

The Life of Faith

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[0 : 00] Good morning, everyone. Good morning. We're going to read from Ruth, Chapter 3. 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. 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 she came softly and uncovered his feet and lay down. At midnight, the man was startled and turned over, and behold, a woman lay at his feet.

[1 : 16] 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 recognise another.

[2 : 21] And he said, Let it not be known that the woman came to the threshing floor. 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 about 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.

All right, good morning, everyone. Thank you, Rob. My name is Dave. I'm one of the pastors at the church here. Well, the story of Ruth is a feel-good story, isn't it?

[3 : 25] It's nothing like the horror stories in the book of Judges. In Ruth, no character does anything evil towards other people, but instead we see Boaz shine with his kindness and Ruth with her loyalty to Naomi.

It does start with tragedy, but with each step, our anticipation grows for a satisfying, happy ending. It's got the appeal of a rags-to-riches story. Ruth is empty with nothing and no hope, but she rises up until she is full, and not just full with food, as we'll see next week.

And here in Chapter 3... Oh, Dave. Here in Chapter 3, with Cinderella in our heads and all the rom-coms that we've been binge-watching in lockdown, we sense a bit of a love story going on.

Boaz and Ruth seem to have a deep admiration for each other's faithfulness to the Lord. This is a feel-good story.

[4 : 45] Ruth is amazing. But it offers us so much more. A barrier we have to unlocking all the riches of this story is that it assumes what God's ancient people, Israel, understood in their bones since birth.

As Israelites, they knew they were the descendants of Abraham, whom God promised to you and your offspring, I will give this land. I will be your God.

Whoever blesses you, I will bless. Whoever curses you, I will curse. They were God's chosen and special people, inheriting God's promises.

They were the ones whom God redeemed out of slavery in Egypt, becoming God's treasured possession, living with God in the land.

And here comes the scandal that's at the heart of this story. Their neighbours, the Moabites, they are the descendants of Moab, a son born out of incest, we hear in Genesis chapter 19.

[6 : 06] Talk about skeletons in your family history. And the scandal gets worse. In Deuteronomy 23, the Lord commands his people, no Moabite may enter the assembly of the Lord, even to the 10th generation.

None of them may enter the assembly of the Lord forever, because they did not meet you with bread and with water on the way when you came out of Egypt.

And the other reason given is that Moab tried to curse Israel. You shall not seek their peace, all their prosperity, all your days, forever.

Do you see the scandal of Ruth, the Moabite, coming to the land of Israel, hoping to find rest, a home, God's community, a family, a future, belonging to God and the blessings of his presence.

This Moabite has zero right to the promises of the descendants of Abraham. She has zero right to be near to God in the land.

[7 : 34] She has zero right to expect to belong to his people. And she has every reason to expect the curse of God.

no peace, no prosperity, no rest forever. Do you feel the scandal at the heart of the story of Ruth? What's going to happen? What will happen if Ruth draws near to this God and his people? In my mind, it seems like entering the lion cage at a zoo and hoping to be welcomed in.

chapter 3, it's not a Cinderella story. It's more scandalous than that. And I think it raises this question.

How does the Lord respond to the unworthy person who approaches him to find rest? how does the Lord respond?

[8 : 42] You should be very interested in the answer to this question because we have a lot in common with Ruth. Listen to what God says about each one of us who aren't Jewish in Ephesians chapter 2, verse 12.

Remember that you were at that time separated from Christ, alienated from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world.

And just a few verses earlier, we're told that because of the way each of us has lived, we deserve God's wrath. I remember this time when I was a young boy and I had done something I knew my parents would be angry at and they found out about it.

And I was really afraid to leave my bedroom to go to the kitchen for breakfast with my family. Would they be angry? Would they be disappointed?

Would they look at me and talk to me with affection ever again? And so I hid in my bedroom for quite a while. Even though we're told to come to God no matter what we've done, I think we can feel like that little boy hiding in his room.

[10 : 19] maybe there's a moral failure in your past that is big in your mind and you just don't think God could forgive that sin. Maybe it's just a general sense that no one could love you.

So it's too hard to believe that God loves you. Maybe you've just learnt bit by bit growing up in this harsh world that you're better off if you never ever let your guard down.

Whatever the case, if we are to find rest, we need to know the answer to Ruth's question. How does the Lord respond to the unworthy person who approaches him to find rest in his presence?

So let's watch Ruth closely to find out. The focus in chapter two was on Boaz, his identity and kindness as the redeemer.

And chapter three focuses on Ruth and her daring approach of Boaz. So far, Ruth and Naomi have been provided protection and food security, but what happens to them as the harvest comes to an end.

[11 : 43] In verses one to six, the scene opens with Naomi instructing Ruth with a daring, even scandalous scheme, and we're told the goal is the goal.

My daughter, should I not seek rest for you that it may be well with you? She could have told her to pursue a young Israelite, perhaps a rich one with good standing in the community.

But Naomi wants Ruth to have an even deeper rest by being obedient to God's word and seeking out a family, a kinsman redeemer.

You see, God's law provided a way back for those cut off from his presence. So if a husband dies without having an heir, it was the obligation of his surviving brother to purchase the land and marry the widow.

And the firstborn son carried on the name of the dead husband, continuing his family name in the land. But our question still remains, does this promise of redemption and rest apply to this Moabite?

[12 : 59] Naomi wants rest for Ruth and Ruth wants a baby boy to carry on the name of Naomi's family. But the way to seek redemption is going to be really risky.

Naomi tells Ruth, go tonight to the threshing floor where they get the grain out of the harvest. in Hosea 9 verse 1, it appears that threshing floors could have prostitutes and drunken revelry.

Boaz, however, we know he fears the Lord, so we expect his threshing floor to be different. But still, for Ruth to be asked to go to the threshing floor at night, if she is seen by anyone, her intentions will be instantly suspected.

If she had any good reputation as a Moabite, it would be lost forever. And then the plan is wash and put perfume on and your best cloak.

This is a picture of a bride preparing herself. What Ruth wants from Boaz will be obvious, getting straight to the point.

[14 : 25] And then watch where Boaz lays down to sleep and then go uncover his legs and lay with him. That picture in the children's story just captured the awkwardness and wrongness of that scene.

Is this a plan to seduce Boaz? A plan to force him to marry Ruth? to lay down is repeated so many times in this chapter.

It is used in the Bible as an idiom for intercourse. But what we're going to see is that despite the sexual possibilities, nothing immoral occurs, quite the opposite.

Seduction is not the plan here. So why the secrecy at night? Perhaps it's to give Boaz no pressure to agree to marry Ruth.

He can reject Ruth while saving face in the community. And perhaps it's also to cause no scandal because there is another redeemer.

[15 : 38] But this plan is very direct. Ruth will be wanting from Boaz marriage, but it's very risky. Ruth has to go all in with Boaz, which highlights Ruth's incredible faith.

We're told she did just as her mother in law had commanded her. Ruth is forsaking any other hope of security in this life and pinning all her future on Boaz and ultimately on the Lord.

In verse 6 to 15, we go to the threshing floor. Ruth is hiding in the dark, waiting for Boaz to go to bed.

She is putting herself at great risk of the young male workers there, risking being caught or much worse. She is letting go of all other securities she could have.

After Boaz finishes eating and drinking, he goes by himself away from the workers to the far side of the heap of grain. Ruth softly approaches him. She uncovers his legs and lay down at his feet.

[17 : 03] This scene is so intimate. To uncover his feet and legs, to lay with him in secret in the dark. It is just Boaz and Ruth here.

She has placed herself in such an incredibly vulnerable position. When it got cold at midnight, Boaz wakes up and he is utter shock.

He notices a woman lying with him. What is he going to do? It appears that Boaz does not permit women at his threshing floor. Will he abide by his own rules?

Will he take advantage of her vulnerability? If he's overtaken with desire as the boss, he could get away with it.

Or if he's concerned with his own honour, he might sound an alarm and drive her out and put it a shame in a way that would stick to her name forever. But he has the presence of mind to find out what's going on.

[18:12] And this begins the whispered and intimate conversation. Who are you? Boaz asked. In chapter two, bowing at his feet, she humbled herself, claiming she wasn't even worthy to be called his servant because she was a Moabite.

But her reply here is an amazing expression of faith in her redeemer. I am Ruth, your servant. Spread your wings over your servant, for you are a redeemer. wings means the corner of your garment, what they use for their blanket.

Spread your blanket over me. Bring me into the warmth of your intimacy, under your protection, providing me security and a future for me and Naomi's family.

Boaz, you should marry me. How presumptuous does this sound coming from a Moabite? She is well aware she has come from the enemies of God's people, but she knows God's law that promises the nearest brother will redeem a childless widow, bringing her under his care, under his wings.

[19:47] She's saying to Boaz, Boaz, remember that day in the field when you prayed that the Lord would be kind to me because I have come to take refuge under the wings of the Lord?

Boaz, come good on your word. Become the living expression of the Lord spreading his wings over me. So what will this redeemer do with this unworthy Moabite?

Will he take advantage of her, quietly turn her away, or publicly put her to shame? May you be blessed by the Lord, my daughter.

He blesses, he doesn't curse. he praises her faithful, loving kindness, the Hebrew word hesed, that wonderful character trait of the Lord himself.

Is she being kind to an older Boaz for not chasing after younger men? No doubt Boaz and Ruth have a deep respect for each other's faithfulness and kindness, which makes them so suitable for marriage.

[21:05] the greater love story is between Ruth and Naomi, between Ruth and the Lord. Ruth is seeking redemption for herself and Naomi's family.

And by doing this, she's being faithful to what the Lord says to do. and her all-in faith, her vulnerable faith is fully rewarded.

Do not fear. Without hesitation, he promises, I will do all that you ask. Even as a Moabite, she is known in Bethlehem as being a worthy woman.

She is a picture of the covenant loyalty that the Lord longed for his rebellious Israelites to have towards him. But Boaz also redeems her the right way.

He doesn't take any shortcuts. He doesn't do it illegitimately. But as we'll see next week, he does it in public with witnesses.

[22:27] He redeems her properly. The problem is there's a closer relative, but there's no guarantee that this other man will give her rest. So Boaz makes this wonderful, assuring promise as she awaits the outcome.

As the Lord lives, I will redeem you. With this promise, her heart can be at rest.

And then Boaz protects her honour by doing absolutely nothing inappropriate, protecting her from any outside danger in the night, letting her sleep until the morning, and then protecting her honour by sending her home in the early hours of the morning.

But she doesn't return empty. the redeemer gives a generous pledge that he will fully come good on his promise.

Ruth's daring faith in this redeemer is fully rewarded. No longer cut off from God and his people, but having her redeemer spread his garment over her, making her his own.

[23:46] And in the final scene, Ruth returns to Naomi. She literally asks Ruth, who are you, my daughter? Her identity might have changed overnight and it has.

Ruth reports the good news and shows her the pledge of the abundant grain, a foretaste of the complete filling to come.

And the chapter ends with the redeemer himself, not resting until he fulfills his promise. And as they wait, their faith rests in the power and in the character of the redeemer to do what he has promised. Isn't this a wonderful story? Here we have this Moabite, an enemy of God's people, expressing the faith God has always desired from his people.

The Lord said of Israel in Ezekiel 16 verse 8, I spread the corner of my garment over you and covered your nakedness.

[25 : 03] I made my vow to you and entered into a covenant with you, declares the Lord God, and you became mine. But Israel repeatedly chased after other gods and other things to give them rest.

But Ruth goes to the Lord to find rest. the story of Ruth and Boaz gives us such a warm picture of what it means for us today to have faith in Christ, our Redeemer, and to find rest in him.

True faith is daring. Faith forsakes all other things that offer you security in this life. faith is personal and intimate between you and your Redeemer.

Faith comes to Christ completely vulnerable before him. And yet faith expectantly calls on Christ, come good on your promise.

Forgive me, bring me into your permanent covenant care. faith and faith waits for your Redeemer to fully make you his own, a future with him, an inheritance in the new heavens and earth.

[26 : 43] Going back to Ephesians chapter 2, remember that you were at that time separated from Christ, alienated, from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world.

But now, but now, in Christ Jesus, you who were once far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ.

It is our Redeemer's blood shed for us that should give you every confidence to come close to him in faith. how does the Lord respond to the unworthy person who approaches him for rest?

Like Boaz, Christ will never turn you away. He will not put you to shame. He will never use or mistreat you, but he will spread the corner of his garment over you and make you his very own.

So what are you waiting for? Would you pray with me as we finish? Oh, dear Lord, we know slightly, just a little bit, of how unworthy we are to come near to you.

[28 : 33] Forgive us for thinking that we have any merit in ourself that deserves your blessing, but how we thank you that you call us to come, how we thank you that you assure us that your character is good and that you will be gracious to us when we come, that you will not turn us away, that you will bring us into covenant relationship and protection and blessing, a sure future with you forever.

Lord, we don't deserve this. Help us trust your goodness. Lord, I pray for each one of us, wherever we're at, please give us confidence in your goodness goodness, that makes us able to come to you, be vulnerable with you and fully give ourselves into your hands.

We praise you, Christ, for the blood you shed for us, so that you might spread your garment over us and make us yours. Make us thankful, God.

Give us this faith that we need. Give us this rest. In Jesus' name, Amen.