

Guarding The Good Name of Others and Ourselves

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[0 : 00] Let's turn our attention into the Word of God and to Ruth chapter 3 and verse 14.

We'll be using the context of course but particularly verse 14. So she lay that as Ruth lay at his feet until morning and she arose before one could recognize another.

Then Boaz said, Do not let it be known that the woman came to the threshing floor. Do not let it be known that the woman came to the threshing floor.

Our subject this evening is guarding the good name of others and ourselves.

It's part of the commandment, you shall not bear false witness against your neighbor. And this verse brings before us this duty, a duty that Boaz certainly applied himself to successfully.

[1 : 18] Guarding the good name of others and ourselves. Now obviously the subject matter is delicate. It has to do with what went on at the threshing floor of Boaz.

And therefore we'll pick our way through it I hope with some carefulness and discretion. Especially when we live at a time when morally sound standards in public life are low.

When unfaithfulness is sadly more common than faithfulness. When in general people have very little regard for keeping relationships pure and honorable.

And the slogan, and I've seen it, the slogan love your neighbor but don't get caught, sums up how many view relationships today.

People are viewed as odd if they don't get involved in some kind of illicit relationship with a colleague or the PA or someone else.

[2 : 42] And the fact of the matter is that Christian believers can get caught up in this whole thing. Not that they themselves necessarily do the same, but they get caught up in the whole chit chat of the thing.

And what happens in practical terms is that we begin to think the worst about this person or that person, rather than the best. We go for the worst case scenario, whether it is true or not.

Because we're caught up in the whole stream of the life around us at the time. And we're certainly in times of low moral standards.

The danger for us then is that in being caught up in this approach, we make judgments on relationships that are no better than worldly.

Now we have already remarked in this exposition when we looked at the earlier verses, that quite a number of modern commentators and respected commentators take a very worldly view in my opinion here, and I think I can appeal to some very excellent commentators, certainly of the older vintage.

[4 : 06] but nonetheless solid in their thinking and exegesis. Many of the modern commentators are too quick to go with the flow of modern judgment and say there was something going on here that was improper.

That this visit of Ruth to the floor, the threshing floor of Boaz, is indicative of some kind of misdemeanor, misdemeanor of illicit relationship, of something going on in the dark that was impure.

And I want us to look at the context here and to see that quite the opposite is true, that Boaz was concerned to guard the good name of Ruth and to ensure that she got home safely, which she did as we'll see.

And in it we look at the principles of the word of God and apply them to ourselves about guarding the good name of others and ourselves.

Our first point, therefore, is Ruth's honour is maintained. And the first thing I want us to notice within this heading is the innocence of the characters.

[5 : 25] Now, I have to go back to what we've already pointed out. And that is that they were themselves there not on their own. It seems to me, and it seems that the modern commentator makes nothing of this or very little of this, verse 14 tells us that there were more there than the two

of them.

That Boaz had his men there, some of them anyway, with him to help with the winnowing. You see, we're told in the second part of the verse, Then Boaz said, Do not let it be known that the woman came to the threshing floor.

I think you would need to do somewhat peculiar mental gymnastics to avoid the inference that's to be drawn here. He's talking to his men.

He's talking to his workers. He's talking to others than Ruth. Don't let it be known. He says to them that the woman came to the threshing floor.

Also, he said, that is at the same time to her, bring the shawl that's on you and hold it out. There's a genuine innocence and openness here.

[6 : 54] Ruth herself had taken specific note of where Boaz lay down to sleep.

And if you go back a little bit in the passage, you'll notice that before she even went to the threshing floor, Naomi told her what to do, very specifically what to do.

And one of the things she told her daughter-in-law to do was, now make sure you know where Boaz lies down. I don't think we need to elaborate too much on that.

Be sure you know that you're lifting the corner of Boaz's blanket. You see, verse 4, then it shall be, when he finishes eating and drinking, then it shall be, when he lies down, that you shall notice the place where he lies.

And you shall go in and uncover his feet and lie down. That is, lift the corner back and lie down there. And he will tell you what you should do.

[8 : 07] So there are two important points to notice here in our understanding of what was going on and what was not going on.

She lay down at his feet and then in the middle of the night, Boaz was startled and he awoke, verse 8. And he found a woman lying at his feet and he said, Who are you?

Straightforward, uncomplicated. The woman is lying at his feet. And when she declares herself and why she's there, he assures her he will act as her goel, as her kinsman redeemer.

And you see, in the same breath, in commending her for coming in this way, in pressing upon him the duty, I want you to act as my kinsman redeemer.

That was effectively to bring back into the family what belonged to Naomi and an extension of that to Ruth. Bring that back and do what the law says ought to be done.

[9 : 29] I want to be married to you. It was something that was part and parcel of the law regarding the kinsman redeemer. And Boaz says, I'll do this.

I'll do it on the understanding that the nearer kinsman will not perform the duty. But you see how he describes Ruth.

He says to her, Blessed are you of the Lord for you did not go after, verse 10, for you did not go after young men.

And you see, we might say to ourselves, ah well, we know why, we know why she never went after the young men because they were poor. and she was interested in a rich old man a good in head.

Ah, see what it says? Whether poor or rich. Not interested in the many. Verse 10.

[10 : 36] So the picture that is developing is open and honourable. And then Boaz says this in verse 11. And now my daughter, don't fear.

I will do for you all that you request. Notice this clause. For all the people of my town know that you are a virtuous, not that you were, but that you are a virtuous woman.

and you see, this is the way it is presented to us and we mustn't let our own view of modern life affect us in our understanding.

We mustn't let the standards that although we may resist ourselves, we've grown up to and become accustomed to. We may push them away from ourselves, but they affect our thinking on people and relationships too much.

Boaz is saying here, I'll do what is right to do. Everyone in the town knows you are an honourable woman, a virtuous woman. But you see, Boaz goes on here.

[12 : 01] Boaz is not, he may be innocent, of innocent character, of noble character, but he's not naive. He knows the way he crumbles and he says to himself, right, we've got to work this out, we've got to be careful here that we don't spoil what is there.

We want her to be regarded as she is, a virtuous and honourable woman. He wants to guard her good name. And he knew perfectly well that if people saw her leave the threshing floor or heard a

report that she was there, tongues would wag.

Sadly, people love a bit of scandal to feast on, as it was, so it is. the juicier the better. But we want to take notice of Boaz's concern that this will not happen.

You see, not only is it ungodly, but it has a detrimental effect on the people who peddle it and on the people who receive it.

Someone called scandal withering blight. And I think that's a jolly good way of describing it. It's withering in its effects. It's spiritually harmful.

[13:38] It hurts us. We may think it doesn't, but it does. Because all the while it's lowering our estimation of people, we're going with the flow.

And so, you see, Boaz has this concern to guard her good name. And so, Boaz instructs her as to what to do. Verse 13, Stay this night, and in the morning it shall be that if he will perform the duty of a kinsman redeemer for you good, that's okay.

let him do it. But if he does not want to perform the duty for you, then I will perform the duty for you as the Lord lives. Lie down until morning.

Go back to where you were. So, verse 14, she lay at his feet until morning. This is Boaz's instruction to her.

And I think that what is clear here is that he is doing his utmost to avoid, in a practical way, to avoid the appearance of evil, of something going on that's wrong.

[14:59] He wants to avoid any opportunity for gossip. Now, it's true that that's not always possible. there are situations that develop that even the best, even the keenest Christian mind will not anticipate.

And sometimes we may land ourselves in what on the face of it is a compromising position. But there is a duty laid upon us to avoid compromising positions, to be circumspect in our approach to life and to relationships, to do our utmost, to avoid giving grist to the mill of scandal mongers.

And so Boaz's plan is set. There's a strategic time in the morning before people start to step, before one could recognize another.

That's when you're going away from the threshing float. Now, in all this, I hope that what has come through, on the basis of the Bible, Boaz's concern to guard the good name of Ruth.

And that we can learn from. Second thing is that Ruth is sent out discreetly. The plan which we've touched on a moment ago is set in motion.

[16:29] It's put into effect. Boaz has this concern that Ruth has sent out discreetly, carefully, so that there's no way a scandal is going to arise.

Obviously, the timing, as we've mentioned, is most important. But it seems to me to be totally wrong to just go on the time.

For years, nearly seven years, I worked the most awkward times conceivable all round the clock.

And very often, fishermen ended up leaving the house at one in the morning, or coming home at three in the morning, or four in the morning, or five in the morning, depending on which time of year you were working, and how you were working.

And it never ceased to amaze me. There was always folk on the go. Always on the go. It could be one, or two, or three, or four, or five, or six.

[17:41] They were always on the go. Always somebody. And I say that simply to make the point that no matter how careful Boaz was, and he was, no matter how he wanted his men to guard the situation, to be discreet, to avoid any opportunity for scandal, back of it all, God was working.

God was working. God was protecting. The proverb, Proverbs 3, 9, says this, In his heart, man determines his course or his way.

Bet. Ah, there's a good bet there. But the Lord determines his steps. And that is what this is about. Boaz has done his duty. Boaz has taken care to guard the good name of Ruth. And you might see himself too. But back of it all, and most particularly, God is honoring what is honorable.

Whosoever honors me, I will honor. And Boaz certainly did that. If the Bible is true and it is, and what is in front of us here is the account of what happened, not what might have or could have happened, but what happened.

[19:12] Whosoever honors me, I will honor. And Boaz determined this plan, this course of action, but the Lord directed his steps and her steps.

Only thus will the plan succeed. Proverbs 16.3 And it is clear enough from the context that both Boaz and Ruth were of such moral and spiritual character that they committed their way to the Lord.

You see, as the Lord lives, Boaz is there in the situation that he could so easily have taken advantage of it. A stranger, a Moabitess, okay, she was connected with him through Elimelech, through Naomi, and through her husband, but bet.

But here is godliness at work. There's moral character, there's spiritual fiber here, and what is happening is God honoring.

And so in that context, Boaz approaches this with honor and caution. verse 14 again at the end, the last clause of it, do not let it be known that the woman came to the threshing floor.

[20 : 49] We must guard this. Now, this is not concealing evil, as we've sought to show. It is a carefulness. it's not trying to fudge over sleaze, as is so common today.

But it is genuine honorable protecting of their good name, of the name of another, and of herself. And that's something, and of course I mentioned earlier on, that's what the commandment says, you shall not bear false witness against your neighbor. And in the extension to that, in the other bits of the catechism there, dealing with the subject, you remember, it elaborates on your neighbor. It elaborates on what is false witness. And this is what this passage we're looking at is about. And we see how Boaz has this concern.

And so, in this second point, Ruth is discreetly sent home. Safely because God is at work, honoring those who honor him.

[22 : 09] Whereas, you see, the tendency of the go-with-the-flow approach to these things is that a big story is made. A juicy story is made out of very little.

And it seems to me, the more that we seek in our own lives and in our own relationships to uphold the honor of Jesus and to preserve or to guard the good name of one another, the more likely we will be to be spoken against.

The last point, Ruth arrived safely home. Boaz planned this and he ensured it within the framework of the providence of God, as we've said.

But we've noticed that the plan was wise and carefully executed in an honorable way to ensure that the strife of tongues wouldn't need to cease, it wouldn't get started at all.

And we know that when Ruth arrived home safely and securely and then observed that she rehearsed all that Boaz had done for it. And in it all, what shines through is her assessment of the character of Boaz.

[23 : 46] And when she came to her mother-in-law she said, her mother-in-law said, that you my daughter, she told that all of the manor done for it. And then she refers verse 17 to the heap of barley she was able to take home in her shawl.

Do not go empty handed to your mother-in-law. And look what Naomi has to say. Sit still my daughter until you know how the matter will turn out.

For the man will not rest until he has concluded this matter this day. We see the character of Boaz lifted up.

Ruth tells of it, Naomi recognizes it. He responded positively to the obligations laid upon him.

This is what I want you to do for me. I will do it. Verse 13 as the Lord lives. And this again, you see, brings us back to this important area of Christian life.

[24 : 58] Seeking to uphold the good name of others and ourselves. Seeking to put ourselves out to ensure it. That's not saying we are to put a false construction on a thing.

But it is saying that when we can genuinely do it, we ought to do all we can to uphold the good name of another. We've already said that the Christian believer has to avoid situations that could be described as compromising that would cast ourselves in a bad light.

But now you see the business here is on challenging ourselves to resist the temptation to think evil of others simply because there is a given situation with a given possibility.

We are to put the best construction on it. love thinks no evil Paul says. Love thinks the good. It resists the temptation to think the worst of this one or that one.

And I say, you're hearing what I'm saying, I'm saying we resist. We've got to resist because sin in us will rise up and will manipulate us and make us do what the world does and go with the flow.

[26 : 31] And it's a sad truth that sometimes indeed it's a perverse thing. Sometimes Christian believers can actually think by speaking another down they're exalting themselves.

It's exalting oneself over another by putting that person down in the estimation of others. We are to guard the good name not only of ourselves but of others too.

And if you think about Boaz, he took action to protect Ruth and to maintain her good name. He did not take advantage of a situation which he could have, nor did he put a bad construction on her being at the threshing floor that night.

Sadly, too much goes on in church life that is thoroughly worldly. Too many things are cast in a bad light.

Indeed, we might argue, and according to the law itself, we could argue, that so much of the trouble that has occurred to the free church has been because of bad constructions on things that in themselves were perhaps indiscreet, but nothing more.

[28 : 12] And calamity befell us, split the church apart, made people obsessed with going after this one and miscalling that one and convinced of this and that, of soaking up written records which the law, having no real interest one way or the other, which the law having no interest one way or the other, said, in substantial.

show. Oh, what damage is done by breaching that commandment, by flagrantly turving it aside in the name of uprightness and godliness.

Boaz shows us a more excellent way. Boaz shows us how to resist, to resist and jest rumours and tried rumours.

It is true too, of course, that sometimes scandalous talk arises through thoughtlessness.

People hear a thing, they absorb it, they don't think deeply on it, they don't check it out, they pass it on. And you've got the same thing, a breach of guarding the good name of others and ourselves.

[29 : 48] Someone said, evil is wrought from want of thought as well as want of heart.

Evil is wrought from want of thought as well as want of heart. And I think that last clause is important. If we have much heart, we'll be slow to come to scandalous conclusions.

Boaz had a wholesome, healthy, moral approach to what Ruth did, what she was there for, and he responded as a Christian gentleman, so to speak.

And we are reminded here of the importance of the way to conduct ourselves, to maintain, to guard the good name of others and ourselves, to approach situations which may well be capable of a bad construction, but to do in them our utmost to protect another and their good name.

I think one of the sadnesses that I carry with me from my own home county and 14, nearly 14 years of ministry there is that too often bad constructions were put on things that were really quite the reverse.

[31 : 37] And I remember being in the firing line myself by this very approach of scandalous comment and I was feeling thoroughly down about it.

I don't know if the family know about this, but anyway, it was not matter. I was feeling thoroughly down about it and I knew that this scandalous person was determined to malign me.

And I was praying much about it. And I came across a story about an evangelist in that part of the world. He was in Sutherland and Russia.

His name was John Graham of a place called Ardclach. And he had the practice of going out into the woods. There were lots of forests around and about.

And he would go out into the forest and he would meditate and pray. And as often these old preachers did, they weren't embarrassed about it.

[32 : 47] Nowadays you would have to get a clearance to make sure it's safe to do. Get it koshered and all the rest of it. A minefield.

We wouldn't do it. We wouldn't risk it. But in those days the great preachers and evangelists went away out into the forest to lay hold of God.

To plead for a blessing that they might become a blessing to people. They wept and cried. They pleaded. They wouldn't let him go until they had a blessing and then they went and they preached the word.

Well, John Graham of Ardclach was like that. Then, I forgot to tell you, he used to take, this was before the days of lemonade bottles or beer bottles, but they had whiskey bottles.

Ah, you got it. He used to take water in a whiskey bottle so that he would have something to sip. I suppose he didn't like cold tea, but anyway, that's what he did.

[33 : 56] He put his water in a whiskey bottle and took it in his pocket. What was the scandal monger doing with it? Christopher the mill, that whiskey bottle it was.

He's a drunkard, he's a secret drunkard. That's what he does. He goes away into the wood pretending to piety. Well, that was an evil and damaging, thoroughly damaging, scandalous lie.

And the man had to live with it. I tell you this, I'd prefer to live the way he lived than die the way she died. It was a lady. I'd prefer to live the way he lived than die the way she died. a scandal monger. My dear friends, let's make it our great business to give attention to the word of God and the precepts of God.

Those who love me will keep my commandments, says Jesus. Those who say they believe in the name of the Son of God, those who say they believe his blood is upon them, that is their means of forgiveness.

[35 : 11] God provided it. Let them live as those who love me. Let them live as those who keep my precepts.

And Boaz brings before us the way to do it, to be careful and concerned for the good name of others and ourselves.

I remind you, in connection with John Graham of Arclach, his reply to those who suggested he was at it, he said this, they said my Savior, what did he say?

He said, they said my Savior was a winebibber and I am no more a winebibber than he was.

A winebibber means a dank girt, by the way. Let us be earnest and careful about not slandering without him or taking up an evil report against our neighbor.

[36 : 31] Let's have a godly carefulness for the good name of others in the household of faith as well as ourselves.

So, she lay at his feet until morning, at his feet until morning, and she arose before one could recognize another. Then Boaz said to his men, do not let it be known that the woman came to the threshing floor.

May he bless to us his word. Amen.