

The Book of Ruth – 9

Finding Rest

Text: Ruth 3

Introduction

Chapter 3 is the hinge in the story. Things start to change here. Things start to ramp up. Up until now we have seen that due to an economic crisis Elimelech moved his wife Naomi and two sons to Moab – modern day Jordan. There they found food but also hit another crisis: death. In time both Naomi's husband and two sons died, leaving three widows. Naomi and Ruth (the wife of Mahlon) moved back to Bethlehem because there was a harvest to be had.

As a widow, a Jordanian refugee, Ruth found work in the fields of a man named Boaz. He proved to be a man of integrity, generosity and care. He was a relative of Naomi's husband: Elimelech. He was a kinsman-redeemer – a family member charged with the care of Naomi. One half of Naomi's problem was solved. She now had food. And then we are left with this very poignant, boring, anti-climatic statement about Ruth: "And she lived with her mother-in-law."¹

Naomi the Match Maker

Now this is no time for 'mother-in-law' jokes. If anything, there should be daughter-in-law jokes. Why? Because this living arrangement didn't satisfy Naomi. Listen who takes the initiative to get the ball rolling: "*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?"*" (Ruth 3:1, ESV). That's Hebrew for "Ruth, it's time to find a man!"

Now that word "rest" we have seen before. In Moab after the death of her sons, Naomi said to both daughters-in-law: "*The LORD grant that you may find rest, each of you in the house of her husband!*" *Then she kissed them, and they lifted up their voices and wept.*" (Ruth 1:9, ESV). So clearly Naomi had in mind that Ruth ought to re-marry. So here is Naomi's plan:

1. This guy Boaz who is an eligible bachelor is thrashing grain and is staying the night in the fields.
2. Take off your mourning clothes and dress in a way that shows you are available for marriage.
3. When Boaz has finished work for the day, after his evening meal and he lays down for the night, "observe the place where he is laying". Translation: I don't want you to make a mistake and approach the wrong guy!
4. God uncover his feet.
5. Wait for his response.

Now most of that we can figure out but what is this "uncovering his feet" thing? The best understanding of that act, that maintains the modesty of the story and has contextual support is supplied by this

¹ [*The Holy Bible: English Standard Version*](#). (2016). (Ru 2:23). Wheaton: Standard Bible Society.

cultural comment: “Ruth is secretly to fold back the skirt of Boaz’s long tunic, exposing the ‘area around the feet’ (Hebrew *margēlôt*), and “lie down” there. These proposed actions seem very forward but in fact involve no moral compromise by either Ruth or Boaz (cf. v. 11). The exposure of Boaz’s feet to the night chill will awaken him at the best moment for a private conversation. More important, the gesture symbolizes Ruth’s willingness to marry Boaz (cf. v. 9; Ezek 16: 8).”² So this sounds very strange to us, but we are convinced that Naomi is simply saying to Ruth: It’s time to get on with life. It’s time to re-marry. Go tell Boaz that you are available. Do it in private, not in public.

Ruth’s Proposal

So Ruth does what her mother-in-law suggests – sort of! She doesn’t follow it to a tea, but here’s what we are told: *“So she went down to the threshing floor and did just as her mother-in-law had commanded her. And when Boaz had eaten and drunk, and his heart was merry, he went to lie down at the end of the heap of grain. Then she came softly and uncovered his feet and lay down.”* (Ruth 3:6–7, ESV). Well all this startled Boaz and when he arose and asked who she was, Ruth went off script. Here’s what she said:

1. She answered him, *“I am Ruth, your servant.”* Now that’s not the first time Ruth had said that to Boaz, but in Hebrew there is a different nuance. Look with me back to verse 13: *“Then she said, ‘I have found favor in your eyes, my lord, for you have comforted me and spoken kindly to your servant, though I am not one of your servants.’”* There the emphasis is on Ruth the slave. In chapter 3 though a different word is used in Hebrew that is more personal. A good word would be *handmaiden*.³ All this is still saying the same message: “I am ready for marriage.”
2. So, she says, *“Spread your wings over your servant, for you are a redeemer.”* This is a Hebrew idiom. We might say, “Let’s get hitched!” Ruth said, “Spread your wings over your handmaiden.” Translation: “Marry me!”

Boaz’s Response

Now we read: *“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. 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. And now it is true that I am a redeemer. Yet there is a redeemer nearer than I. Remain tonight, and in the morning, if he will redeem you, good; let him do it. But if he is not willing to redeem you, then, as the Lord lives, I will redeem you. Lie down until the morning.””* (Ruth 3:10–13, ESV)

² Zondervan. The NIV Zondervan Study Bible, eBook: Built on the Truth of Scripture and Centered on the Gospel Message (Kindle Locations 63535-63540). Zondervan. Kindle Edition.

³ “Finally, the twice-repeated *your maidservant* (*‘amāteḳā*) also implied an improved status: she was no longer simply a lower-class “servant” (*šiphâ*, 2:13); rather, she identified herself among those eligible for marriage or concubinage.” - Hubbard, R. L. (1988). *The Book of Ruth* (p. 211). Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co.

The short answer? Yes! I will marry you. Boaz, this godly man, treats her with respect and purity. He agrees to marry her, and he determines to do it right. There is someone who by right has first right of refusal. He must deal with that first. This godly man is so humble. He is eager to marry Ruth. An Israelite marrying a Moabite; a servant girl marrying a landowner; a younger woman marrying an older man; and a widow marrying a bachelor (maybe)! But there's something even more important to note. Remember their first meeting? Marriage wasn't even on the table and Boaz says to Ruth, *"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 2:12, ESV). Boaz was the answer to his own prayer. Isn't God amazing? He prayed that this dear lady would find rest and protection in the God of Israel and in practical human ways, he was the answer to his own prayer.

So, we read about this couple *"So she lay at his feet until the morning, but arose before one could recognize another. And he said, 'Let it not be known that the woman came to the threshing floor.' And he said, 'Bring the garment you are wearing and hold it out.' So she held it, and he measured out six measures of barley and put it on her. Then she went into the city."* (Ruth 3:14–15, ESV).

Again, we witness the *hesed* steadfast, loyal love of Boaz to Ruth. He cared for her protection, her purity and was generous to the core. Some guys load their fiancées up with an expensive engagement ring, some load them up with six measures of barley. It's all love!

"I Love It When A Plan Comes Together!"

The mother-in-law that proposed this course of action now gets to find out what took place. We read, *"And when she came to her mother-in-law, she said, 'How did you fare, my daughter?' Then she told her all that the man had done for her, 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.' " She replied, "Wait, my daughter, until you learn how the matter turns out, for the man will not rest but will settle the matter today.'" (Ruth 3:16–18, ESV)*


The Main Point

I think we would be very wrong to try to suggest this is the recommended way for our eligible young people to approach marriage. The story is not given to us as a prescription for courting and engagement. That would be speculative and wrong.

So, when you read a story like this, how do you discern the point or points that the Holy Spirit wants to convey to us? As I looked at the text I saw two bookends to this chapter. Notice the two references to "rest":

"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?" (Ruth 3:1, ESV)

"She replied, "Wait, my daughter, until you learn how the matter turns out, for the man will not rest but will settle the matter today."" (Ruth 3:18, ESV)



Finding "rest" is the theme of this Book. The rest that Naomi wanted for Ruth was the love and provision of a husband, of children and a future. Ruth could now relax, she could cease her anxiety and truth in Boaz to finish what he promised. Ron Hubbard writes: "Ruth need expend no more effort, because (*kî*) *the man will not relax his efforts*. A man of his word, Boaz would deny himself respite until his promised obligation was done . . . Boaz would leave no loose ends; he would completely settle this affair."⁴ Likewise Darryll Block agrees, "Indeed he will not rest (*šāqat*) unless the matter is brought to a conclusion, today!"⁵

Here's the point: Ruth's fate is in the hands of her kinsman-redeemer.

Application

As I already noted, Boaz is a type of Christ. As our Kinsman-Redeemer, Christ is more perfect, more glorious, more faithful, more loving than Boaz ever could be. Jesus Christ is the one who did not rest until He had redeemed us. He is the one who came, who suffered, to secure our salvation. Christ is the one to whom we can find rest for our souls. The prayer of Boaz (which is the key verse of the Book) for Ruth was "*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 2:12, ESV).

If you are a Christian, who has come to the God of Israel, whose wings you have sought refuge, our prayer today is that as you consider the Gospel that you will find rest for your soul. The writer to the Hebrews reminds us that "¹⁸we who have fled for refuge might have strong encouragement to hold fast to the hope set before us. ¹⁹We have this as a sure and steadfast anchor of the soul."⁶ Often times as Christians, a lack of rest is the result of hoping in the wrong things. May we be reminded today that our hope is not in ourselves or others, but in the eternal promises of our Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ.

But there's a message today for those who have never come to the God of Israel for refuge. The songwriter asks the question:

*O soul are you weary and troubled?
No light in the darkness you see?
There's light for a look at the Savior
And life more abundant and free*

⁴ Hubbard, R. L. (1988). [*The Book of Ruth*](#) (p. 227). Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co.

⁵ Block, D. I. (1999). [*Judges, Ruth*](#) (Vol. 6, p. 701). Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers.

⁶ [*The Holy Bible: English Standard Version*](#). (2016). (Heb 6:18–19). Wheaton: Standard Bible Society.

Turn your eyes upon Jesus

Christ is the one to whom we can find rest for our souls. Jesus is the one who said: *"Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light."* (Matthew 11:28–30, ESV)