

MESSAGE TITLE: A Hopeful Proposal

SCRIPTURE: Ruth 3

KEY TRUTH: This chapter shows how people who are transformed by grace live with hope for the good of others. Naomi, a God-honoring woman of hope, instructs Ruth to approach Boaz and ask for redemption.

GETTING STARTED

This passage records the 2nd crucial encounter between Ruth and Boaz. Naomi instructed Ruth to approach Boaz in hopes that he would serve as her kinsman redeemer. Notice how grace has changed Naomi's heart from a bitter woman (1:19-21) to a woman of hope who became concerned about the welfare of others. God's grace when received by faith produces hope. Ask God to generate hope in you by the power of His Holy Spirit as you read this passage (Romans 15:13). God's grace produces hope which leads us to want to serve for the good of others.

OBSERVATION

Unpack the biblical text to discover what the Scripture says.

Although Naomi struggled with feelings of bitterness over her losses (see 1:20-21), she affirmed that God had shown kindness to her when Ruth was allowed to gather grain in the fields of none other than a close relative of her deceased husband (see 2:20). Furthermore, Naomi was surely aware of the stipulations in God's law about preserving family names and property allotments (see Lev. 25:25-28; Deut. 25:5-10). Finally, and to her credit, Naomi continued to consider ways that she could contribute to her and Ruth's well-being and future security (see Ruth 3:1). In particular, she recognized an opportunity for Boaz, a close relative, to act as the family redeemer.

Read Ruth 3:1-18.

Getting Boaz to act as the family redeemer meant that Ruth had to first approach him. What risks did Ruth take as she followed Naomi's advice (vv. 5-9)?

What was the significance of uncovering Boaz's feet (vv. 4,8)?

On the other hand, what risks did Boaz take to reach out to Ruth and allow her into his life?

What does Boaz's response to Ruth's request (vv. 10-11) and his actions in verses 14-16 tell us about how he treated Ruth?

Ruth followed Naomi's advice and lay down near Boaz while he slept. When he awoke in the night, Ruth identified herself and asked for his help as the family redeemer. Boaz

complimented Ruth as a noble woman and agreed to pursue the matter of family redemption the next day, explaining that a closer family member first had to be consulted. In verse 11, Boaz told Ruth he would do what she asked. Knowing that Boaz was a close relative of her late husband, Ruth had come to Boaz privately and asked him to spread his cloak over her (v. 9). In Hebrew, this is the same phrase Boaz used when he observed that Ruth had come for refuge under the wings of the Lord God of Israel (2:12). Ruth was asking Boaz to be her family redeemer who would protect her and marry her so her late husband's line and inheritance would continue in Israel.

Why do you think God values risk? What do we communicate to God when we take risks to make His name known?

How did Boaz accept responsibility in this situation beyond what was required under the law?

What would Boaz need to do before agreeing to be Naomi and Ruth's family redeemer? What is the lesson here for us?

Although Boaz was willing to take Ruth as his wife, the matter was not yet settled. He pointed out that there was another man who, from the standpoint of Israelite legal practice, had the right to marry her first. Boaz could not marry Ruth unless the closer male relative passed on the opportunity. Boaz's words reveal two things about his character. First, he was careful about following the law and yielding to what, in the custom of the day, was the other man's right. Second, Boaz was concerned primarily for the well-being of Naomi and Ruth. If in fact this relative would take care of them, then all was good. In other words, Ruth's and Naomi's future care took priority over what Boaz personally wanted.

What clear responsibilities do we have when it comes to helping people come to know Jesus? Think about specific commands in Scripture.

What risks are associated with these responsibilities? What happens if we fail to accept these responsibilities?

As believers in Christ, we are God's ambassadors, tasked with representing Him to a lost world and helping people come to know Jesus. We do this through who we are and how we live, as we join with the work the Holy Spirit is already doing in people's lives. As Jesus left earth for heaven following His resurrection, He left us with the command to make disciples of all nations (Matt. 28:19-20), and the rest of the New Testament is dedicated to telling us about how the gospel spread and teaching us how to be a part of God's mission. We have the great responsibility of spiritually caring for the people God places in our lives.

How well are you accepting your basic responsibilities to show love and care to people who need Jesus? Is there anything more you need to start doing?

APPLICATION

What are some of the sacrifices we must make if we want to minister to others?

Do any of these sacrifices feel risky to you? If so, which ones, and how so?

What do we need to remind ourselves of when the risk to minister to others doesn't seem worth it?

Our pre-occupation with self can blind us to ministry opportunities to others, even those that are right in front of us. Ask that Jesus would help you receive his grace for you so that you can extend that same grace to others in needs around you.

Think about your own life. Who took a risk on you and helped you come to know Jesus? What can you learn from his or her example?

Take some time to ask God to fill you with courage and strength to share the Gospel with one of your five this week.

How can we as a group stand together to encourage each other in what God has told us to do?

PRAYER

Close in prayer, thanking God that He first loved us before we could do anything for Him. Pray that your group will have a greater awareness of His love and grace in their lives this week, and that in response they will be challenged to give take risks to minister to others. Ask God to help us overcome our tendency to become self-absorbed to the point that we don't notice the needs of others. Add to your prayer any specific requests mentioned during your discussion.

COMMENTARY NOTES

3:1-3. In view of Boaz's relationship to the family and his kindness and generosity thus far to Ruth, perhaps he could be persuaded to take the further step of marriage. At the end of the barley harvest, in late May or June, the barley had to be winnowed, tossed into the air with a fork allowing the wind to carry away the lighter chaff while the heavier grain fell to the ground. At night, someone would guard the grain against being stolen or eaten by animals. Apparently, this was Boaz's night to be on duty. Dressing as Naomi instructed would not only enhance Ruth's attractiveness to Boaz but would symbolize an end to her period of mourning for her husband (2Sam 12:20), signaling her willingness to remarry.

3:4-7. Naomi instructed Ruth to go to Boaz when he was asleep and uncover his feet, or, more precisely, "uncover the place of his feet." By this act Ruth was inquiring about Boaz's willingness to fulfill the role of family redeemer, to take her as wife and provide for her.

3:8-9. Whereas her mother-in-law had anticipated Boaz taking the initiative in the conversation, Ruth responded to Boaz's question about her identity with a clarification of her purpose. She asked him to spread the corner of his robe over her as a symbolic statement of a marriage commitment (Ezek 16:8). The request also involved a wordplay, since spread your cloak over me literally means "spread your wing over me," inviting Boaz to become the answer to his own prayer in 2:12 that she might find refuge under the wings of the Lord.

3:10-11. Boaz's first words, my daughter, showed he had not been misled by the potential ambiguity of the situation. He declared himself willing to pay the social and financial costs of welcoming this despised outsider into his family. Boaz rightly saw Ruth's proposal as another act of covenant faithfulness (Hb chesed) on Ruth's part. Just as she had left her own household and her own family to be with Naomi, so now she was subordinating her own interests to those of Naomi. In the Hebrew ordering of the OT, the book of Ruth comes immediately after the book of Proverbs, which closes with a description of a woman of noble character (Pr 31:10).

3:12-13. Even though Boaz was a near relative of Naomi, there was another who had a prior claim to act as redeemer. Yet Boaz reassured Ruth that, one way or another, she (and Naomi) would be redeemed.

3:14-15. If it became widely known that Ruth had visited Boaz that night, people would wrongly assume that Boaz had taken Ruth as wife or that they were guilty of sexual impropriety. Boaz was unwilling to preempt his close relative who had first right of refusal to Ruth, so getting Ruth home before daylight kept wrong impressions from being formed. To seal his commitment (and perhaps also to provide Ruth with an excuse for being out so early), Boaz gave her six measures of barley. If the unspecified measures are seahs, then that would be around 80 pounds, an enormous load. Yet the lack of a measure may be intended to focus attention on the number six, which often represents incompleteness in the OT. Even this generous gift is incomplete. Ruth still awaited the final installment of "seed" that would accomplish her rest.

3:16-18. On Ruth's return, Naomi asked her literally, "Who are you, my daughter?" This is the same question that Boaz asked in 3:8. Was Ruth merely an awkward and embarrassing duty to Naomi, or was she the one who would provide Naomi with an enduring place in the genealogies of Israel through the provision of a son? The answer depended on what transpired overnight. This was the real nature of Naomi's question, as evidenced by Ruth's answer.