

SUMMER B3 - God's Loving Kindness

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[0:00] Our gracious Heavenly Father, we do thank you for your word. Father, we do thank you that it is a light unto our feet.

And so, Father, we pray that you would help us to understand what you are telling us through it. But more than that, as Doug mentioned before, to live in light of it. That we may be a people who live for your glory and your glory alone.

We pray these things in Jesus' name. Amen. Well, there are all sorts of marriage proposals that you hear these days.

For one guy whose girlfriend was from the country, he popped the question using wrapped up bowels of hay. So on the next slide, there it is. Marry me. And complete with a tick the box option. So the next slide.

And so what he did is he blindfolded his girlfriend, led her to the field, sat her on the back of his truck, then he took off the blindfold, and here on the next slide is her reaction.

[1:04] So she's very excited. And on the next slide, here they are after she said... Notice the tick in the background? Yes. For another guy I know of, he was much simpler.

He proposed to his girlfriend not in a plane or with hay bales, but at her kitchen table with a cup of coffee, gazing over an Excel spreadsheet.

You see, they were both students, and they were crunching the numbers to see if they could afford to get married. And he thought, oh, let's just do it. So he proposed.

I heard him say once that he still gets a bit misty-eyed whenever he sees an Excel spreadsheet. As we come to Ruth chapter 3 today, we see yet another marriage proposal.

But it's different again, and a rather unusual one. But before we get to that, I need to do two things. Firstly, just a brief recap in case you've missed one in the series.

[2:06] So just very briefly, in chapter 1, you might remember that there is a famine in the land of Israel, and a man named Elimelech and his wife Naomi with their two sons move to Moab, away from Israel and away from God.

The move may have seemed like a good idea at the time, but it was disastrous. First, Elimelech dies, and instead of returning to Israel, the two sons stay and marry two Moabite women, even though God had said to Israel, don't intermarry, otherwise they'll lead you astray to worship their gods.

And then the sons die, and Naomi is left with her two daughters-in-law, one of whom, Ruth, returns. You might remember that word, returns, with her to Israel and to God.

At the end of chapter 1, verse 21, Naomi exclaims, I went away full, but the Lord has brought me back empty. And so she's consumed with bitterness.

That was Ruth chapter 1. And the next day, at the start of chapter 2, Naomi still seems bitter because it's Ruth who takes all the initiative, you might remember from Sunday. She asks, can I go and get some food for us?

[3:07] And in the rest of chapter 2, we see God's sovereign and silent hand at work to provide for both Naomi and Ruth. Do you remember? Ruth just so happens to do the very best thing and glean in someone's field when God's law allowed for foreigners to have the leftovers.

And she just so happens to find herself in Boaz's field, and Boaz just so happens to turn up and see Ruth. And when Boaz finds out who she is, he shows extravagant kindness to her because of her noble character.

In fact, there are hints of some sort of innocent attraction here because it says that Boaz does this because of her noble character. He's attracted to a noble character.

And so he continues to show great kindness, showers gifts on her, and she goes home with a huge bundle of grain. Now, when Ruth tells her mother about this, or her mother-in-law Naomi, Naomi realizes that God has not stopped showing kindness to her.

Do you remember that? Chapter 2, verse 20. He says, He, that is the Lord, has not stopped showing kindness to the living and the dead. And then she added, The man who did this for us is one of our guardian redeemers.

[4:18] And so that's the recap. That's what we're up to. But the second thing I need to do is to give you some background information about the guardian redeemer, or in some Bibles, the kinsman redeemer.

It's from one Hebrew word, really. But in ancient Israel, there were four main obligations on relatives. One was to redeem family members if they got into trouble and sold themselves as slaves.

Two had to do with avenging a murdered family member. It's in Numbers 35. Thirdly, involved redeeming land of a family member.

And fourthly, involved marriage and continuing the family line. Now, we'll have a look at redeeming the land next week, but it's this marriage thing that pops up and is in the background of chapter 3 tonight.

Though, this obligation was only for very close relatives. And so, I'm from Deuteronomy 25, which I think, is that on the next slide?

[5:24] I can't remember. That was someone else's marriage proposal. Got it wrong. Okay. Here's from Deuteronomy 25. If brothers are living together and one of them dies without a son, he must not marry outside the family.

Her husband's brother shall take her and marry her and fulfill the duty of her brother-in-law to her. The first son she bears shall carry on the name of the dead brother so that his name will not be blotted out from Israel.

And so, we see how it works. If there are unmarried brothers, then they are to marry the dead brother's wife to carry on his name. But if the unbrother married does not want to marry her, then he doesn't have to.

But he will be shamed for it. And so, on the next slide, we continue to read from Deuteronomy 25. This is what it says. However, if a man does not want to marry his brother's wife, she shall go to the elders at the town gate and say, my husband's brother refuses to carry on his brother's name in Israel.

He will not fulfill the duty of a brother-in-law to me. Then the elders of his town shall summon him and talk to him. If he persists in saying, I do not want to marry her, his brother's widow shall go up to him in the presence of the elders, take off one of his sandals, spit in his face and say, this is what is done to the man who will not build up his brother's family line.

[6:51] And that man's line, the unwilling brother, shall be known in Israel as the family of the unsandalled. So you don't have to do it, but shame on you if you don't.

Sandals will come up again in chapter 4, but the point here is that there was a custom for an unmarried brother-in-law to marry his widowed sister-in-law.

Now notice though, it's brothers-in-law that we're talking about here, not necessarily cousins or uncles and so on. And even the brothers didn't have to, though they certainly should.

And later on in chapter 4, we'll hear that Naomi is going to sell the land. And the money from this land will only last so long, and maybe long enough to provide for Naomi, but certainly not long enough to provide for Ruth, who's much younger as well.

What's more, the ancient world was not a safe place for a young unmarried widow. We only need to remember chapter 2, how Ruth is told to stay with Boaz's servant girls for safety.

[7 : 54] So Ruth really needs a husband to protect and provide for her, and Naomi knows it. So she comes up with a plan, which brings us to point 1 and verse 1 of chapter 3.

The plan. One day, Ruth's mother-in-law, Naomi, said to her, My daughter, I must find a home for you where you'll 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's lying. Then go and uncover his feet and lie down. 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.

Now you could read these verses in a rather negative light, couldn't you? I mean they do sound like the plans of a scheming mother-in-law who's teaching Ruth the art of seduction.

[9 : 03] You know, it sounds like Naomi finds out, perhaps from one of her sources at the hairdressers, that Boaz will be out on the threshing floor tonight. Then she tells Ruth to have a bath, get cleaned up.

Then she says, make sure you put on some nice smelling perfumes, perhaps the latest from Chanel, called Moabite Madness. Then put on your best clothes, which perhaps meant just get out of your work clothes.

Though, as poor people, it's likely they only had one set of clothes, and so it probably means to put on a large shawl, which we read about at the end of the chapter, because the Hebrew word can actually mean that.

And Naomi tells her, make sure she's not recognised. Anyway, she is then to go down and wait secretly until Boaz has had lots to eat and drink, and then she is to watch or literally know the place he lies down, and the Hebrew word for know, someone can also mean to sleep with someone.

And then she is to go and uncover his feet, which in those days was an imitation for sex and hence marriage. In fact, the Hebrew word for feet is sometimes used in the Bible as a euphemism for one's private parts.

[10 : 13] And then Ruth is to lie down with him. Now, the whole way this is written is very suggestive, which is what led to Doug's comment before about it perhaps being M-rated.

And it could easily lead us to think that these are the plans indeed of a scheming mother-in-law training Ruth in the art of seduction, but I don't think so. You see, Naomi is not doing this for herself.

She is doing it for Ruth. See verse 1 again? My daughter, I must find a home for you. And the word for home there is literally rest as your footnote in the Bible tells you.

And in verse 18, also has the word rest in it. Boaz will not rest until the matter is settled. And so the narrator starts and ends this chapter with the idea of rest.

Naomi is trying to provide rest for Ruth. And what's more, Naomi now knows God has been working in providing Boaz, who happens to be a redeemer, a close relative.

[11:20] And we saw that in chapter 2. And so she doesn't just sit back and do nothing, a kind of let go and let God mentality. Rather, knowing that God has been at work to provide not only food but also a guardian and redeemer who might marry Ruth, it gives Naomi confidence to act.

But it is a risky plan. After all, Naomi says to make sure that Ruth is not seen. It's risky. And the way the narrator writes with all this double meaning, this double entendre is, I think, his way of highlighting just how risky this is.

That it could be misinterpreted just like we could misinterpret chapter 3 and what Naomi is doing. I mean, if Ruth is discovered or dressed up on the threshing floor, her actions could be seen as that of a prostitute or someone who seduces men.

After all, that's what the Moabite women were famous for back in Numbers chapter 25. It is a risky plan. I mean, I have two daughters, one of whom once told me about three different boys she'd like to marry.

Even more concerning was the week before it was a different three boys. But I tell you what, when the time comes, I'm not going to give any of my daughters this kind of advice. But Naomi does it in order to provide for Ruth.

[12:42] And she does it because she has already seen God's hand at work back in chapter 2 in providing Boaz, who is a redeemer. And because she knows God's word from Deuteronomy about kingsmen redeemers.

In other words, it's an informed risk, not a foolish one. And Ruth obeys, which brings us to the proposal, point to verse 7.

And see if you can pick up which bit is the proposal as I read these verses. So verse 7 to 9. 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'm your servant, Ruth, she said. Spread the corner of your garment over me since you are a guardian redeemer of our family. Well, after celebrating, Boaz sleeps near a pile of grain to protect his investment when he is startled.

[13:55] And he awakes to see a woman at his feet and asks, who are you? Which is a normal question to ask. And notice Ruth's reply shows a sense of intimacy. She says, I am your servant.

And then Ruth goes further than Naomi instructed and actually proposes something to Boaz by saying, put the corner of your garment, Boaz, over me. That's the proposal.

You see, when a man put his garment or coat over or around someone in those days, it was a symbol that you were kind of taking them under your wing, that you would marry them. Putting your garment around someone was like a proposal.

Though, strictly speaking, Ruth actually asks Boaz to propose to her. Some guys are just too slow off the mark, you see. But there's more going on here than that.

The word garment literally means wing. Ruth asks Boaz to spread your wing over me. And this word was used back in chapter 2, verse 12.

[14:58] Have a look there for a moment. Chapter 2, verse 12. There, Boaz says to Ruth, in fact, prays a prayer, kind of prayer.

He says, May the Lord repay you for what you have done, you know, showing kindness to Naomi. May you be richly rewarded by the Lord, the God of Israel, under whose wings you have come to take refuge.

same word. You see, the narrator is pointing out here that Ruth is asking Boaz to act like God. Just as Ruth came to take refuge under God's wings, so now she's seeking refuge under Boaz's wing.

She's asking Boaz to be God's answer to his prayer. Boaz prayed that she might be richly rewarded by God, chapter 2, verse 12. And Boaz has been God's answer to that prayer in part already by giving her lots of grain, and showing kindness to her, as we saw last Sunday.

But now Ruth is calling on Boaz to be God's answer to that prayer in full, to be the means by which God gives her rich blessing. In terms of the law we saw from Deuteronomy, she's calling on Boaz to be her redeemer, who marries her and continues Elimelech's family name.

[16:22] But remember, Boaz is not Ruth's brother-in-law. He's under no obligation to marry her. If he was, wouldn't this man of standing, chapter 2, verse 1, already have had the integrity to do it?

So how will he respond to Ruth's proposal? Point 3, verse 10. 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're a woman of noble character. Boaz is blown over by Ruth's proposal, for him to propose.

He can't believe it, can he? He can't believe that this lady of noble character would want him. It's quite romantic, really, isn't it? Ruth could have chased after younger, presumably better-looking men, but she went for faithful old Boaz.

[17:31] And he's over the moon. You can just imagine his eyes lighting up as he exclaims, this is even greater kindness than you showed your mother-in-law Naomi. And again, the word for kindness here is that word *chesed*, the word used for God's great loving kindness.

So Boaz says, I will do for you all you ask. And then adds, everyone knows your character, Ruth. In fact, the word used to describe Ruth's character here is the same used to describe Boaz's character back in chapter 2 verse 1.

Both literally mean mighty people of character. But just when things seem set for a happy ending, Boaz points out a problem.

Do you see verse 12? Although it is true, he says, that I am a guardian redeemer of our family, there is another who is more closely related than I.

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.

[18:42] Lie here until morning. And 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. You see the problem here?

There is another one, another guardian redeemer who is a closer relative than Boaz, and so he must be asked first. Notice again that although it is described as a duty here, it doesn't seem to be one that they are bound to, because neither are Ruth's brother-in-laws.

In fact, the Hebrew text simply says, if he wants to redeem, good, let him redeem. It doesn't use the word duty. So while it would be a loving thing to do, this other person is not obligated to do it.

So Ruth stays till morning, without any funny business happening, because some people think it does, but after all we've just heard of their worthy, almighty characters. But before Ruth returns home the next morning, look at what Boaz does for her in verse 15.

verse 15, he said to her, bring me the shawl you are wearing and hold it out. When she did so, he pulled into it six measures of barley and placed the bundle on her.

[19 : 56] 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. Before I asked my wife Michelle to marry me, I took her parents out for dinner to their favorite restaurant, I might add, found out what it was, took it there, even bought them some wine, they liked their wine, to butter them up to see if they'd say yes.

Now is that what Boaz was doing by loading Ruth up, getting on Naomi's good side? I doubt it. I mean, Ruth has already kind of proposed, so presumably Naomi knows what's going on.

Rather, what Boaz does here is again demonstrate his kindness by giving food to Naomi. But more than that, God is again showing Naomi that he will provide for her.

Remember how Naomi describes her return to Bethlehem back in chapter 1? She said, I went away full, but came back empty. And what does Boaz say here at the end of chapter 3?

[21 : 18] Don't go back to your mother in law, empty handed. And then fills Ruth's hands with grain. In other words, God is using Boaz and Ruth to fill Naomi's emptiness, you see.

And we'll see this in a bigger way next week. But the chapter ends with a bit of uncertainty and suspense. Boaz has gone to town to sort things out with his competition, so to speak.

But will he get the girl? Or will the other kingsman redeemer pull rank and win Ruth for himself? Ruth is left waiting to see. And so are we. Unless, of course, you know the story.

So what lessons are there for us in this, which brings us to point four? Well, three things, I think. First, we are again reminded of God's kindness, aren't we?

Through the kindness of the characters. Naomi shows kindness by trying to provide rest for Ruth. Ruth shows kindness, or literally hesed, by going for faithful old Boaz.

[22 : 24] And Boaz shows kindness by spreading the corner of his wing or garment over Ruth, signalling he will redeem her. if he can. In this chapter, everyone is acting like God.

But it's this picture of Boaz spreading his garment over Ruth that the other prophets pick up, like Ezekiel, when he describes what God did for Israel.

Yet, there was one big difference. Israel's character was very different to Ruth's noble character. Israel's character was very unattractive, in fact.

On the next slide, have a look at how Ezekiel describes the situation. This is from chapter 16. It says, On the day you were born, Israel, your cord was not cut, nor were you washed with water to make you clean, nor were you rubbed with salt or wrapped in cloths.

No one looked on you with pity or had compassion enough to do any of these things for you. Rather, you were thrown out into the open field, for on that day you were born, you were despised.

[23:31] Then I passed by and saw you kicking about in your blood. And as you lay there in your blood, I said to you, live. Here God is describing Israel's character as helpless, like a newborn baby, but also kind of ugly, kicking around in its blood, despised, rejected.

Yet God had compassion and said, live. And then we continue to read from Ezekiel on the next slide. Later I passed by and when I looked at you and saw that you were old enough for love, notice the phrase, I spread the corner of my garment over you and covered your naked body.

I gave you my solemn oath and entered into a covenant with you, declares the Sovereign Lord, and you became mine. I bathed you with water and washed the blood from you and put ointments on you.

I clothed you with embroidered dress and put leather sandals on you. I dressed you in fine linen and covered you with costly garments. You became very beautiful and rose to be a queen. You see, Boaz's kindness to Ruth in spreading the corner of his garment over her is but a pale shadow of God's kindness to Israel.

For God did it when Israel was nothing. Indeed, when Israel was unattractive. And this is what God has done for us. For our character was not like Ruth's.

[24:51] but like Israel's. We were helpless and dead in sin as we envied and hated one another, just like Paul says in Titus chapter 3.

And so let me show you from our second reading. So please turn to Titus chapter 3. Page 1201.

Titus chapter 3. And we'll pick it up at verse 3 at the top of the page.

Right-hand column. Paul writes verse 3, At one time we too were foolish, disobedient, deceived, and enslaved by all kinds of passions and pleasures.

We lived in malice and envy, being hated and hating one another. This was what our character was once like. Is it attractive? No.

[25:55] We're so used to these words of hate and envy, we forget sometimes, I think, how unattractive they truly are. But this is what we were once like, like Israel, kicking around in our own blood.

And if that image is a little repulsive to you, then good, because we were repulsive to God, because of our malice and envy and selfishness. Yet despite our character, look at what God did in verse 4.

But when the kindness and love of God, our Saviour, appeared, he saved us. Not because of the righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy.

He saved us through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit, whom he pulled out on us generously through Jesus Christ, our Saviour. So that having been justified by his grace, we might become heirs having the hope of eternal life.

See what God has done for us? He showered us with loving kindness. By his Spirit, God washes us clean as he did for Israel.

[27:10] He forgives us our sins and spreads the corner of his garment over us and redeems us. But notice it all comes through the Lord Jesus, our Saviour, it says.

God died for us. And for us who believe in Jesus, then God made us his precious children, heirs of eternal life, it says. You see, in Boaz we see but a pale shadow of God's kindness to us.

For Ruth had a noble character to attract Boaz, but we had no such character to attract God, to make us worthy in God's sight. Kindness. But in his kindness and love, God still showered us with blessing upon blessing.

He still gave his son up for us. He still showed us loving kindness. He still washed us and gave us life eternal as an inheritance.

And so the first question for us this evening then is what have we done with God's loving kindness? kindness, his kindness that loved even us who were unlovely.

[28 : 22] The first thing we need to do is to accept it by believing in Jesus. I take it you wouldn't be here tonight if you haven't done that. And so if you have then the question becomes really do we still appreciate it?

Do we realise what we once were like without Jesus? Do we see just how amazing God's amazing grace is? As we sung about that he would love even us?

Or do we take it for granted and forget it? We must not do that. We must remember it. In fact we must reflect on it, meditate on it and let it move us to act like God as Naomi and Ruth and Boaz all do in this chapter.

In fact in your Bible Titus chapter 2 so towards the end of chapter 2 verse 11 Paul says much the same thing. He says verse 11 for the grace of God has appeared that offers salvation to all people and it teaches us or motivates or moves us to say no to ungodliness and worldly passions and instead to live self controlled upright and godly lives in the present age.

You see last Sunday we were to show kindness because God has shown kindness to us but this week we had to show not just kindness but God's whole character. In light of God's grace and kindness we had no longer to live ungodly lives but godly lives like God which reflect his upright character.

[30 : 01] Just as Ruth and Boaz were people of standing and reflected God's character so too are we to be and our motivation is to be God's grace. His undeserved kindness in Christ.

One of my favourite hymns is a hymn by Isaac Watts. We're going to sing it as our last hymn tonight. It's one you will all know well I'm sure it's called When I Survey the Wondrous Cross.

You know it? But the last line of the hymn is the one that really strikes me. It says this Love so amazing so divine it demands my soul my life my all.

God's grace his loving kindness you see it ought to drive us to surrender our all to the Lord Jesus who gave his all for us. It ought to move us to live godly lives like him.

And this may even mean taking risks for him. Not foolish risks but faithful risks. Remember Naomi she saw that God was working to provide for them she now believed that she now trusted that yet she didn't sit back and do nothing she didn't say let go and let God rather God's sovereignty at work motivated her encouraged her to take action and so too are we but never without trusting in him.

[31 : 26] Naomi trusted God was at work and acted in light of God's word about redeemers and so she and Ruth took a risk to provide rest for Ruth. I wonder whether we too are to act trusting in God and in light of God's word.

I wonder whether we are to act and even take risks for the good of others that they too may have rest eternal rest in heaven. Let me give you an illustration of this. I was speaking with a friend from my old church a couple of years ago beginning of last year I think it was a successful builder in fact owned his own building company in Sydney so making quite a good income and at the beginning of last year he decided to sell his half of the business to his business partner and go and work part time three days a week for his business partner so he went from being boss and owner part owner to employee so they could reduce his working days and with the two days he wasn't at work he used to teach RE in schools help out with youth group run men's Bible studies meet up with guys during the week during the lunch time now this wasn't a last minute decision it was thought out he'd been doing some of this already and seeing people become Christians and he wanted to do more of it and his wife had good income and so he you know he thought it would work but it was still a risk

I mean his wife worked for Qantas and her job was you know a bit shaky and as it turns out a few months later she lost it she was made redundant but for him it was worth the risk you see in fact God provided his wife with another job three months later but either way in his mind it was worth the risk because he knew God's loving kindness to him and he wanted to share it with others that they too might find rest eternal and so let me finish may we then see afresh God's loving kindness to us in Christ that he would love us the unlovely may that loving kindness move us to live for him and even take risks for people's good and God's glory let's pray our gracious heavenly father we do thank you for your loving kindness shown to us in the Lord

Jesus father although we've heard it so many times before help us to keep reflecting on it help us to keep considering Christ that we may live as a living sacrifice for you lives that are godly and that even take risks for the good of others and the glory of your name we pray all these things in Jesus name amen amen