

## **Love Story: God's Epic Tale of Redemption**

The Risk of Love

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### **THE RISK OF LOVE Ruth 3**

All right, if you have a Bible, and I hope you do, let me invite you to open with me to Ruth 3. Part 3 of a love story known as the Book of Ruth. And tonight things are going to get a little dicey. Ruth 3 is the climatic turning point in this story, and it is the height of tension, drama, suspense, and the reality is—just kind of hold onto your seats, because Ruth is about to turn up the temperature on the romance in this chapter right here in ways that are going to shock us.

And here's the deal. I am praying that tonight, I am praying that tonight you will see, maybe in a new, maybe all together fresh way, the depth of the love of God for you. If you are here tonight and you are not a Christian, and I hope, I'm praying that tonight in this room for the first time, your heart will be opened wide to the great love of God. And if you are a Christian, that tonight your mind will be renewed and your heart rekindled by picture of God's unfathomable love for you.

So if you've not been here the last couple of weeks, I want to make sure to catch you up to speed before we dive into Ruth 3, and what's happened in the story to this point and for some this will just be a reminder, but the story of Ruth begins, Ruth 1, with Naomi, along with her two sons, following her husband, Elimelech from Bethlehem to Moab. Moab's a place of the storied history, and it's not a good history, not a good history with the people of Israel. They go there, as soon as they get to Moab, unexpectedly Elimelech, her husband, dies, and then her two sons die, and she is left alone with two Moabite daughters in law. They are three widows, childless, no heirs, no family to carry on their line.

And so what, what happens is Naomi hears that there is food in Bethlehem, and so Naomi decides to go back to Bethlehem, tells her two daughter in laws to stay there in Moab. One stays and the other, Ruth, looks at Naomi and says, "I'm going with you. Your people will be my people. Your god will be my god. I'm going to be buried with you. I am committed to you." And so at the end of Ruth 1, Ruth and Naomi walk together back into Bethlehem. Naomi tells her friends who recognize her that she is bitter. She went away full and she has come back empty with nothing in her hands.

That leads us into Ruth 2. The major problems in the book are twofold at this point. These are two women in need of food and in need of family. First, in need of food, is tackled in Ruth 2. Ruth goes out into the fields to glean. It was harvest time, and she just so happened to find herself in the fields of a guy name Boaz. And Boaz just so happened to walk up when Ruth was working in his field, and she caught his eye. And the rest is what dreams are made of. It was a meal of roasted grain. It was a bushel full of barley on her back as she walked away. It was oil and vinegar. I mean it was, it was an incredible romantic scene in Ruth 2.

She comes back to her mother-in-law, Naomi, and Naomi is giddy, to say the least. She is bumbling with her words. She cannot believe all this grain that has been brought back. And

the best part is when Ruth tells her whose field she had been in. She had been in the fields of Boaz, and Naomi immediately recognizes Boaz is from the clan, which is a larger family group, the clan of Elimelech, which means he is uniquely qualified to care for them, and to provide for them, and to protect them, to take them under his care.

And so Naomi says, "Ruth, stay in his fields. Everyday you go to his field." And that's what she did. Everyday throughout the harvest season she's in Boaz's fields, week after week after week in the harvest season, she is in Boaz's fields. Which leads to the most anti-climactic ending to Ruth 2, when it says so she lived with her mother-in-law. Disappointing. Food has been taken care of. They have enough grain probably for at least the rest of the year, but family is still a void.

What you've got at the end of Ruth 2 is the odd couple, still the odd couple. Ruth and Naomi. Ruth living with her mother-in-law. Boaz has done nothing. That sets the stage for some of the shadiest verses in all the Old Testament in Ruth 3. Okay. And I've, I've prayed like how to preach this text. It just doesn't seem appropriate in this setting, I'll be honest with you, but it's scripture. And so we're just going to pray that God will give us grace to understand the meaning of this text in an appropriate way.

So Ruth 3:1. Now what we're going to do is we're going to walk through this story, just like we have the last couple of weeks, just kind of phrase by phrase, verse by verse, and just pause and put ourselves in the story and feel what's going on, to imagine the scene, to hear what the original hearers were hearing, and to put ourselves in the middle of the story.

So Ruth 3:1. This whole chapter, it's under a cloak of darkness. It happens from sunset to sunrise. Verse 1, "*One day Naomi her mother-in-law said to her, 'My daughter, should I not try to find a home for you, where you will be well provided for?'*" (Ruth 3:1). That's Hebrew for, "Ruth you need a man. You need a husband." "My daughter, shall I not try to find a home that word home?" And you might even have a little note in your Bible that takes you to the bottom where it says "where you will find rest", and this is a phrase that is very common to describe the rest, security, comfort that you would find as a woman in arms, in the home of a loving husband. You need a husband, Ruth.

So here's the plan that the scheming mother-in-law is going to concoct. Verse 2. "*Is not Boaz, with whose servant girls you have been, a kinsman of ours? Tonight he will be winnowing barley on the threshing floor*" (Ruth 3:2). Pause here. Two things about Boaz. Number one, we're reminded that Boaz is a kinsman, which basically means that Boaz is an eligible bachelor for Ruth, particularly eligible. And we're going to see this even more next week in Ruth 4, this picture of the kinsman, the kinsman redeemer. We saw it last week at the end of Ruth 2. It's kind of a thread that's been woven throughout. We're going to see it really camp out in Ruth 4.

But the picture is, "Ruth Boaz is an eligible bachelor for you Ruth." And then second, "tonight, he's going to be winnowing barley on the threshing floor." What would happen is at the end, after all the barley had been harvested, you would have a secluded area, most likely on the side of a hill or something where in the evening when there was this cool breeze that was coming across, what they would do is basically, you take the pitchforks and you toss the barley up into the air and the wind would come and blow away the chaffe, and the grain, which was heavier, would fall to the ground. And so this is what winnowing is.

And Naomi knows that that evening Boaz is going to be winnowing barley in a place that's more secluded. Up until this point, Boaz has just been in the field. It's not like Ruth could go up to Boaz in the middle of the field and say, "Hey, have you ever thought about marrying

me?" It's not happened to this point, but this is a unique opportunity that is set before them. And so here's, here's what Naomi says needs to happen. And this is where it just gets downright shady.

Verse 3, she says, "*Wash and perfume yourself, and put on 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 is lying. Then go and uncover his feet and lie down. He will tell you what to do*" (Ruth 3:3-4). If you are hearing this in the original context, you are blushing big time right now. Like if your children are nearby, you are totally covering their ears as they're listening to this. Can you believe that Naomi just said this?

Now here's, let me do a little interpretation here, and as best as I can. Okay go back up to the beginning. Verse 3, "*Wash and perfume yourself, and put on your best clothes.*" This is more than Naomi saying Ruth, you smell bad and you need to clean up so you can smell better for Boaz. This is deeper than that. There's an interesting parallel. Over in Second Samuel 12:20, King David does the exact same thing. He washes himself. He puts oil on, and he puts on his best clothes. He does that in Second Samuel 12:20, to signify that he has left behind a time of mourning over his son, his child who has passed away.

And this is the transition from mourning to, "Okay I'm moving on now." And so the picture here is, "Ruth, you have been a widow, and you have been in a picture, a state, of mourning for all of these years. Now, it's time to put that behind and move on to show that you are no longer in mourning over your former husband. You are an eligible bachelorette at this point," is the picture. "You're eligible for marriage, and, in addition, you'll smell better."

So, she says, "*Then go down to the threshing floor, but don't let him know you are there until he has finished eating and drinking*" (Ruth 3:3). "So you hide out, you watch him eat and drink." And the picture here is not, "Okay, Boaz is getting drunk," that kind of thing at all. This is just simply wait until he's in a good mood. Men are in better moods after they've had a nice meal. So wait 'til he's finished eating and drinking, he's in a good mood. When he lies down, when he goes over to the edge of the winning floor, lays down and looks up in the stars and falls asleep, here's what you're going to do, "*note the place where he is lying*" (Ruth 3:4), then - and even that word then right there, it's a euphemism in the original language of the Old Testament there that basically is like Naomi saying, "Now this is crucial. Here's what you're going to do." And this raises the tension and sets the stage for this sentence, "*Then*"—this is crucial—"go and uncover his feet and lie down" (Ruth 3:4).

All right, this is where it gets difficult. Three words in Hebrew right here that are all filled with sexual overtones. Uncover, feet or legs, and lie down. That's not something you do with just anybody, any day. To go to him and do this, as you're listening to this being described, you're thinking what is Naomi up to. What is Naomi telling Ruth to do? The effect of these words in the original language of the Old Testament is to send the hearers' minds just racing. Uncover his legs? Lie down? And this is what she's supposed to do? This is what a Moabite worker in the field is supposed to do to the Israelite owner of the field?

Ruth responds, verse 5, "*I will do whatever you say, 'Ruth answered*" (Ruth 3:5). So she's, she's going to do this. I love what verse 4, back up in verse 4 when it says, "*When he lies down, note the place where he's lying*" (Ruth 3:4). That phrase right there, like Ruth, make sure you don't do this with the wrong guy. Like you pay close attention. You keep your eyes fixed on Boaz where he lies down. Wrong legs, oh no. Okay. No. You just don't do that. Make sure it's Boaz.

Ruth says, "Okay. I will do whatever you say." *"So she went down to the threshing floor and did everything her mother-in-law told her to do"* (Ruth 3:6). She did it. We're sitting here as an audience thinking what in the world happened? And the narrator tells us, verse 7, *"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 3:7). So he's finished eating. He's in good spirits. He goes over. It just so happens, coincidence, I think not, to go away from everybody else, to a place where he is secluded at the far end of the grain pile, and he lays down.

Now just put yourself in Ruth's shoes at this point. You are hiding out in some kind of little crevice or something where nobody can see you, and you are watching Boaz. Your eyes are on him. You are watching your man winnow, ladies. I mean this is a romantic scene. And it's intense. You can almost hear Ruth's heart beating in this scene as she is anticipating what she is about to do in approaching Boaz. She sees him walk over to the side by himself, lay down, and go to sleep.

You know the scene, the picture I have in my mind here, especially when our, our kids were even smaller than they are right now, when they're little babies and maybe they're, maybe they're sick or they're having a hard time sleeping, and I would come in and just kind of pat their back and get them to calm down, and keep patting, and keep patting, and after a while it gets old. Your arm starts to get tired doing this whole patting thing, and so you finally get to the point where okay, I think, I think he's asleep, and then you just kind of squeeze your hand out. You ever done this parents? And then you just kind of exit real slowly. And inevitably, as soon as you like take one, two steps back, his little head pops up and he looks around, and like oh, I thought you were asleep. Okay, here we go. And you go back to doing it.

I think that's the picture here with Ruth just looking, okay is he asleep, is he asleep, is he asleep? And just when she thinks he is, he kind of rolls over and she says okay, I'll wait, I'll wait. And so she waits till he is asleep, 'til she can approach him totally unnoticed. And when he is asleep, verse 7 says, *"Ruth approached quietly, uncovered his feet and lay down"* (Ruth 3:7). Wow!

Okay. It's happening. And we, we don't know. This is intentionally ambiguous language. We don't know is she laying down. This is more than just taking a nap on his, on his feet. This is, we don't know if she's laying perpendicular, parallel to. All we know is that this is a very provocative picture in the language of the Old Testament.

Now mark it down, and we're going to talk about this. Nothing happens that we see in scripture. The narrator does not tell us anything here that calls into the question the morality and nobility and the purity of Ruth or Boaz. But the scene is intense. She's laying down there.

Now verse 8 says, *"In the middle of the night something startled the man, and he turned and discovered a woman lying at his feet"* (Ruth 3:8). Now put yourself in Boaz's shoes. In the middle of the night, something startles. Most commentators are like, probably the breeze on bare legs caused a little startling. And so you're Boaz, and you got a breeze on the bare legs, and so you kind of turn over—and here's the picture I've got on this one.

Go back to the kids for a second. Two days ago I was laying on the couch taking a little nap, and I was laying there, nice and quiet, sleeping, and then all of a sudden I sense that something was near me, and, and so I open up my eyes, and there, two inches in front of

my face is my three year old, Caleb, his eyes looking right at me. And as soon as my eyes open, he was looking at me and he says, "Daddy, would you like to play with me now?"

That's what I'm picturing here. You think about it. Ruth is definitely awake in this thing. She's not like snoring at Boaz's side. She's awake. She is waiting, anticipating the moment when he's going to wake up and see that she's right there. And so she's looking... So I almost picture, Boaz, a little startled for whatever reason, kind of rolls over a little bit to cover himself, opens his eyes, and there's two eyes looking right at him.

And I love this response, this question that he asked. Verse 9, "*Who are you?*" (Ruth 3:9). What a great question. Like I wish, I wish we had a little more information about the tone in which he asked that question. Like how did he ask it? I just, as I thought about that this week, I couldn't stop rolling just laughing, thinking about like was it a confused like, "Ah, who are you?" [*Intonation*] Was it like a shock and awe, like, "Who are you?" [*Intonation*] Or was it, was it just like, I mean there was a lot of people around. Was it just kind of a cool whisper? You can imagine, whisper. Yeah, did he whisper it. "*Who are you?*" he asked" (Ruth 3:9). Like, what in the world's going on? The language is literally, "Behold a woman." "*Who are you?*" he asked" (Ruth 3:9).

She responds, "*I am your servant Ruth*" (Ruth 3:9). Now what's interesting is, that word "servant" there, she had mentioned earlier in chapter 2:13, "you have spoken kindly to your servant." But the interesting thing is it's a totally different word that she's using to describe herself now than when she first met Boaz. When she first met Boaz she said in chapter 2:13, "You have spoken kindly to your servant", and the word that she used there is the word that's almost like slave. It's the lowest rung of the ladder. Worker. This time, it's translated the same word in the English translation, I'm your servant Ruth. But this time it's a totally different word. It's a more personal word. It's a word that denotes a relationship with someone. It's basically, "I am your servant. I am available for a relationship with you." "*I am your servant Ruth,*" she said" (Ruth 3:9).

Now this is where it gets interesting, because Ruth all of a sudden departs from Naomi's game plan. What did Naomi say? She had said, "Go, uncover his feet, lie down. *He will tell you what to do*" (Ruth 3:4). So we as the audience are thinking okay, she's introduced herself. That was appropriate. But we are shifting our eyes back to Boaz. Okay, what's he going to tell her to do, and all of a sudden, Ruth keeps talking. Listen to what she says, "*Spread the corner of your garment over me, since you are a kinsman-redeemer*" (Ruth 3:9). What that is right there is a clear, blatant, just in case you missed it Boaz of me lying at your feet, I want you to pursue me in marriage.

This is forward, to say the least. I mean when Heather and I met, I'll admit, I was pretty dense. I was pretty oblivious. I had not had a girlfriend before, and pretty scared to talk to girls to be honest, and I noticed her for sure, but I was, you know I was just going to go up and like start talking to her. And so, by the grace of God she takes some steps to make clear that I need to, she made some moves to make it clear that I needed to pursue her in a relationship with her. But this is, this is Ruth saying, "*Spread the corner of your garment over me*" (Ruth 3:9). This is a phrase that is basically... A husband only does this with a wife—"To spread your garment over me; to bring your protection over me; to bring me under your care, close to your side."

What's really interesting, when it says spread the corner of your garment, that word garment, you might make a little note in your Bible, it's the same word that used back in Ruth 2:12—this is really interesting—when Boaz was speaking to Ruth and basically praying a blessing over her. Boaz said, "*May the Lord repay you for what you have done. May you*

*be richly rewarded by the Lord, the God of Israel, under whose wings you have come to take refuge*" (Ruth 2:12). We saw this last week, but what's interesting is that word "wings" right there in chapter 2:12, is the same word that's translated "garment" over here in chapter 3:9.

And so basically what Ruth is saying is, "Hey Boaz, you remember when you prayed the Lord would spread His protection over me, well now it's time for you to be the answer to that prayer." Got to love it when a wife uses scripture on you. "You be the provision of God. You spread your protection over me since you're a kinsman redeemer."

This is more than Naomi had said. She is stepping out here, and it creates this anticipation, and our hearts and our minds are thinking how in the world is Boaz going to respond to this. A Moabite just proposed to an Israelite. Moabite woman just proposed to an Israelite man. A worker in the field just proposed to the owner of the field. A younger person just proposed to an older person. This is breaking all the rules. How is Boaz going to respond? This was risky to say the least. Boaz realizes there's a woman at his feet. He can scold her at that point. "What are you doing? You should not be here. Go back home, never to come back to my field again." He could take advantage of her. This is a time in the middle of the Judges, historical period of the people of Israel where sexual immorality was rampant, and everybody was doing what was right in their own eyes. This is risky, dangerous, to say the least. And we're thinking how in the world is Boaz going to respond.

And so we wait. Their ears to the ground for verse 10, Boaz says, "*The Lord bless you, my daughter*" (Ruth 3:10), and we breathe a collective sigh of relief, because it's clear in the very first words out of Boaz's mouth that he is going to respond favorably to Ruth, that he is not going to take advantage of her in any way, that he is wanting to bless her. His affectionate term, my daughter. "*This kindness is greater than that which you showed earlier*" (Ruth 3:10). Talking about the kindness that she had showed to Naomi. "*You have not run after the younger men, whether rich or poor*" (Ruth 3:10). And the picture is Boaz is stunned that she is actually interested in him and that she has, of all men, pursued him.

This picture of receiving love, verse 11, "*Now, my daughter, don't be afraid. I will do for you all that you ask. All my fellow townsmen know that you are a woman of noble character*" (Ruth 3:11). You want to know something really interesting here? Hold your place in Ruth 3, and go with me to Proverbs 31. Go with me to Proverbs 31:10. Proverbs 31, it's the last chapter in the book of Proverbs. Many of you may know it. Picture a Proverbs 31 woman, as the phrase is used sometimes. What's interesting is the Hebrew Bible had a different book order than we have in our present day Old Testament. We've got these 39 books in the Old Testament grouped this certain way. Hebrew Bible, they were not grouped this way.

Now there's some debate over exactly how they were grouped, but most are pretty confident that Ruth, in the Hebrew Bible, was much later, after the history and then the prophets in a group of books called the Writings at the end of the Hebrew Bible. And many think that Ruth actually came right after the book of Proverbs.

Now think about that in light of the way that the book of Proverb ends. Proverbs 31:10, "*A wife of noble character who can find? She is worth far more than rubies.*" Side note, verse 10 here is the exact same language that's used to describe Ruth in Ruth 3:11, a woman of noble character. Same phrase. A wife of noble character who can find.

You might go back—we don't have time to do it tonight –just read slowly through the last half of Proverbs 31, and you just think about Ruth in light of all these descriptions. Her working hard, providing for her family, being Naomi at that time, even before she was a

wife or had any children, anything like that. And then you get to the very end, Proverbs 31:31, *"Give her the reward she has earned, and let her works bring her praise at the city gate."* Again, same language is used there that's used back in Ruth 3:11 when it talks about the townspeople, the people at the gate are the ones who speak of how noble she is.

This Proverbs 31:10-31, is the perfect lead in to the portrait of the Proverbs 31 woman in the book of Ruth. And so the picture here, come back to Ruth 3:11, she's a woman of noble character. And it's at this point things are going incredible. We can hear the wedding bells in the background. Going to the chapel, going to get married, like this is working out better than we ever could have imagined. We were on our seats wondering if everything in the story was about to fall apart, and now it's beautifully coming together. Yes, until verse 12. And Boaz says, *"Although it is true that I am near of kin, there is a kinsman-redeemer nearer than I"* (Ruth 3:12).

We were just getting to where things were good and coming together, and then we find out there's another guy in the picture. Boaz says there's another man who is closer in kin to you, who has the right before me to redeem you, to care for you, to protect and provide for you. So here's what Boaz says, *"Stay here for the night, and in the morning if he wants to redeem, good; let him redeem"* (Ruth 3:13). This is a picture of the character of Boaz here. He knows that this was the way things were set up among the people of God. This is the law and he's going to respect that. *"But if he is not willing, as surely as the Lord lives I will do it"* (Ruth 3:13). He says, "If he's not willing, I'll do it in a heartbeat." *"Lie here until morning"* (Ruth 3:13). He says, "Stay here. You don't need to be out in the middle of the night on your own by yourself. You stay here."

I mean you can just imagine, neither one of these guys is sleeping very well that evening. As they're looking up into the stars, considering what is, the conversation that's just taken place, and what's about to unfold that day, you've got Boaz thinking all right, I'm going to go into town and declare my desire to be married to this Moabite woman. Declare my desire to be married to this Moabite woman. What will people think? What is this going to be like? And I wonder how this kin is going to respond when I put this out there, which could be lost from that point on.

Ruth, sitting there realizing that in the next 24 hours she's going to find out who her husband is going to be. She'd love for it to be Boaz, but it could be this other guy. And so it says verse 14, *"So she lay at his feet until morning, but got up before anyone could be recognized; and he said, 'Don't let it be known that a woman came to the threshing floor'"* (Ruth 3:14). In other words, let's just keep this whole deal between you and me. It's a little secret. And he also said, *"'Bring me the shawl you are wearing and hold it out.' When she did so, he poured into it six measures of barley and put it on her. Then he went back to town"* (Ruth 3:15).

We don't know exactly how... It just says measures. Doesn't give us the specific measurement. But we know this a lot of barley. Most think that this is more barley than she's ever had before; maybe around 75 pounds. We know it's heavy, because he had to literally hoist it up on her. This is where we're reminded, Ruth is a, she's a strong girl. You don't mess with Ruth. She can carry some grain.

And so verse 16, she heads back to Naomi. Now you want to talk about somebody who has not slept much. I mean this is, this is Naomi who has been back at her place after concocting this scheme, sending Ruth out and she has been sitting back waiting. No such thing as text messaging going on during that day, getting little updates here and there. Ruth, not signed up for Twitter at this point.

So, as a result, she's been pacing back and forth in her home wondering what's happening, praying every once in a while, opening the window or the door to peak out and see if Ruth is coming back early, if things have fallen apart. Finally she comes back. "*Ruth came to her mother-in-law, Naomi asked, 'How did it go, my daughter?'*" (Ruth 3:16). Literally, "Who are you my daughter? Are you going to be this man's wife or not?" And this is the question. Boaz asked it in verse 9, who are you? Down here in verse 16, it's translated my daughter, but the language is who are you my daughter. And this is the question of the book. Is this a Moabitess or not? Because she looks a lot like an Israelite.

So is she going to be married into the clan? Is she going to be married into Boaz's family. "*'How did it go, my daughter?' Then she told her everything Boaz had done for her and added*" (Ruth 3:16-17). Now here's what's really interesting. What Ruth does at this point is she shares with Naomi something that Boaz had told her when Boaz was giving this barley to her, but the narrator waits until this point when Naomi is in the scene for us to hear what Boaz has said. You follow that? Boaz said something earlier, but the narrator didn't tell us Boaz said it earlier, when it actually happened. The narrator is waiting until this point when Naomi is there to reveal what Boaz has said. Why? Well listen.

"*He gave me these six measures of barley, saying*" (Ruth 3:17), this is what Boaz had said "*Don't go back to your mother-in-law empty-handed*" (Ruth 3:17). Now why would that be significant? Have we seen that word empty before in the book of Ruth? It immediately takes our minds back to Ruth 1:21 when Naomi came back from Moab with Ruth by her side, and what did she say, "*I went away full, but the Lord has brought me back*" what? "*Empty*" (Ruth 1:21). And so here's the picture. The narrator, in God's sovereign design of this book, give us a picture of Ruth coming back from Boaz with not just grain, but a promise to redeem, to see to it that their family is redeemed. And the message is, you're not empty. You're not empty.

This is a reminder—we saw it in the first chapter—just want to remind us of it tonight. When we feel empty, alone, when it seems that God is far from us, He may just be setting the stage for the greatest display we have ever seen of His faithfulness to us. When it seems like nothing is working out like it was supposed to - that's Naomi, end of Ruth 1, standing there with Ruth by her side, telling her friends, I've got nothing. And little does she know that standing right beside her is a picture of the fullness of God in ways that she never could have fathomed.

And that leads Naomi to respond, verse 18, "*Wait, my daughter, until you find out what happens. For the man will not rest until the matter is settled today*" (Ruth 3:18). In other words, sit tight, today is going to be the day, and he's going to take care of things. And this scene comes to a dramatic end. This is the last time we will hear from Ruth or Naomi in this book. They will not speak again in the book of Ruth.

And what happens here at the end of chapter 3 is the curtain closes on two women in need of an heir, sitting in their home, waiting. Boaz has taken center stage, but the reality is, things are not in his hands or Ruth and Naomi's hands. Things are ultimately now in the hands of the Yahweh, the Lord, and we're waiting to see what He's going to do.

## **The Indescribable Love of God...**

It's a good story, isn't it? The word just comes alive. Now what, from Ruth 3, what do we have to take away when it comes to the love of God in our own lives? What I want to do is I



want to show you a picture of the indescribable love of God, and I'll be honest with you, it's not a picture of truths that are new, things you've not thought of before. They are simple, gloriously breathtaking truths about the love of God.

Now we have to be careful. When we come to Ruth 3, not to equate any one character fully with God. What I mean by that is when we see Boaz, we don't need to think, "Okay Boaz equals God in the story." Now we're going to see in Ruth 4, close correlation between the character Boaz and the character of God, but the picture here, we don't, we don't just identify Boaz equals God. And that, if we do that, then we start thinking well does that mean I need to come to God and pursue a relationship with him, that he is humble, that I would approach him. We get into all kinds of thoughts. That's not what Ruth 3 is teaching.

But, the same way that Boaz is not God, Ruth is not God, Naomi is not God, we are seeing a picture of the character of God displayed in the characters in this story, particularly Ruth 3, and it revolves around love and kindness.

Now remember last week, Ruth 2:20, I had you circle a word, "kindness," back in Ruth 2:20. *"He has not stopped showing his kindness to the living and the dead"* (Ruth 2:20). Now I want you to circle in chapter 3:10, the same word. *"The Lord bless you, my daughter," [Boaz] replied. 'This kindness is greater than that which you showed earlier'"* (Ruth 3:10). Circle it right there. And while you're at it, 3:10, 2:20, and then go back to chapter 1:8. We read it back there. We didn't emphasize it when we walked through Ruth 1, but when Naomi was talking about the kindness that Orpah and Ruth, her Moabite daughters in law had shown her, she said back in verse 8, *"Go back, each of you, to your mother's home. May the Lord show kindness to you"* (Ruth 1:8), circle it right there.

We've got this word mentioned three times, 1:8, 2:20, 3:10, and you might make a little not out to the side. It's going to be kind of a little Hebrew insight here, but it's, I promise, it's not just Hebrew to try to impress you with Hebrew. This is a great word in the original language of the Old Testament, that it's good to know when we study the Bible. And the word is "hesed." You might write a little note to the side, H-E-S-E-D, "hesed."

And the great thing about this word, and the original language of the Old Testament, is that there really isn't a comparable word in the English language. There's not a word in English that translates "hesed" well. If you can imagine when it comes to the definition of "hesed," and it's translated kindness here obviously three different times, but imagine kindness, love, loyalty, faithfulness, grace, mercy, and compassion all wrapped up into one word, and you've got "hesed." Kindness, love, loyalty, faithfulness, grace, mercy, compassion, all wrapped into one word. That's what this word is. The majority of times it's used in the Old Testament, it's used to describe God's love toward His covenant people.

This is a uniquely divine love. This is not a man manufactured, man created love. This is love that flows from God toward his people. That's most of the times we see it, and then including these times in Ruth then we see this word used to describe how God's people love others. And the picture is "hesed," this kind of love flows from God, and it is expressed to others, but it's origination is always in God.

There's a picture of divine love, compassion, loyalty, kindness, goodness, mercy, grace, all wrapped up into one. Probably the best translation using all the different usages in the English language would be something like "loving kindness," but even that, it's just a thick word. And the reason I emphasize that is because what we are seeing in Ruth 3 is all kinds of practical pictures of hesed at work, of this kind of love at work in all of these characters.

### **Love is patient.**

I want you to think about it with me, the characteristics of this kind of love. First it's patient, it's patient from the first verse to the last verse in Ruth 3. We see patience and love. Now, obviously Ruth is pretty forward at one point here, and Naomi is coming up with a scheme, but you, you take the picture as a whole, and it's been day after day, week after week. Think about Ruth, she has come into Israelite society, and she's not come on the scene flaunting herself so to speak. She has come on the scene, risen early in the morning, and worked hard in the fields all day long, gone back with grain to her, to her mother-in-law, gotten up the next morning, done the same thing, day after day after day. And nothing is happening. In all of those weeks going to the fields and gleaning in them, nothing is happening.

That's the picture of waiting leading up to Ruth 3. And at the end of Ruth 3, the curtain closes on two women sitting there waiting, things out of their hands. And we see a picture of love that is patient, love that waits. Kind of picture we see in Psalm 27:14, "*Wait for the Lord; be strong and take heart and wait for the Lord.*" There is a love that's expressed in waiting. Isn't there a trust that's expressed in waiting? Love doesn't always know what's coming around the corner. Love doesn't always know exactly why this particular thing is happening, but love trusts, love is patient to wait. It's the whole picture in 1 Corinthians 13—starts off, "Love is..." what? It's patient. Love is content to wait. Love is patient.

### **Love protects.**

Second, love protects. And this whole scene in Ruth 3 is about protection. Naomi wants to protect Ruth in the very beginning from a life of widowhood. You need to find a husband. I'm going to help you find a husband. When Ruth starts speaking up there in verse 9, says, "Spread the corner of your garment over me, since you are a kinsman-redeemer." The reality is, Ruth is not just looking for a husband for yourself, she is looking for a provider for her and Naomi, a protector for her and Naomi. A kinsman redeemer who would take care of and protect her family. Boaz, obviously being requested to protect Ruth, and Boaz looking out for the best interests of Ruth. Love protects.

### **Love is pure.**

Third, love is pure. Pure. I want you to see the purity of love in Ruth 3, on two remarkable levels. First of all, to realize that this story took place—and we mentioned this briefly earlier—took place in the middle of the historical period called the Judges, when sexual immorality was rampant and everyone doing what was right in his own eyes. And to see this scene of a man and a woman alone, secluded on the threshing floor in Ruth 3, and for both of them to walk away morally unscathed, pure, not having given in to the crucible of temptation that undoubtedly was there. The author is intentional to show us with this kind of language that this was an intense scene, and yet they walk away in purity.

That's even heightened when you look at the second level. Now this is where it gets really interesting. Hold your place here in Ruth 3; go back to Genesis to the left, Genesis 19. You've got to see this. Genesis 19—Remember Ruth is a Moabitess, and we have mentioned all along this series where the Moabites came from. Remember the story that led to the picture of the Moabite and see if there are any parallels between this story and the story we just read in Ruth 3.

I've read Ruth before, but I never noticed or seen this. Look in Genesis 19:30. Okay, follow along. Now there's significant differences, but there are some surprising similarities, intentional similarities, I believe. Look at Genesis 19:30, "*Lot and his two daughters left Zoar and settled in the mountains, for he was afraid to stay in Zoar. He and his two daughters lived in a cave. One day the older daughter said to the younger, 'Our father is old,*

*and there is no man around here to lie with us, as is the custom all over the earth. Let's get our father to drink wine and then lie with him and preserve our family line through our father'" (Gen. 19:30-32).*

Now pause here, similarity. Here in Genesis 19, you have two women scheming, plotting to preserve their family line. It's the same picture, although very different. In Ruth 3, two women, plotting, to preserve their family line. The similarities continue. Verse 33, *"That night they got their father to drink wine"* (Gen. 19:33). Second here, now the difference is, I mean Lot gets totally drunk here in Genesis 19. And we know, we talked about it, Boaz doesn't. But the picture is wait until the man has finished drinking, then, what does it say, *"The older daughter went in and lay with him"* (Gen. 19:33). Same picture that we see over here in Ruth 3.

Although radically different, because this led to much more in Genesis 19 than what happened in Ruth 3, but the similarities are there. Listen to the rest of the story. *"He was not aware of it when she lay down or when she got up. The next day the older daughter said to the younger, 'Last night I lay with my father. Let's get him to drink wine again tonight, and you go in and lie with him so we can preserve our family line through our father.' So they got their father to drink wine that night also, and the younger daughter went and lay with him. Again he was not aware of it when she lay down or when she got up"* (Gen. 19:33-35).

So listen to verse 36, *"Both of Lot's daughters became pregnant by their father"* (Gen. 19:36). Here's another similarity. Both of the women in both of these stories walk away from this scene with seed. In this case it's with seed of children. In this other case, it's with the seed of grain. Both walk away with seed, and then listen to verse 37 in Genesis 19. *"The older daughter had a son, and she named him [what?] Moab; he is the father of the Moabites of today"* (Gen. 19:37). Don't miss that.

If you're an original hearer here in the Old Testament, you're hearing the story of Ruth told about a Moabite going to an Israelite. Scheming, going, waiting 'til he is finished eating. Lying with him. The things that are coming in your mind immediately are this is how the whole Moabite picture got started, in incestual sin and total sexual immorality. And the author is giving us parallels here, intentional parallels here, to show us in the backdrop of dark impurity, in the history of the people of God, the people of Moab, Genesis 19, in the picture of this dark impurity, there is a light shining of purity, of a rock solid, no compromise kind of trust in God between a Moabite and an Israelite.

Original hearers would see that; see the shining picture of purity that so contrasts with history and present day. The day of the Judges, what had happened in Genesis 19, this just shines a light in the middle of it, and I pray, I pray that in this room tonight, it would have the same effect. Obviously maybe not in sense of Genesis 19 or the period of the Judges, but let's be honest brothers and sisters, we live in a day of rampant sexual immorality, of rampant impurity. Almost every love story that we watch in our culture, almost every, if not every single one of them, involves a man in passion seeking a woman or a woman in passion responding to a man, and it's physical, and the picture is we look at a screen and we indulge in watching that, and our minds hardly give second thought to the fact that this is radically immoral before God.

Instead we picture this as love, our hearts are warmed, our affections turned by that kind of picture every time we turn on a love story in our culture. And Ruth 3 is bringing this picture to the scene and telling us tonight there is another way. There's another way, and it's a way of purity and holiness, and this is not love, what we watch on the screen. This is love. It is

pure. It is a picture of integrity and holiness, and love for God that springs forth in true love for one another, not lust in pursuing one another.

God raise up Ruths and Boazes all across this faith family. God raise up Ruths, teenage girls, college girls, single women all across this room who desire purity and the holiness of God above any and everything else in a relationship with a man. God raise up Boazes in this room, teenage guys, college guys, single guys who refuse to gratify their own desires, compromise the holiness of a servant of God in order to pursue their own pleasures. God raise up Boazes who love holiness more than anything else in this world.

Not just singles, but married men and women, husbands, wives, all across this room, God raise up the people in a day of rampant impurity and immorality who love purity and holiness, and will not compromise what we see, what we expose ourselves to on the Internet or in movies, or this or that. God raise up a people who are pure in our love. God give us this kind of purity. We can't manufacture this kind of pure love in our day. This only comes from the heart, the strength of God. God do that in us. Love is pure. It's pure. It's patient. It protects, and it's pure.

### **Love provides.**

And love provides. Again, all the characters here are showing provision for one another. They're going out of their way to provide for each other, all the way to the end.

### **Love has a price.**

And then finally love has a price. Love has a price. There are risks all over Ruth 3. Naomi risking everything in her family, on putting Ruth in this position. Ruth risking everything, her reputation, her future could fall apart completely if this were to go array.

Boaz, the risk he's about to take as he contemplates going into the town square, the city gate, and declaring his desire to marry a Moabite woman. There's risks all over this picture, and it's a picture of the price that is associated with love, the risks that are associated with love. Love causes risk. Love compels risk. Why? Why does a single girl that we commissioned earlier, abandon her life and all the wants and dreams and desires here to go into the middle of a tough part of the world in Central Asia, love risks it all. Why does a man go with his wife and two kids into the middle of the toughest part of the world, because love risks it. It's worth risking it in love.

When there was a love for the glory of God. God made this be so. When there was a love for the glory of God in Birmingham, and in this church, when there was a love for the glory of God in all nations, then there is radical risk to follow. Love pays a price.

Now this is the picture we see in these characters, a love that is, that is patient, that protects, that is pure, that provides, and it pays a price. The whole intent is to turn our eyes to the hesed—the loving kindness of God. Would you just let this soak into your heart tonight? Not just the person beside you or in front of you or behind you, but right where you're sitting. Consider this, the supreme god of the universe, creator of all, sovereign over all, He is patient with you. Praise God, He's patient in love toward us.

Though we turn time and time again, though we fail to get it, to trust, even in spite of past faithfulness, we struggle to trust, and yet he is patient. He is Exodus 34, "*The Lord, the Lord, the compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in love [hesed] and faithfulness, maintaining love to thousands, and forgiving wickedness, rebellion and sin*" (Ex. 34:6-7). Aren't you glad God, in love, is patient with us?

And this God is the one who vows to protect you, not just the person beside you, in front of you, behind you. He spreads His... The God of the universe spreads His garment over you. And He becomes your refuge, a fortress for you, impenetrable by life's storms and circumstances and struggles, and suffering, he protects. He is pure. His love is untainted. It is holy toward you.

## **The Irresistible Lure of the Gospel...**

A sinner, loved by a pure and holy God. His love provides for you. Brothers and sisters, when you are under the protection of your God, you will never find yourselves empty, never. For all of eternity, you will never, ever, ever be empty again. He has staked His glory on providing for your needs. And His love has a price. How do you know He protects and provides? How do you know He is patient and pure? How do we know this, this is the gospel, ladies and gentlemen.

The irresistible lure of the gospel found in no other love story. The greatest love story, God, in patient holiness. God, in supremely patient holiness, shelters us from his wrath. When we are due the punishment of our sin, our patient and holy God chooses us to shelter us from his wrath and save us from our sins, deliver us, redeem us from our sin, how, by sacrificing His son. That's the great love story. It is the gospel, and it is unfathomable, indescribable in power of its love.

And so I want to invite you tonight to, to receive that kind of love. If you are not a Christian here tonight, for the first time, for you to open your hearts to a God who loves you supremely, enough to send his son to cover over your sin and become your shelter and your strength. For Christians all across this room who am I guessing find themselves in a position of waiting, many of you, in a position where you don't know what's around the corner, you don't know what the next step is, not sure what's going to happen. And you find things out of your control, wait and love. Rest in that kind of love, because the God of the universe who is writing this love story on your heart knows exactly how it's going to end up. And the things you may not see right now, He sees. The things you may not know right now, He knows, and He is guiding your life out of love for your good and for His glory.

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