Ruth

She said to them, "Do not call me Naomi; call me Mara, for the Almighty has dealt very bitterly with me. (Ruth 1:20 ESV)

And the women of the neighborhood gave him a name, saying, "A son has been born to Naomi." They named him Obed. He was the father of Jesse, the father of David. (Ruth 4:17 ESV)

Spread Your Wings Over Your Servant
December 21st, 2025
Ruth 3
Rev. Levi denBok

Introduction:

Good morning! Please keep your Bibles open to Ruth chapter 3. Thank you, Leah, for reading for us.

As Christmas quickly approaches, Hallmark movies are being played in living rooms everywhere. Don't raise your hand, but I know that there are many of you who just eat those up. City girls returning to their small-town roots. The long forgotten high school sweetheart, dressed in plaid. A surprising twist when – lo and behold – they fall in love!

Can I tell you something? Hallmark has nothing on Ruth. A young Moabitess widow moves to a foreign land to support her dead husband's mother. There, in abject poverty, she happens upon the field of one of her husband's distant relatives and he is captivated by her integrity. Sensing that love might be in the air, the mother-in-law puts a risky plan in motion. And that brings us to our passage for this morning.

This is a beautiful, moving story, and I'm thankful for the opportunity to walk through it with you. Admittedly, it is not particularly 'Christmasy', but I've drawn from some of the best Christmas carols to title the three scenes in hopes that you will forgive me for that. Let's begin now with:

Scene 1: A Thrill Of Hope

The first thing that I want to draw your attention to in this opening section is the complete transformation that we are witnessing in Naomi.

Thus far in the story, Naomi's life has been one tragedy after another. Famine drove her away from her homeland. Death robbed her of her husband. Apparently unsatisfied, death came back again and robbed her of her two beloved sons. Destitute and desperate, she returned to Bethlehem and proclaimed to the women of the city:

> "Do not call me Naomi; call me Mara, for the Almighty has dealt very bitterly with me. **21** I went away full, and **the Lord has brought me back empty**. Why call me Naomi, when the Lord has testified against me and **the Almighty has brought calamity upon me**?" (Ruth 1:20b-21 ESV)

It's important for us to recognize here that Naomi doesn't attribute her suffering to *chance*. She doesn't attribute it to *a string of bad luck*. She states in no uncertain terms: 'THE ALMIGHTY has brought calamity upon me. GOD did this.' Job – a man who suffered a similar loss to that of Naomi – had a similar response when *his* world fell apart. He cried out to God and said:

> **You have turned cruel to me**;
> with the might of your hand you persecute me. (Job 30:21 ESV)

Here, we find a very honest look into the bitterness of grief. It's one thing to believe that God is *absent* and that your suffering is *meaningless.* There is despair in that. But here is a hopelessness that runs deeper. Naomi KNOWS that God is real! She KNOWS that God is in control! And yet, for some reason unknown to her, He chose not to spare her from this calamity. So, as we are all tempted to do, Naomi chose to fill in the blanks herself. She determined that God must be *against her.* And that left her entirely hopeless.

I imagine there are some people in the room today who are wrestling with that same thought. Sometimes God seemingly knocks us down and we're left wondering, 'How could you have possibly let this happen? Why would You put me through this?' Neither Job nor Naomi ever came to see the full picture of what God was doing behind the scenes. But, if I could encourage you this morning, in due time they did come to experience the truth that we find in Lamentations 3:

the Lord will not
cast off forever,
32 for, **though he cause grief, he will have compassion**
according to the abundance of his steadfast love; (Lamentations 3:31b-32 ESV)

Naomi was right. The Almighty DID bring calamity upon her. But what she didn't see was that the calamity was paving the way for BLESSING. Naomi saw the first glimpse of this compassion when Ruth went out into the fields to scavenge for food. Naomi expected nothing more than a handful of barley to split between them. But, to her delight, Ruth came home with a two-week supply of food! Her eyes grew wider when Ruth reported:

> "The man's name with whom I worked today is **Boaz**." 20 And Naomi said to her daughter-in-law, "May he be blessed by the Lord, whose kindness has not forsaken the living or the dead!" Naomi also said to her, "**The man is a close relative of ours, one of our redeemers**." (Ruth 2:19b-20 ESV)

This is the moment in the story when everything changes for Naomi. She realizes: 'Boaz is a redeemer! He is a relative who – if he so chooses – can restore to us something of what we have lost! God has provided us with a possible way out of our despair!'

And with that thrill of hope, the hopeless Naomi of the opening chapters is transformed into the risk taking, hopeful woman that we find in this opening scene. Look again at verses 1-4:

> Then Naomi her mother-in-law said to her, "My daughter, should I not seek rest for you, that it may be well with you? 2 Is not Boaz our relative, with whose young women you were? See, he is winnowing barley tonight at the threshing floor. 3 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 until he has finished eating and drinking. 4 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." (Ruth 3:1-4 ESV)

Suddenly, Naomi is *proactive.* Suddenly she is *making plans* and *taking risks* and *believing for a better future*. Suddenly, she has HOPE.

Perhaps there's someone who needs to hear this today: Hope that has died can be REBORN!

Naomi is so hopeful, in fact, that she presents a daring plan to her daughter-in-law.

Ruth will sneak over to the threshing floor where Boaz has spent the day winnowing his barley. Once he's sound asleep, Ruth will sneak over, uncover his feet, and then lay down near him. Eventually, when a cold draft hits his toes, he will awake to find Ruth, and then... Well, Naomi never clarified that detail. She simply said:

> 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**." (Ruth 3:4 ESV)

If that sounds risky to you, make no mistake, it sounded even riskier when it was written! The first Jewish readers would have said 'Woah, woah, woah!' as they heard this plan. This wasn't standard practice. Women didn't go around uncovering men's feet and lying next to them to see what would happen. And they *especially* weren't doing this at the threshing floor. Bad things happened at the threshing floor! In Hosea 9, for example, we read:

> Rejoice not, O Israel!
> Exult not like the peoples;
> for you have played the whore, forsaking your God.
> **You have loved a prostitute's wages**
> **on all threshing floors**. (Hosea 9:1 ESV)

Apparently, the threshing floor was a place where the ladies of the night would collect their wages! Ruth was taking a great risk in following through with this plan and the first readers would have been on the edge of their seat in anticipation of what would follow.

Will Boaz take advantage of her for having put herself in such a compromising position? Remember, this was not a time in history when Israel had an upright reputation. We read in the first verse of this book that this took place in the *days of the judges* – the days when *everyone did what was right in his own eyes.* Can Ruth count on Boaz to be a gentleman?

And, even if he is a gentleman, how will he perceive her actions? Will he assume impure motives and cast her out? Will he assemble the men of the city to stone the Moabite temptress who tried to seduce him?

This plan could go wrong in so many ways! It was a tremendous risk!

And yet, with a newfound hope, Naomi pitched this dangerous plan to her daughter-in-law, to which Ruth replied:

> "All that you say I will do." (Ruth 3:5b ESV)

For better or worse, the stage has been set. And that brings us to:

Scene 2: A Silent Night

Before we walk through the events of this night, I want to draw your attention to a powerful lesson that we learn from Ruth's example. As we consider her story, we are reminded that real faith is *active faith.*

Take our passage from last Sunday, for example. Was Ruth praying for food? You'd better believe she was! But she was also trekking out to the field each day. There was prayer, but there was also action. She *asked* for the blessing, and then she *positioned herself* where the blessing could be found.

And, sure enough, God provided for her. But that provision was *out in the field!* She would never have received it if she had not first trusted God and stepped out in faith. We see the same principle in this story as Ruth once again *positions herself* in the place where the blessing can be found – this time at the feet of Boaz.

This story reminds me of how Jesus healed the woman in Mark 5 who broke through the crowd and touched his robe. It reminds me of the paralytic in Mark 2 whose friends cut a hole in the roof and lowered him down to Jesus. It reminds me of Zaccheus in Luke 19 climbing up a sycamore tree. Real faith is *active faith.* God rewards those who earnestly seek Him.

Maybe there's someone here today who needs that reminder. Maybe you're secretly seeking after Jesus, quietly hoping that he might bless you without causing too much disruption. Perhaps, what you need to do this morning is to risk embarrassment – to risk losing everything – and to throw

yourself at the feet of your Redeemer. I think we're meant to see a subtle picture of that in this story.

Ruth hid out of sight while Boaz ate and drank, and she waited until he was fast asleep before laying down. Eventually, as Naomi had predicted, Boaz woke up and was shocked to see a woman at his feet! At this stage in the plan – if you recall – Ruth's job was to wait quietly for Boaz's instruction. But, in verses 8-9, Ruth went off the script. Look there again:

> At midnight the man was startled and turned over, and behold, a woman lay at his feet! **9** He said, "Who are you?" And she answered, "I am Ruth, your servant. **Spread your wings over your servant, for you are a redeemer**." (Ruth 3:8-9 ESV)

In that one sentence, Ruth masterfully set the tone for the night. By inviting Boaz to 'Spread his wings over her' she was alluding back to something that he had said when they first met in the fields. He told her:

> "All that you have done for your mother-in-law since the death of your husband has been fully told to me, and how you left your father and mother and your native land and came to a people that you did not know before. **12** The Lord repay you for what you have done, and a full reward be given you by the Lord, the God of Israel, **under whose wings you have come to take refuge**!" (Ruth 2:11b-12 ESV)

Boaz had essentially said, 'I've heard what you've done, and it ought to be rewarded! May God care for you by placing you under his protective wing!' Ruth, now, says, 'You are Elimilech's relative. You are positioned to be a redeemer for our family! You are positioned to care for Naomi and myself – to buy back all that Elimilech's family has lost – and to provide his family line with an heir! If you TRULY desire that God would reward me for my faithfulness, then recognize that He has positioned YOU to be the protective wing that stretches over me!'

In essence, Ruth very politely asked: 'Will your walk match your talk, Boaz?'

We find his response in verses 10-11:

> 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 poor or

> rich. **11** And now, my daughter, do not fear. I will do for you all that you ask, for all my fellow townsmen know that you are a worthy woman. (Ruth 3:10-11 ESV)

Any fear the reader had about how Boaz might respond is quickly alleviated. He doesn't take advantage of Ruth, nor does he cast her out. He even honours her for choosing to pursue him – an older man – rather than the younger men of the community.

We don't know how much older Boaz was, but he was old enough to conclude that the only reason why Ruth would choose him is because of his status as kinsman redeemer. Rather than pursuing the most handsome man, or the wealthiest man, Ruth has chosen to pursue the man who will continue her family line and provide for her destitute mother-in-law. Commentator Ian Duguid says it well:

> Theirs was a character match, not a love match: they were both people of substance.[1]

As a brief aside, to the young men and women in the room, there is an important lesson here: Physical attraction fades. I'm not saying that looks don't matter. Song of Solomon suggests that attraction has its rightful place. But I AM saying that it ought to be MUCH lower on your priority list than you will naturally want to place it.

Pursue someone of character and substance. Find someone who loves the Lord and whose walk matches their talk. Prioritize friendship and connection. And – if they're also cute – that's a bonus! Better a 4 out of 10 who is committed to loving the Lord and treasuring your heart than a 10 out of 10 who is committed to loving himself and treasuring your body.

Back to the story now. Having stated his intentions to marry Ruth – and having identified a potential problem that we will return to in chapter 4 – Boaz invites Ruth to lie down for the night. Our modern minds might be tempted to assume some nuance in Boaz's invitation, but the author shuts that down right away with his careful choice of words. As one Hebrew scholar notes:

> Cleverly, the narrator used the verb lun ("to lodge'), for two purposes. On the one hand, since it had no sexual connotations, the verb removed all ambiguity concerning sexual

[1] Ian M. Duguid, *Esther and Ruth* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2005), 178.

> relations between the pair. It signaled that, thrown together in the crucible of temptation, the two proved themselves righteous by placing integrity above passion.[2]

As this chapter developed, the author of Ruth led us to expect that maybe these two outstanding characters would succumb to temptation. Instead, however, we see a man and woman of integrity choosing to honour the Lord. This sets the stage for the final scene:

Scene 3: Tidings Of Comfort And Joy

As morning approaches, Boaz wants to protect Ruth's reputation. Nothing untoward has happened, but that won't keep the town gossips from running their mouths. Before the sun rises, Boaz sends Ruth home to Naomi. But first, he loads her up with gifts. We read in verse 15:

> 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. (Ruth 3:15 ESV)

We can't be sure exactly how much barley Boaz sent home with Ruth because the Hebrew simply says 'six barley'. That said, the most common measure of barley was a seah – six of which would have equalled nearly 65 pounds! Whatever the exact amount was, Boaz's intention was to show great generosity to Naomi. That's exactly what Ruth tells Naomi in verses 16-17:

> Then she told her all that the man had done for her, **17** saying, "These six measures of barley he gave to me, for he said to me, '**You must not go back empty-handed to your mother-in-law.**'" (Ruth 3:16b-17 ESV)

Try to picture this scene through the eyes of Naomi for a moment. Here, standing in the doorway is her faithful daughter-in-law Ruth. Just a few months ago, she pleaded with this girl to leave her for a better life. She was convinced that that there would only be sorrow ahead and she didn't want anyone else to have suffer under her curse.

But Ruth wouldn't let her go.

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[2] Robert L. Hubbard Jr., *The Book Of Ruth* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1988), 218.

Now, this beautiful young woman stands with a 65-pound bag of barley – which she adds to the 33 pounds of barley that she collected on her first day out in the field – and she reports that Boaz has every intention to take the family under his wing and to provide Naomi with an heir. I can't help but wonder if she felt some embarrassment as she remembered her angry outburst when she first entered the city:

> "Do not call me Naomi; call me Mara, for the Almighty has dealt very bitterly with me. **21** I went away full, and **the Lord has brought me back empty**. (Ruth 1:20b-21a ESV)

She made that proclamation in the presence of Ruth! I wonder if Ruth didn't have a loving, knowing smirk on her face when she reported Boaz's words: 'You must not go back empty-handed to your mother-in-law.'

The Lord will not cast off forever. Though He cause grief, He will have compassion.

As we conclude this morning, I hear John 5:39 ringing in my ears where Jesus said:

> You search the Scriptures because you think that in them you have eternal life; and it is they that bear witness about me, (John 5:39 ESV)

I see Jesus everywhere in this passage! In fact, the characters of Naomi, Ruth and Boaz fade further and further into the background the longer I look at this. John Calvin once wrote:

> We ought to read the Scriptures with the express design of finding Christ in them. Whoever shall turn aside from this object, though he may weary himself throughout his whole life in learning, will never attain the knowledge of the truth; for what wisdom can we have without the wisdom of God?[3]

I see in this passage the story of our great Redeemer! I see in this love story a glimpse of His great love for us. I see in this story an encouragement to anyone in this room who has come today feeling empty and hopeless.

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[3] John Calvin as quoted in Sidney Greidanus, *Preaching Christ From The Old Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1999), 227.

Come! Throw yourself at the feet of your Redeemer! Find refuge under the shelter of his wings! Take a risk this morning.

Perhaps that looks like finally confessing that sin that you've been concealing.

Perhaps that looks like asking the person next to you to pray for you.

Perhaps that looks like coming to me after the service and telling me to fill up the baptism tank for next Sunday.

Push through the crowd; dig a hole in the roof; climb the tree; do whatever you need to do to throw yourself at the feet of your redeemer! Whatever it costs you – whatever risk is holding you back – I promise you that what he has for you on the other side is so much better! Jesus said:

> "Truly, I say to you, there is no one who has left house or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or lands, for my sake and for the gospel,[30] who will not receive a hundredfold now in this time, houses and brothers and sisters and mothers and children and lands, with persecutions, and in the age to come eternal life. (Mark 10:29-30 ESV)

If you are in Christ, though you go away empty, you will always come back full. May this beautiful love story remind you of the Redeemer who delights to shower his people with blessing, and may we join our voices with Ruth as she asks:

> Spread your wings over your servant, for you are a redeemer (Ruth 3:9b ESV)

This is the word of the Lord. Thanks be to God. Let's pray together.