

Series: Ruth

Sermon Text: Ruth 3

Date: 5.23.2021

Title: Trust God and Take a Step

Intro

If you have your bible make your way to the book of Ruth. It's the 8th book. And this book is the short summary account of 3 people who experience the faithfulness of God in their lives. It's only 4 chapters long. That's intentional. This is a story you can tell in 4 minutes. It's a story you can tell to your kids at bedtime. And yet it is filled with powerful subtleties about the character of God and the way he works in the world that take a lifetime to appreciate.

Let me catch you up so you can fully appreciate the rather strange scene that unfolds in chapter 3. Chapter 1 we met 2 widows. First was Naomi. She was an Israelite...that just means she was one of God's people. Because of a famine in her hometown she and her husband fled to a foreign land called Moab. While there her 2 sons met and married women from Moab. THEN tragedy strikes and Naomi's husband dies. Then more tragedy, her two sons die. So now it's the widow Naomi and her two widowed daughters in law. Naomi decides to return home and Ruth decides to go with her.

They arrive in her hometown of Bethlehem...That's right. Bethlehem. O little town of Bethlehem. Yes, the same town generations later Jesus would be born into. And when the people come out and say HEY NAOMI! She says don't call me

Naomi. Call me Mara. Which means bitter. Because the Lord has dealt bitterly with me.

And she was right. Some providences of the Lord are bitter & some are sweet. Sometimes the Lord strips things away and it hurts. And yet she recognizes the Lord's hand in her suffering. She does not turn from the Lord as she grieves and mourns.

God does not expect us to pretend like everything is awesome all the time. We can GRIEVE and BELIEVE. Talk to people who've walked with the Lord for some time and they will tell you there is something especially refining that God does to you in dark days. He doesn't EXPLAIN why he's taking you through it, but he does promise to be with you and if you will trust him he will provide a kind of grace to you that you couldn't get otherwise. That's what chapter 1 shows us. GOD wasn't finished with Naomi & Ruth. What Naomi thought was a bitter end was only chapter 1 of a beautiful story.

Chapter 2 opens in Barley Harvest season. And we learn that there is an eligible bachelor in town. He's older but a man of good reputation. Known to be generous and hardworking. Ruth, in an attempt to provide for her mother in law, goes out to "glean" in the fields. Which basically means pick up scraps of grain left behind. And She HAPPENS to wander into the field of this eligible bachelor named BOAZ. And BOAZ happens to be related to Naomi which means he HAPPENS to be perfectly suited under Levitical law to marry a widow of his relative. And what chapter 2 tipped us off to is that nothing just HAPPENS. **God is providentially behind ordinary circumstances.**

Boaz starts to make googly eyes at Ruth. He provides protection for her from the young men in his field. He provides A LOT of barley for her. Even cooks her dinner. He takes care of her. Sends her home with bundles of barley & dinner leftovers and when Ruth tells Naomi who sent her home with all this Naomi gets HYPE. Because she knows Boaz! He's a relative of hers. Which means according to their laws he has the legal right to marry Ruth. Which means...there is hope for Ruth and Naomi. See Naomi is starting to see hope. A few bright rays of sunshine cutting through the dark cloud of her sorrow.

THAT brings us to chapter 3. And its gotta be one of my favorite chapters in the bible. It is a very STRANGE scenario that unfolds. But, it is romantic and beautiful and teaches us so much about the grace of God. Today I'm going to draw out a message from chapter 3 to you and I that I believe encapsulates the true nature of what it means to be a follower of Christ. And the message is very simple. Whether you are in 6th grade or in your sixties...the message is the same. TRUST GOD and TAKE A STEP. REPEAT.

The call to you today is TRUST GOD. Trust his character trust his word. Trust that he will provide for you. Trust he is working in the ordinary moments. And Take a step. I believe God's providence unfolds through our actions. Big and small. Decision moments. What step to take will require us trusting him. Because we don't know how it's going to turn out. We pray about it. We get godly counsel from people we trust. But ultimately we can't PRAY OURSELVES INTO SEEING THE FUTURE. FAITH DOESN'T WORK THAT WAY. We cannot know

the future. God does not want that for us because we'd miss out on closeness to God if we knew how it was going to work out. Intimacy is built on trust. We can only trust God and take a step.

And I think that is the message God wants to give to us today. To TRUST him and to take a step. Steps that put us into that vulnerable space where we have to Trust God will provide for us. And it is RIGHT there that our faith grows, our closeness to God grows, and God gets glory. I want to show you how that happens in the romance between Boaz and Ruth. How Naomi and then the two of them take a big step, a leap really. They all three trust God and act. Ok get ready. Strange situation about to unfold. Let's walk through it. I'll do it scene by scene.

Scene 1: Naomi's Plan

Ruth's mother-in-law Naomi said to her, "My daughter, shouldn't I find rest for you, so that you will be taken care of? Rest is her way of saying security & provision. In this day it was common for the parents to find a spouse for their children. So, she's saying...let me go find you a new husband. Because in a husband you will find rest. I think this is a noble and good motive. But the plan she devises is an unusual one to be sure.

2 Now isn't Boaz our relative? Haven't you been working with his female servants? This evening he will be winnowing barley on the threshing floor.

Some time has passed. And apparently Naomi has been scouting Boaz. I'm gonna use that word instead of stalking. But you know how old ladies in small towns know everybody's business. Tell me I'm wrong. Boaz owns the farm but is a guy

who still likes a good day's work so he will be down there at the threshing floor taking a turn tonight. This is hard work where you toss the wheat in the air, the chaff blows away and what lands is barley. Physical labor.

And after a hard day's work he's gonna have good food and drink then he's gonna sleep real well. So Naomi tells Ruth:

3 Wash, put on perfumed oil, and wear your best clothes.

This is good so far. Clean yourself up. You want to make a good impression - Look your best, smell your best. I want to encourage both men and women to incorporate hygiene into your romantic pursuits. But then the plan raises some eyebrows.

Go down to the threshing floor, but don't let the man know you are there until he has finished eating and drinking. 4 When he lies down, notice the place where he's lying, go in and uncover his feet, and lie down. Then he will explain to you what you should do." 5 So Ruth said to her, "I will do everything you say."

Ummmmm. Ok. So this probably needs some explaining huh. Well uncover his feet is more accurately uncover his legs. So Ruth your assignment is to go uncover his lower half and lie down beside him. And then he wakes up...see what he tells you to do. SO What are we supposed to do with this? This is a rather bizarre instruction.

Is Naomi encouraging Ruth to use seduction to basically entrap Boaz? Like "Use what you got girl?" There is a history to that line of thinking. Ruth was a Moabite woman, and Moabite women were notorious for using their bodies to get the men of Israel to walk away from the faith Numbers 25:1–3.¹ Is Naomi's plan really seduction? Well, first that doesn't square up with God's law. And Naomi knows that. Naomi knows God does not want any of us manipulating others with our body in hopes of finding long-term fidelity. In the words of a famous old dating proverb – if you get the ring the wrong way, in your marriage you will pay.

Well if it's not entrapment, what is it? I believe it is the best way Naomi knows to help her daughter-in-law appeal to the man she clearly has feelings for. And Boaz clearly has feelings for her. See this story is riddled with subtleties. You gotta see Boaz providing grain. Like what guy provides that much grain? Only an interested guy. When I was dating Courtney I CHANGED JOBS to work at the pool she worked at. It was not a great pool. It was fine, but not great. But no other pool had Courtney Little. Guys and girls do things to be in proximity with those they are interested in. I see it here. Some of ya'll are at church because SHE is at church. or HE is at church. That's fine. You won't be the first person God saved while trying to get noticed by a guy or girl at church. Nor the last. God loves love.

¹ Gay, Jerome. Renewal: Grace and Redemption in the Story of Ruth. Sermon to Book. Kindle Edition.

I think Naomi is for sure being a matchmaker. And she's putting the two in a place where they will have to acknowledge their romantic interest. They gotta get out of this friend zone.

But more importantly Naomi is the first to see God is the one who has set all of these "happenings" in place in order for Ruth and Boaz to be together. I think chapter 2 tipped us off to that – Naomi identified Boaz and blessed him. He's a kinsman redeemer. I think she's seeing these ordinary circumstances as God's providence. God is unfolding a plan and she sees it. The providence of God compels her to act. More on that to come. So she tells Ruth to go uncover his legs and lay down beside him.

Just as a wife lay beside her husband in bed. This is not a sexual act but it is filled with sexual tension. It is intimate. A servant doesn't do this. A friend doesn't do this. only A spouse does this.

Anyways let's see what happens:

Scene 2: A Midnight Proposal

6 She went down to the threshing floor and did everything her mother-in-law had charged her to do. 7 After Boaz ate, drank, and was in good spirits, he went to lie down at the end of the pile of barley, and she came secretly, uncovered his feet, and lay down.

8 At midnight, Boaz was startled, turned over, and there lying at his feet was a woman! 9 So he asked, "Who are you?"

Most understated re-telling ever. Dude had a hard work day & laid down to rest after good food & drink. He's fast asleep and I'm guessing his lower half being uncovered woke him up. And there lying next to his legs was a lookin good smelling good woman!? WHOA. That is unexpected. Who are you?

"I am Ruth, your servant," she replied. "Take me under your wing, for you are a family redeemer."

Now....THIS WAS NOT a part of Naomi's plan. Naomi said lay there and wait for him to tell you what to do. And maybe to avoid any attempt at him getting the wrong idea about her intentions she just says HEY, IM RUTH – MARRY ME. Again, not sure this is the strategy I would recommend to you single women. But this is a midnight marriage proposal

Ok ya'll this statement by Ruth, when we Christians read it, man it is like a good buffalo cheese dip. There's a lot of layers. Take me under your wing for you are a family redeemer - This is **her** proposing marriage **to** him!

"Take me under your wing" is Ruth using *Boaz's* own words to show him that God has prepared him to be her husband. Boaz said to her in chapter 2:

12 May the Lord reward you for what you have done, and may you receive a full reward from the Lord God of Israel, under whose wings you have come for refuge." -- Ruth 2:12 (CSB)

Well now Ruth is saying I believe you are God's refuge for me. I believe YOU are his blessing in my life. Oh man how we need

more of this. Men and Woman calling each other to RISE UP as God's agents of providence in the world. I can't speak for women but that lights the right kind of fire under a man. Having his woman not call him out but instead call him UP.

So she says just like I went under God's wing, I want to be under your wing. But there's another layer! Because that word wing...in the Hebrew it is gloriously ambiguous. It can ALSO mean skirt. Basically cover me with your clothing. And in Hebrew culture a man covering a woman with his garment was a promise that he would be her security going forward. It's like an ancient Hebrew letterman's jacket. She's wearing my jacket...cause she's my girl. You get it.

10 Then he said, "May the Lord bless you, my daughter. You have shown more kindness now than before, because you have not pursued younger men, whether rich or poor.

Boaz sees her taking a step here. A trust God step. And expressing her desire for him...and he says this is KINDNESS TO HIM. AMEN MAN. You didn't go after those young guys and their man buns. No, you came to me. A Gen Xer who is still wearing plaid.

11 Now don't be afraid, my daughter. I will do for you whatever you say, since all the people in my town know that you are a woman of noble character.

My town. Love that. way to be a baller Boaz. Noble character. He's saying yes I want you because of your character. THAT'S

why I'm marrying you. Look Good Smell Good – that helps. But you won't look good smell good every day the rest of your life. Some days you gonna look rough smell rough.

Ruth and Boaz were the poster couple for people of character. Ruth was young and evidently strong, judging by the weight she could carry on her back for long distances. Boaz was an older man. They weren't your typical glamor duo, like Jay-Z and Beyoncé, but they were people of solid character. True love is built on character rather than on physical attraction. I don't know of any couple who stayed together because they were cute, but I do know couples who have had long-lasting marriages because of their character.²

12 Yes, it is true that I am a family redeemer, but there is a redeemer closer than I am. 13 Stay here tonight, and in the morning, if he wants to redeem you, that's good. Let him redeem you. But if he doesn't want to redeem you, as the Lord lives, I will. Now lie down until morning."

Full moon, threshing floor, privacy, beautiful woman...and Can you feel the love tonight....ALL that and Boaz thinks GOD is doing something so I will TRUST GOD and ACT. And my action is holiness. It's obedience to his command that says the marriage bed should be pure and undefiled.

So listen to me REAL quick. The notion that sex before marriage is no big deal...That's you saying the bible is no big deal and God is no big deal. Jesus and his salvation is no big

² Gay, Jerome. Renewal: Grace and Redemption in the Story of Ruth. Sermon to Book. Kindle Edition.

deal. Boaz says YES to God. And that YES.... that decision RIGHT THERE...means he may never marry Ruth. But he loves God and Ruth too much to compromise her character for his pleasure. He TRUSTS GOD. and he takes a step. A step of denying himself. And God blesses it.

Scene 3: The Next Morning

14 So she lay down at his feet until morning but got up while it was still dark. Then Boaz said, "Don't let it be known that a woman came to the threshing floor."

- wants to protect their relationship from even the appearance of wrong doing. So he tells his guys to keep a lid on it.

15 And he told Ruth, "Bring the shawl you're wearing and hold it out." When she held it out, he shoveled six measures of barley into her shawl, and she went into the town. 16 She went to her mother-in-law, Naomi, who asked her, "What happened, my daughter?"

Then Ruth told her everything the man had done for her. 17 She said, "He gave me these six measures of barley, because he said, 'Don't go back to your mother-in-law empty-handed.'"

18 Naomi said, "My daughter, wait until you find out how things go, for he won't rest unless he resolves this today." -- Ruth 3:1-18 (CSB)

And chapter 3 ends with us clearly needing chapter 4! WHAT HAPPENS! Find out next week. Or, you can just read it. What all three of these characters are doing, and what I believe you

and I need to take away today – They are trusting God and taking a step. So let's start with trusting God.

Deeper Layer – for us on this side of the Cross. See Boaz is one of the clearest foreshadows of Jesus in the Old Testament. He is a redeemer who has the legal capability to bring a foreigner in and make her a part of his family. But on top of that...Boaz LOVES this woman. He desires her. This is a foreshadowing of Jesus. One who is legally capable to redeem us. To make us acceptable to God. But to redeem us will mean paying for our sins and the payment for our sin is death. The gospel is a love story where just as Boaz is going to go speak for Ruth because he LOVES her, so Christ will go speak for us. And he LOVES you so much he willingly trades his life for yours.

The Gospel says you and I are like Ruth. We have no right to be a part of God's family. We are beggars who are actually worse off than Ruth. Because when we sin we actually betray & reject God. We don't want you. We have run to the foreign land of Moab and have no right or ability to come back to God. BUT out of his GREAT love for us...God sent the greater Boaz. Jesus. OUR redeemer.

4 But God, who is rich in mercy, because of his great love that he had for us, 5 made us alive with Christ even though we were dead in trespasses. You are saved by grace -- Ephesians 2:4-5 (CSB)

I told you our big thing today is Trust God and take a step. I want you to embrace, receive the Love of the God I'm telling you that you can trust. This GOD WENT TO THE CROSS FOR

YOU! He LOVES YOU! The Gospel is a LOVE STORY! Of a husband redeeming his bride and making her new and perfect and taking her into his forever home. I think maybe the biggest reasons we don't trust God like we should is that he's either too small in our eyes or his love is too weak in our hearts.

GOD is providentially working all things. What if you believed everything that has happened in your past was a message from God, a part of his plan, to get you here and now. Maybe you'd smirk at it...But this is true! God is behind it. And that God has a very big message for you: HE LOVES YOU! But not some half-hearted love. NO,

Song of Solomon Love:

for love is strong as death, jealousy is fierce as the grave. Its flashes are flashes of fire, the very flame of the LORD. [7] Many waters cannot quench love, neither can floods drown it. If a man offered for love all the wealth of his house, he would be utterly despised. SS 8.6-7

THAT is the intensity of the love God has towards you. He LOVES YOU! He has offered you redemption. Unlike Ruth, You and I don't have to clean ourselves up. We get to simply receive that love! TRUST HIM! And maybe the reason you haven't taken any bold steps of faith in your life is because you have forgotten the power and intensity of either your God or his love for you. He is GOD – unchanging in character – all powerful – providentially overseeing the world – and he loves you.

Like a parent hovering right by a child taking their first steps. The kid is going to be fine. Dad is right there hand JUST out of reach enough so that he can take a step. And then dad will catch him and celebrate.

So let's talk about that step. The idea of the providence of God...that God is in control and nothing happens outside of his will...that did not paralyze Naomi, Ruth, or Boaz. They didn't sit back and say well, if God wants it to happen it will happen. YES, that is TRUE. BUT, what if he wants to USE YOU to be the agent of his providence? What if instead of being paralyzed by providence we were PUSHED by providence?

What if we start looking for what God is doing around us...start praying the question "GOD what are you doing here?" "God what do you want to do through me here?"

Naomi recognizes God's providence when Ruth says the name "Boaz." Oh God is doing something. And Naomi is the one called to shepherd Ruth through this relationship. Ruth sees God is doing something. So she takes a RISK and proposes marriage to Boaz. Boaz sees God is doing something. So instead of taking advantage of Ruth...he trusts God and chooses righteousness over pleasure.

So let's run the TRUST GOD and Take a STEP idea over your life. Do you trust God enough to obey his call on your life?

Finances – The Lord calls you to sacrificial generosity. Not to excessive comfort. Listen to me – comfort is a slow deceptive death. God says your money is his money. And he calls you to

give it to his mission. Will you trust God and act? Remember our questions from last week? What do you have, what needs are around you? Let's go!

Family – I think the root cause of the helicopter parent problem is I don't trust God with my kids. What would it mean to trust God and ACT in your parenting? Maybe it means you prioritize prayer in your home. It's never too late to start discipling your children. And no, you don't know how they will receive it. That's the point. You just gotta trust God. Maybe you gotta send them to student camp. Maybe they want to go overseas on a mission trip with a college ministry you know nothing about. At some point you gotta trust God and ACT on that trust. Otherwise THEY will never trust God because they never saw it modeled.

When we were in the decision process of leaving home to come plant mercy I looked at Courtney and said in 10 years my sons will be teenagers. And I want to be able to tell them that when God called, their dad trusted him and said yes. Even though we had no idea what would happen.

Romance – Trust God and practice purity. Trust God and ask the girl out! Seriously. What are you waiting on? Trust God and ask her to marry you. Husbands & Wives – trust God and make an attempt at romance AGAIN. I know it's been a minute. I know maybe your world started revolving around your kids. Husband I know you are clumsy. But your vow said you will cherish her till death do you part. So look good smell good. tell her how much you love her, why you love her. How you see Christ in her. Write it out if you need to. Do it over

dinner where no kids are. Trust God and Take a step. You are the person God has chosen to work through in her life. If you will step up to that call!

Evangelism – Trust God and share the gospel!

You figure it out. Listen our value around here is that we help everybody take their next step in following Jesus. I believe in this whole heartedly. We all have a next step. And it's in the STEP, in the moving from where we are...out into the unknown...that God grows us.

Return to Gospel – Spread your wing over me.

On top of all that – She calls him to take up the role God has providentially put before him. Family redeemer. Here is the deal: Ruth's husband was an Israelite. and the tradition was that if an Israelite died without a male heir, then the closest male of kin to the deceased would go make a male heir with the widow and provide for them. Deuteronomy 25. But in a broader context the kinsman redeemer was to make sure no widow or orphan relative was left out to struggle alone. It was a communal social structure. One the church was born into. SO Boaz & Ruth have a spark...AND they believe he is legally the right man for the job.

Ruth and Boaz were the poster couple for people of character. Ruth was young and evidently strong, judging by the weight she could carry on her back for long distances. Boaz was an older man. They weren't your typical glamor duo, like Jay-Z and Beyoncé, but they were people of solid character. True love is built on character rather than on physical attraction. I don't know of any couple who stayed together because they were cute, but I do know couples who have had long-lasting marriages because of their character. However, in all there were three love stories at play here: Ruth and Naomi, Ruth and Boaz, and a third—God and His people.³

What is happening here? Possibilities:

1. **Seduce to Succeed** – *use what you got Ruth*. Sexual aggression & promiscuity are labeled now as empowering. In such songs as Sza's "The Weekend," women are encouraged to level the playing field using their bodies. Though men won't argue with it one bit, because they benefit from this false sense of female empowerment, is this God's way? Does He want any of us manipulating others with our body in hopes of finding long-term fidelity? Of course not.⁴ *If you get the ring the wrong way, in your marriage you will pay*
2. **An impatient Instigator** – Eh, I'm not sure I buy that Naomi was in the wrong here. I THINK Jerome is saying she was NOT doing this. Book wasn't super clear. But yes we should be patient. SS 2.7

³ Gay, Jerome. *Renewal: Grace and Redemption in the Story of Ruth*. Sermon to Book. Kindle Edition.

An Authentic Appeal

Look at Naomi – She is not some scheming old widow. NO she sees God has provided. Ruth HAPPENED to go into BOAZ's field. Boaz happens to be showing special favor to Ruth. Love is in the air and Naomi KNOWS God is at work. He is in control. And maybe he's doing something between Ruth and Boaz and so out of love for Ruth she trusts what she knows about God and she acts. She doesn't know how it will turn out. There is immense RISK in this chapter. But Naomi trusts the character of Boaz because she trusts his God. and that leads her to action.

Ruth - Remember she's a Moabite. She did not grow up in the church. but man she has decided to trust God

⁴ Gay, Jerome. *Renewal: Grace and Redemption in the Story of Ruth*. Sermon to Book. Kindle Edition.