

## Ruth 2016 3B

- After a long break, we're ready to start back in our study of Ruth, picking up again in chapter 3
  - We're following the story of two widows seeking rest in the land of Israel
    - One widow is Jewish, one is Gentile
    - Together they represent Israel and the Church
  - And they have met, Boaz, the man willing to care and provide for them
    - For Ruth, Boaz entered into a personal covenant to care for the woman
    - For Naomi, Boaz is discreetly making provision available through Ruth
  - Boaz is a picture of Christ
    - And his relationship with each of these women pictures Christ's relationship with God's chosen people, and with the Gentile Church
    - While Israel has been set aside in a period of judgment, the Church has entered into a relationship with Christ
    - But Israel hasn't been forgotten, so that in a time to come, they will be restored as well
  - These two stories are intertwined in the story of Ruth
    - One story of two widows who work together to obtain the rest they desperately want
    - And a second story about two groups of people who obtain eternal rest by the grace of a common Savior
- As we reached the end of Chapter 2, the season of harvest is coming to an end
  - Ruth has spent the season working in Boaz's field
    - The work has been easy and rewarding because Boaz has made it so
    - And it gave Ruth and Naomi the security they sought

- In these details, we also saw a prophecy of God's plan for Israel and the Church
  - Israel would enter into a period of judgment as a result of her disobedience to the Old Covenant
    - During that time, the nation will experience trial after trial, making the nation weak and reduced in number
    - During that time, the Gentile church would come into a relationship with Israel's Messiah
    - And it would do so through the influence of the Jewish people, through their scriptures and according to their promised covenant
  - Eventually, the time for Israel's judgment would give way to a time of testimony
    - And in that moment, Christ's relationship with both Israel and the Gentile church would change in significant ways
    - Those changes are where we go next in this story
    - Beginning with how Naomi and Ruth's relationship to Boaz changes in Chapter 3
  - The harvest season is drawing to a close, and so Naomi's concerns over rest return
    - How will these two widows get by during the long winter?
    - Will Boaz's kindness continue after the harvest is over?
- Not waiting to find out, Naomi launches a plan to help Ruth cement her relationship with Boaz and ensure this season of provision becomes a lifetime of support

**Ruth 3:1** Then Naomi her mother-in-law said to her, "My daughter, shall I not seek security for you, that it may be well with you?"

**Ruth 3:2** "Now is not Boaz our kinsman, with whose maids you were? Behold, he winnows barley at the threshing floor tonight.

**Ruth 3:3** "Wash yourself therefore, and anoint yourself and put on your best clothes, and go down to the threshing floor; but do not make yourself known to the man until he has finished eating and drinking.

**Ruth 3:4** "It shall be when he lies down, that you shall notice the place where he lies, and you shall go and uncover his feet and lie down; then he will tell you what you shall do."

**Ruth 3:5** She said to her, "All that you say I will do."

- Naomi's plan centers on Boaz's role as the kinsman to Naomi
  - Boaz is Elimelech's relative and so, according to the Law, he's the man expected to rescue Naomi's family from widowhood
    - But as we learned in past weeks, Naomi is simply too old now to be taken as a wife
    - But Ruth is still young enough to marry, and that's Naomi's hope
  - Ruth's decision to remain with Naomi has become Naomi's best hope for security
    - If Ruth remarries, then Naomi knows she will be welcomed into the home as well
    - So Naomi's future is tied to Ruth's
- Naomi explains to Ruth that her relationship with Boaz is the key to their continued survival after the harvest ends
  - Naomi says she is going to seek security for Ruth
    - This is the chiasmic turning point in the story of Ruth
    - The Hebrew word translated "security" here is *manoach*, which literally translated means a place of rest
    - Naomi finally sees a way to obtain rest, both for her and Ruth
  - To the Hebrew mind, rest is a sacred term
    - Theologically, we speak of "being saved" in the same way that Hebrews spoke of obtaining rest
    - Obtaining rest means far more than simply finding a comfortable living
    - *Manoach* means ceasing to worry, ceasing to struggle, ceasing to doubt, ceasing to be in jeopardy, by obtaining a permanent source of blessing
- Finding rest has been the desire of Naomi's heart from the beginning of our story
  - She followed her husband outside her land, seeking rest from a famine

- But his decision led the family to experience one tragedy after another
- First her husband died, then her sons died, and so she found herself destitute in a foreign land
- The family had done everything it could and by its own power to find rest
- But things have only gone from bad to worse
- So Naomi and Ruth returned to the land still in search of rest
  - Meeting Boaz gave them a measure of provision and protection in the land, but this is not true *manoach*; rest
  - It's temporary provision at best, and when your hope lies in something temporary, it's no rest at all
- Many of us know how Naomi and Ruth feel, searching for rest from the disappointments and insecurities of daily life
  - Rest seems forever out of reach
    - Every phase of our lives is a pursuit of some kind of satisfaction, but for many of us it's like living in a Rolling Stones song
    - We strive in school expecting to enjoy the security of a good job
    - We get the job, but then find we have to work overtime to afford the things we expect will bring us comfort and rest
    - We obtain the things, but they never bring the joy we expected
    - In fact, we struggle a lifetime to be ready for the retirement that will finally give us rest
    - Yet as we approach retirement, we begin to worry there won't be enough to last...enough money, enough health, enough friends or enough purpose
    - And what are we supposed to do in retirement anyway?
  - If we're not careful, we'll fill our lives with striving and regrets so that as the end approaches, we'll be left with worry that life just passed us by
    - We worked our whole life for some kind of rest, yet it was always just out of reach

- Where's the satisfaction, the rest, the security, the freedom from want and worry that we were striving so hard to obtain?
- For those Christians who lead this kind of life, the problem isn't that rest can't be found
- The problem is they were always looking for rest in the wrong place
- As the saying goes...we all want to go to heaven, but just not today
- In that sense we're like Naomi's family, working to secure a rest that couldn't be found outside the land
  - Their rest was found in a redeemer they never saw coming
    - But now that they have him, they're anxious to move to the next step of the plan
    - Just as we've come to know our Redeemer, our Protector and Provider
    - He's made promises to us, and He's directed us to work in His field
    - But we're eager to see Him bring us into the rest we so long to know
    - The true, eternal rest of the Kingdom
  - While you wait, don't make the mistake of thinking you can accelerate His plan, that you can obtain true rest on your own terms
    - True rest isn't going to come while we're working in His field
    - Our true rest – true relief from sin and disappointment and conflict and all the unfulfilled longings of our life –
    - That rest comes only in the Kingdom
    - If we think we can find that rest while we're still working in the field, we're going to get distracted from the work of serving Christ
    - We're going to wander into someone else's field, so to speak

- But we're not going to find that peace we were seeking, because it was never there
- Nevertheless, we can know a measure of that rest even now...if we know what to look for
  - We aren't going to escape working, but if we make our work building the Kingdom, then our work can be as joyful and easy as Ruth's work in Boaz's field
  - We may not obtain earthly riches, but we can learn to be content with less if it means obtaining riches in the Kingdom
  - We won't escape trials, but we can endure them gladly knowing Christ is testing us to know if we are worthy of greater things in the Kingdom
  - In other words, we can withstand a lifetime of striving with Christ to obtain an eternity of rest with Christ
- So at the start of Chapter 3, Naomi and Ruth are seeking to find that true rest, and Naomi sees an opportunity to secure it
  - Naomi has been waiting the entire harvest season for Boaz to fulfill the levirate marriage requirement of the Law
    - Remember, the levirate marriage law expected the closest relative to marry a widow who lacked a son
    - Through a levirate marriage, the widow might receive a son and an inheritance for her dead husband
  - A husband and a son for these women would mean true rest
    - In a patriarchal culture, a husband and a son would bring the protection and provision for life that both these women are seeking desperately
    - If only Boaz would decide to meet the terms of the Law
  - One of these widows needs to pursue the relationship in a cautious manner
    - But which of the widows should seek his proposal?
    - Obviously, Naomi's child-bearing days are over, so it falls to Ruth

- Naomi instructs Ruth to take a bold step to prompt Boaz into assuming the levirate marriage responsibilities
  - She tells Ruth in v.2 that Boaz is sleeping on the threshing floor during the harvest
    - At the end of a harvest, the threshing and winnowing begins
    - This is a process of bringing the stalks of grain to a hard floor and beating them severely to separate the grains of fruit from the chaff
    - Then the remains are lifted up into the air so that the wind might blow the lighter chaff away from the heavier fruit, which then falls back to the threshing floor to be collected
  - This process was usually done at night because in the Middle East in late summer, the hot dry climate produces little breeze during the day
    - But the breeze kicks up in the evening, finally subsiding around midnight
    - So in the first half of the night, the threshing begins with the beating of the grain
    - Followed by the winnowing until about midnight, when the work would cease and a large meal would follow
    - Then the workers would sleep by their heaps of grain to guard them
    - Naomi knew how the harvest worked so she saw an opportunity for Ruth to approach Boaz on this night and appeal to him to fulfill the Law for her sake
- Naomi tells Ruth how to approach Boaz to encourage a proposal for marriage
  - First, Ruth is to wash herself, anoint herself and put on her best clothes
    - These are the steps a bride takes before a wedding
    - In this day, a bride was betrothed to her husband weeks or months prior to the wedding day
    - And during this time, the bride lived apart from her groom in a state of perpetual readiness

- On an unannounced day, her groom would come to claim her and escort her to the wedding ceremony
- Therefore, Naomi is coaching Ruth to present herself as a woman ready for her groom
- Secondly, Naomi tells Ruth to find Boaz at the threshing floor
  - In the time of the harvest, the threshing floor would have been a busy, happy place
  - It was the place where a year's hard work was rewarded
  - Each night's feast would be a joyous affair
- It's the place Naomi knew Ruth could find Boaz and find him in a good mood
  - Notice that she tells Ruth to wait until the eating and drinking has completed
  - She's telling Ruth to be patient and wait for the right moment when things have quieted down
- Finally, in v.4 Naomi tells Ruth to lie down discreetly next to Boaz and uncover his feet
  - Men in this day wore robes that covered even their feet
    - So as they lay down to sleep, their robes formed a blanket over them
    - Naomi wants Ruth to discreetly pull up Boaz's robe just far enough to expose Boaz's feet to the cool desert night air
  - At first this may seem like a strange plan, but Naomi knew what she was doing
    - She's drawing on a Jewish custom, one Naomi expects Boaz to understand
    - We can see this because in v.4 Naomi tells Ruth that Boaz will tell her what to do
  - What is Naomi up to here?
    - By taking these actions, Ruth will be letting Boaz know she's willing to be his wife if he should desire to marry her



- In Israel, uncovering someone in this manner was an allusion to marriage
- We can see this idea reflected in scripture in various places
  - In Ezekiel, the Lord describes entering into a covenant with His “wife,” Israel this way

**Ezek. 16:7** “I made you numerous like plants of the field. Then you grew up, became tall and reached the age for fine ornaments; your breasts were formed and your hair had grown. Yet you were naked and bare.

**Ezek. 16:8** “Then I passed by you and saw you, and behold, you were at the time for love; so I spread My skirt over you and covered your nakedness. I also swore to you and entered into a covenant with you so that you became Mine,” declares the Lord God.

- Notice that God says He spread His “skirt” over Israel and covered Her nakedness
- This is symbolic language to represent a spiritual marriage through the Old Covenant
- Similarly, entering into a sexual union is described in the same way

**Deut. 22:30** “A man shall not take his father’s wife so that he will not uncover his father’s skirt.

**Deut. 27:20** ‘Cursed is he who lies with his father’s wife, because he has uncovered his father’s skirt.’ And all the people shall say, ‘Amen.’

- So when Naomi asks Ruth to lift up Boaz’s cloak to expose his feet, she’s sending a clear message to Boaz
- By uncovering his feet, Ruth is inviting a marriage proposal
- She’s implying that when Boaz acts to recover his cold feet, he is welcome to cover hers as well
- Some have chosen to take this innocent moment and pervert it by suggesting Ruth was uncovering more than Boaz’s feet
  - Others have suggested Naomi was encouraging Ruth to brashly make her own proposal to Boaz
    - But these speculations are not dealing with the text honestly

- In reality, Naomi was asking Ruth only to uncover Boaz's feet, just enough exposure to make a point and no more
- And Ruth wasn't proposing to Boaz
- Boaz has already initiated the relationship with his earlier promises to Ruth
- Boaz hasn't moved the relationship ahead because he was considerably older than Ruth and assumed she wanted a younger husband
- Therefore, Ruth's actions were a way for her to politely indicate her willingness to consider marriage
  - Furthermore, Naomi has ensured that the encounter would take place in the most discreet manner possible
  - It was dark and many people were gathered in a large area sleeping in the open
  - Under those circumstances, Ruth's appearance at the feet of Boaz would not have attracted much attention
  - And as she uncovers Boaz's feet and waits for his response, no one would have been the wiser either way
  - Boaz would be free to respond either way without concern for his reputation
- And with that Ruth sets out to obey her mother-in-law

**Ruth 3:6** So she went down to the threshing floor and did according to all that her mother-in-law had commanded her.

**Ruth 3:7** When Boaz had eaten and drunk and his heart was merry, he went to lie down at the end of the heap of grain; and she came secretly, and uncovered his feet and lay down.

**Ruth 3:8** It happened in the middle of the night that the man was startled and bent forward; and behold, a woman was lying at his feet.

**Ruth 3:9** He said, "Who are you?" And she answered, "I am Ruth your maid. So spread your covering over your maid, for you are a close relative."

**Ruth 3:10** Then he said, "May you be blessed of the Lord, my daughter. You have shown your last kindness to be better than the first by not going after young men, whether poor or rich.

**Ruth 3:11** "Now, my daughter, do not fear. I will do for you whatever you ask, for all my people in the city know that you are a woman of excellence.

**Ruth 3:12** "Now it is true I am a close relative; however, there is a relative closer than I.

[Ruth 3:13](#) “Remain this night, and when morning comes, if he will redeem you, good; let him redeem you. But if he does not wish to redeem you, then I will redeem you, as the Lord lives. Lie down until morning.”

- Ruth executes Naomi’s plan perfectly
  - When Boaz awoke to find Ruth there and his feet uncovered, he asked Ruth who she was and what her intentions were
    - The fact that Boaz didn’t realize it was Ruth at first tells us how dark it was that night
    - Everyone was in the shadows
  - Ruth responds telling Boaz he may “spread your covering over your maid”
    - Moreover, Ruth adds that Boaz is a close relative
    - The Hebrew word for close relative is the same word for kinsman redeemer
    - So Ruth is politely saying I am willing to have you as my redeemer if he would be willing to fulfill the Law on her behalf
    - Naomi expected her plan to bring Ruth and Boaz to this point
    - Naomi has faith in Boaz’s character to expect he’ll do the right thing in the end
- In response to Ruth’s overture, Boaz responds with joy declaring that her first kindness to him has been exceeded by this kindness
  - That may seem like a backward statement, since after all it was Boaz who showed kindness to Ruth, wasn’t it?
    - Yes, but Ruth showed respect and kindness to Boaz as well
    - Her first act of kindness toward Boaz was to serve him well as a maidservant
  - Ruth showed Boaz kindness in her devoted service during the harvest season, working every day, all day, rewarding his trust
    - Every servant in Boaz’s household was blessed to be made a part of Boaz’s house

- But not every servant returned that favor by blessing Boaz with faithful obedience
- So Boaz was blessed by Ruth's service
- And now Ruth is willing to forgo younger men and become Boaz's wife, a second act of kindness toward him
  - Boaz notes that Ruth hasn't gone after younger men
  - From his perspective, Ruth was young and attractive
  - As an older man, Boaz must have assumed she was looking past him seeking a younger man as a husband
- Instead, she has remained devoted to him, gladly seeking to be his bride
  - Once again, it's Ruth who would be gaining the blessing of a husband, but Boaz is likewise blessed by her affection
  - Just as every man is blessed by the affection of a loving wife
- In response to Ruth's kindness, Boaz pledges to do what he can to make the wedding happen, but there is an obstacle
  - Here we learn the second reason Boaz hadn't moved yet to redeem Ruth or Naomi
    - Boaz is not the closest living relative to these women
    - Another man has the first right to redeem any widow in Elimelech's family
    - So Boaz has been prevented from acting for this reason
  - Remember, the levirate marriage rule in the Law required that the closest relative be the one to redeem the widow
    - And marrying a beautiful young woman was not considered an act of sacrifice but of privilege
    - So before Boaz could take Ruth, he had to give the closest relative the right of first refusal
    - Boaz was a man who made sure the Law was followed exactly
  - Therefore, Boaz says he will address this conflict in the morning

- In the morning, he will seek to know if this closer relative can redeem Ruth
- If the closer relative is unable to meet the terms of the levirate Law, then Boaz will step into his place and redeem Ruth
- One way or the other, Ruth and Naomi are finally going to get the rest they have been seeking
- Turning to our second story, we remember Ruth pictures the Gentile church betrothed to our Groom, Christ
  - Like Ruth, we feel as though we are the ones blessed by our relationship with Christ, and certainly we are
    - In fact, we truly don't have a clue just how blessed we are
    - We can't possibly appreciate all the glory our relationship with Christ will bring for us in time, as Paul says

**1Cor. 2:9** but just as it is written,

**“Things which eye has not seen and ear has not heard,  
And which have not entered the heart of man,  
All that God has prepared for those who love Him.”**

- But also like Ruth, despite the fact that we receive so much from Christ, nevertheless we can be a blessing to Him
  - Ruth blessed Boaz in response to his kindness by working diligently in his field
  - Likewise, we can bless the Lord Who has extended grace to us by serving Him faithfully in His field, that is the world
- It's a small thing when you think about it, really
  - Where would Ruth have been without Boaz's kindness?
  - And where would we be had the Lord not extended His grace to change the eternal course of our lives?
  - How lonely, how frustrated, how desperate, how hopeless might we be today without Him?
- So if you have wished you could find a way to repay the Lord or show Him your thanks, well here's the way we do it

- Paul sums it up in Romans 12

[Rom. 12:1](#) Therefore I urge you, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies a living and holy sacrifice, acceptable to God, which is your spiritual service of worship.

[Rom. 12:2](#) And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, so that you may prove what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect.

- If you want to bless your Lord, serve Him sacrificially
  - Bless Him by forsaking other, more “attractive” suitors and remaining devoted to Him
  - Set aside your desires for earthly riches, fame, power, accomplishment, pleasures and the like
  - Don’t waste time striving for the rest that only comes in the Kingdom
  - Just serve in the field, get up everyday seeking ways to bless the Lord
  - And when the harvest comes, we’ll have our rest, just as these women are about to receive theirs