

A Strange Proposal

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[0 : 0 0] what we have here is a very unusual proposal a strange proposal as the title of the sermon is because here in this very strange scene in the middle of the night Boaz awakes to discover this lady at his at his feet who then essentially proposes to him what's happening is a marriage proposal and how I propose that we walk through this wonderful part of the story is to look at it in four parts four parts because it begins doesn't it with a plan Naomi has a cunning plan she has hatched this idea and so it begins with a plan that's verses one to five which you can see in front of you there then there's the proposal itself verses six to eleven Ruth does what Naomi tells her pretty much although we'll notice there's actually a very important change from what Naomi tells Ruth to do Ruth uses her own initiative and she's all the more praiseworthy for doing so so we have the plan the proposal but then a problem emerges sure Boaz is a redeemer and he'd really like to to honor

Ruth's request but it turns out that we've never heard of this person before there's another person nearer who has the right to marry her and redeem the land that belongs to the family of which she's a part before Boaz so a problem arises with this plan seems to all be going well but then oh there's a problem the problem is verses 12 to 14 finally verses 15 to down to the end to 18 is a promise although there is this issue we don't quite know how things will be resolved but Boaz gives Ruth this really impressive down payment that shows he's serious about what she's asked him to do and his desire to fulfill it the amount of grain he gives her it's amazing she could carry it basically back to Naomi and Naomi is also it's not lost on her the impact of that gift that Boaz gives Ruth as he goes away to try and sort out the issue of redemption there's the promise so the plan the proposal the problem and the promise it does seem to suit the structure of the passage and also help us to bring out some of the things we should be noticing as we look at this wonderful and very unusual and very strange encounter at the threshing floor so first of all the plan Naomi initiates this whole thing and that's the first thing to notice

Naomi has come back to Bethlehem in chapter one empty she says and she even doesn't want people to call her by her given name Naomi which means pleasant she'd rather people call her Mara which means bitter that's how crushed she's become by what's happened in her life she's in a sorrowful state and that's lent her to be quite pessimistic we might say understandably so quite pessimistic about what life might hold for her being back in Bethlehem but now look at Naomi what's been happening since then has seems to have encouraged her sufficiently to get some of her hope back and she appears now more optimistic I think she's repenting of her cynicism that she had at the start because now it's Naomi that's got a plan for the future it's a pretty crazy plan it's pretty out there but Naomi has been encouraged by their fortunes since returning to Israel because Ruth dutifully has gone out to glean and has come back with lots of food Boaz the their kinsman has been very kind to her and as a result they now have food to eat but that doesn't solve the ultimate problem for Naomi as far as Naomi's concerned coming back empty just doesn't mean coming back without food it means coming back without issue without children the continuation of the family line was just so essential in those days in Israel you had to have children to keep the line going to keep the name going and she wants to keep the name of

Elimelech going and she knows that Boaz is a kinsman redeemer and therefore has certain obligations towards his kins people if say someone had had got into so much debt that they'd had to sell themselves into slavery a kinsman redeemer was obliged to buy them out of it and there were other obligations as well but clearly uh nothing so he's not near enough or there's nothing so pressing that he's acted so Naomi's taking the initiative now hasn't she she's going well if Boaz isn't going to do anything I've got a plan what's being proposed here by Naomi is just quite odd but basically she knows where he's going to be she essentially instructs Ruth to dress as a bride might putting on her best clothes washing and putting on her best clothes but then there's this interesting uh procedure she's going to go through which is not to make herself known until he lies down then go and take the the cover of his feet and lie down at his feet and then it's simply and then he'll tell you the rest once again Ruth's faith comes to the fore because Ruth says I will do whatever you say and we could quite easily imagine her saying eh you sorry you want me to do what and remember this is Israel in the time of the judges dangerous women in the fields during daytime Naomi has said who knows what could have happened could happen to you elsewhere stick with Boaz stick with his servants nighttime at the threshing floor as she goes out alone the threshing floor uh would have been outdoors it's a a level hard uh stone floor um somewhere normally relatively high in order to get the wind because that's where the grain was threshed out and then winnowed and to winnow you have to get your winnowing fork and toss it up into the air and the the wind will catch the chaff and blow it away and bring the grain back down so yet in many ways a very risky proposition by Naomi but she obviously thinks desperate times desperate measures let's try and you know get get Boaz to step up here if you like she seems to be thinking but Ruth again her faith is active it takes action she agrees to do something faith isn't just totally passive faith acts out steps out according to promises and she clearly as she's committed herself to

Naomi and to Naomi's God and so when Naomi tells her to do something she does it so that's the plan but if we were reading this for the first time we might think I don't think this plan is really going to work out or what could happen here but we come then to the proposal from verse 6 to 11 and it's basically Ruth doing what she was told she went down to the threshing floor and what the workers would generally do is when they were doing this work of threshing and winnowing they would sleep out there at night to guard the big piles of grain so she went down to the threshing floor and did everything her mother-in-law told her to do faith is obedient 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 so near the valuable grain Ruth approached quietly uncovered his feet and lay down and then we get this the really the center of the story in chapter 3 in the middle of the night something startled him it seems that obviously having had his feet uncovered the cold has maybe got to his feet and there's or there's been a gust of wind and it's woken him up and he turned and discovered a woman lying at his feet and you can imagine his confusion he's just woken up he's been working hard all day and he he comes to his senses and there's a woman lying at his feet who are you he asks he's just bewildered but this is where Ruth deviates from what Naomi told her to do she said if you remember in verse 4 then go and uncover his feet and lie down he will tell you what to do in other words leave it open-ended the man will decide what to do no again it's this aspect of faith taking the initiative

[10 : 39] Ruth then speaks to him and tells him what she wants him to do very different from what Naomi said I am your servant Ruth she said and then this is the key phrase spread the corner of your garment over me since you are a kinsman redeemer she is calling in Boaz on his status as a kinsman redeemer and saying marry me she's seeking refuge the refuge that Boaz told her she was seeking in chapter 2 in verse 12 we read this is Boaz speaking to Ruth when they meet in the fields may the Lord repay you for what you have done may you be richly rewarded by the Lord the God of Israel under whose wings you have come to take refuge this is Ruth coming to take refuge under the wings of the Lord in the person or through the medium of Boaz because the same word is used the word that Boaz uses there of coming under the wings of God to take refuge it's the same word for corner the corner of your garment it's the same expression she's seeking the shelter of the God of Israel through the person of her kinsman redeemer in Boaz in whom there's safety and rest and the prospect of continuing the family line it's such a wonderful picture of faith of reaching out to the God that offers us refuge under the shadow of his wings through the person of a redeemer it's such a tender picture Ruth is certainly being really putting it all on the line here clearly Boaz is not totally obliged to do anything about this otherwise he would have done so sooner or she might have had to just approach him in the field and say you're my redeemer you should marry me she's gone about it in this way that Naomi has recommended so what's the answer going to be to this request spread the corner of your garment over me since you're a kinsman redeemer in this expression spread the corner of your garment over me we see it in the book of Ezekiel as referring to marriage there it refers to God spreading the corner of his garment over his people being their husband what's the reaction going to be to this very strange proposal Boaz very similar lots of similarities in between chapter 3 and chapter 2 although it's much more heightened in this chapter the Lord bless you

Boaz is impressed and indeed he describes it describes it as a kindness greater than that which he showed earlier before which he showed earlier before Boaz was impressed about her hard work and her desire to provide for her family to provide for Naomi but this he says is even greater and this rids any suggestion because it could look iffy if you like this whole situation going on here at the threshing floor and all the instructions that are being given we might think well what is really going on here is this all above board is this all decent but it's in Boaz who we already know is a man of standing a man of noble character himself his evaluation of Ruth is yes it's all entirely above board because he blesses her and he asks for God's blessing upon her which he surely would not do if there were anything untoward about what's going on here strange it may be but it's not questionable and then he says this kindness is greater than that which you showed earlier and again what we might see as maybe being a reason as to why

Boaz might not agree to Ruth's request the fact that she is she's asking the man she's a Moabite asking an Israelite she's younger he's much older it would appear and also she's a servant and he's a landowner so there's a lot of things humanly speaking kind of looking bad for Ruth here but actually he blesses her for the fact that she's done this and she's looking to him and not run after the younger men whether rich or poor and that really gets us to the core of what's going on here as well this is Ruth trusting in the promises yes it's a love story but it's not really a romance in the way that we would look at it now where two good-looking people sort of attractive people fall in love with each other at the threshing floor and just can't take their eyes off each other she's looking for safety she's looking for refuge from the God of Israel and it's coming through Boaz she sees it being offered in the fact that Boaz has this relationship to her family which means she can make a request to him to marry her that's what she's seeking and that's what Boaz sees in her we don't know anything about what Ruth looked like and with the amount of grain that she carries home and the amount of work she's able to do in the field she's no slight you know slip of a thing size eight model it's what he sees in her is this commitment to to the God of Israel and to the promise of blessing if you take refuge in him and so he continues in verse 11 and now my daughter he tells her again don't be afraid I will do for you all that you ask all my fellow townsmen know that you're a woman of noble character and this again seals the fact that this is a act of total integrity on the part of Ruth again there's nothing untoward happening because this expression woman of noble character is exactly the same expression that we find in the book of proverbs and its famous description of the woman of noble character proverbs chapter 31 and incidentally that's where Ruth comes after the book of proverbs in the Hebrew bibles ordering and where it would therefore be really obvious that Boaz is identifying Ruth as a woman of real virtue so it's all great then isn't it it's all sorted she's asked he's effectively said yes great we can get on with it surely the book of Ruth is about to end now verse 12 the problem materializes although it is true that I am near of kin there is a kinsman redeemer nearer than I now you can really imagine Ruth's heart dropping at this point what

I'm not going to have to go out to another threshing field at midnight am I now and ask him in this peculiar way if he'll marry me there's there's an issue here that means this can't all get resolved straight away stay here for the night and in the morning if he wants to redeem good let him redeem but if he is not willing again this assurance from Boaz as surely as the Lord lives I will do it if we come to Jesus claiming the promises that whoever comes to him he will in no wise cast out that all who are weary and heavy laden he invites to come to him and he will give them rest then the response of Jesus is as surely as the Lord lives I will do it he as our redeemer is the one who has bound himself to honor these promises to all those who come to him in faith and say I've got nothing in myself as we were singing this morning nothing in my hands I bring but I see that in you you have done everything required to grant me peace to give me rest to take away these sins that blight my life and weigh me down and which incur God's curse on me

I know that you can take that all away will you please do so as surely as the Lord lives I will do it what a redeemer that we have lie here until morning he says so she lay at his feet until morning and again it's a strange scene to try and think about isn't it out there on this threshing floor somewhere in the countryside outside Bethlehem there's this kinsman redeemer with a woman sleeping at his feet in the darkness no one knows she's there no one knows what's just happened and she lay at his feet until morning but got up before anyone could be recognized and he said don't let it be known that a woman came to the threshing floor so there's this problem that's unresolved but then and Ruth may be a little worried a little anxious about how this is now going to sort out because there's this other guy in the picture he never gets named he's really just sort of Mr. So-and-so what's going to happen

[21 : 50] Boaz is so kind in giving her a token of his goodwill and his commitment to her to ensure that he will do right by her and he gives her this huge amount six measures of barley he put it on her so it would be on her back and she went back in into town a token of assurance a down payment if you like a guarantee that he will do right by her and that's a really wonderful picture as well of what we receive when we come to Christ not all the promises are realized are they yet our bodies if you look at our bodies they're not getting any younger are they we still await the redemption of our bodies and there are a number of aspects of the promises that are yet to be realized but God gives us a down payment as an assurance that these promises will be realized and the down payment is the Holy Spirit the Holy Spirit is given to each one each believer to grant assurance that we're sealed for the day of redemption at the great day when all the promises will be finally and fully realized in the creation of a new heavens and a new earth where righteousness dwells so there's this glorious promise he poured six measures of barley put it on her he went back into town then Ruth came to her mother-in-law and again see the similarity with chapter 2 and again this is really we're seeing in so many ways in the book of Ruth the story of Naomi's recovery

Naomi's return to the Lord Naomi's returning to the fold and having her hope renewed in the Lord because what she hears is music to her ears when Ruth tells her everything Boaz had done for her and added verse 17 he gave me these six measures of barley saying don't go back to your mother-in-law empty-handed remember the one who said she'd come back empty now she's no longer empty-handed there's this overflow of barley but also there's the hope of what is to come verse 18 Naomi said wait my daughter until you find out what happens for the man will not rest until the matter is settled today and that's another aspect of faith isn't it it's waiting she doesn't know what's going to transpire now that's out of her hands

Boaz has to go now to negotiate with the other redeemer see what his view is faith requires waiting on the Lord doesn't it and trusting trusting in those promises remembering how faithful he's been in the past and that's surely something both Naomi and Ruth can do at this point looking back at how they were so blessed in the gleaning time and looking now at how Boaz has said yes I'll do it if I can although there is this other man that's nearer than me but also has given them this great token of goodwill now it's time to wait and we're in waiting time too in so many respects aren't we waiting trusting knowing though that the Lord will make good on every single promise because all his promises are yes and amen in the Lord Jesus Christ our redeemer it's interesting when we hear this word which would have been not music to Ruth's ears there is a kinsman redeemer nearer than I for us these words have an altogether

I'm taking them awfully out of context but the words there's a nearer kinsman redeemer than I coming from Boaz has another dimension to us there is a nearer kinsman redeemer than Boaz to us even the Lord Jesus Christ himself much nearer a far greater redeemer in so many ways the son of God the son of God became incarnate that is he took a human nature to himself in order to become our kinsman redeemer it's not angels that he helps says the author of Hebrews he helps the offspring of Abraham and in order for the son of God to help us he assumes a kinship relationship to us like the one described there but actually much closer because as the author to the Hebrews also says therefore he had to be made like his brothers in every respect so that he might become a merciful and faithful high priest in the service of God to make propitiation for the sins of the people now

Boaz is going to have to if he's going to redeem pay some kind of price or make some kind of oath and arrangement but for Christ to redeem helpless sinners there's more than a promise made on a threshing floor to be done and a deal to be done at the city gate the following morning what is going to happen is a trial and then being taken outside the city gate to Golgotha to the place of the skull because the redemption payment is infinitely more serious and vast than the one that we're speaking of here and impossible to pay by anyone other than the Son of God incarnate the Lord Jesus Christ man incurred the guilt so man must pay it but no mere man is able to would be acceptable before God so it's the God man only he can do it and he does do it he does do it so willingly he does do it so lovingly and he invites anyone to come to him and shelter under the corner of his garment he offers to spread the corner of his garment over our sinful hopeless nakedness what love what tenderness do you know this love tonight do you know this love tonight for yourself have you responded to this love by giving your heart to the Redeemer and I invite you if you have not yet done that to do so knowing that if you sincerely come to him in faith he will do what he's promised to do even take all your sins away and bring you into

[29 : 44] God's own family make you a child of God and this gift of love that we see if we are Christians is the love that we share as well isn't it in our measure we can't lay down our lives in the way that Jesus did for others but we are called to that loving self-sacrifice and to speak of that love to share that love with others who don't yet know that love to tell them about one who does indeed offer us full redemption that is purchase us from out of the ownership of sin and of Satan and bring us into glorious freedom and glorious forgiveness forever by faith and by faith in Christ alone what we're going to be singing next is a very rare hymn it's not by an unusual hymn writer it's actually by

Charles Wesley but I found it the only hymnal I found it in it dates back to I think it's the late 1700s maybe the early 1800s I chose it because it's based on Ruth chapter 3 one of the few hymns that is but I just want to read you all the words as I close so that when we sing them this will really come home to us whether we have come to Christ or not yet and if this is the time for you to come to Christ sing these words not just from your mouth but from your heart and offer your heart to the Lord Jesus Christ the words read Jesus we claim thee for our own our kinsmen near allied in blood flesh of our flesh bone of our bone the son of man the son of God oh may we lie at thy dear feet our sentence from thy mouth to meet partaker of our flesh below to thee oh Jesus we apply thou wilt thy poor relations know thou never canst thyself deny nor cast from us thy guardian care nor slight a seeking sinner's prayer thee saviour in our greatest need we trust our greatest friend to prove now o'er thy waiting servants spread the skirt of thy redeeming love under thy wings protecting take and save us for thy mercy's sake aren't those such wonderful words that show the the christ centred nature of what we've just been reading and how that's ultimately all realized in christ our gentle kind loving self-sacrificing guardian and kinsman redeemer through