

Ruth 3

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[0 : 00] Well, I want to welcome all of you back to the book of Ruth, and it was great to hear the children's story that Will was doing. He stole some of my thunder as well. I'm going to have to erase some of my points here. They'll be redundant.

But it is a great story. It's a true story, and it has significance that's far beyond these characters that we've been hearing about, to Ruth and Naomi and Boaz. If it was just their story, it would be a great blessing to hear.

It would be an encouragement to hear God's working in their lives. But it has a lot to do with your story and the story of the whole world, because it helps us to understand what God's redemption is all about.

And redemption is at the heart of who you and I are this morning. And so we're going to hear about redemption in this chapter. It is important for us because we live in a culture that is desperately trying to define who we are and what our purpose and significance is.

Do identity politics define us? Is it our gender or our sexuality or our response to COVID or the way we voted in the election?

[1 : 19] When you come to it, we're trying to define in our culture who we are in many ways. But when you come to put your faith in Jesus, you discover who you truly are, what your purpose is, what your identity is at the very depth of your being.

And what is that? It is very simply that you are a sinner who is saved by grace. A sinner saved by grace into his family forever.

And that's the good news that permanently defines you and me. Now, when I was getting my COVID vaccination shot, the nurse who was just about to give me my shot asked me what my birthday was.

And I told her and she said, oh, you're a Sagittarius. Now, that was an unusual thing to say at a shot. But if I had been quick, what I should have said is, no, I am a sinner saved by grace.

Now, that would have changed the conversation very quickly. You know, if somebody asks what your sign is, you say it's the sign of the cross. And that is our identity.

[2 : 38] You are saved because you have been redeemed by Jesus dying on a cross for you. He was God and perfect man who took your place on this cross to bring you into his family through the forgiveness of sins.

That's redemption. He became what you were so that you could become what he is. A beloved child of God in his family forever.

This changes everything about you. And that's why redemption is so important and one of the powerful themes in Ruth. And it comes to a climax in this chapter today.

If you think it's just a big theological term or sort of a cold legal transaction, Ruth helps us understand that God's redemption is different.

It is about deep rest. It is about faithful love. It is about belonging into a family. And it's about being filled.

[3 : 43] You see all of that in this beautiful chapter three. Let's turn to it right now. And in that chapter, you have the first scene in verses one through five.

And it's Ruth and Naomi. They're at the place where they're staying. And they're talking together. And Naomi says to Ruth in verse one, My daughter, should I not seek rest for you that it may be well with you?

You see, in her love, Naomi wants a permanent refuge for Ruth, where she won't have to worry about food or companionship or being safe facing danger.

Naomi has actually been praying about this since verse nine of chapter one. Do you remember what she said? She said, May the Lord grant that you may find rest, each of you, in the house of her husband.

It's been an ongoing prayer of Naomi's rest for Ruth. And just as an aside, this is a wonderful encouragement for us to pray for our loved ones.

[4 : 54] To pray for your children. Pray for your grandchildren. Pray for those who you know, because your ongoing prayers are critical. They are powerful.

We saw the fruit beginning of, in fact, I can't think of anybody that I know and talking to them about how they came to Christ, who was not prayed for by somebody.

You know, whether it was a colleague or a friend or a mother or father or a family member, just about everybody I think of was prayed for, that they would come to faith in the Lord Jesus.

And we see the fruit of Naomi's prayer in chapter two, where it just so happens that the field that Ruth is gleaning in belongs to Boaz. And Boaz just happened to be a close relative who could be a kinsman redeemer, which means he can acquire Naomi's husband's land for her according to Hebrew law, and could provide for Ruth by marrying her.

So Naomi now sees that this greatest gift for Ruth would be a warm, loving, safe, joyous refuge with Boaz, the redeemer.

[6 : 08] And, you know, in this dark and dangerous time that Will was describing in the book of Judges, this is when it's taking place, Israel is filled with sin and violence, and Naomi wanted Ruth to be safely married to a righteous man, one who knew and loved God.

She knew he could give the great blessing of caring for her within a right relationship with God. And, you know, this points to God's understanding and powerful work of redemption for us, because the nature of redemption is that it brings us into that kind of place of rest or refuge.

It's a place where our souls are secure, where we can never be taken away or separated from the love of God in the Lord Jesus Christ, whatever swirls around us in this world.

Jesus' redeeming invitation to all of us this morning is really clear in Matthew 11, 28. He says this, These words you hear every other Sunday, Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.

I will give you rest. In the forgiveness of our sins, Jesus gives us a place for our souls to rest safely, because he himself is the place of rest.

[7 : 33] It's not a geographical location. He himself makes us safe from the power of sin. So that nothing takes us away from the family of God and his love for us.

Redemption means that even in the darkest and most confusing of times, Jesus cares for us and gives rest for our souls. As Ruth's great grandson, David, wrote about his own redemption, he said, In you, O Lord, do I take refuge.

You, O Lord, lead me to lie down in green pastures. He knew what redemption was. And so Naomi wants this for Ruth.

And she wants it so badly, she comes up with this very risky, extreme plan to get Ruth alone and in front of her Redeemer. And you can see it in the next few verses.

She, in verse six and, she tells her, sorry, in verse three and following, she tells her that Boaz is winnowing barley at the threshing floor, which is an outdoor smooth rock outcropping.

[8 : 42] And so it's outside. He's going to have a big supper. And he'll be sleeping afterwards near this pile of grain. He says, All you have to do now is, once he's all finished eating and he lies down, sneak down there, watch where he goes to sleep.

And then, as soon as he's asleep, go uncover his feet and lie down there. And when he wakes up, do whatever he tells you to do. So get some perfume on, clean up, get a cloak around you, it's going to be cold, and go now.

Well, what could possibly go wrong with that plan? It is very risky. And of course, it can be easily interpreted as her trying to seduce him, as prostitutes would do at the harvest time.

And so if he was a godly man, he would sternly send her away, shoo her away, get out of here. If he was immoral, he would take advantage of her.

So why would Naomi suggest this unwise scheme? Well, we don't know for sure from the story.

Perhaps it's a bit of desperation. She has a zeal for securing Ruth's future.

[9 : 54] But I think it's very clear in this story that Naomi deeply trusts Boaz. Boaz. She has seen who he is in that harvest time.

She has a high regard for his character, that he is trustworthy, and upright, and godly. She has seen his goodness to her and to Ruth.

And at the end of this little section of their conversation, Ruth says, sure, I'll do it. I'm going. And you see in verses 6 and 7 that there's suspense as she stealthily carries out this plan.

And then Boaz suddenly awakes in the middle of the night, probably because his feet were cold. If any of you have spouses that like to grab the blankets, you know what this is all about.

And so he's very groggy. He wakes up, and he must have been very disoriented. He says, who are you? She answers very matter-of-factly, I am Ruth. And then she turns the tables.

[11 : 00] Did you notice this? And she tells him who he is. You are a redeemer, so I want you to ask me to be married to you.

And the way she says it is, spread your wings over your servant, for you are a redeemer. Now, if that sounds familiar, it's from last week, from chapter 2, verse 15, Boaz shared his prayer with her. May a full reward be given to you by the Lord, the God of Israel, under whose wings you have come to take refuge. So you see, in asking him to spread his wings over her, Ruth is saying, be the reward and the refuge that you have prayed to God for, me.

It's a very audacious thing to say. But imagine, also, being in Boaz's shoes, or his cold feet. You've just wakened up in the middle of the night with somebody at your feet asking you to ask her to marry you.

How do you take it in? I don't know how you guys are in the morning, right when you wake up. Are you groggy? Are you clear? I am very, very fuzzy.

[12 : 21] But God must have guided Boaz's heart and his tongue in that moment because his first reaction is to immediately bless Ruth.

He doesn't send her away or take advantage of her. His tone is warm. It is tender. And he says, may you be blessed by the Lord, my daughter. And then he praised her.

She said, you have made this last kindness greater than the first in that you have not gone after young men, whether poor or rich. What is that last kindness? It's not this kindness that she has asked him to propose to her in marriage.

It is this. It is that he knows that she is taking this risk, not just for herself, but for the sake of Naomi, her mother-in-law, who would be brought into that family with a secure future because he is a kinsman redeemer who would marry Ruth.

As that redeemer, he says these words, my daughter, don't fear. I will do all that you ask. Now this is an extraordinary response by Boaz, especially in those circumstances.

[13 : 39] He is calming her fears, promising to do all she asks, praising her, and blessing her. What this is, is Boaz overflowing with chesed.

And that is the second aspect of redemption that is so clear in God's work. You see, Boaz shows this loving kindness, which is chesed, this extravagant generosity and understanding in his redeeming work.

Boaz completely accepts Boaz, or Boaz completely accepts Ruth in this compromising situation. And there is a real joy that he has in showing this loving kindness to her.

I will do everything that you ask. He shows us that chesed is at the heart of God's redeeming work for us. Because you see, as beautiful as Boaz's chesed is, it's just a pale reflection of Jesus, our Redeemer's chesed for you and for me.

Jesus is a Redeemer overflowing with loving kindness. You know, the root for chesed has this primary meaning of eager or ardent desire.

[14 : 59] There's a passion about it. So chesed has a sense of zeal and love and kindness towards somebody. And this shows us that God does not redeem us reluctantly.

It is his passion. And it brings joy to him to show that to us. Jesus tells us the story of the lost sheep and how much joy there is when the sheep is found.

He says, that's a picture of heaven. There is this deep abiding joy every time a person repents and is redeemed by God.

You see, in Jesus, his zeal and passion is shown as he dies on a cross for you. pouring out his loving kindness, understanding us, absolutely delighting in making us his own forever in his passion, in his death.

If you have not yet asked Jesus to redeem you, and there may be some here this morning who are in that time, if you have not asked him to redeem you by forgiving your sins, this is the time to do it.

[16:13] It is the time to simply ask him as Ruth did for Boaz, please be my redeemer, forgive my sin, give me a new life, knowing your love in your family forever.

This is what Jesus delights in doing for you. It is why he came to this earth to die for us. Jesus, in his persistent love, in his joy, gives the benefit of his death to you.

So that's an invitation of the chesed love of God for you. And then the third thing that happens here is that Boaz's promise promises something quite extraordinary.

If you look at verses 12 and 13, you're going to see the word redeemer over and over and over again, five times in that one little two verse section. It says this, And now it is true that I am a redeemer, this is Boaz saying to Ruth, yet there is a redeemer nearer than I.

Remain tonight and in the morning he will redeem you. Good. 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.

[17:31] Now I want to say this word redemption or redeem is all about in these verses being brought into the family of God. Being brought into family.

Five times redeem is mentioned and the emphasis is that Ruth will be released into a family. Boaz makes a solemn vow that he's going to use everything in his power to bring her into that family. It is going to happen. It's a certainty. Now there's a little crisis here if you noticed because there's another family member who's closer than Boaz who can redeem and bring her into the family of God as well.

But Boaz clearly wants Ruth in his particular family within the family of God. This is a love story and you're going to have to wait until next week to find out how this turns out.

But you can know that her redemption here means that she will no longer be a foreigner. She will no longer be a penniless refugee.

[18:36] She is fully going to belong into the family of God's people. So much so that as you heard Ruth's great grandson is going to be King David.

And his family line will lead directly to Jesus. And you see we see the nature of Jesus' redemption here. It is all about belonging.

It is about adoption into the family of God so complete so permanent that God is our Father forever. And that's why Paul said remember that you were at one time separated from Christ.

You were alienated from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers to the covenant of promise. You didn't have hope. You didn't have God in the world. But now in Christ Jesus you who were far off are brought near.

You have been brought near by the blood of Jesus. By that redeeming blood. You see God welcomes you into the family of God in your redemption.

[19:42] It's all being brought near to God and to his people by Jesus' death for us. You are seeing here God's warmth, his welcome, his bringing together and closeness being at the heart of redemption.

And this actually means a lot for us as we're thinking of our own life here at St. John's your life through the week because there's a strong implication for us from Romans 15.

Welcome one another as Christ has welcomed you. It's saying that if you have been welcomed in your redemption how can you welcome those who are new to the church into the family of God?

And this is particularly important if that new person is from another culture. Your friendship with them mirrors the very essence of redemption in which God brings you into a new family to be loved forever.

This welcome is one of the clearest expressions of hesed. It is a commitment to love simply because we are in the family of God forever.

[21:00] So here again redemption is about family. It is about welcome. And so I want to close by saying that in the end of this little section that we've been thinking about there is this amazing thing that happens where Boaz sends Ruth away and fills her cloak with grain and with good news about the certainty of redemption.

And she goes home and tells Ruth goes home and tells Naomi everything. And that sign, that grain is a sign of the empty Naomi being filled and flourishing that she and Ruth will know the extravagant filling of God in their life.

In the same way, in our redemption, Jesus fills us in the life, in this life, with his Holy Spirit. And in the life to come, gives us everything in our inheritance in heaven with him.

And so this exuberant reading from Ephesians we heard, blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. He has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places, even as he chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless for us.

Before him. So how does this affect us this morning? Well, Ruth and Naomi come boldly to Boaz, their Redeemer, imperfectly and with empty hands.

[22 : 36] We do the same thing. We come to God empty-handed in our sinfulness, in our imperfection, you know, like Naomi's plans, but we, like Ruth and Naomi, come trusting deeply in our Redeemer, in God's goodness that he has shown to us.

We know God's promise of grace, and so we come to him for a mini redemption every time we confess our sins, and we ask God to fill us. We did that in the confession this morning.

Do you remember? We said, grant us true repentance, and your Holy Spirit, that those things may please you, which you do at this present, and that the rest of our life may be pure and holy, so that at the last we may come to is eternal joy through Jesus Christ our Lord.

You see, redemption doesn't mean just leaving a life of emptiness before God. He actually moves us into the full life of grain overflowing, a life of pleasing him and worshipping him in the everyday things of life.

It is a life of humility and serving each other with that chesed that Ruth, Boaz, and Naomi showed to one another. You know that Naomi, Ruth, and Boaz are like lights, shining lights in a dark period of Israel's life.

[24 : 00] And they were light because they reflected chesed, God's character, to their people. Chesed completely changes the way we relate to each other.

It's never a feeling. It is always lived out in practical ways. It's outward looking, seeking to bless at all costs because God has blessed you.

Jesus has loved you first by dying on a cross. And because of that, we love. Today, we also live in a rather dark and chaotic time.

there's lots of division in our culture. It's highlighted by political differences that we saw in this week's election. It's highlighted by differences in the ways that we think we should deal with COVID. But like Ruth and Boaz and Naomi, redeemed people are a light in the darkness of this world as they live out a life that is faithful to God and reflect his chesed.

[25 : 00] In this church, we have the same differences of opinions that are strong in politics, in maybe the ways that we should deal with COVID, and with our church also.

What do we do about a new church building, a place of our own? We have fears and we have hopes that can be very different from one another about these things. But in these differences, we are all within the family of God because we have been redeemed by him.

And what this means is that we have this great opportunity and challenged to bless one another with chesed. Those issues are very secondary to the truth that each of you are redeemed in God's steadfast love so that you are part of God's family.

God calls us to cover our imperfections and our weaknesses by chesed. He calls us to sacrificially and extravagantly show his love and generosity of spirit, particularly in the trying times that churches face.

He calls us to delight, to show care and mercy to the family of God, even if it means inconvenience and a lessening of our rights.

[26 : 21] Don't we have a glorious redeemer? Doesn't this show how incredibly loving and powerful that redemptive work is in our life?

May we give glory to Jesus each day as we reflect his chesed love for us. This will be the life of heaven, by the way. Let us practice it now.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen.