

Ruth 3

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[0 : 00] There we go.

How's that? That work? All right. Well, good morning. We're glad you're here. We are continuing in our Advent series in the book of Ruth.

I was thinking this week, if I were a filmmaker, I would begin the story with two women trudging along a dusty road back from Moab to Jerusalem.

If you haven't been here, you might not know why they were there, what the story is. The older woman had left with her husband and with her sons because of a famine to go away.

Their sons found wives, and then all of the men died. And Naomi, the older woman, turns back to her homeland.

[1 : 18] And Ruth, the younger woman, the widow, the foreigner, commits to go with her. But I would open with that scene of these women walking down a dusty road, empty, despairing, wondering, wondering if there's any hope at all.

And somehow the movie would tell that backstory, and then it would engage in chapter two where Ruth walks out into the field of a man named Boaz, and it feels like maybe there's a glimmer of hope because this man treats her kindly and generously.

And he provides for her, and he protects her. And you know, if this was a Hallmark movie, we'd be running straight to the wedding, you know, at the end of the story, right?

We'd be right there. But I want you to see that the storyteller, there's some more steps along the way. The story is not so clean. When you look at the end of chapter two, it's striking.

That episode ends with, and she lived with her mother-in-law. Although she had met this man who had provided for her generously, at the end of the scene, he's gone again.

[2 : 40] And it's just the two women. Yes, with a little food in their pantry, but no better off in many ways. And friends, we know too much of the story to be able to put ourselves into it again.

But I want to put yourself in the position of these two women. They've had a good day, and they've seen a glimmer of hope. And yet, and yet, how much might they have expected beyond what they've already gotten?

Perhaps you've walked a hard road. Perhaps your life has turned bleak, or your hopes have been dashed, your dreams have been shattered.

Even when things start to turn around, what do you expect? What do you hope for? Maybe you're like me.

Maybe you're like me. But it's easy to expect little. It's easy to protect my heart from disappointment. It's easy to think, I don't want to hope for much, because it probably won't happen.

[3 : 57] I do this in my life. I do it in my relationship with God. I've seen Him provide for me. I've seen Him protect me and my family through a hard season.

And yet, I see in my own heart that same impulse. I don't want to expect too much from God.

Because I don't want to be disappointed. I don't want to have my heart broken again. I don't want to have to face another round.

And so, I lower my expectations. I settle for God who will provide and protect for me. I lose an intimacy and a boldness in my relationship with God.

And I think, isn't it enough? When I think this way, though, I realize that I'm not seeing my problem or our problem clearly enough.

[5 : 09] Because I realize that as great as it is to have a God who might be a protector and a provider, I need more than that. Because the depth of my sin has not just made my life harder.

The depth of my sin has cut me off from the creator of the universe and the God that I was made to know and to glorify. And I don't need just a benefactor God.

I need a redeemer. I need a redeemer who will come and rescue me from the depth of my problem. Not just the hardship of my life, but from my sin.

I need to recognize that God's common grace won't solve the problem of sin and separation from God. I need something more.

And this is where I think we are at the book of Ruth. As we look at chapter 3 together, we're going to see how God steps in and helps Naomi and helps Ruth see the kind of God he is.

[6 : 21] To see that he is a God who provides a redeemer that we really need. So let's read this chapter together. You can look in your pew Bible.

It's on page, let me get it for you. Page 223. In your pew Bible. We're going to read the whole chapter of the book of Ruth and then explore it together.

Page 223. Then Naomi, her mother-in-law, said to her, that is to Ruth, 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 till 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.

[7 : 35] And she replied, all that you say I will do. So she went down to the threshing floor and did just as her mother-in-law had commanded her.

And when Boaz had eaten and drunk and his heart was merry, he went to lie down at the end of the heap of grain. Then she came softly and uncovered his feet and lay down.

At midnight, the man was startled and turned over and, behold, a woman lay at his feet. And 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 rich, whether poor or rich. And now, my daughter, do not fear.

[8 : 33] I will do for you all that you ask. For all my fellow townsmen know that you are a worthy woman. And now it is true that I am a redeemer.

Yet, there is a redeemer nearer than I. Remain tonight and in the morning, if he will redeem you. Good, let him do it. But if he is not willing to redeem you, then as the Lord lives, I will redeem you.

Lie down until the morning. So she lay at his feet until the morning, but arose before one could 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 had come to her mother-in-law, she said, how did you fare, my daughter? And she told her all that the man had done for her, saying, these six measures of barley he gave to me.

[9 : 35] 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. Will you pray with me? Lord, we thank you for your word.

And we thank you that in its richness and in its diversity, Lord, you reveal the glory of your person and of your work. That is, in it we see you more clearly.

God, I pray this morning that in my words, that you would speak to all of us about what kind of God you are, who you are in this world and for us.

Lord, will you turn our hearts towards you as we see your greatness. We pray these things in Jesus' name. Amen. God provides a redeemer that we really need.

[10 : 46] This story breaks down in some ways into two simple parts. Verses one through nine has to do with the women's initiative. The bold ask for redemption. And verses 10 through 18 is the response.

We see the great provision of a redeemer. So we're going to explore it in those two sections. So first, the bold ask for a fullness of redemption.

You have to get into the story to understand what's going on here. Right? At the end of chapter two, as I said, the women are alone. Naomi looks at Ruth and she says to herself, I can do nothing for myself now, but for you, at least, I want to take care of you.

How can I give you rest? And by rest, Naomi means, how can I give you security, which really means a husband? In that culture, that's what it looked like.

A single woman, a widow, a foreigner, had no standing and was deeply, deeply hindered to provide for herself and extremely vulnerable to abuse or neglect and abandonment.

[12 : 02] And so Naomi, out of her love, says, I've got a plan for you. Right? And she comes up with this plan. She says, the harvest time is almost over.

And Boaz may go away. Do you remember in chapter two, it says Boaz came up from Bethlehem to the field? He's probably going to go away for the foreseeable future.

And Naomi thinks, we've got to strike now. We've got to try to grab this guy while he's close. Her desire is to get Ruth a husband. And she thinks Boaz is a pretty good catch.

And so that's what she's doing. And so she concocts this plan. Make yourself attractive. Go down.

Don't make a show. Honor him in how you approach him. But make a fairly bold and fairly countercultural and not necessarily how anyone would say you ought to do it approach to this man in hopes that he might, in his mercy, take you in and provide for you and protect for you.

[13 : 11] That's what we see in verses one through five. Ruth says, okay, I'll do it. So, in verses six and seven, we see that he does this.

Just to clarify a few things. Waiting for him to have eaten and drunk does not mean that he is drunk. She is not trying to take advantage of him in his impairment after partying too much.

Despite the reputation that the threshing floor was a place of great partying among the men who were working there long hours, it was a great place of celebration.

But there's no hint that Naomi and Ruth are trying to manipulate or trying to take advantage of the situation. In fact, I believe they're seeking to honor him.

And after he eats and drinks and his heart is happy because his work is done, his stores of grain are full, he lies down to watch over his well-earned crop and goes to sleep.

[14 : 19] And she comes in and in an act of humility and yet bold faith, she puts herself under the cover, the corner of his blanket and lies down and waits.

It's a great scene, right? Again, think about this from a movie. There they are sleeping. And then suddenly, did you see how the story told it, right? Behold, behold only happens a couple of times in this story.

And behold, a woman was lying at his feet. He had no idea. He had gone to sleep. He thought, I'm just going to sleep. I'll wake up in the morning. Suddenly, in the middle of the night, he wakes up and there's a woman there.

And he thinks, who are you? What are you doing? And she replies, I am Ruth. I am Ruth, your servant.

Now, if you look through, you could map through in chapters one and two, Ruth has grown in her self-designation. She was a foreigner. She was less than a servant.

[15 : 29] Here, she's presenting herself, actually, as one who might actually be his peer, or at least a marriageable woman. She'd never designated herself like that before because it wasn't necessarily appropriate.

But in this context, she says, this is who I am. I am your servant. And then she goes beyond what Naomi had longed for and told her to do.

Do you see that? Naomi gives all these specific instructions. And specifically, at this point, what is she supposed to do? Wait and let him tell you what to do next.

But Ruth wants more than just provision and protection. Ruth wants more than just the rest of a husband. And so, she opens her mouth and makes an incredibly bold request.

Look with me again, verse 9. Spread your wings over your servant, for you are a redeemer. Now, if you have a different translation, you might be wondering why I'm reading it that way.

[16 : 39] Because the phrase, spread your wings, is not an easy one. And people translate it differently. The NIV will tell you, spread the corner of your garment. The King James will say, spread your skirt.

The NAS will say, spread your covering. So, why is it that the ESV says, spread your wings over me? It's an image.

It's an image. It's a phrase. It's usually used for cloth or clothing. So, that's, the other translations are very reasonable. But what she's asking for is actually what Boaz had asked for her in a blessing in chapter 2.

Look back real quickly. Chapter 2, verse 12. Boaz is honoring Ruth for her faithfulness to Naomi.

She says, the Lord repay you for what you have done. And a full reward be given you by the Lord your God of Israel. Under whose wings, that's the same word, the same phrase.

[17 : 45] Under whose wings you have come to take refuge. Ruth says, I'm going to come, I'm asking you to be my protector, to be my provider.

This is a marriage proposal. Let's not beat around the bush. She is initiating this with him. But she says, not only that, spread your wings over your servant, for you are a redeemer.

She's asking for more than just a marriage. Because by calling him a redeemer, she is calling upon him to respond to his role.

Not just to protect her. But to protect Naomi. And to protect the house of her father-in-law, Elimelech. Alright?

To understand this, you have to understand there are a couple of traditions, there are a couple of legal threads that are coming together here. Right? One is the threat of leveret marriage.

[18 : 46] When a man dies without having a child, his brother is bound by the law to marry that woman, take her in, and produce an heir so that that man's line will continue.

Okay? So that's one strain of it. The other strand of it is this principle of being a kinsman redeemer.

Which has to do not with the line, but with the land. So the house of Elimelech had a land. If you notice in chapter 2, it says that Ruth ended up in a field, one of Elimelech's fields, that Boaz owned.

It's a fascinating little detail back in chapter 2. Elimelech's land, the family still had this, but Naomi was cut off, and there was a sense of, what are we going to do with this land?

Right? And so what she is saying is, not just take me as your wife so that you can be my protector, but redeem the household into which I married. Redeem the land.

[19 : 54] Redeem my mother-in-law and give her a place. Give her an inheritance. Buy this land so that you might redeem me and all of my family.

This is the request that she's making. And it's a bold one. It's a big one. And as we saw in chapter 2, I believe it's tied to her trust in the God of Elimelech, in the God of Naomi, in the God of Boaz, that she has embraced and put her faith in.

Leaving her family, leaving her family, leaving her family, leaving her homeland in Moab to come and be among the people of Israel. Your people will be my people and your God will be my God.

Remember that? She did it in faith. She did it in faith. But she made a very bold ask. And you have to recognize that the risk was great.

The risk was great for her. What would have happened if he had looked at her and said, that's not my responsibility? What would have happened if he had looked at her and said, oh, well, you're a vulnerable woman in the middle of the night with no one around, lying at my feet.

[21 : 22] I'm a man. I know what to do with this. He could have easily violated her, taken advantage of her.

He could have dismissed her and shamed her. She might have lost all the protection and provision that she'd gained in chapter 2. She risks all of that because she believes that there is something greater, that there is a greater redemption for her and for her family and for the family of Elimelech, for her mother-in-law, Naomi, who she loves so dearly.

And she didn't do it foolishly. She had seen the character of Boaz. She had seen his kindness, his honorableness. She had a faith that wasn't willing to settle for just a benefactor.

She wanted a redeemer. She knew how desperately she needed it. What about you? What are you looking for here this morning?

God who will help you long in life, try to make things a little better, work out a little easier. Some of you may feel in great need and may be crying out for God to be a provider and to be a protector.

- [22 : 55] Some of you may be pretty well set, may not even be thinking that's a desperate need right now. But do you see that there's a greater need for you?
- Not just to be provided for or protected, but to be brought in to a full redemption with God. One that has intimacy of relationship.
- One that has a certainty of status. One that has an eternal nature to it that cannot be changed.
- Maybe you're like me and you've given up a little bit and hoping that God might do that for you.
- Don't let the fear of disappointment allow you to settle for less than all that God has for you. Why do I say that?
- [23 : 59] How can I say that? Well, because of the rest of the story. Because when Boaz responds, if you've ever studied literature, look for the high point of tension in the story.
- Look for that moment where you think, this is where it all hangs. And this is where it all hangs. Ruth says, I am Ruth, your servant.
- Spread your wings over me. For you are my redeemer. And all the weight of that ask. And the question is, how will he respond? What will happen to him?
- To her, I'm sorry. What will happen to her? How will he respond to this bold and desperate woman? At his feet. Verse 11, we see clearly his response.
- I will do this. I will do all that you ask. But see how he does it. Look at all the ways that he fleshes this out.
- [25 : 05] First, in verse 10, he blesses her. He says, may you be blessed by the Lord, my daughter. For you have made this first kindness greater.
- This last kindness greater than the first kindness. What is he talking about here? It's fascinating, right? There are lots of different ways that people have understood this.
- I think it actually has two different senses. One is with regard to Naomi. Your first kindness was not abandoning Naomi when she came back from Moab.
- That was your first kindness. But this last kindness is greater. You have longed for a redemption for Naomi that is beyond what she had hoped for. And so he sees in her heart a generosity of spirit and a sacrificial love.
- But clearly, in the context, it is also about him. This last kindness is that she has come to him and asked him to take this role of redeeming her.
- [26 : 16] Redeeming her by taking her as his wife. Redeeming her family by taking responsibility for the land.
- And she has done it in a way that honors him. She has done it privately so that he might respond without shame.
- She has done it apart from all of the suggestive undertones that may be throbbing through this story.
- I think the reason why those are in there is to highlight the fact that both Ruth and Boaz are completely above reproach.
- There is no hint of scandal in this story. His concern for her is so great as he continues.
- [27 : 17] Not only does he bless her and say, this is a great kindness you have done to me. He says, I will do this. I will make sure. For everyone knows what a worthy woman you are.
- He recognizes she's a great match. Go back to the beginning of chapter 2. Do you know how Boaz is described? He's a worthy man. Well, here's a worthy man and a worthy woman. And God has brought them together in this remarkable place.

And again, if this were Hallmark telling the story, we're at like 1052 in the movie that goes from 9 to 11. Right? And it's just about to hit that sweet spot where they all hug and kiss.

And, you know, there's this last, like, lame scene about all, you know, they all live happily ever after. Right? Right? He says, I am a redeemer.

I will do this. But. And you just think, no! No! But there is a redeemer closer than I. And you see his honor in it.

[28 : 25] I will not jeopardize this redemption by responding to you now in the fullness of what the Hallmark movie would want you to.

The music doesn't swell. There's no passionate kiss on the threshing floor. No. No. He says, I'm going to protect you and protect the process of this redemption so that it is above reproach and with honor.

There is another redeemer, and I will not jump the line and take his place. I need to honor him and let him do what he has the first right to do. And so he cares for her by withholding more than he gives in the moment.

Greg's going to preach chapter 4 on how he works this out. It'll be really fun to see. But he does it. He takes care of her.

Takes care of her by sending her home with grain. Which is both a good reason for anyone who might meet her in the morning walk to the well saying, Oh, what are you doing up?

[29 : 42] I've gotten grain from my household, from the house of Boaz. But it also might be, if you think about it, Boaz might not see her again in the same context.

Because if this other redeemer steps up and redeems them, then they're in his house, not in Boaz's. So this may be also a last blessing to Naomi.

He honors her by telling his men. It seems like that's the import of verse 14. Let it not be known that the woman came.

It seemed like he said that to someone. I think he said that to maybe other men who were around, who were on the threshing floor. This is not a public matter. Don't talk about this.

There has been no unrighteousness here. But he's trying to protect her and protect him and protect the process of redemption that's going to happen.

[30 : 44] For if anything dishonorable had happened, that might have jeopardized that process. But I want you to see at the end that Boaz really wants to be the redeemer.

He doesn't just say, ah, I'm second in line. We'll see how this plays out. He says, I need to honor this man because he has the right of first privilege in this process.

But if he does not, I will redeem you. And as you'll see in chapter 4, he kind of works it out to make sure he does redeem her.

And no one else does. There's no bait and switch at the end of this story. There will be a happy ending. The redemption will happen. And yet, and so what you see in the course of that is that what Boaz is giving is not just, I'm going to honor you.

Not just, I'm going to protect you. Not just, I'm going to provide for you by making sure that there is some redeemer that will redeem you. But he gives himself.

[31 : 55] He says, I'm going to, I will redeem you. I am the one who will come and do this. And thus, Ruth's risky faith is matched by Boaz's abundant promise of redemption.

What a great story. But friends, is it not pointing to an even greater story that we know? Is it not even more so for us and for our redeemer?

For he has dealt honorably. He has not simply overlooked our sin and said, that's okay. He has not come up with some backdoor way that he might rescue us from our rebellion and our darkness by waving a magic wand.

But God has honored us and his own character of righteousness by coming to save us.

By coming to die in our place. And by his death and by his resurrection, he has worked a redemption for us. That now he can look at us and say, to all who come to him in desperate need.

[33 : 24] To all who come and say, I'd want more than just provision and protection. I need redemption for my sin. Jesus comes and says, I will be your redeemer.

Ruth points to this by saying that the offspring of Ruth and Boaz is the line of David, which is the line of Jesus. God gives not just provision and protection, but he gives himself.

He gives his son for us. Jonathan Edwards wrote this. Those that give themselves to God and resign themselves to his will will find that his will is nothing but their eternal welfare and happiness.

They never need to fear to trust God, not knowing what his will will be. For as soon as you have heartily and entirely given yourself to him and retain nothing, God will set himself to make you happy.

You are sure that he will do nothing to you while here, but what will end in your glorious happiness hereafter.

[34 : 50] And when you die, you shall be received unto God as his own, very near to himself, into the closest union, and he will completely fill you with happiness.

If you give yourself to God and obey him, he will receive you as his to make you blessed.

If you give yourself to God, he will also give himself to you. You give yourself to him to be his servant. He will give himself to you to be your portion and everlasting happiness.

And therefore, you are sure of eternal glory because the infinite source and fountain of eternal glory is yours already. He has given himself to you.

Faith that with abandon throws itself into a desperate and risky and bold situation of trusting that she will actually be redeemed.

[36 : 24] And Edwards says, when you do that, you need not fear. For God will redeem you. And in redeeming you, he will make you full of happiness, of glory, everlasting.

And friends, is this not, is this not what Christmas is about? The angel says, fear not, for behold, I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people.

For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior who is Christ the Lord. This will be a sign for you. You will find a baby wrapped in swaddling cloths and lying in a manger.

And the words that the angel spoke to Joseph in Matthew chapter 1. She will bear a son and you shall call his name Jesus.

For he will save the people from their sins. All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had spoken by the prophet. Behold, a virgin shall conceive and bear a son and they shall call his name Emmanuel.

[37 : 31] Which means God with us. What we celebrate in Christmas is that God has provided a Savior. And God has provided a Savior who has come to be with us so that he might redeem us for himself.

Friends, this is the good news of the book of Ruth and this is the good news of Christmas. I'm going to pray by speaking the words of a familiar Christmas carol.

It's an invitation. It's an invitation for Jesus to come and be our Redeemer. If you're here this morning and you have not placed your faith in Christ, this is an opportunity for you to say yes.

Yes, that's what I want. That's what I desperately need. Is it God who will redeem me? And if you, like me, have hardened your heart and struggle with faith to believe that God will give more, may this restore your hope.

Let's pray together. Come thou long expected Jesus, born to set thy people free. From our fears and sins release us.

[38 : 48] Let us find our rest in thee. Israel's strength and consolation. Hope of all the earth thou art. Dear desire of every nation.

Joy of every longing heart. Born thy people to deliver. Born a child and yet a king. Born to reign in us forever. Now thy gracious kingdom bring.

By thine own eternal spirit. Rule in all our hearts alone. By thine all sufficient merit. Raise us to thy glorious throne.

May it be so, Lord. May it be so. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

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