

Reading: Ruth 3:8-9 "8 At midnight, Boaz was startled, turned over, and there lying at his feet was a woman! 9 So he asked, "Who are you?" "I am Ruth, your servant," she replied. "Take me under your wing, for you are a family redeemer."

Main Point: There is rest in the redeemer when we live what we believe.

3:1-3 Ruth's mother-in-law Naomi said to her, "My daughter, shouldn't I find rest (*mānôah*) for you, so that you will be taken care of? ² Now isn't Boaz our relative? Haven't you been working with his female servants? This evening he will be winnowing barley on the threshing floor. ³ Wash, put on perfumed oil, and wear your best clothes. Go down to the threshing floor, but don't let the man know you are there until he has finished eating and drinking.

Our story continues in thrilling development. Boaz's introduction and first interaction with Ruth go favorably. We now know he is wealthy, generous, and well-respected. Yet how favorable was Boaz to Ruth? Ruth and Naomi received 6-8 months' worth of grain to make bread. A great gift that secures their lives for a while but still has not changed their status as destitute widows. Something must be done because they can not rely on charity forever. Naomi has an idea; you might even say plan or scheme.

Naomi wishes for Ruth to find rest. The Hebrew word she is using is "*mānôah*." Literally resting place. You might remember that word from a sermon I preached a few months ago. It was the name of Samson's father. What will settle the soul of Ruth and, by extension, Naomi? Only one thing would bring rest to these women in this world. Marriage to a good man. Naomi and Ruth both know this, so it is no surprise Naomi sees a change that Boaz is that man. Why? He just gave them 6 months of food. A pretty good indicator that he might be into her.

Naomi's instruction to Ruth is explicit. Find a husband, and it should be Boaz. She is a motivated individual, is she not? Boaz checks all the boxes. He is rich, kind, generous, and available. No time to waste. Because tonight he'll be on the threshing floor. A threshing floor is probably on a hill, where farmers would come to separate the seed from the stalks or chaff. This is one time of year that the landowners would spend all day and night working together. The noblemen usually work their fields during the day but retire to the walled houses in the evening. This night is different. Boaz is going to be out there all night.

Naomi plays a matchmaker and tells her to look, smell, and dress well. All the things a bride would do before her wedding, but I think Naomi is stating something else. She instructs Ruth to end her time of mourning. "You have honored the dead; it is time to find rest." So go to the threshing floor and make your move tonight.

Let's keep reading. Naomi continues...

3:4-5 ⁴ When he lies down, notice the place where he's lying, go in and uncover his feet, and lie down. Then he will explain to you what you should do." ⁵ So Ruth said to her, "I will do everything you say."

This is a controversial moment. Not to Naomi or Ruth, but it is for us. Naomi basically told Ruth to take off Boaz's pants. The simple reading of just this text describes a sexual advance made by Ruth. Obviously not uncommon during the time the judges, but in our story, it seems odd. Beginning in Chapter one the author presents Naomi, Ruth, and Boaz as exceptions to the world

around them. Ruth is a foreigner who devotes herself to Yahweh. Boaz is an honorable Yahweh worshiper. Naomi has returned to her home, pleading with God for salvation bitterness. Why the sudden shift in morality?

We have to uphold the author's intent. Clearly, the context promotes noble character, integrity, and boldness to pursue Boaz. Therefore, it is unlikely Ruth is making a purely sexual advance. She is, however, making her desire and intentions clear. Which is why our translation says "uncover his feet" alluding to intimacy not fornication. This action comes with significant risk. What will Boaz, a man of high character, react to such an advance.

With the high-risk, high-reward atmosphere, Ruth promises to do "everything," Naomi says.

3:6-7 ⁶ She went down to the threshing floor and did everything her mother-in-law had charged her to do. ⁷ After Boaz ate, drank, and was in good spirits, he went to lie down at the end of the pile of barley, and she came secretly, uncovered his feet, and lay down.

Ruth and Naom mirror the invisible hand of God working behind the scenes to bring about a favorable conclusion. This is not presented as seduction or manipulation the way we might be predisposed to interpret it. Like the section before, this one follows suit. Signs are promising that Ruth will find favor in Boaz. It's not guaranteed, but Ruth acts according to the wisdom at her disposal.

Waiting on God does not be idleness. Most often, it requires great effort and trust. Why? God's providence sometimes utilizes supernatural or natural means to bring about blessings. In our story, Naomi is the catalyst for Ruth to act, but not blindly. She uses wisdom to know when to approach Boaz. Wisely she goes to him when he finishes his work, enjoys an evening with his servants, waits for when he'll be in his best mood, and finally when he is lying alone. The purity of her motivation is what keeps these actions from being seduction or manipulation. She is doing all of this out of service and loyalty to Naomi.

She uncovered his legs and laid down.

3:8-9 ⁸ At midnight, Boaz was startled, turned over, and there lying at his feet was a woman! ⁹ So he asked, "Who are you?" "I am Ruth, your servant [*'āmā*]," she replied. "Take me under your wing, for you are a family redeemer."

We have reached the crescendo. Boaz, startled by a breeze, no doubt turns over and touches Ruth. Who are you? Her reply is drenched in boldness. She uses a different word for "servant" than she used in chapter 2, verse 13. First, she used šiphâ meaning ordinary servant, and here she uses 'āmâ the word a wife would use to describe herself. Ama conveys the need for provision, protection, and the perks of marriage. She says to Boaz, "I'm wife material; you can bring me home to Mom."

A bold move, but she's not done. She goes on to press Boaz into a decision. "Take me under your wing." That may not mean much to you, but Ruth asked, "Boaz will you marry me? You are my *go'el*." You are my family redeemer. Three things are twisted together.

1. I want to be under your provision and protection as your wife.
2. You are responsible for taking me into your house as a family redeemer.
3. You prayed for me to find full reward under the wings of God's refuge. Will you be the answer to your own prayer?

What is a family (Kinsman) redeemer? It was the duty of the nearest male relative of a deceased man to marry the childless widow and to father her children. Her firstborn son would then be acknowledged as her dead husband's son and inherit his property. This was prescribed in Deut. 25 as a responsibility of God's people to uphold. Ruth presses Boaz to fulfill this responsibility. In a way, Ruth reverses Boaz's question, "Who are you," and asks him, "Who will you be?"

I wish we were all ancient Jews because you could cut the tension with a knife. There is no certainty about how Boaz will respond despite some signs of his favor being clear. An ancient Jew would have known in their bones that Ruth was shattering severe social norms.

She is the servant, and he is the master; she is the uninvited vaster, he is a noble land owner; she is a woman, and he is a man; she is a foreigner, and he is the native; she is poor, and he is wealthy. How will Boaz respond to Ruth's actions?

1. He could do what was right in his own eyes and abuse her.
2. He could send her away quietly, viewing her only as a prostitute.
3. He could have accused her of entrapment and seduction.

He does none of those things because he is a man who represents genuine of *hesed*. The Hebrew word for covenant loyalty/love.

3:10-11¹⁰ Then he said, "May the LORD bless you, my daughter. You have shown more kindness now than before, because you have not pursued younger men, whether rich or poor. ¹¹ Now don't be afraid, my daughter. I will do for you whatever you say, since all the people in my town know that you are a woman of noble character.

Amen! The tension is cut by a master becoming the servant. He wants to serve her. He doesn't view her as a daughter, but the phrase signifies her being precious to him. They both demonstrate covenant love and loyalty to each other. In the same way, the narrator introduces Boaz as a man of noble character; Boaz bestows the same honor onto Ruth. Treating her as his equal in standing and rank.

3:12-15 ¹² Yes, it is true that I am a family redeemer, but there is a redeemer closer than I am. ¹³ Stay here tonight, and in the morning, if he wants to redeem you, that's good. Let him redeem you. But if he doesn't want to redeem you, as the LORD lives, I will. Now lie down until morning." ¹⁴ So she lay down at his feet until morning but got up while it was still dark. Then Boaz said, "Don't let it be known that a woman came to the threshing floor." ¹⁵ And he told Ruth, "Bring the shawl you're wearing and hold it out." When she held it out, he shoveled six measures of barley into her shawl, and she went into the town.

Recognize the depth of Boaz's covenant loyalty. His honor and integrity will not usurp another man from the blessing of being a redeemer. A man is in pole position before him, and it is proper that he gets the right of first refusal. This action is why we know this is not just a sexual encounter. Boaz has the integrity to do what is right even when the situation presents an opportunity for sin and personal gain.

This couple truly is the exception during the time of the judges. They consistently do what is right in God's eyes, not their own. There might not be a king in Israel, but there is a Lord over their life. A refreshing story genuinely. When godliness is a person's motivation, blessing abounds. So, Boaz gives 6 measures of barley to Ruth as a bride price, or promise, that he will make way for them to be married.

3:16-18 ¹⁶ She went to her mother-in-law, Naomi, who asked her, "What happened, my daughter?" Then Ruth told her everything the man had done for her. ¹⁷ She said, "He gave me these six measures of barley, because he said, 'Don't go back to your mother-in-law empty-handed.'" ¹⁸ Naomi said, "My daughter, wait until you find out how things go, for he won't rest unless he resolves this today."

The narrator condenses our story into a straightforward line but repeats what was stated in the previous verses with an addition. Why repeat the 6 measures of Barley? It concerns Boaz's statement, "Don't go back ... empty-handed." Naomi says to the people of Bethlehem in 1:21, "I went away full, but the LORD has brought me back empty." Boaz is redeeming what was emptied. The hidden hand of God is working through Boaz to remove Ruth's bitterness, making her whole again.

Now Boaz takes center stage for the conclusion of our redemption story. Ruth and Naomi have played their part. They responded in faith by taking action when needed, but now they wait expectantly for God to work through other people.

Our story is powerful. The tension and intrigue are captivating, but God intends for this story to instruct us with a few principles that easily translate into our lives.

1. React to God's catalyst.

A catalyst is a substance or object that initiates a change in another substance or object. Naomi was Ruth's catalyst for action. Ruth needs the encouraging direction of Naomi to bring about her rest. God has supplied us with catalysts like Naomi to transform us into faithful saints. Our primary source is God's word. The encouragement from God himself to elicit noticeable change in our life. God providentially places people in our life for motivating us to righteousness.

Hebrews 10:24-25 ²⁴ And let us consider one another to provoke love and good works, ²⁵ not neglecting to gather together, as some are in the habit of doing, but encouraging each other, and all the more as you see the day approaching.

We are catalysts in each other's lives through the use of our spiritual gifts to stir one another into godliness. In what ways are you being led to be a catalyst today?

2. Live with integrity.

Each of the three characters acts on behalf of another despite having no obligation. Each faced significant risks acting the way they did. As we have seen, each acts honorably with integrity. Why? Because they had pure motives. The desire of their heart was for righteousness.

Proverbs 16:2 “² All a person's ways seem right to him, but the LORD weighs motives.”

God is interested in what drives us to action. So, what caused our characters to go into action? Naomi wanted to find a place of rest for Ruth. Ruth wanted to honor her mother. Boaz was motivated by compassion for a woman of honor and integrity wanting to redeem them from despair. What is our motivation supposed to be as Christians? Read with me Paul's motivation as an ambassador for God.

1 Thessalonians 2:3-4 “³For our exhortation didn’t come from error or impurity or an intent to deceive. ⁴Instead, just as we have been approved by God to be entrusted with the gospel, so we speak, not to please people, but rather God, who examines our hearts.”

Our motivations produce integrity. If we, like Paul, are motivated by God's good pleasure, we will live with integrity all the days of our life.

3. Find rest under the redeemer’s wing.

Boaz is an archetype of Jesus Christ. A foreshadowing of Christ redeeming his creation from their condemnation of death because of sin. Remember how Boaz was delighted to know it was Ruth who startled him. In the same way, Christ delights in us when we seek him for our redemption. Remember how Boaz redeemed Ruth’s material trials and her social stigma of being a destitute widow by bestowing his honor on her. Jesus saves us from our sinful sigma and bestows on us his righteousness.

There is no more fantastic rest our souls can find than to be secure in the righteousness of Christ. Death is no longer a fear, condemnation is no longer a threat, and future provision is not in question, for our souls are filled with the Spirit of God for eternity. The rest we reap is the fruit of love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. Like Ruth, we must seek out the redeemer.

How do we seek him out? We don’t have to conceive of a plan or wait for the timing to be right. That part of our story does not correlate. So how? Hebrews 11:6 “⁶Now without faith it is impossible to please God, since the one who draws near to him must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who seek him.”

Faith is how we seek Jesus. Belief in who he is and what he has done, according to the scriptures, is all that one must do to find rest. That is because Jesus sought us out, Luke 19:10 “⁹“Today salvation has come to this house,” Jesus told him, “because he too is a son of Abraham. ¹⁰For the Son of Man has come to seek and to save the lost.”

Let's Pray