Boaz comes again as such a wonderful character such a wonderful help to point us to the character of Jesus what does Boaz do verse 10 the Lord bless you my daughter this kindness is greater than that which you showed earlier again here's this word hesed this word of kindness so his first instinct is to again praise Ruth for her loyalty and devotion to Naomi but also to praise her for the loyalty and devotion now she's showing to

Boaz she could have gone after someone younger or richer perhaps but no she's stuck with faithful Boaz and we find Boaz is wonderfully determined to seek her welfare verse 11 now my daughter don't be afraid I will do for you all you ask he knows there's someone closer another kinsman redeemer but he promises he's not going to let the matter drop he's going to work to resolve this we find in Boaz someone who is wonderfully willing to pay the price of redemption again think about the social cost because Ruth is from Moab she's a foreigner she's a natural outsider think about the financial cost taking on Naomi and Ruth but Boaz gladly acts in the spirit of the kinsman redeemer and he takes in verse 13 an oath before the

Lord as surely as the Lord lives I will do it and we see as the story develops he becomes the Lord's means of blessing Ruth of providing for Ruth and for Naomi and again just to pause and to frame this story within the bigger Bible story because the story of Naomi and Ruth and Boaz really takes us to the gospel so many times perhaps we can think about the reality that Christianity is at heart a rescue religion it recognizes that we are sinful people and that if there is to be any hope of us being reconciled to a holy God we need someone from outside of ourselves to save us to reconcile us to redeem us our need is far greater than the very real needs facing Ruth and Naomi for them it was the risk of poverty and the lack of having someone to keep on a family line insecurity poverty but for us we need to understand that by nature because of our sin we stand in a position of guilt before a holy

God without Jesus we stand condemned before the righteous judge under his righteous anger ultimately without Christ heading for eternal homelessness eternal restlessness in hell away from God and everything that is good and we need to be aware of that we need to be aware of the urgent need that we all face to be right with God to find the right redeemer our hope and our rescue does not lie within ourselves it's not let me try a little bit harder let me turn over a new leaf let me begin some religious practices no we need our kinsman redeemer we need Jesus to take on flesh to dwell among us ultimately to die for us and we discover in Jesus one who is willing to pay the redemption price as we're told in the book of first

[24 : 33] Peter we're redeemed not with silver gold but by the precious blood of the Lord Jesus Jesus is the one who covers us not with a garment but with the garment of his spotless righteousness so we can be welcomed and loved as Jesus himself is loved and Jesus has so acted in his death and resurrection that he has secured for us an eternal home and eternal rest that we receive by faith before moving on maybe it's worth us thinking about the character of the church that this should produce when we think about someone like Boaz shouldn't we want to be this kind of community where we are actively looking to extend grace kindness that crosses countries and cultures that reaches to the lonely and to the isolated where we're pointing by our words and our actions to

Jesus the Redeemer to where home and rest is to be found Paul in 2nd Corinthians 5 says that we're ambassadors of Christ and we're agents of reconciliation therefore we have this calling to serve others like Boaz to seek their welfare like Boaz to seek to honour like Boaz that others might come under the wings of God and find rest with him we come to the last section from verse 14 to verse 18 again if Naomi reminded me of Mrs Bennett I couldn't help but think of Hannibal from the A team some of us I'm sure are old enough to remember Hannibal every episode same line usually with a cigar in his mouth I love it when a plan comes together and don't we see the wonderful way that

God has been working out his plan and Naomi begins to appreciate remember she started off with that sense of bitterness towards God but now God is working for her and she can see it and she knows this is going to end well but picture Naomi here is Ruth she's just got up she's got her barley she's coming back home we can imagine Naomi can't we up all night waiting to see Ruth coming waiting to find word so verse 16 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 that barley is a message to Naomi it's a message of Boaz's commitment to her family commitment to act a sign of good faith and our chapter ends with waiting

Naomi said wait my daughter until you find out what happens for the man will not rest until the matter is settled today she understands the character of Boaz here is a redeemer who will not wait he'll not keep us waiting he is going to work and to make sure that Ruth and Naomi will be redeemed so here is Naomi looking back on this plan which was a bold plan but ultimately we know it was God's plan remember that the way Ruth is written it reminds us at the end that Naomi and Ruth are connected to the royal family to the line of David God had this plan to establish his royal line the king after his own heart ultimately Jesus his son and saviour as king and this is all part of God's wonderful redemption story the story of Ruth and Boaz is a great love story but there is a greater love story standing over and above it

God's love story the story of Jesus the son who left his home left his place of rest leaving glory the glory of heaven coming to earth ultimately to pay the ultimate price giving his life to redeem foreigners like us foreigners to God's grace foreigners to God's promises without hope and without God in the world except for God's grace and God's redeeming love Ephesians 5 speaking of how marriage points us to the gospel speaks of Jesus as the bridegroom who loves his church his bride who gives himself for his bride who has washed his bride clean and will present her to himself as holy and beautiful home and rest found in eternal fellowship with the Lord

[30 : 10] Jesus that's where God's love story ends for the church and you know just as we leave the story with that promise that Boaz as redeemer will not rest until the job is done Jesus our redeemer is not resting from his work today Jesus is still praying for his church his bride Jesus is still sending his spirit to his church Jesus is still calling others home to himself and we know that Jesus ultimately will not rest until all his people his whole church throughout history is at home with him his love for us is so great that he has bound his heart to the heart of the church he has bound his joy to ours so as we enjoy this wonderful love story let's remember

God's great love for his church and we'll come back next week to see how it all finishes now let's pray together Lord our God we thank you that throughout the Bible there are so many stories and pointers and pictures towards your redeeming love thank you that Jesus taught us to read the Old Testament and to see him as the fulfillment and so we are glad to recognize that Boaz is just a faint shadow of Jesus the perfect Redeemer thank you for his willingness to act as our kinsman Redeemer thank you for his willingness to go to the cross to pay the redemption price to free us from our sin by his precious blood thank you for his ongoing commitment to his church his bride thank you that he will present us to himself in the end holy and beautiful

Lord in those days when we feel restless and homeless may we recognize that you are drawing our hearts to find our rest in you that while we can place so much time and energy on building a house today may we be so much more careful to be preparing for our eternal home give us that wisdom and give us that joy increase our understanding of your great love for us we pray in Jesus name amen now our closing hymn speaks to us of the call of Jesus to find rest in him I heard the voice of Jesus say come unto me and rest so let's stand and let's sing together amen