

“by means of the means...”

At the close of Ruth chapter 1, Naomi has no job, no pension, no plan. She has heard the famine’s over in Israel 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 there.

But by the time we start chapter 3, Naomi seems totally different! Bitter, empty Naomi has a daughter-in-law who loves her, and a well-to-do relative—the worthy Boaz—has made sure they have food in the pantry! God has worked through all kinds of ordinary “coincidences” to pour out lovingkindness on Naomi. And little by little, something beautiful is happening in her. God’s started to show her his lovingkindness by means of Ruth, by means of Boaz—and now Naomi is being freed up to love others with the same kindness she’s received. In fact, in chapter 3, all three characters—Naomi, Ruth and Boaz—become conduits for God’s lovingkindness as they respond to the lovingkindness they themselves have experienced.

The love shown by Naomi, Ruth, and Boaz in this passage is all in response to their experience and pursuit of *God’s* lovingkindness. “It just so happens” that God has shown Naomi and Ruth love by means of Boaz (who had seen God’s lovingkindness at work in the life of his mother, the prostitute-turned-worshipper Rahab!), and now as a result Naomi and her daughter-in-law don’t just sit around *waiting* for more of God’s love—they start to *seek it* and *show it!* Both seeking and showing God’s love are main themes of this chapter—but we focused in this sermon on the former: both Naomi and Ruth seek rest and refuge by recognizing and pressing into *the redeemer* God has brought into their lives.

One takeaway for us is this: **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 Seeks Rest for Ruth

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?” (3:1)

Naomi had used very similar language in chapter 1:9: *“The Lord grant that you may find rest, each of you in the house of her husband.”* But now, Naomi seeks to be God’s answer to her own prayer: she instructs Ruth to move toward the man by whom God has already started to show them his lovingkindness. 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!

Ruth Seeks a Redeemer for Naomi

Ruth herself does the same kind of thing. Boaz had prayed in chapter 2 verse 12 that the LORD would bless Ruth—the LORD *“under whose wings [she had] come to take refuge.”* Here in chapter 3, Ruth essentially asks Boaz to be the answer to his own prayer. The LORD is proving his lovingkindness by means of “a redeemer”; Naomi and Ruth are active in seeking God—but they are seeking him along the same road he’s traveled, so to speak, to get to them.

We are to do the same....

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.

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? Through the redeemer; through Christ. 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. And so any approach to God or Christianity that does not hinge on Jesus's person and work is going to lead us astray.

By what means 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. We can move toward Christ along the same road he moves toward us...

The number one means by which God brings the love of Christ, the power of Christ, the person of Christ into his peoples' life is the Word. The Good News! Move toward Jesus along the road of his Word—because that's the primary means he uses to dispense his grace: through Christ-centered preaching, through baptism and the Lord's supper, through prayer guided by the Word and offered through faith in Christ, through a community of believers shaped by and submitted to and fed by the Word, through study of Scripture. Through the Word—the whole body builds itself up...in *love!*

Questions for Reflection and Discussion:

1. What questions or convictions has this passage led to in your own life the last few weeks?
2. Boaz notes that Ruth is showing kindness to Naomi by pursuing him rather than any of the younger men. What does this indicate about Ruth's motivations? Do you have other questions about this "awkward" situation?
3. I noted in the sermon that "by means of the means" does not refer primarily to (1) the pursuit of an emotional experience or (2) equating circumstances with God's leading (e.g., if you're praying about how much of a raise to ask for, don't take the arrival of the 4 train as an indication that you should ask for 4K). What questions does this raise for you?
4. What are other Bible passages that reinforce the truth that it is through *the Word of Christ* that God moves toward his people in love? How might this challenge our view of "church" and inform our relationships with each other? What role does the Holy Spirit play in all of this??
5. What are hindrances to your pursuit of Christ "by means of the means" (the Word, prayer, communion, baptism, being with God's people) listed above?
6. Another main emphasis in this passage is that **when we get God's love, we give it**. As we 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—they become *means* by which God shows his love. What are ways you've seen that happen, in you or others? What are current opportunities you have to be the means of God's love to those he's put in your life?