

Against the Grain

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 15 August 2018

Preacher: Lee Roberts

[0 : 00] Tonight we will start Chapter 3 of the Book of Ruth.

! And Naomi her mother-in-law said to her, Where did you glean today, and where have you worked?

Blessed be the man who took notice of you. So she told her mother-in-law with whom she had worked, and said, The man's name with whom I work today is Boaz. 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. Last week we also talked about seven characteristics of the qualified Redeemer, or of the redemption itself. Here are those for a quick review. 1. Redemption by a kinsman is a matter of divine appointment. We saw that God had set forth specific laws about who could be a Redeemer, and what order that redemption could happen in.

[1 : 25] 2. The one that has the right to redeem must be a near kinsman. 3. The kinsman-redeemer must be himself entirely free of the debt. 4. The one who has the right to redeem must be able to redeem.

5. The one who has the right to redeem must be willing to redeem. 6. The redemption was made for a specific people and obtained a specific inheritance.

7. The one who has the right to redeem must raise up a seed. we already have seen evidence that Boaz meets the first four characteristics. Divine providence certainly led Ruth to Boaz's field. Naomi herself identified himself as a near kinsman in verse 220. Boaz also had nothing to do with the debt incurred, and his generosity so far indicates that he is able to redeem.

Tonight's verses will focus on whether Boaz meets the fifth characteristic and whether he is willing to redeem. Several weeks likely have passed since the end of chapter 2.

[2 : 39] Scripture gives us no indication that Boaz and Ruth have had any further contact. Naomi helps to force the issue when she sends Ruth down to the threshing floor. No doubt, Naomi is hoping that Boaz will go against the grain of Israelite society and serve as a redeemer for a Moabite lady.

We'll cover the first 13 verses of chapter 3 tonight. Let's go ahead and read those verses. 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?

Is not Boaz our relative, with whose young women you were? See, he is winnowing barley tonight at the threshing floor. 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. 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.

And she replied, All that you say, I will do. So she went down to the threshing floor, and did just as her mother-in-law had commanded her. When Boaz had eaten and drunk, and his heart was merry, he went to lie down at the end of the heap of grain.

[3 : 59] Then she came softly, and uncovered his feet, and lay down. 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. Spread your wings over your servant, for you are a redeemer. 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 morning. The events of this chapter occur at barley winnowing time, which probably happened after both the barley and the wheat had been cut and gathered at the threshing floor.

[5 : 12] Before we look at the verses in more detail, here is an overview of how threshing and winnowing was done during the time of Ruth. Threshing floors in these times were frequently situated in the immediate vicinity of the harvest field.

A raised level area was used, and the floor was packed down hard so as to provide a durable surface. The grain was then placed in a pile on the floor, and a heavy, flat slab of rock was sometimes dragged over it by oxen.

After the threshers had initially separated the grain from the stalk and chaff, they threw it with a fork into the air against the strong wind. The heavier grain would fall to the ground, but the remaining lighter stalk and chaff would be blown to the end of the threshing floor, where a slow fire would be burning.

Evenings were normally chosen for this kind of work, perhaps because the wind blew more steadily from one direction. The owner of the foreman would usually sleep on the threshing floor with his men, in order to protect his harvest from robbers.

Boaz followed these procedures almost exactly to the letter. We'll break tonight's passage into three sections. In verses 1 through 5, we see the recommendation.

[6 : 28] The recommendation. Here are those verses again. 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?

Is not Boaz our relative, with whose young women you were? See, he is winnowing barley tonight at the threshing floor. Watch, 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. 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.

And she replied, All that you say, I will do. Naomi perhaps hoped that Boaz would take the initiative in establishing a relationship with Ruth that was more personal, and that would eventually lead to marriage.

Perhaps he was being sensitive toward Ruth as a widow, not wishing to impose himself upon her until she was emotionally healed and ready to contemplate marriage. Obviously, he was not making any moves, so, as Ruth's mother-in-law, Naomi took it upon herself to overcome what she perceived as a lack of initiative.

[7 : 41] The thought in itself seems to be a mark of progress in Naomi's thinking. Through most of the first two chapters of the book, Naomi's been preoccupied with one person, and that was herself.

She had turned inward, consumed by grief and bitterness, cut off from those around her. Even Ruth's passionate commitment of devotion in Chapter 1 seemed unable to touch her heart.

While Ruth went out to glean, Naomi stayed home. But now she's starting to think of someone else's needs rather than her own. As Naomi experienced God's goodness and continued faithfulness to her, her heart had begun to soften.

Through the hard work of Ruth and the generosity of Boaz, she found new hope. Perhaps she even began to see that she'd been too quick to blame God and to assume that when things went badly, her life was bad because God was out to get her.

Perhaps she began to recognize her failure to take responsibility and to repent of it. Repentance inevitably draws our attention away from ourselves and out toward others.

[8 : 49] Bitterness, though, drives us inward in self-absorbed oppression, while true repentance enables us and motivates us to start to serve other people's needs. Ruth needed a husband and a home of her own.

This wasn't exactly a new observation. It was the reason why Naomi had told Ruth to go home in Chapter 1, back to a place where she might be more likely to find a place of rest with a husband of her own.

Naomi had even asked the Lord to provide such a place for both of her daughters-in-law in Moab. We saw that back in Chapter 1, verse 9. In that society, finding someone to marry Ruth might have been difficult.

In Numbers 25, Moabite women led the Israelite women into sexual immorality and idolatry. The very origins of Moab were in an act of drunken incest between Lot and his older daughter. You can read about that in Genesis 19, verses 31-38. The image of Moabite women in Israel's society was far from positive. Taking on a Moabite wife would probably have been at least socially awkward, if not worse.

[10:00] A man might end up as a social outcast, spurned by decent society. Not many people would be willing to take that risk. Naomi's speech to Ruth actually breaks down into three parts.

We see a statement of the problem in verse 1, a summary of the facts in verse 2, and a detailed prescription of the procedure in verses 3-5. The statement of the problem comes in verse 1. That's where Naomi said, My daughter, should I not seek rest for you, that it may be well with you? As she declares it, Naomi's sole motivation in proposing the following scheme is the welfare of her daughter-in-law.

In that cultural context, Ruth certainly would have answered Naomi's question in verse 1 in the affirmative. It is the daughter of the widowed mother-in-law to cede to the welfare and security of her widowed daughter-in-law.

This applies all the more in this case, because Ruth committed herself on oath to Naomi until death do they part. In any healthy covenant relationship, the two people have to commit themselves to the other's good above their own.

[11:12] Verse 2 summarizes the facts. Boaz is the two women's near-relative. The wording suggests that in Naomi's mind, Boaz is not simply a relative, but the near-kinsman who must fulfill the role she has in mind.

Naomi reminds her that tonight, Boaz will be winnowing barley at the threshing floor. Verse 3-5 summarize the procedure that Naomi wants Ruth to follow.

Naomi tells Ruth to bathe, to put on perfume, and to get dressed, to visit Boaz on the threshing floor. Some translations say that Naomi told Ruth to put on her best clothes.

Based on the original Hebrew word there, that's not the case. The word used for dress normally refers to the outer garment that covered virtually the entire body except the head.

The word designated garments worn by both men and women. According to Exodus 22, verses 25 and 26, poor people use this garment for a blanket at night.

[12:15] Because Ruth was a poor person going out to spend the night in the field, she would have needed this blanket to keep warm. After Boaz goes to sleep, Ruth is to uncover his feet and lie down next to him.

And when he awakens, she is to ask him to marry her. Some commentators have severely criticized Naomi for suggesting that Ruth go to the threshing floor outside Bethlehem at night to do this.

Some have even become so defensive that they overlook the positive teaching of the passage.

Nothing suggests that Naomi expected anything improper to happen.

Instead, Naomi was looking out for Ruth's best interest. Most likely, Naomi had been learning what she could about Boaz since Ruth started working in his field.

Everything pointed to the high quality of his character. And Naomi also had first-hand experience with Ruth's character. We've seen Ruth stand by Naomi and take care of Naomi, even when Naomi had been unpleasant.

[13:17] This brings us to the second section of the lesson. In verses 6-9, we see the request. The request is what goes into your second blank.

Ruth makes a direct request of Boaz in verses 6-9. And here are those verses again. So she, Ruth, 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.

At midnight the man who 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.

Spread your wings over your servant, for you are a redeemer. Picture this scene as it's happening. Boaz and his men sit around the fire eating and drinking and then lie down on the floor for the night.

[14 : 21] Boaz takes his place near the heap of grain while his men probably chose places at the end of the threshing floor near the fire. Ruth takes note of where Boaz lies down.

When everyone else is asleep and the fire has died to just a little more than glowing embers, she creeps quietly to the place where he's sleeping. Then, uncovering his feet so that he will awaken when they become cold, she lies down and waits.

Ruth obviously wanted Boaz to get cold feet before she made the request and not after. One reason that Naomi wants Ruth to approach Boaz this way is because he is a godly man and he would not take advantage of Ruth.

He's a man of integrity and he will respond rightly. Boaz knows how to handle such matters. If he is to refuse her, then he will do so in a proper and private way.

If she's rejected, at least Ruth's reputation will be preserved. Ruth is being forward, but she's also discreet.

[15 : 34] She's not compromising her virtue. Boaz recognizes that she is approaching him in an honorable way. She's simply attempting to claim her rights under the Mosaic law.

There's no scandal here, but privacy keeps disgrace away from both of them. The reality is that Boaz is not being manipulated or coerced because he's being approached privately.

There's no indication that Boaz is drunk. When the text says that his heart is merry, it uses a Hebrew word that means good, happy, or satisfied.

Boaz is content and fulfilled his day's labor and his evening meal. In the middle of the night, Boaz is startled. This is a verb that bears the idea of trembling or stuttering.

He's at the threshing floor to guard the harvest, and he's not expecting an intruder of this kind. He turns himself to look, and behold, a woman is lying at his feet.

[16 : 36] The Hebrew word for behold is a figure of surprise. Boaz is shocked, and he senses that he's not alone under the blanket. What question does Boaz ask there?

He asks the obvious question that any of us would ask. He says, who are you? Ruth answers Boaz with characteristic humility as she thrice refers to herself as your servant.

Ruth then makes a discreet request of Boaz. Spread your wings over your servant. She is appealing to Boaz to exercise his right as a kinsman redeemer.

She's asking him to perform the elaborate law and to marry her. The symbol of spreading wings over another person as a sign of marriage and covenant is found in Ezekiel 16.8.

That's where God says to his people in Jerusalem, When I passed by you again and saw you, behold, you were at the age for love, and I spread the corner of my garment.

[17 : 44] Literally, that's the same word for wing there. I spread my garment over you and covered your nakedness. I made my vow to you and entered into a covenant with you, declares the Lord God, and you became mine.

The word wings appears earlier in the book of Ruth when Boaz wishes Ruth well by saying that she has come under God's wings for refuge and protection. That was back in verse 12 of chapter 2.

Ruth is asking that Boaz would be willing to take her under his redeeming wings to protect her, and that he would become the human extension of the wings of God.

Placing the blanket over her is symbolic of that protection and security. You may have noticed that here is where Ruth's actions differed from her mother-in-law's instructions.

Instead of leaving the situation dangerously ambiguous, like Naomi had suggested, Ruth wanted to make her intentions clear right from the outset. Her goal was a commitment to marriage.

[18 : 50] Ruth wanted Boaz to marry her and provide a refuge for both her and Naomi, just as a kinsman-redeemer would. We can infer from these verses that there was no legal obligation on Boaz to act this way.

Otherwise, this kind of elaborate strategy would have been unnecessary. Ruth could simply have walked up to Boaz in the marketplace and said, You're my redeemer. Do what you're supposed to do.

Boaz was a man of character, and we can assume that he would have followed through on his obligation in spite of the personal and social cost. What Ruth was asking Boaz to do, though, was to act according to the spirit of the law of the kinsman-redeemer, even though he was not under any legal obligation.

She appealed to him to be the family member who, at his own cost, would act to rescue those whose future had been blighted, even though he didn't have to do so. We just finished a series

called Counterculture on Sunday nights.

Think about how countercultural Ruth's request would have been in her day. It was entirely countercultural for a woman to propose marriage to a man, or a younger person to an elder, or a field worker to a field owner.

[20 : 09] And Ruth went against all of those things. She did exactly the things that were opposite of what would have been normal. Indeed, Naomi's plan had called for her simply to be silent at this point and to let Boaz take the initiative.

Whether out of faith or fear or just an inability to keep her mouth shut, Ruth actually burnt out her whole heart in response to Boaz's rather less searching question.

Now she has to wait for Boaz's answer. Fortunately for her, she won't have to wait long. We've seen the recommendation and the request.

In verses 10 through 13, we see the reply. So the reply is what goes into your third blank. And here are those verses again. 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.

[21 : 15] 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 morning. Boaz's responses to Ruth's actions and to her proposition is as remarkable as Ruth's deeds and words.

First, instead of cursing her and shooing her off, Boaz blesses her. Like Naomi in verse 1, he expresses his respect for and sense of obligation to Ruth by addressing her with, My daughter.

The form of the blessing he pronounces is identical to that which Naomi had pronounced upon him in verse 20 of chapter 2. These opening words are extremely important.

They break the tension in the drama. Ruth's brazen acts and extraordinary proposition have received a sympathetic response. But this raises a question of why he responds this way.

[22 : 27] How is it that being awakened at midnight in a most unusual and compromising situation, he knows exactly what Ruth has meant by her speech, and he actually commends her for it?

Obviously, we see the hidden hand of God guiding not only the actions of individuals, but their reactions too. God does that so that his agenda is fulfilled.

Boaz's words have the ring of divine inspiration. Boaz praises Ruth for her remarkable demonstration of kindness. He says, literally, Your act of kindness is better than the first.

What Boaz has in mind by Ruth's last kindness obviously is her daring appearance at the threshing floor to ask him to marry her. For the first kindness in which he compares this act, we must go back to his previous praise of Ruth in verse 11 of chapter 2.

Boaz was referring to Ruth's radical abandonment of her own past to cast her lot with Naomi and her people. Why would Boaz think that this most recent act by Ruth showed more kindness than what she had shown before?

[23 : 38] Well, Boaz answers this question in part by himself by lauding Ruth for not going after other desirable men. The expression gone after is more commonly used in a religious sense of devoting oneself to other gods and following them in a cultic way.

But it also can prescribe the efforts of one person to establish a relationship with another. Boaz obviously is not a withered old man.

He's still able to put in a full day's work in the field with his young workers and then stay all night at the threshing floor. We know he's not a poor man either. He's characterized as a man of standing in verse 1 of chapter 2.

We've already seen he owns land and he has servants. He recognizes, however, that if Ruth would have married for status, she would have gone after a young man.

Or if she'd married for love or money, she could have gone elsewhere too. But this still doesn't explain how Ruth's preference for Boaz is to be understood as an act of loyalty and kindness.

[24 : 47] The issue revolves around Boaz's use of the word goel, translated kinsman-redeemer. Ruth's primary demand is simply that he marry her.

But Boaz knows as soon as she utters this word that the stakes are higher. And this is what triggers his interpretation of her words. They represent kindness and grace for the benefit of someone else.

Boaz's words in verse 11 must have been a big relief to Ruth. He said, How did Ruth achieve this reputation among the Bethlehem people when just a few short weeks earlier she'd been ignored and slighted as an insignificant foreigner?

She didn't gain a good reputation by pushing herself forward and blowing her own trumpet. Instead, she made herself Naomi's servant and worked without complaint in the heat of the harvest to help her mother-in-law survive.

That humble devotion didn't escape people's notice. If the story had stopped there, though, it would have seemed like a perfect ending.

[26 : 03] It doesn't stop there, though. We see a complication come in in verses 12 and 13. Boaz was a close relative of Naomi's, but apparently there was another redeemer who was even closer.

Boaz explained to Ruth, 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. By rights, this other redeemer had a better claim to perform this service for Naomi and her family.

This must have been a bitter blow to Ruth, who at this point was surely feeling that the things had been progressing rather well. But Boaz would take care of this unwanted and unexpected complication himself.

In the morning, he would approach the man and sound him out. If the other man wanted to redeem her, then that was good. But if he were not absolutely delighted to undertake this service, then Boaz swore that he would take care of it himself.

[27 : 12] One way or another, Naomi and Ruth, would certainly be taken care of. Let's think about something else before we leave this section. It might have raised a question for you as we've gone through this chapter.

Was Boaz right to want to marry Ruth? In chapter one, we suggested that Malin was wrong to marry Ruth because Ruth was a Moabite. How then could it be right for Boaz to want to marry her? The answer is this. Although the Old Testament laws seem to be racist, this was never in fact the case. Whoever identified with the people of God was given the full status of an Israelite.

The prohibitions against marriage with someone from another race were intended to teach that God hated his people to marry outside of the people of God. The Old Testament laws were not so much racist as religious.

The people of God were to marry only others from among the people of God. That was the point that's important here. In chapter one, Malin married Ruth when she was a worshiper of the God of the Moabites.

[28 : 22] However, after Ruth's confession in verses 16 and 17 of chapter one, her words and her actions have shown that she is now a true worshiper of God.

No obstacle existed anymore for an Israelite to marry her. Instead, both Boaz and Ruth show such a spiritual maturity in chapter two that Boaz clearly could have done no better than to marry Ruth. The way that the author of Ruth repeatedly commends her credentials is intended to stress this point. Ruth's actions illustrate for us certain biblical principles that are important.

For the provision of God's words to be fulfilled, the believer must be completely identified with the Lord and his cause. Again, for the provision of God's word to be fulfilled, the believer must first be completely identified with the Lord and his cause.

And second, the promises of God's word must be claimed by faith. The promises of God's word must be claimed by faith. Ruth met the first of these conditions when she turned her back on her home, her people, and her former way of life, and forever identified herself with Naomi, Naomi's people, and Naomi's God.

[29 : 43] In claiming the fulfillment of the provisions of the covenant, Ruth went down to the threshing floor. Her faith was seen in her belief in a possibility against all probabilities.

Hers was not a fattish faith. That kind of faith can be dangerous because that faith is false. Ruth's faith was a faith that lacked presumption and relied solely on what the Lord had communicated to his people.

It was, to quote Martin Luther, a living, daring confidence in God's grace. It was also confidence in God's power to work out in Ruth's experience that which was, from man's point of view, impossible.

In Ruth's case, she lived obediently under the law. Her submission to it was not the result of some legalistic imperative, but rather the response of an enlightened person to the grace of God. Second, in claiming the benefits, of the covenant, she acted in faith, not knowing how matters would turn out. The word of God is a declaration of redemption and grace in Christ.

[30 : 54] Not only does the Bible declare and explain God's great purpose and mighty operations of grace, it gives us numerous types, pictures, and examples to which believers can relate.

Boaz took special notice of Ruth, just as the Lord Jesus Christ took special notice of chosen sinners before the world began. As Boaz commanded his young people not to touch Ruth, so Christ has commanded all things to not touch his chosen.

God's elect are under his special protection. Things can go bad for us in this world, but we know that no matter what happens, things are going to work out for us in the end.

Boaz provided handfuls of grain to Ruth on purpose specifically for her, and the Lord Jesus rules and commands all things specifically for his chosen too.

Boaz was Ruth's near kinsman, the one who had the right to redeem. In that way, he portrays our great God and Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ. Chapter 3 speaks of two rest.

[32 : 00] We've seen the first one tonight. There was the rest for Ruth talked about in verse 1, and this is the rest of faith. Sinners coming to Christ cease from their own works and rest in him.

Listen to Jesus' own words in Matthew 11, verses 28 and 29. 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.

Here's something else to ponder as we finish this lesson. Tonight, we saw Boaz and Ruth each take big risks. Today, people willingly face all kinds of risks in life, both small and great.

We do that for the sake of having fun, for receiving a promotion at work, for having a family, and for doing those things, we're willing to put up with all kinds of discomforts and potential costs.

[33 : 07] We climb mountains, we cross seas, we work long hours, and we endure pain for all kinds of reasons. The question, though, is this. What are we willing to risk for the sake of the gospel?

What are we willing to risk for the sake of the gospel? For most of us, including me, the answer probably is not very much. We're not very willing to risk our lives and our health, our reputations, or our comfort, and even our friends or our families for the sake of the gospel.

The most obvious proof of our aversion to spiritual risk lies in our unwillingness to talk to others about God. Francis Schaeffer called this our guilty silence.

Never mind putting our reputations at risk at midnight during the barley harvest. We wouldn't even risk being thought odd by our friends because we talked to them about Jesus. Sharing our faith might cost us our friends and our reputation.

People might even think that we're weird, or at least weirder than what they already thought we were. We may even rationalize our unwillingness to share the gospel by saying that people haven't done anything for us to deserve us taking a risk for them.

[34 : 26] What if Ruth had done the same thing? Her actions certainly could have cost her her reputation or much worse. Did Naomi deserve to have Ruth to go out on a limb for her?

Certainly not, but Ruth had made a commitment to Naomi in spite of her earlier coldness and her lack of responsiveness to Ruth. Ruth would not let anything stand in the way of fulfilling her promises.

Did Naomi deserve Boaz's willingness to accept the social and financial cost of welcoming outsiders into his home? We know the answer to that is no as well. Naomi was among the undeserving, but because Ruth and Boaz treated her with grace, she came to know the joy of God's salvation.

So who are the people that we can reach for Christ if only we will take a personal risk with the gospel? Boaz and Ruth were living examples of Romans 12, 1 and 2 before Paul wrote the words. The words today challenge us to be the same thing. Here are Romans 12, 1 and 2. I appeal to you, therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship.

[35 : 44] Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect.

Thank you.