

The Risky Nature of Love

Text: Ruth 3.1–18

Theme: There are times when the Christian, rather than waiting passively, must take action to see God's will be done

Introduction — Just over 3,000 years ago, this letter appeared in the Bethlehem Herald

- Dear Abby, my daughter-in-law is a widow
- when we moved back to my hometown, she went to work for a relative of mine
- he has been nothing but kind, generous, and respectful toward her
- it seems, from the moment they first met, that there was an interest in my daughter-in-law
- he treats her like a princess and I benefit greatly from this wonderful treatment
- but it's been over two months, her contract is about to expire for her work, and still nothing
- this relationship needs to move to the next level, but it's like he's stuck in the mud
- how can we ignite his inertia, light his lethargy, cancel this relational coma he is in
- Signed, Befuddled in Bethlehem

Dear Befuddled...

- of course, having looked at Ruth, chs. 1 & 2, we recognize Naomi's handwriting, don't we
- she IS befuddled...baffled, and bewildered
- she and her daughter-in-law, Ruth, back in Bethlehem, have seen God's hand working
- from bitterness to blessing, God's is orchestrating great things
- but, from her human perspective, it still seems like that blessing isn't coming fast enough
- Boaz has been providing Ruth with plenty of mercy in the grain harvest
- Ruth and Naomi will have plenty to sustain them
- but the harvest is about to end, the end of season celebration is soon
- Naomi doesn't know if Boaz will try to maintain any kind of a relationship with Ruth after this
- rather than sitting passively by and watching and waiting for events to unfold...
- Naomi determines in her heart that initiative is hers for the taking: it's time to take a risk

There is a time for God's people to wait passively for God to remove obstacles

- yet there is also a time for us to engage those obstacles
- both must be done in the faith that our God works all things together for good for those who love Him
- God is immensely concerned about the details of our lives
- now, beginning in chapter 3, all three of our main characters are about to take risks
- Naomi, Ruth, and Boaz will find themselves vulnerable here
- but all three are trusting the Lord and it is honor and love for Him that motivates them most

Let's watch now, as...

I. THE MATE — NAOMI PLOTS, (3.1–5)

- the remaining weeks of harvest have passed too quickly for Naomi
- when she first heard Boaz' name and the kindness he showed to Ruth, she was excited
- for the first time in a long time, she had reason to hope in God's blessing once again
- in her mind, Boaz must surely be more than just a kind-hearted benefactor
- this is where we find her at the beginning of ch. 3
- note how she calls Ruth her daughter, for Ruth has become her very own now
- and she approaches her with a delicate subject
- "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)

- no more mourning; it's time to move on from that
- she now introduces the object of her plan
- “Is not Boaz our relative, with whose young women you were? See, he is winnowing barley tonight at the threshing floor.”

(Ruth 3:2 ESV)

- in her mind is this truth of the kinsman-redeemer

1. The kinsman-redeemer

- Naomi first introduced this concept at the end of ch. 2
- “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 2:20 ESV)

- Naomi's statement has its background in an Old Testament practice
- God is showing His covenant mercy in this practice
- the practice is known as Levirate marriage
- ““If brothers dwell together, and one of them dies and has no son, the wife of the dead man shall not be married outside the family to a stranger. Her husband's brother shall go in to her and take her as his wife and perform the duty of a husband's brother to her. And the first son whom she bears shall succeed to the name of his dead brother, that his name may not be blotted out of Israel. And if the man does not wish to take his brother's wife, then his brother's wife shall go up to the gate to the elders and say, ‘My husband's brother refuses to perpetuate his brother's name in Israel; he will not perform the duty of a husband's brother to me.’ Then the elders of his city shall call him and speak to him, and if he persists, saying, ‘I do not wish to take her,’ then his brother's wife shall go up to him in the presence of the elders and pull his sandal off his foot and spit in his face. And she shall answer and say, ‘So shall it be done to the man who does not build up his brother's house.’ And the name of his house shall be called in Israel, ‘The house of him who had his sandal pulled off.’”

(Deuteronomy 25:5-10 ESV)

- this was the issue the Sadducees attempted to trick Jesus with in Matthew's gospel
- “saying, “Teacher, Moses said, ‘If a man dies having no children, his brother must marry the widow and raise up offspring for his brother.’”

(Matthew 22:24 ESV)

- during the days of the judges, this practice went to the nearest relative, if there was no brother
- Naomi, aware of this, begins her plotting

2. The plot takes shape

- there must be no delay: tonight is when this must happen
- she tells her daughter-in-law: be attractive, attentive, assertive, and available

1) attractive

- do not look like you're mourning and grieving any long
- “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.”

(Ruth 3:3 ESV)

- Ruth, preparing herself in such a way, would be announcing: I'm done mourning
- I am now ready to move on with my life

2) attentive

- pay attention to Boaz and the events there this evening, Naomi advises
- “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)

3) assertive

- now would be the time for Ruth to be assertive: “Go, uncover his feet and lie down”
- this would serve two purposes
- first, it symbolized the humility with which Ruth approached Boaz
- this would keep her from looking like some type of brazen hussy
- this would also awaken the older man gradually, not suddenly
- he would feel his feet getting cold and wonder why

4) available

- at last, when Boaz sees Ruth at his feet, he would tell her what to do
- he would finally realize what was happening

3. The response of a trusting heart

- “And she replied, “All that you say I will do.””

(Ruth 3:5 ESV)

- her words carry more force than they sound on the surface
- she was acknowledging that she trusted Naomi’s commitment to the Lord
- Naomi would never ask her to do that which was immoral
- Ruth also was trusting Naomi’s loving attachment to her, her “daughter”
- yes, there was the risk that Boaz wouldn’t take up the challenge
- but there was no risk of danger; Ruth would be kept safe and pure in this
- and Ruth also trusts Naomi’s judgment: this was the best way to move ahead
- Naomi’s assessment of Boaz’s character and even his response was spot on
- So, Ruth is about to move forward in all this

*The scene shifts from Naomi now to where we see that...***II. THE DATE — RUTH PROPOSES, (3.6–10)**

- Ruth is willing to risk safety and reputation
- she is willing to trust their common evaluation of Boaz as a man of integrity

1. Risk, but with great care

- “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)

- Ruth does all that her mother-in-law had instructed
- Boaz’s heart was merry, not drunk, but nevertheless, quite light-hearted, maybe light-headed

2. The plot unfolds

- “At midnight the man was startled and turned over, and behold, a woman lay at his feet! He said, “Who are you?” And she answered, “I am Ruth, your servant..””

(Ruth 3:8-9 ESV)

- Boaz awakens and asks the obvious question: “Who are you?”

- note Ruth's response: "I am your servant Ruth"
- in ch. 2, Ruth placed herself below the status of Boaz's servants
- the term she uses here is different, it is the term "handmaiden"
- there is a difference in status, sort of like in the middle ages
- Boaz was no longer a "knight with a scullery wench"
- rather, he was now, in Ruth's terms, a "knight with a maid-in-waiting"

3. The desires spoken

- Ruth 3.9b says "Spread your wings over your servant, for you are a redeemer."
- this phrase was full of meaning
- remember when Ruth sought protection under Boaz's wing, 2.12?
- this is repeated now by Ruth in this phrase, quite intentionally, by the way
- in ch 2, Boaz blessed Ruth; here, he becomes the agent of that blessing
- there, Ruth came under the "wing" of the Lord
- here, the "wing" of the Lord becomes the "wing" of Boaz

4. The biblical rationale given

- "since you are a redeemer" Ruth had just uttered
- Ruth is taking the risk that Boaz will reject her because she is so brazen in this meeting
- so she uses the Scriptures to argue her point
- no doubt, Naomi had filled Ruth in on what a kinsman-redeemer was
- and since Boaz is so filled with integrity, this responsibility would not be taken lightly by him
- and that is exactly what we see: he is honorable and receives this positively
- perhaps Ruth was not quite prepared for the enthusiasm of his response
- he blesses her with strength in his words now
- "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."
(Ruth 3:10 ESV)
- it is very likely that Boaz is old enough to be Ruth's father
- this might explain some of his initial reluctance to show affection toward her
- but now, seeing the mercy and covenant love Ruth had shown to Naomi, he moves forward
- even though Ruth's commitment to Naomi was great, Boaz saw this as even greater
- she had not sullied herself or her reputation by chasing younger men
- so, not only had Ruth shown this *hesed*, to Naomi, she was showing it to him!
- Boaz saw this as truly a blessing from the Lord
- if he would have known it, I have no doubt Boaz would have been singing the Doxology now

5. An obstacle?

- one obstacle has already been removed
- Ruth put off younger men and pursued him, an older man—what a mercy this was & would be
- but Boaz knows there is a kinsman closer in line than him
- he is about to reveal how he will seek to deal with that next

From Naomi to Ruth, now to Boaz, we hear...

III. THE WAIT — BOAZ PROMISES(3.11–18)

- Boaz, clearly saw himself as the recipient of grace both from God and from Ruth
- he treated Ruth with respect and honor
- and he now accepts the risk of pursuing the role of the kinsman-redeemer

1. Protecting her honor

- hear his next words
- “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 3:11 ESV)
- for some, this risk might have been exceedingly scandalous
- but Boaz tells her not to be afraid; he is, in the words of 1 Timothy 3.2, above reproach
- as such, he will be able to assure the townspeople, especially the elders, of her purity
- he also promises to do all he is able to do to redeem her, even though there is this other man
- “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 3:12, 13 ESV)
- Ruth is left without doubt: Boaz loves her and is promising to take care of her the rest of their lives
- he shows this in the way he protects her now
- “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.””
(Ruth 3:14 ESV)
- he doesn’t send a lone woman, a foreigner, out into the night

2. Providing still

- “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)
- this provision was not just for more food; Ruth & Naomi had plenty from the harvest
- this was provision of a pledge to Naomi that he, her relative, would redeem Ruth
- it would also provide evidence to anyone awake at that early hour what was going on
- they would see Ruth with grain, she would tell them what it was for, and head home

3. The plot and promise come together

- I doubt Naomi slept much that night, wondering how it was all working out
- note her words, probably spoken as soon as she heard Ruth at the door
- “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,”
(Ruth 3:16 ESV)
- Naomi wished to know — was Ruth still just the widow of Mahlon?
- or was she now the engaged bride of Boaz?
- Ruth’s words give us a bit of show-and-tell, don't they
- “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 3:17 ESV)
- there were verbal assurances and promises made
- but the grain was also visual assurance that Naomi’s “empty” days were over
- remember Naomi’s words back in ch 1: “the Lord brought me back empty”?
- same words used here, but now in reverse—she would no longer be empty

4. Now wait

- “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)

- wait upon the man for his working things out
- but wait upon the Lord, who is moving us from bitterness to blessedness

Conclusion – C.S. Lewis wrote...

- To love at all is to be vulnerable. Love anything, and your heart will certainly be wrung and possibly broken.

All three of our main characters in this book took risks

- all three were motivated by love
- yet there were all kinds of possibilities for misunderstanding
- Ruth could have misunderstood Naomi’s reliance on God’s law for a kinsman-redeemer
- Boaz could have misunderstood the offer Ruth made to him
- both Naomi and Ruth could have misunderstood the kind of man Boaz was

Yet all three took those risks

- and in doing so they reflect the heart of God
- “For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.”

(John 3:16 ESV)

- God loved us so much that He would rather die on the cross for us than not have us at all
- God the Son became vulnerable—incarnated as a baby and nearly assassinated
- nearly stoned for blasphemy but still obeying His Father with authority
- suffering untold agonies, dying horribly, yet being raised to resurrection glory

If you are one of His children, are you willing to not just give of yourself, but give yourself?
And if you are not His yet, will you take the risk of letting His love transform you?

Let us pray —

“Disturb us, Lord,
when we are too well pleased with ourselves,
when our dreams have come true because we have dreamed too little,
when we arrive safely because we have sailed too close to the shore.

Disturb us, Lord, when with the abundance of things we possess,
we have lost our thirst for the waters of life;
having fallen in love with life, we have ceased to dream of eternity;
and in our efforts to build a new earth, we have allowed our vision of the new Heaven to dim.

Disturb us, Lord, to dare more boldly,
to venture on wider seas where storms will show your mastery;
where losing sight of land, we shall find the stars.

We ask you to push back the horizons of our hopes;
and to push into the future in strength, courage, hope, and love”
(reported prayer of Sir Frances Drake).

