

(3) Kindness through a redeemer

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[0 : 00] Hello to those of you who have downloaded the Ruth 3 talk from the Grace Church Dulwich website. Unfortunately the recording equipment was not working on Sunday, so this is me, Mark Jackson, re-giving the Ruth 3 talk from my study.

Obviously this will be slightly different to Sunday itself, but I trust that with God's help, he will speak to us now through Ruth 3 and build us up in his word.

So let me pray for us, then I'll read out Ruth chapter 3 and we can look at it together. Let's pray.

Father God, we thank you that you speak to us through your word, whether we're reading it for ourselves, whether we're listening to others explaining it.

And we thank you, Father God, that you do this as well when we're listening to talks from the internet. We thank you for MP3 players at the internet that allows us to hear your word taught and explained, even if we've missed that Sunday.

And so we ask, Father God, that you would speak to us now. Now, wherever we're at, whether we're at home, whether we're walking to work right now, in the car, we pray, Father God, that you would focus our thoughts, our attentions on you.

[1 : 10] We pray that you would fill our hearts with your loving kindness and change us as a result. We ask it for Jesus' sake. Amen.

Ruth chapter 3, page 269. 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 woman 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 is 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.

[2 : 20] 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.

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.

[3 : 21] 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 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 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, but will settle the matter today. One of the joys of preaching through a book of the Bible, chapter by chapter, verse by verse, as we do at Grace Church, is you get to preach on passages that you probably wouldn't choose to preach on yourself.

Or put the other way round, one of the burdens of preaching through a book of the Bible, chapter by chapter, is you don't get to skip over the difficult or particularly strange passages.

[4 : 36] And Ruth chapter 3, I think anyway, is one of those passages. I don't know what you were thinking as you heard the passage read out.

You may have thought it all sounded a bit bizarre. This talk of redeemers, of finding rest, of nearer redeemers. There's this request to spread your wings over me.

And what's going on with the uncovering of Boaz's feet whilst he's asleep at night? It's all a bit bizarre. And you may have been left thinking, well, one, what in the world is this chapter about? But two, and more importantly, what's it got to do with me and being a Christian and a part of the church today? Well, with those questions in mind, it's worth just taking a step back and reminding ourselves of where we've got to in the book of Ruth so far.

We've said that the book of Ruth overall is about the loving kindness of God. So in chapter one, we saw God's loving kindness to Naomi and Ruth in bringing them back from Moab to Bethlehem.

[5 : 46] We saw his kindness was undeserved in the context of sin and rebellion. His kindness was unexpected, bringing Ruth, a Moabite, a foreigner, back with Naomi. Then in chapter two, we saw the abundant nature of God's loving kindness.

Overflowing food, abundant provision, protection, more food, God at work in the lives of Naomi and Ruth through a man named Boaz.

Loving kindness, abundant kindness. But as we've looked at these two chapters, we've also seen the book of Ruth is not merely a story of God's kindness to them back then, 3000 years ago.

Rather, the book of Ruth is a picture of God's loving kindness to his people today. So do you remember the genealogy at the end of the book? Just flick there with me now.

Chapter four, verse 21. Key verses for applying Ruth to us today. So read verse 21. Salmon fathered Boaz.

[6 : 54] Boaz fathered Obed. Obed fathered Jesse. And Jesse fathered David. From Boaz to King David. From King David to King Jesus. The book of Ruth is a picture, a shadow, a blueprint, pointing us forward to God's loving kindness in the Lord Jesus.

Which, of course, has immediate relevance to us as disciples of the Lord Jesus. And so this is the big picture of Ruth as we come to chapter three. Whatever's going on with the uncovering of feet, with a line down at the end of the bed.

Well, we know it can't be can't be Christian dating tips for the 21st century. It can't be a Christian marriage manual like how to propose for dummies. Because first and foremost, we've been seeing this book is about God's loving kindness to his people.

And we need this in mind as we come to chapter three. Now, that's all by way of introduction. Let's turn now to chapter three. First, the search for rest.

Because in verse one, the presenting issue is Naomi's desire to seek rest for Ruth. So let me read verse one to you. 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?

[8 : 11] For the first time in the book, Naomi's interest turns to someone other than herself. Which is often the case when God's kindness breaks into a person's life. End of chapter one.

It was me, me, me with Naomi. The Lord has dealt bitterly with me. The Lord has brought me back empty. The Lord has brought calamity upon me. But then God's overflowing kindness in chapter two melted her hard heart.

So that now at the start of chapter three, we're not hearing me, me, me anymore. Now we're hearing you. Should I not seek rest for you? Asked Naomi to Ruth.

Should I not look out for your well-being, my daughter? God's kindness has lifted Naomi out of her darkness of self-pity and bitterness. And now her concern is for someone else.

Finding Ruth rest. In those days, seeking rest meant seeking a husband. Someone who could protect and provide for Ruth's future.

[9 : 10] Ruth, remember, was a widow. She was poor. The harvests were almost over now, so there's nowhere left for her to glean. She needed food, clothing, security, a roof over her head. In a word, she needed rest.

It's something a husband could provide. Nowadays, of course, having a husband might cause you considerable unrest. But the fact that the narrator uses this word rest and not husband reminds us that one of the big promises of the Old Testament was for God to bring his people into rest. Rest from their enemies. Rest in their own land. The rest of a safe, secure future in relationship with God. With our New Testament perspective, we know this promise of rest ultimately refers to the rest of heaven.

Whereas Christians, we will have rest from our enemies of sin, of death, of the devil. Rest not in the land of Israel, but in the beautiful new heavens and new earth.

The rest of a safe, secure future in relationship with Christ and his church. But back then, finding rest meant finding a husband. And that is what Naomi plans to do for Ruth.

[10:25] Well, if that's the search for rest, secondly, let's see how Naomi plans on going about obtaining this rest for Ruth. Because in verses 2 to 9, Naomi and Ruth devise a plan to seek rest through a redeemer.

This is the second thing we're going to see, the search for rest through a redeemer. Verse 2. Naomi says, Is not Boaz our relative? With whose young woman you were?

You remember from last week in chapter 2, Ruth went off to get food by gleaning in a field. And she just happened to come to the field belonging to Boaz. Not only had Boaz been ridiculously kind to Ruth, showering her with food and protection, but also he just so happened to be one of their redeemers.

So just glance up to verse 20 from chapter 2. Naomi says, The man is a close relative of ours, one of our redeemers. A redeemer was someone within the family, wealthy enough and willing enough to protect the family and secure a future for the family, whether it be buying back their land for them, or in the case of a widow with no children, marrying the widow to keep the family name alive.

Ruth was a widow. Ruth had no children. And would you know it? Ruth had just happened to come to Boaz's field, a godly, wealthy, generous man who was also one of their redeemers.

[11:54] So, Naomi's thinking, well, here's a perfect candidate for providing rest for Ruth. And it looks like it was God who brought the two of them together in the first place. Could he be the one? Well, there's only one way to find out.

And Naomi tells Ruth exactly what to do, verse 2. 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.

Tonight's the night, Ruth. Make sure you look your best. Straighten your hair. Touch of eye shadow. Perfume, of course. Favourite dress. Off you go to meet him. But do not make yourself known to the man until he's finished eating and drinking.

Let's say the way to a man's heart is through his stomach. So let him eat first. But when he lies down, observe the place where he lies. Don't want to get that wrong, do you? Then go and uncover his feet and lie down and he will tell you what to do.

Now, it's not difficult to imagine what most single men would be tempted to do when they find an attractive woman in bed with them. And it makes you wonder, just what was Naomi thinking?

[13:08] Lift up the duvet, Ruth. Lie down next to him and he'll tell you what to do. Yeah, right. Now, it may well be a good thing for Naomi to seek rest for Ruth.

But the end never justifies the means. And surely this is not the way to go about it. Is this not forcing the issue somewhat rather than depending on God?

I wonder what you make of Naomi's advice. Interestingly, the verses give no indication whether this is good or bad advice. The words in the original Hebrew are laden with ambiguity.

Each of the phrases in verse four can be taken one of two ways. And it seems the author just wants to build up the suspense and heighten the tension, especially when Ruth replies to Naomi.

Yeah, all that you say, I will do. So what happens next? Well, verse six, Ruth goes down to the threshing floor and does just as her mother-in-law had commanded her.

[14:10] 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. Seems just priceless, isn't it? Who are you, asked Boaz. This is a dream. But Ruth answers, I am Ruth, your servant.

Spread your wings over your servant, for you are a redeemer. At this point, the ambiguity ends. Ruth is totally up front with Boaz.

The phrase spread your garment over me is the same phrase God himself uses in Ezekiel 16. Towards his people. It's the equivalent of saying today something like put your engagement ring on me.

It's a marriage proposal. Ruth is proposing to Tabaoth say, marry me, that she is saying. Now, whatever we make of Ruth's forwardness here, remember these aren't Christian dating tips for today.

[15:13] We cannot fault her for her boldness. Boldness in going along with her mother's plan. Boldness in covering his feet. What would he think? Boldness in laying herself open before Boaz.

Boaz. Why this boldness? Contrary to what we might at first think, I suggest it's because she was trusting in the protective wings of God.

The word wings only comes up twice in the book. Last week, when Ruth sought refuge under the wings of God. And here, when Ruth asked Boaz to spread his wings, or the corner of his garment, over her.

Ruth uses exactly the same word. And I think it shows us that Ruth trusts in her God. She knows his love, his kindness. She's experienced his protection, his provision.

She's seen God's protective care of her in the past under his wings. And so she trusts God's protective care under Boaz's wings going forwards. That's why she can step out in boldness with her mother's plan.

[16:15] She can trust Naomi with all this redeemer business, which is a merabout she knows very little about. She can trust Boaz, through whom God has already blessed her. She trusts in her God.

And this frees her up to step out in boldness, even though she doesn't know the outcome. And that's always the nature of faith, isn't it?

Trust in God, and we don't know the outcome. So often we actually want everything planned out beforehand, don't we? We're scared of making a mistake, scared of looking silly.

We want to be 100% certain of the outcome before we step out in faith. But that's not faith. That's unbelief. Faith means trusting in God, knowing his love, his kindness, even though we don't know how things will turn out.

We don't know how that person will react if we invite them along to the week of talks. We can't know for certain beforehand whether they'll say yes or no, whether they'll laugh at you or say thank you.

[17:15] But that's the nature of faith. We don't know the outcome. But knowing how loving and kind God is, we can trust him with the outcome. We can step out in faith with boldness, even though we don't know how things will turn out.

Just like Ruth stepped out in faith and asked Boaz. But the question remains, is Boaz willing to redeem Ruth?

Because now we get to the heart of the passage as the spotlight falls on Boaz. Will he redeem Ruth from her poverty? Will he spread his wings over her and give her rest?

This is our third point. Is he willing to redeem her? Well, let me read verse 10 to you. 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.

[18:29] For all my fellow townsmen know that you are a worthy woman. I will, says Boaz. He is willing to redeem her. Despite her pain, her bereavement, her loneliness, Ruth has a redeemer.

Someone willing to give her rest. Boaz is a willing redeemer. And we can see from verse 12 that he was under no obligation to redeem Ruth.

He says, And now it's true that I am a redeemer, yet there is a redeemer nearer than I. Remain tonight. And in the morning, if we 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. If Boaz had wanted to, he could have said, Thanks, love. Not interested.

There's another redeemer. Boaz was under no obligation to redeem Ruth. But he wants to. He's committed. He is willing to redeem Ruth, a Moabite, a foreigner, an outsider.

[19:30] Remember Moab? It was not a number one holiday destination. For starters, Moab had come into being through drunken incest, Lot and his older daughter. In Numbers 25, Moabite women had led the men of Israel into sexual morality and idolatry.

At the present time, Moab was a sworn enemy of God. As you can imagine, Moabite women were not viewed as suitable spouses in Israel. And marrying one, one of them, marrying a Moabite woman, might not be best for your social kudos or standing in Israel.

Boaz doesn't care for this. Boaz's care for Ruth is much greater than his fear of losing face or his desire for social approval. He's committed to Ruth. He's willing to redeem her.

Why? Out of love, out of loving kindness, it's a loving kindness that he's been showing her since he first met her. A kindness full of love. Not the sort of love that the Hollywood paints on the big screen as mere feelings and physical attraction, but a love which seeks the best for the other person.

A loving kindness which will protect and provide for Ruth. A loving kindness which will bring her comfort, security, rest. Boaz loves Ruth. And just look at him in verses 14 to 18.

[20 : 48] Protecting her until the morning, providing her with a load more food, bring the garment you're wearing, hold it out, she does, six measures of barley. His commitment to her, end of verse 18.

Not resting until the matter is settled. Protection, provision, commitment. Boaz is a willing redeemer. How do we apply all this to us?

Well, we said at the start, the book of Ruth is not merely a love story between Ruth and Boaz. But ultimately, in the grand sweep of God's plan of salvation, it is a picture of God's love and kindness to his church.

Whilst it is tempting, perhaps, for the women to look at Boaz and think, I wish I had a husband like that. Or for the men listening, perhaps, to look at Boaz and think, I want to be like that.

First and foremost, it's about all of us, as a church, looking at Boaz in Ruth chapter 3 and thinking, we already have someone like that.

[21 : 56] someone willing to redeem us, someone willing to redeem us from our sin and bring us into God's rest in heaven, someone willing to redeem us for no other reason than that he loves us.

Jesus Christ is our willing redeemer. And Jesus doesn't redeem us out of duty or out of obligation. He redeems us because he wants to.

Out of love. I hope we see how wonderful and reassuring that is. Because it shows what value Jesus places on us, his church.

Imagine if Boaz had responded to Ruth instead by saying, oh, all right, if I have to redeem you, I will. If God's law obligates me to, well, I'll do my duty, I'll redeem you.

I mean, how do you think Ruth would have felt then? Not great, right? Not very valued. Certainly not very loved. And yet, some people view Jesus' love of them like this, out of duty.

[23 : 02] As if Jesus is some pawn in God's chess game of salvation. Obligating him. As if God the Father is twisting Jesus' arm. Go on, redeem them.

Well, all right, if I have to. But Jesus doesn't redeem us out of duty or out of obligation. He redeems us because he wants to out of love. He loves us, which is pretty staggering when you consider how unlovable we are.

Jesus could have come to earth, taken one look at the sinful bunch we are, and just said, look, no thanks guys, not interested. And yet, despite our sin, despite our rebellion, our pride, Jesus was willing to redeem us.

Why? Not for no other reason than that he loves us. And as Jesus goes to his death, a death we deserve, well, we see the full extent of his love.

Greater love has no one than this, said Jesus, that someone lays down his life for his friends. Jesus laid his life down for his enemies, people like you and me.

[24 : 02] There he is, being mocked and shamed, hanging on a cross, rejected by the world, and yet he can still say, Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.

He's staggering. Jesus' commitment towards us, his willingness to redeem us. Do you see it?

Imagine, for a moment, the most annoying person you know, someone who perhaps rubs you up the wrong way, mocks you incessantly, constantly puts you down.

Imagine being willing to love him to your death. or think about someone who has it in for you, a rival, a competitor at work, someone who makes your life for misery, who longs for your own downfall.

Imagine being willing to lay your life down for him or her. Or pushing it further, imagine someone who would have no hesitation in killing you or your family for their own personal gain.

Someone who could quite easily and happily destroy your entire life if it would give them a more enjoyable life. Can you imagine, can you begin to imagine loving someone like this, loving the

unlovable?

[25 : 27] And yet this is just how Jesus loved you and me. You might think at times you're quite lovable, but you're not. Jesus knows what we're really like.

Jesus knows us at our worst and still he was willing to redeem us, willing to redeem us for no other reason than that he loves us. It's amazing.

Amazing to think that Jesus is willing to do this for us, to spread his wings over us and cover our sins, to clothe us in his righteousness, to redeem us and one day give us rest in heaven.

it's amazing. It's amazing. And it's true. And if for one moment you doubt it, then hear these words of Jesus himself.

Come to me, all who labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon me and you will find rest for your souls.

[26 : 30] come to Jesus and he will give you rest. It's a promise. He will. He's willing. It doesn't matter how lovable you think you are.

Jesus is willing to redeem you. Trust in him and you will find rest for your souls. And whatever your view of God's sovereignty and election, one thing is clear, Jesus is not there saying to people, no, you can't come to me.

Away with you. Oh yes, you can come. No, no, no, you can't. There he is. He's calling out to all who labour, everyone. God's sovereignty does not undermine people's responsibility to come to him, to take refuge under his wings.

So come and know this rest that he is willingly lovingly offering. And if you've been drifting from the Lord, perhaps you've been flirting with sin, you feel restless, you know the Spirit's convicting presence, you long for the peace of God's forgiveness, well Jesus calls out to you too, come back to me.

He won't cast you away. Come back to Jesus, fall at his feet, confess your sin, receive his forgiveness, you will find rest for your soul. And may all of us know today Jesus' willingness to be our redeemer, his willingness to redeem us from sin, to bring us to heaven, to redeem us for no other reason than that he loves us.

[28 : 06] Let's pray together. Father God, we thank you for sending Jesus to earth as our redeemer to redeem us from our sins and bring us to your rest in heaven.

Lord Jesus, we thank you that you were willing to redeem us even though we know how unlovable that we are. And so we ask that you would help us by your Holy Spirit to believe this truth about your willingness and to experience it afresh in our lives, to know this rest in Christ and long for the fulfillment of it in heaven.

we ask it in Jesus' name. Amen.