

Ruth 3—The Story

(see p. 11 for application)

This is an awkward chapter. This is an uncomfortable chapter. What is going on here??

This woman Naomi has come up with a plan, essentially, to have Ruth her widowed daughter-in-law propose marriage to Boaz. Now we have all kind of engagement stories in this room but I would guess none of us thought to do it this way.

Here's what's going on:

Naomi has been through tragedy after tragedy. If you remember, her family left Israel because of a famine. But it was a terrible mistake. While they were in the nearby country of Moab, her husband died. Then her 2 sons got married to two Moabite women, and 10 years later they'd had no children. This is a dead-end family. And literally, after 10 years of marriage, *both* of Naomi's sons died. And so she comes back to Bethelhem bitter, and sorrowful, with no job, no pension, no plan. She just has heard the famine's over and she figures she might as well die in her home country. She returns to Bethlehem broken, and bitter. "The LORD has brought me back empty," she says when she gets home.

But we notice here in chapter 3, Naomi is not alone! **Her life is *not* empty!** While she was in Moab, something incredible happened: Ruth, one of her sons widows—has been converted! Ruth commits to returning to Bethlehem *with* Naomi—partly because she wants to provide for Naomi, but also because, as she says, she wants Naomi's God to be *her* God. Where Naomi dies, that's

where *Ruth* wants to be buried. She wants to be an Israelite. She wants to join the people of the living God.

And so Ruth has come back because she wants to do life and face death with *Naomi* and *Naomi's God*. Now it just so happens that these two women get to Bethlehem at harvest time. And so Ruth starts going out in to the fields of Bethelhem and **gleaning**. **Gleaning -- It would be almost the equivalent of collecting bottles:** tiring, scavenging work that just lets you make enough to get by. And yet Ruth wants to do this for her mother-in-law.

But Ruth **just so happens to find herself in the field of a man named Boaz**. And out of all the men in Bethelhem, during a time when Israel was full of wickedness, and violence—felt more like Gotham than the promised land—Boaz just happens to be a godly, generous, wealthy man. Chapter 2 calls him a “worthy man” which is like the Aldi guarantee—twice as nice—he’s rich AND he’s good. And Boaz commands his workers to protect Ruth and to make sure she gets more than enough food.

So by the end of chapter 2, bitter, empty Naomi has a daughter-in-law who loves her, a distant relative who’s made sure they have food in the pantry—God has worked through all these “just so happens” to pour out lovingkindness on Naomi.

And little by little, **something beautiful is happening in Naomi**. At the end of chapter 1, she is blind to Ruth. Do you remember? She gets back to Bethlehem with this incredible daughter-in-law by her side, and she doesn’t say “This is Ruth,

everyone.” No, she says “Call me Mara, because the LORD has brought me back empty!”

But little by little, God has started to soften Naomi’s heart. He’s started to show her his lovingkindness by means of Ruth, by means of Boaz—and now Naomi’s heart is beginning to be freed up to love others with the same kindness she’s received.

So Naomi starts to think about Ruth! And it’s about time, because Naomi is sharp! She sees right away that BOAZ is the man for her daughter. That’s why at the end of chapter 2, if you noticed, Ruth had told her mom that Boaz was letting her work alongside his “young men”—like his summer workers. And what did Naomi say? “It is good my daughter, for you to stay close to his young *women*.”

What is Naomi thinking?

“Look, my daughter Ruth is great. She’s great! But she’s a Moabite. What *respectable* Israelite man is going to see past that, with all their prejudices against Moabites? Not only that, but she’s a widow. Everyone knows it. That’s two strikes against her! And not only that, but she’s *barren*, she was married to my son for 10 years and couldn’t have kids.

But Boaz—he is a godly man. An honorable man. And he doesn’t *technically* have an obligation to marry Ruth—but I don’t think it’s an accident that God has put him in Ruth’s life. I’ve been asking God to give her rest in the home of a loving husband. Maybe Boaz is the answer to my prayers!”

And so Naomi comes up with this plan:

She tells her to bathe, to get washed up. She tells her to anoint herself—put on the equivalent of some deodorant. It's possible that up to this point Ruth has been wearing still some of the traditional mourning clothes of a woman whose husband has died. If that's the case then Naomi is telling Ruth it's time to reactivate her eHarmony account because it's time to put herself out there again.

She's simply telling Ruth to make it clear she's available for marriage.

This is a RISKY PLAN! So much could go wrong...But it's the ONLY plan...

How can Naomi be so confident?

She is moving toward God by means of the means by which God has moved toward her. She has experienced the lovingkindness of God—and she apparently has stopped believing the lie that God is a stingy God. God has shown *hesed* to her and Ruth by means of Boaz—so she's gonna move toward Boaz!

And that's what Ruth does, too. When she does go to Boaz, she asks him to “spread his wings over her.” Essentially this is asking him to marry her...But what's interesting is that Boaz had used this phrase earlier in ch 2, about Ruth taking refuge under God's wings.

So Ruth asks Boaz to be the answer to his own prayer (cf. ch 2:12:).

But she's banking on the **hesed** he's already shown, and asking **him** to be the means God uses to show even *more* lovingkindness to her mother-in-law.

The second "lens" we won't spend as much time on, because it really flows from what we just saw. If we see and embrace the reality of God's love for us in Christ—then we are called and we are *freed* to move toward others in self-sacrificing love.

We see this with Naomi, and particularly with Ruth and Boaz.

reltp btwn the two lenses: The security they had in trusting GOD's love enabled them to take risks in showing love to others.

Naomi lays out this risky plan. What would you have done if you were Ruth? What would you have said?

Ruth doesn't even hesitate. "**I'll do what you say.**" Wow! What is Ruth thinking? She must be head over heels for Boaz, right?

I don't know. Not yet, anyway. I think she's got something else on her mind. This is Naomi's plan to provide for Ruth; but you know what Ruth is thinking? I think Ruth is thinking up a plan to provide for *Naomi*.

Look at what happens:

Ruth does just what Naomi tells her to do. She goes down to the threshing floor. She waits until Boaz has finished his work, had a good supper, and goes to sleep. Then—knowing all the risks to her reputation, to her safety, to her livelihood even—she creeps over and uncovers this guys feet (now he just worked all day, in sandals, probably hasn't had a bath in several days). And she lies down there. And in the middle of the night—in the pitch blackness—she feels him stirring, maybe because his feet are cold! and she suddenly hear's his voice say “Who are you??”

Now, Ruth must have been terrified at this point. What if Boaz gets angry? What if Boaz is not as honorable as she and Naomi thought? What if other people hear them talking and news gets out?? But she answers him: “I am Ruth, your servant.”

Now—what was Ruth supposed to do at this point, according to Naomi? She was supposed to see what he said. Naomi had said “He will tell you what to do.”

But Ruth didn't *quite* follow the plan – because what actually happens is she tells *Boaz* what to do:

“Spread your wing over me—for you are a redeemer.”

What does Ruth mean by calling Boaz a redeemer? Well apparently in those times there was a custom based on a couple different laws that said if a man in Israel died and he had a brother, his brother was obligated to *purchase* the land of the dead man and care for his family so that the land and the family name would be preserved. So that meant if a man died and left behind a widow, the man's brother would take her into his home as his wife to provide for and protect her *and* to carry on the name

of the dead man, so any kids they have would technically carry on the dead brothers name and inherit that land, etc.

So when Ruth asks Boaz to “spread his wing over her”—she’s asking him to marry her *because he’s a redeemer*.

But here’s the question: is he *really*? How was Ruth related to Boaz? She was the widow of one of Naomi’s sons. Whose relative is Boaz? *Elimelech’s*.

And he’s not Elimelech’s *brother*—he’s just a relative, and actually, we’ve heard, there’s actually a closer relative in Bethlehem somewhere.

Scholar’s have some different opinions about what’s going on here, but from what I can understand, Boaz technically has NO OBLIGATION whatsoever to marry Ruth as a *redeemer*. That’s why Naomi hasn’t just walked right over to his house, rang the bell and said “Ok, buddy, you know what you have to do.”

So he can marry Ruth if he wants to, but he doesn’t have to take on the burden of acting as “kinsman redeemer” to Ruth. If anything, he has more obligation to NAOMI.

But that’s just what Ruth is saying. “Spread your wings over me.”

Ruth asks Boaz to be the answer to his own prayer (cf. ch 2:12:). **But look what she’s asking:**

It's one thing for him to kindly let her glean—you know, **to let her pick the empty bottles out of his alley** way. It's another thing to invite her in and start planning a wedding!

She's poor, he's rich.

She's a Moabite, he's an Israelite

She's young, he's old, etc.

What is she saying? She's saying marry me—**because we need you**. *Naomi* needs you. YOU are the one with all the resources.

Something interesting here: **Boaz has no obligation to marry Ruth**. None.

It's why he hasn't done anything. [[Explain the Redeemer thing?]]

But she's banking on the **hesed** he's already shown, and asking **him** to be the means God uses to show even *more* lovingkindness to her mother-in-law.

So Ruth is pursuing *Naomi's* good, she's asking Boaz to join her in that. She risks herself in order to pursue this man on behalf of Naomi...

Ruth is doing this not to provide for herself only, but to be a means of provision for Naomi. In this intimate, scary, possibly tempting situation, Ruth has Naomi on her mind!

And Boaz—in this surprising, intimate, possibly tempting situation: *his* mind also is drawn to the needs of Naomi—and to his God!

Now that sounds crazy, maybe to our ears. I mean—they obviously like each other, she's lying next to him—come on! “Kiss the girl!”

But thank God, This isn't hollywood. This isn't even us. But it's pretty clear that Boaz is concerned with these women's needs, not his own desires:

"...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)

See, Boaz understands that Ruth is doing this for Naomi. And actually, this word for "**kindness**" clarifies for us what's going on here. It's being used to translate the word "**hesed**" once again.

Boaz recognizes that Ruth is pursuing marriage with him out of a desire to provide *redemption* for NAOMI, not just herself.

→ These three characters are caught up in what God is doing for Naomi, for Ruth, for Israel...

Because he says—you could've tried to win over one of the younger men, either a poor man who at least you could scrape by together or a rich man who's more your age, more likely to give you children, etc. But instead you've asked *me* to provide not just for you, which any man could do, but for NAOMI.

Boaz treats her with great dignity. Brings God into the conversation right away. Calls her "my daughter," which is not the way you speak to a prostitute. It's a term of protection, not a term of self-gratification...Boaz *does* intend to provide protection and provision for this family by marrying Ruth...

...but there's a glitch. there's another guy who has dibs on the land and therefore "on Naomi". If Boaz *did* want to marry Ruth, maybe that's why he's delayed. Bad sign that no men have stepped up to help Naomi and Ruth

besides Boaz. Maybe it's because of Ruth being a Moabite, maybe it's just because a good man is hard to find.

Either way, he says, he will make sure they are provided for one way or another!

So Boaz says “yes”! and she stays there that night, under his protection, and before dawn he sends her back to NAOMI with food. **“You should not go back *empty* to Naomi.”**

Did you catch that? Naomi who at the end of chapter 1 says **“the LORD has brought me back empty”**—and here Boaz, by means of Ruth—and the LORD, by means of both of them—will not let Naomi be empty.

All three of these people are going to be *blessed* as they seek to bless each other—even Naomi! She's seeking rest and security for Ruth--but God is planning rest and security, and a grandson for *her*.

Ruth 3—Application

Main thing to see in this passage:

#1: If you want to know more of God’s love, move toward God “*by means of the means*” by which he has moved toward you.

Naomi, Ruth, and Boaz’s lovingkindness in this passage is all in response to their experience of *God’s* lovingkindness.

“It just so happens” that God has shown them love by means of Boaz, and now as a result they don’t just sit around waiting for more of God’s love—**they start to *seek more of it!***

God had drawn Ruth to himself by means of Naomi. And Ruth stuck with her. God had provided for Naomi and Ruth by means of Boaz. **And they move in his direction.**

More than that, Naomi had prayed for Ruth, in chapter 1, that **God** would show Ruth kindness by giving her rest in the home of a loving husband. But Naomi isn’t therefore being passiv!

Now Naomi seeks to be God’s answer to her own prayer by having Ruth **move toward the man** by whom God has already started to show them his lovingkindness.

She is moving toward God “by means of the means” by which God has moved toward her. She has experienced the lovingkindness of God—and she apparently has stopped believing the lie that God is a stingy God. God has shown hesed to her and Ruth by means of Boaz—so she’s gonna move toward Boaz!

And Boaz himself—though we don’t see it explicitly here, is someone who’s been directly affected by God’s merciful, welcoming, transforming love. Do you know who Boaz’s mother is? Rahab!...

Ruth herself does the same kind of thing. Boaz had prayed in chapter 2 that the LORD would bless Ruth, the LORD under whose wings she had sought refuge. But here in chapter 3, Ruth sees that it’s *through Boaz* that the LORD has provided for her, and so she essentially asks Boaz to be the answer to his own prayer. Or, to put it

another way, the **LORD is proving his lovingkindness *by means of The Redeemer***—and Naomi and Ruth are **pressing into that**, moving toward God by means of the man whom God has sent into their lives. They are *active* in seeking God—but they are seeking him along the same road he’s traveled, so to speak, to get to them.

→ You and me are called to do the same.

#1: If you want to know more of God’s love, move toward God “*by means of the means*” by which he has moved toward you.

“By means of the means...”

I think this is easy to misinterpret so let me tell you what I ***don’t*** mean.

1. I don’t mean primarily that you should look for *emotional experiences*.

You might remember times you’ve been impacted by a really well-orchestrated worship concert or through a particularly powerful preacher, etc.

Feelings are a blessing—but they’re not reliable. Emotions can be good or bad, but they’re supposed to be a by-product of *relationship*. Albert told me last night – feelings are to be felt, not followed. You could say “feelings are to be felt, not pursue-not as a means to knowing God.”

Why? Because God is not into manipulating our emotions as the *means* of showing us his love. It’s by showing us the *truth of who he is*, it’s by showing us the *power of what he’s done* to rescue us from sin that he has come to us. (which can/should make us feel many things...e.g., gratitude, joy, motivation, peace.)

2. I also don’t mean mainly that you have to stay in your current situation, when thinking wisely would have you change your situation, or vice versa.

Just because a nice Christian man has proposed to you doesn’t mean you have to say “well, the pastor said move toward God by means of the means by which he has moved toward you, so I guess I gotta say

yes.” NO! If you don’t want to marry him, you don’t *have* to. He’s not Boaz!

Okay, well, what do I mean?

Look—this is what Christmas is about...

How has God come into your life, into my life—how has he intervened in our story to change our trajectory and show us he will welcome anyone who takes shelter under his wing?

It’s Christ. JESUS CHRIST is the “means by which” God has shown his love to the world. *CHRIST* is the one through whom God shows “the wonders of his love.” *Christ* is the one by means of whom God shows his great love for us – as we heard last week – ***while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.***

The implications of this are very practical: Do you relate to God in such a way that if Jesus had never done his bit on the cross, it wouldn’t really make any difference?

This is one reason why Christmas to many—along with Easter—seems so trivial. Because really they could really do without the central claim of Christianity—that the holy God has poured out his wrath against sinners on his son so that all people—and *only* those people—who take refuge in the *risen* Jesus are forgiven their sins and welcomed into God’s family and transformed into people who *love* God.

Watch out that you not be content to really just get along with the Father and the Holy Spirit. You know it’s nice to think God loves me like a child. It’s kinda exciting to think about this Spirit going around, bringing some POWER to our lives.

But listen to what 1 John says: *And this is the testimony, that God gave us eternal life, and this life is in his Son. Whoever has the Son has life; whoever does not have the Son of God does not have life. I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God that you may know that you have eternal life.* (1 John 5:11-13 ESV)

Believing in God saves no one. James says *the devil believes* in God.

It’s believing in Christ that saves you--because it’s in Christ that God has come to do *for* us what we could never do for ourselves.

Unlike Ruth, there's **No risk!**

Because you and I can move toward God b/c in Christ he has **literally** moved toward us.

That's what Christmas is. God hasn't sent a Boaz—he's come *himself* to redeem us.

Unlike Ruth, we don't initiate by asking him to lift us out of our poverty;

he initiated by becoming poor

2 Cor 8:9 *"you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sake he became poor, so that you by his poverty might become rich."*

Unlike Ruth, we are **NOT** worthy women, and we are not worthy men, who have earned our redeemer's respect with our reputations.

he has given us *his* righteousness, and taken *our shame* on himself.

he became sin that we might become the righteousness of God.

He lived the life we should have lived, and he died the death we should have died—and ANYONE who comes to him in humble faith, he takes under his wings, he allows them to "marry into" all that he's accomplished.

This should be incredible to us, again and again: **because if we were to locate ourselves** in the story of Ruth, who really would we be?

how many of us would be background characters: not the virtuous Boaz and Ruth, but the run-of-the-mill rebels running around in the book of Judges!

In the days of the judges, people did what they wanted--and we have done and wanted things that have not honored God.

And yet—with all our vileness and filth, God has moved toward us. He didn't wait for us to wash ourselves off and anoint ourselves. **HE did it.**

Titus 3:4-6

But when the goodness and loving kindness of God our Savior appeared, he saved us, not because of works done by us in righteousness, but according to his own mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit, whom he poured out on us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior, (Titus 3:4-6 ESV)

It's believing Christ that saves you. It's staking your hope in his life, death, and resurrection-- and giving your life into his hands. That's what the Bible calls "faith" and "repentance." Faith says, "Christ alone is able to save me from sin!" Repentance says, therefore "I am turning from my sin, to him!"

So, if Christ has already moved toward sinners in love, don't be content with a **vague** relationship with Jesus. Lay yourself at his feet.

Ok, but how? "By means of the means." How does God bring *Christ* into your life? It's not *supposed* to be a mystery. The gospel is GOOD NEWS, not a secret mystical feeling. How do we move toward Christ?

1. **The number one means** by which God brings the love of Christ, the power of Christ, the *person* of Christ into his peoples' life? The WORD.

Let me just read a bunch of verses to you:

So faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ. (Romans 10:17 ESV)

Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom, singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, with thankfulness in your hearts to God. (Colossians 3:16 ESV)

...John, who bore witness to the word of God and to the testimony of Jesus Christ, even to all that he saw. Blessed is the one who reads aloud the words of this prophecy, and blessed are those who hear, ... (Revelation 1:1-3 ESV)

...you have been born again, not of perishable seed but of imperishable, through the living and abiding word of God; for "All flesh is like grass and all its glory like the flower of grass. The grass withers, and the flower falls, but the word of the Lord remains forever." And this word is the good news that was preached to you. (1 Peter 1:23-25 ESV)

But as for you, continue in what you have learned and have firmly believed, knowing from whom you learned it and how from childhood you have been acquainted with the

sacred writings, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work. (2 Timothy 3:14-17 ESV)

This is very practical. God changes his people through the word, which is *about* Christ—because it is the word *of Christ*. In his word **preached**, in his word **read** and understood and applied, in the Word remembered, and embraced—God *declares* his love to us—and that in itself IS one of the main ways God *shows* his love to us.

#1: If you want to know more of God’s love, move toward God “*by means of the means*” by which he has moved toward you.

Move toward Jesus along the road of his Word.

Read it at home.

Get into a church where it is preached as good *news* not as **good feelings** or **good advice** -- but as a *proclamation* that God in Christ saves sinners—that God in Christ *loves* sinners who give their lives to his son!

Find some podcasts that break it down.

Join a Bible study.

Read the Bible with a friend.

Ask my mom about books that explain the Bible well.

(if you don’t know my mom really likes books).

2. But another means by which Christ comes to us, another “means of grace” are baptism and the lord’s supper: *pictures of the word* that feed our faith by bringing into our tangible community vivid pointers to how God **applies** the Redemption Christ has purchased to any and all who repent and believe.
→ Missing church = missing Word sung, Word preached, Word *pictured* in the Lord’s supper. You’re missing out on PRIMARY means by which God works in his people.
3. Prayer. (Spirit intercedes for us). God hears us in Christ, and acts. If you struggle to pray, pray with others...

4. Another means is the church—God’s people.

BHOF, if we are to grow strong, if we are going to endure to the end, we need to have it as a long-term goal that makes it on our short-range calendars: to press in to the brothers and sisters God has given us in this church. This is how the body grows in love, Ephesians 4 tells us—when each member, equipped with the word of Christ invests by word and deed in each other.

Which means: you need to be *around* your church in such a way that lets people build you up. Looking for, taking, making opportunities to have others speak into *your* areas of temptation, areas of weakness, fear, and shame. This is how God has moved toward us in Christ: by making us members of *a gathering of his people*.

In our particular church: Sunday school, Worship, Home Groups, Prayer Meeting, one-on-one relationships with the people he’s put in your life.

If you’re praying for growth, don’t just sit around: move toward the pathways, the means of God’s grace he’s already given!

We don’t have time to explore this fully—but **when we *get* God’s love, we give it.**

As you press in to God’s Word and take it to heart, it will send you and me *out* to share that word in love with others. That’s what Naomi, Ruth, and Boaz do. **#2 If you want to see more of God’s love, move toward others *as the means by which they can know more of God’s love.***

Now... This story is about people that we should be like, but that we would never and will never be like apart from God’s grace. But God’s grace CAN transform us into people who make **a present AND an eternal difference in others’ lives.**

Boaz is the son of a woman transformed by God’s grace. (Rahab).

Ruth herself is a woman transformed by God’s grace.

Even Naomi didn’t realize it back in Moab, but she herself—even her sufferings—have become the means by which God has brought Ruth into his family, into the people of Israel—and now, closer to this man, the redeemer (and as we’ll see next week, into the *family line of THE redeemer, Jesus Christ.*

Rahab and Ruth turn up in the genealogy of Jesus. Because it is through these two unlikely women who had experienced God’s lovingkindness that the savior came to the world.

And it can be through you—maybe even this Christmas as you and I take a risk to speak of our redeemer—to sacrifice for others, etc.—that the savior is brought to others.

If you want to know more of God’s love

1. Move toward God by means of the means by which he has moved toward you—
2. and move toward others, as a means of pointing them to his love in Christ.