

Trusting God with New Endeavors

Ruth 3:1-18

Trusting God (Ruth)

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“God would have us part with nothing for Him, but that which will damn us if we keep it. He has no design upon us, but to make us happy.” – THOMAS WATSON

Open your Bible to **Ruth 3:1-18**. We are continuing in a series through the Ruth entitled: “Trusting God.” This morning we are looking a message entitled: “Trusting God with New Endeavors.”

The Story of Ruth (Really Naomi)

You know the story of **Ruth**. It’s really the story of a faithful Jewish woman named **Naomi** from Bethlehem (House of Bread) and her husband Elimelech. There’s a terrible **famine** in the land of Israel, and the “**House of Bread**” becomes a “**House of Famine**.” She follows her husband **Elimelech** obediently to the pagan land of **Moab**. They don’t want to die. Moab is only **fifty** miles away and is an oasis where they can get **work** and **food** and everything seems to fall in place to **live there**. But when they get there, the paganism is out of control. The boys marry pagan, Moabite wives. And God’s hand of blessing is removed from them. Elimelech, who moves to Moab in order to out maneuver death, dies, and their two sons Mahon & Chilion (Sick and Dying) die as well! A very tragic story.

A Story of Hope and Redemption

Of course you know the story of Ruth is one of hope and redemption. After ten years in Moab, Naomi decides it’s time to go back to Israel, back to **Bethlehem, the House of Bread**. The famine has lifted.

A Moment of Decision

There is a moment of decision. Ruth and Orpah want to be with Naomi. Naomi challenges them, tests their faith – says “Go back to Moab and serve your gods.” Orpah leaves, but remember the words of Ruth. This is Ruth’s conversion. This is her confession that YHWH is Lord and Savior of her life.

Ruth 1:16-17, “Where you go I will go, and where you lodge I will lodge. Your people shall be my people, and your God my God. ¹⁷ Where you die I will die, and there will I be buried. May the Lord do so to me and more also if anything but death parts me from you.”

This was a pledge of allegiance to YHWH and His people. So Ruth is converted. This would be the equivalent of a young woman meeting the Lord and saying,

“I want to go to Chicago because I want to be a member of Living Hope, where God’s people love and serve the Lord. I need to get baptized; I want to

get discipleship in a Bible Study. I want to have Christian friends. I desire to grow in my relationship with God.”

So Ruth is radically converted!

Ruth Just Happened to Find Boaz

And you also remember that Ruth and Naomi were on the brink of starvation and homelessness; and last week we saw how they went from starving and almost homeless, to blessed and highly favored. Naomi had said “Call me Mara” or *bitter, broken woman*. Ruth was sent out gleaning, and on the scene comes **BOAZ!**

Boaz Loves the Lord, is Loaded and Single

And so she just *happens* to come upon a man Boaz, who loves the Lord. Boaz happens to be loaded with money. Boaz happens to be single. And Ruth just happens to choose the field of Boaz.

The Touch of God’s Comfort (Oswald Chambers)

God promises to take care of this vulnerable, single, foreign Moabite young widow woman. She’s as vulnerable as they come. God takes care of her. And *God will take care of you*.

Oswald Chambers said this:

“In the midst of the [devastating trials], a touch comes, and you know it is the right hand of Jesus Christ. You know it is not the hand of restraint, correction, nor chastisement, but the right hand of the Everlasting Father. Whenever His hand is laid upon you, it gives inexpressible peace and comfort, and the sense that “underneath are the everlasting arms,” (Deuteronomy 33:27) full of support, **provision**, comfort and strength.”

Boaz provided protection and provision for her and Naomi. Ruth realizes he’s a kinsman redeemer. He can buy them out of debt and potential slavery. Everything is looking rosy. Boaz serves her a meal. Provides her with grain and food and protection.

Barley Harvest Almost Over, and NOTHING Happens

And then... Yes that’s right. Barley harvest is about to end and nothing happens. It’s just about the end of barley harvest. **Ruth 2:23** tells us: “So she kept close to the young women of Boaz, gleaning until the end of the barley and wheat harvests. And she lived with her mother-in-law.”

Ruth goes to her job, but it’s only a temp job. Barley harvest is about over. She works for Boaz every day for six or seven weeks. Boaz shows kindness to her. He prays for her. He protects her. He’s a gentleman. He’s a godly worthy man. But he doesn’t follow up. He doesn’t call. Ruth is kind of left hanging. We had a time where he elevated her – he gave her as a foreigner the highest seat with the best food. In my mind sparks were flying! This could be the one! I was already ringing the wedding bells!

But they never have a “second meeting.” Boaz doesn’t call. Barley harvest is about over. Nothing. Boaz is like the average guy. He does not know how to close the deal. He does not follow through. Ruth must be thinking: “Where are we? Are we friends? Are we more than friends? What are we?” They need to define the relationship. But Ruth is left hanging.

I don't think Boaz was purposely negligent of Ruth. He was a gentleman. Ruth is a Moabite. This is complicated. I'm sure Boaz is thinking –“*Another lonely barley harvest! All this grain and no one to share it with!*” What should he do?

Barley harvest is ending. Boaz is a gentleman, likely being cautious. What can Ruth do? She's a Moabite! What rights does she have in Israel right now? If anything is done, Naomi must do it.

God is about to call Ruth and Boaz to a new endeavor. And we are going to find out about four things God calls us to in a new endeavor.

Outline

- God calls us to **Obedience** in new endeavors (1-5)
- God calls us to **Sacrifice** in new endeavors (6-9)
- God calls us to **Wisdom** in new endeavors (10-14)
- God call us to **Greater Faith** in new endeavors (15-18)

I. God calls us to **obedience** in new endeavors (3:1-5).

God calls Ruth to obey Naomi in a very radical thing. God always requires obedience when He gives us a new endeavor. Let's see how this plays out in Ruth's life. Naomi's going to give Ruth some very *strange instructions*.

Ruth 3:1-5, “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? 2 Is not Boaz our relative, with whose young women you were? See, he is winnowing barley tonight at the threshing floor. 3 **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. 4 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.” 5 And she replied, “All that you say I will do.”

Two Options: Godly Father

Ruth wants to take care of Naomi, and the chief way to do that is to give Naomi an heir. The problem is: *she's not married!* She's got two options at this point. One is the way of scripture, and if she had a godly father, this is where the godly father would get involved. And he would go meet with Boaz, “Boaz, you love the Lord. My daughter really likes you. It seems like you like her. Where are we going? What are we doing? I need to see your **doctrinal statement**, your **401k**. Do you love **Jesus**? You have a **job**? We need to see if you're the one.” And the father was to get involved.

The way it works in scripture, it says that men seek or take a wife, and that daughters are given in marriage. That's the language of scripture. Genesis says that a man will **leave his father and mother**; he is then to get a **job**, get a **house**, get a clue, get a **theology**, get a **church**, get **himself together**, and then he is to pursue a woman for marriage, and that her family is to be involved, making sure that she is married to a good and godly man. The father is to guide the process, to give his daughter in marriage. We show this by the father walking a daughter down the aisle. He's saying, “I've provided and protected you, and now I'm handing that responsibility off to another man.”

Ruth's Dad Not Involved

The problem for Ruth is she doesn't have that kind of Dad, like many of you ladies. We know nothing of her dad. We've heard not a word of her dad. She left Moab – if she had a dad, he's **not a believer**. He's a **Moabite**. And their race and their religion are essentially intertwined, one and the same. She moves to Bethlehem, she comes without even a dollar in her pocket, or a bite to eat. If she has a father, he's **not loved** her, **protected** her, **provided** for her. He's not supported her, he's not done anything. She is on her own. Can God still work in this situation? Yes!

Plan B

Plan B for her could have been the Moabite way, also known as the Chicagoite way! The Moabites were a lascivious, promiscuous, confused people, kind of like people from the USA. We are three thousand years removed from the story of Ruth, but the way that her people that she comes from conduct themselves in dating and marital situations is much like our own.

History of Dating

By the way, *dating* was a word that was introduced into the American language in 1896 as lower class slang for prostitution. So, to say, "I'm going out on a date" means I'm picking up my prostitute.

In the early 1900s, women would enter into a relationship of courtship and engagement and marriage through what was known as **calling**, whereby the man would come to the woman's house and spend time with the woman and her **mother** and her **father**, and his **gun**, and they would all get together and they would sip tea and visit, and the boy could only come if he had an appointment, and as soon as the appointment was over he would have to leave. And he was in the woman's safe home environment with her family.

A woman was very concerned about her reputation, so much so that she wouldn't go out into public, even with a brother or an uncle or a cousin, alone if she was single, 'cause she wouldn't want to give the impression that she was out on a date, acting like a prostitute.

What happened then was that women's magazines started to come out beginning with things like the **Ladies Home Journal**, which quickly sold a million copies, and now you've got voices **competing** with the mother and the father, telling the woman, "Here's how you should dress, and here's what men to like, and here's how you can get one," and it was just like the junk that's lining the grocery store check-out line shelves, as we speak.

- 1920s automobiles and urbanization. A car is a closet on wheels.
- 1930s restaurants, farther from the home and influence of parents
- 1940s feminism begins with WWII. Women become more like men
- 1950s –the birth of "rock and roll" and promiscuity openly in music
- 1960s – the sexual revolution, birth control pill, "free love", confusion
- 1970s Magazines of ill-repute are now being sold openly at the gas station
- 1973 abortion is legalized
- 1974 no fault divorce

Moabite Culture

The result is that Chicago is a very Moabite culture. You and I are born into a world that we think is normal because it's all we know. But it is not NORMAL. It's not Christlike. It's very Moabite.

So Ruth takes the counsel of an older woman, Naomi. This is sort of echoing the concept of Titus 2: older woman gives counsel to younger.

God's Plan

God's plan is different. Ruth doesn't have a father on the scene. She's not going back to her old life and her old ways. What can she do? Nothing! She's a Moabite. Naomi gets involved. Naomi wants to "seek rest" for Ruth. She wants to set her up in marriage!

Ruth 3:1-5, "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? 2 Is not Boaz our relative, with whose young women you were? See, he is winnowing barley tonight at the threshing floor. 3 **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. 4 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." 5 And she replied, "All that you say I will do."

Put Off the Clothes of Mourning, Put on the Clothes of a New Day

Ruth is powerless to help herself. Naomi must do something. And something she does! Naomi lifts Ruth to a new endeavor. Naomi says (vs. 3), "Wash therefore and anoint yourself, and put on your cloak and go down to the threshing floor."

"Wash"... because up to this time Ruth's been working in the field. All Boaz has seen is her sweaty, smelly, no make up, messed up hair. You get the idea. "put on your cloak" – get some nice clothes on. Forget the factory uniform, so to speak. This is a major shift in Ruth's life. Up to this time she and Naomi have been in mourning.

It's time for both of them to put off the **clothes of mourning** and put on the **clothes of a new day!** You may be here, and you may be living in regret for the past. What can you do about the past? You can certainly ask God for forgiveness, but you surely cannot change the past. There comes a point when it's time to move on. It's a new day.

God Can Make a Way!

Barley harvest is ending. Boaz is kind of paralyzed. This is a Moabite woman. I'm not sure he knows what to do. Ruth can't do much. She's a Moabite. But do you know God can make a way when there is no other way? But there is a requirement. For God to bring you through a Red Sea, or for Him to rain manna from heaven, you have to unconditionally obey Him. He calls you to obedience and surrender.

This is where we pick up with Ruth and Naomi. Ruth learns to obey Naomi, and really she is living out her obedience to Naomi's God. Ruth is now a disciple of Naomi, and she wants to get to know YHWH better.

Put Away the Mourning Clothes

God calls Ruth to put away the mourning clothes and by faith, move on to a new stage and a new endeavor in her life. She is likely scared. But she trusts God and she trusts Naomi. She does all that Naomi says.

Psalm 56:3, "What time I am afraid, I will put my trust in you."

Obedience is a Worship Response!

In this statement: “All that you say I will do” (vs. 5), there is worship and trust of Almighty God. Jesus said, “If you love me, keep my commandments” (**John 14:15**). “Worship is a believer's response to God's revelation of Himself. It is expressing wonder, awe, and gratitude for the worthiness, the greatness, and the goodness of our Lord. It is the appropriate response to God's person, His **provision**, His power, His promises, and His plan” (Nancy Leigh DeMoss).

Ruth 3:5, “All that you say I will do.”

Ruth Parts with Her Security

“All that you say I will do” (vs. 5). So Ruth parts with her security and becomes even more vulnerable. Naomi knows the laws of the kinsman redeemer. I don't believe any woman in her right mind would want to do something so risky. But Ruth is now converted. She wants to obey God. She trusts Naomi. She puts off the mourning clothes. She puts on her clothes for a new day and a new life. And she trusts God. She may lose everything, but she wants to obey God.

Thomas Watson – God Has No Design But to Make us Happy

Thomas Watson said, “God would have us part with nothing for Him, but that which will damn us if we keep it. He has no design upon us, but to make us happy.”¹

Application

Ruth's motives here are not marriage. We know that by the very language she uses in the passage. In verse 10, Boaz later calls what she is doing an act of “kindness” (חסד). He says, “You have made this last kindness greater than the first.”

The first act of “kindness” is best understood to be Ruth's loyalty to her mother-in-law that led her to leave her own country (2:10).² Ruth's first act of loyalty was an obedience to God.

No Good Thing...

Obedience must be our motive. We can trust God. Psalm 84:11, “the LORD God is a sun and shield; the LORD bestows favor and honor. No good thing does he withhold from those who walk uprightly.”

II. God calls us to sacrifice in new endeavors (3:6-9).

What we have in verses 6-9 is a big celebration. It is the celebration of harvest time. This is the Thanksgiving time in Israel. There's tons of food. Tons of people. Lots of celebration. And at the end of the day, he's going to sleep by the grain. And Naomi gives some very scary counsel to Ruth.

Naomi's Counsel Descriptive not Prescriptive

Now let's understand that Naomi's counsel is **descriptive** not **prescriptive**. That is, what she says is not what you should do, but it is what she told Ruth to do in this very special

¹ A Puritan Golden Treasury, compiled by I.D.E. Thomas, Banner of Truth, Carlisle, PA. 2000, p. 159.

² Robert L. Hubbard, JR., *The Book of Ruth*, “NICOT” (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1988), 463.

situation. So Ruth obeys, and she's going to sacrifice. She's doing this not for herself but for her mother in law.

The Joy of Celebration

Ruth went down to the threshing floor, the hard packed floor. They bring in all the grain. They trample it with animals or with sledgehammers or with carts. They would break the husk. They would then get a fork, a pitchfork, or a shovel. They would throw the grain into the air. The wind would blow the chaff away. The heavier grain would fall to the ground. This was the center of the party. This is where everyone is celebrating. Everybody is thanking God.

Ruth 3:6-9, “So she went down to the threshing floor and did just as her mother-in-law had commanded her. 7 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.”

The Big Surprise

8 At **midnight** the man was startled and turned over, and behold, a woman lay at his feet! 9 He said, “Who are you?” And she answered, “I am Ruth, your servant...”

“At Midnight...” This doesn't even sound good!

There's a woman! “He said, ‘Who are you?’” Good question! Historically, at this time prostitutes would also come out to the threshing floor. It was payday. The prostitutes would take advantage of that.

He Calls her “A Woman”

It's night. He doesn't recognize her. He doesn't call her Ruth. Who's that woman down there? Smells like trouble. “She answered, ‘I am Ruth, your servant’” (**Ruth 3:9**). Your servant.

In v. 9 Ruth refers to herself as Boaz's נַמְסָה (“handmaid” or “servant”), which is a different classification than she uses of herself in **Ruth 2:10**, “Why have I found favor in your eyes, that you should take notice of me, since I am a **foreigner**?”

Progression of Terms

There is certainly a progression of terms; Ruth is moved from a status of **foreigner** to a woman who is **marriageable** – a **maidservant** of Israel.³ She now understands her identity in YHWH.

It must also be noted that this is Ruth's description of herself: she is very intentional in convey herself as a woman who is desirable for marriage.⁴ By the end of this scene Ruth will have moved all the way from a foreigner to a “woman of noble character” (3:11); this progression is obvious.

It get's even more amazing.

A Proposal for Proposal for Marriage

“9 He said, “Who are you?” And she answered, “I am Ruth, your servant. Spread your wings over your servant, for you are a redeemer.”

³ Ibid., 211.

⁴ K. Lawson Younger JR., *Judges and Ruth*, “NIVAC” (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2002), 461.

In chapter 2, verse 12, Boaz prayed that God would take her under his proverbial wing. And here she is saying, “Boaz, why don’t you answer that prayer and be God’s wing. Love me, protect me, hold me close, look after me.”

Here we have a metaphor. In ancient Jewish culture, to propose marriage a Jewish man would put a blanket over his potential bride.

Does Ruth propose to Boaz? No. But she proposes that HE propose!

What Sacrifice!

This is an amazing sacrifice for Ruth. she is crossing here a number of taboos. A woman asking a man, a Moabite asking a Hebrew, a younger person asking an older person, an employee asking an employer. She’s very bold. She takes a great risk.

Her heart is not on marriage. This is very risky. It’s almost insane. She’s doing it for Naomi. She wants to take care of her mother-in-law.

Application

Motives are important. Are you willing to sacrifice for others? Is that your motive?

The question then begs to be answered, **how will Boaz respond?** How would you, gentlemen, respond? You guys? Many of you are single. Most of you are single in this service. Imagine a beautiful woman is at the foot of your bed. What do you say? Do you try and manipulate that towards sin? Will you act in sacrifice for the Lord.

III. God calls us to wisdom in new endeavors (3:10-14).

Obviously this situation calls for wisdom.

Boaz Prays for Ruth

Ruth 3:10a, “And he said, “May you be blessed by the LORD, my daughter.””

What’s Boaz’s response? “Anything I can pray for you about?” That shows his motives and his worthiness right there. He does not take advantage of her.

Boaz Commends Her Motives

Ruth 3:10b, “You have made this last kindness greater than the first in that you have not gone after young men, whether poor or rich.”

Boaz basically says, “I can’t believe you’d want to be with me.” I think Boaz is shocked that Ruth is interested in him. He’s probably not the best looking guy. But here’s what he has: a job, literacy. He’s a believer. He loves God. He’s faithful. He’s good to people and he’s going to be a faithful provider for his family.

Ladies, sometimes a man doesn’t pursue you not because he’s not interested, but because he doesn’t think that you would be interested in him. So Boaz is like, You want to be with me? Done! I’m in! That’s a great plan!

A Worthy Woman

Boaz now recognizes that this is a woman who loves the Lord.

Verse 11, “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.**””

In calling her a worthy woman he is echoing what was said of him in chapter 2, verse 1, that he was a worthy man, worthy of respect and praise and emulation. He's a good man, and now she is a woman of exceedingly good character.

In Proverbs 31 the same word is used of the prototypical **Proverbs 31 woman**. And here it's applied to the redeemed Moabite, Ruth. Remember after Prov. 31 in the Hebrew Bible is the book of Ruth.

The Hebrews never saw that coming. This woman, just a year before, was an unbeliever, and was a Moabite, and probably worshipping Chemosh. And now she loves the Lord. And she's had such a hard transformation that, like many of you gals, though she was a woman in sin and a woman who didn't know God, and a woman who didn't come from a good family, and a woman who didn't get a great start, she becomes a woman who is Proverbs 31, worthy of respect, worthy of praise, worthy of love, worthy of the commitment of Boaz. She's a woman of exceedingly good character.

Boaz Protect Ruth Wisely

12 And now it is true that I am a redeemer. Yet there is a redeemer nearer than I. 13 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. 14 So she lay at his feet until the morning, but arose before one could recognize another. And he said, "Let it not be known that the woman came to the threshing floor."

Boaz doesn't call her out. He doesn't take advantage of her. He's very wise.

IV. God calls us to greater faith in new endeavors (3:15-18).

Ruth 3:15-18, "And he said, "Bring the garment you are wearing and hold it out." So she held it, and he measured out six measures of barley and put it on her. Boaz loaded her down with blessing. Take this, and take this!

Then she went into the city. 16 And when she came to her mother-in-law, she said, "How did you fare, my daughter?" Then she told her all that the man had done for her, 17 saying, "These six measures of barley he gave to me, for he said to me, 'You must not go back empty-handed to your mother-in-law.' " 18 She replied, "Wait, my daughter, until you learn how the matter turns out, for the man will not rest but will settle the matter today."

Mother in Law is Important!

Boaz is concerned about his possible mother in law.

Beware of doing anything that you wouldn't want your affectionate mother to know. If you apply that rule, you will be saved so much heartache. The concealment from the population was not a concealment from Naomi. There was no concealment there.

Boaz Acts Immediately

The man will not rest till the matter is settled. The way this man settles issues is how we ought act. When we are ready to make the decision we should make no delays. **Defer nothing till tomorrow what can be done today.** Do the hard thing first.

They're All Waiting

They're all waiting. Ruth, Naomi waiting at home. Boaz is waiting at the gate. This is what it is to follow God in a new endeavor. You wait. You act wisely. You sacrifice. You obey.

Cloud of Fire-Greater Faith

It's like the pillar of fire in Israel. You don't move till you see the cloudy pillar of fire moving. That's God's Shekinah glory! Jesus said, "I am the light of the world." If you know the history, he's talking at the Feast of Tabernacles. He's saying, "I'm the pillar of fire." Follow me! You're going to need greater faith to follow Christ!

Conclusion: Christ, our Great Boaz

- As Ruth offered herself in surrender to Boaz, so we offer ourselves in surrender to Christ.
- As she leaves herself at Boaz's mercy, so we are at Christ's mercy
- As she was covered by Christ's garment, so we are covered in the righteousness of Christ.
- As she waits for Boaz to return, so we wait for Christ to return!