

Ruth's Proposal

- Ruth 3:6-18
- Last week we looked at verses 1-5 of chapter 3 and discussed Naomi's plan. She saw an opportunity for Ruth to be provided for. She suggested a strategy for Ruth to follow in order to make the most of that opportunity. And Ruth responded with humility, saying, "All that you say I will do." So, last we saw Ruth, she was "going to the threshing floor and, going to get married..."
- Before we look at Ruth's proposal, I think it might be worth a few minutes for us to talk about the principle we can learn with regard to helping our children find their spouses. We are not part of the Jewish society in 1200 B.C. Therefore the laws of levirate marriage do not apply to us, where a close relative would step in and marry a widow and purchase her property so all would not be lost. And we do not practice arranged marriages. And, for the most part, women do not propose to men! So this story of Ruth's proposal is descriptive, not prescriptive. As many things in the Bible are. We don't march around a car we want to buy at the local car lot seven times and then blow a trumpet, expecting the car to then be surrendered into our hands at no cost. That story of how Jericho was to be conquered is descriptive, but not prescriptive.
- But there is a common connection we can find here in Ruth's brief courtship. It is this: Naomi worked a plan so that Ruth could be in a position to marry Boaz. I believe we as parents should do three things to help our sons and daughters to be in a position to marry. First, **pray** for your children and for their future spouses, if they are to be married. God is the giver. He decides what gifts He gives, and as Paul says in 1 Cor. 7, singleness is a gift from God. And marriage is a gift from God. So, pray for God's best gift for that child to be given and to be joyfully received. Second, **prepare** them for marriage. The best way to do that is to have a good marriage yourself! But there are many lessons a young man needs to learn before marriage so that he doesn't have to learn them the hard way during marriage. The same goes for young women. As Gregg Harris said a few weeks ago, we need to train our children until we like them. You could also say, "train them so their spouses will like them!" We also prepare them by teaching them what to look for in a husband or wife, looking below the surface! As our memory verse says for today, "**Charm is deceitful, and beauty is vain, but a woman who fears the Lord is to be praised.**" Third, **provide** opportunities for them to meet godly young people. Now, there are silly ways to try to do this. Like the dad a few years ago from somewhere in Europe. He sent a picture of his daughter, along with a long list of how she was qualified to be a good wife, to people all over the globe, seeking suitors for her. I was embarrassed for him, for his wife, and especially for the poor girl. Here's a better idea. Invite the young people in the church and community to your home for volleyball or for a Bible Study or for a cookout. It is also perfectly acceptable, I think, for Moms and Dads to be on the lookout for prospective spouses for our children, and even make suggestions to our children about them! Suggestions. Not demands.
- Let's look at the rest of this chapter today under two headings: the midnight meeting, and the morning matters.
- **The Midnight Meeting**
- Ruth carries out Naomi's strategy almost to a tee. She must have bathed, put on perfume, and dressed in something nice but not revealing. We know all of that because verse 6 says that she did just as her mother-in-law had commanded. She watched and waited until Boaz was asleep, marking the place carefully as to avoid embarrassing herself and the poor sap she might have awakened had she gone and uncovered the wrong feet. Then it happened. I love the way the narrator uses the cover of darkness and anonymity in verse 8: "At midnight the

man was startled and turned over, and behold, a woman lay at his feet!" And I would guess that he was even MORE startled then!

- He said, "Who are you?" Think about it: it was midnight, you are probably halfway into a four-hour cycle, coming out of a deep sleep, and you see a woman covered up from head to toe lying at your feet, in the dark, on the threshing floor, with all the other men snoring all around you. What would YOU be? Disoriented? At BEST! Ruth responds with humility: "I am Ruth your servant."
- Can we pause here a moment? May I suggest, young ladies, that Ruth's response is a way to a man's heart. What **could** she have done at midnight when Boaz says, "who are you?" Ruth could have used sarcasm. She could have said a number of things that would have made Boaz feel stupid. But this was 1200 BC, not 2013. If Ruth had been up to date with our culture, she would have known what anyone today knows if they watch TV: that men are complete morons and women have to do everything for him and lead him and teach him, and if that fails, there are always children who can step in and help him not to make a complete fool of himself. No, here's a better idea. You want to catch a man, ladies? Learn to respect men as created in the image of God and created by God to lead! **Look up to him, and win his heart. Look down on him and drive him away.** Young men, that means you have to be doing...what? Living like the image-bearer that you are. Living for the glory of God, not for your own desires.
- Now Ruth goes off script. Naomi told her just to lie at his feet and then "he will tell you what to do." Ruth doesn't wait. Instead, Ruth essentially asks Boaz to do what he needs to do to make her his wife! She didn't propose to Boaz, but she did the next best thing: she told **him** to propose. Interesting that Boaz had said to her the first day they met that his prayer for her would be the Lord would give her a full reward, "under whose wings you have come to take refuge." Ruth says, "Hey, answer your own prayer. Spread your wings over me. You are my redeemer."
- Let me ask you something. Why did Naomi set up this strategy to begin with? Because she loved Ruth and wanted her to be happy. It was an expression of her devotion to Ruth. But when Ruth proposed to Boaz and called him a "goel," a redeemer, why did she do that? She was thinking of Naomi, and the family name, and providing Naomi an heir. It was an expression of her devotion to Naomi!
- Boaz' mouth was probably hanging open for a moment. There was stunned silence in the barn as Ruth waited, nervously, to see how he would respond. Then he breaks into song! Maybe a Hebrew version of Gary Puckett's "Young Girl." Young girl, get out of my mind My love for you is way out of line Better run, girl, You're much too young, girl Well, maybe not, but he is so excited that this young woman would want him. That she would choose him! The recurrent theme of kindness comes up again, as Boaz says this second act of kindness is greater than the first. The first act was her concern and care for Naomi. Her second act is her desire to love and care about this man who is obviously older, when she could have gone after someone younger.
- Next thing you know, Boaz becomes a man with a mission. He says, in essence, "I will do all you ask, There's another, closer then me, and you better believe that I will be on his doorstep when the sun comes up. And we will get this thing done. If he will redeem you, fine. If not, I will. As the Lord lives!"
- **The Morning Matters**
- Before it got light enough for anyone to recognize anyone else, Boaz and Ruth got up. His concern was for her. They had obviously just slept, nothing else, and now he wants to make sure that she gets back home without being recognized. It would not be good for her to be seen leaving a threshing floor in the middle of the night. It would also not be good for him to be seen with her, even though the night was spent innocently. It was the appearance of evil

that he was intent on avoiding. Do you see the character of Boaz again? He was intentional not only about avoiding evil but in avoiding the appearance of evil as well! As Paul said, "Abstain from every form (or every appearance) of evil." (1 Thess. 5:22)

- A godly man, upright, a man of standing in the community, wakes up in the middle of the night to find a woman curl up at his feet. I love the character on display here, again, as we have already seen in Boaz. The opportunity to do something wrong, in the cover of darkness, is presented to him. DL Moody used to say, "Character is who you are in the dark." When no one is looking, what would you do if you knew you could get away with it. I have told you this study before, called the Goldman Dilemma, where 198 of the premier Olympic athletes were asked these questions. First, if you could take a banned performance-enhancing substance, like a steroid, without being caught, would you do it? 195 of the 198 said yes. Then the second question: would you take the substance if it would guarantee you victories, but then you would die in five years from the effects of the drug? More than half said yes. What would you do when no one is looking?
- Then we see again the heart of Boaz as he stops Ruth before she can leave and gives her something. It wasn't exactly an engagement ring, or anything romantic whatsoever. Or was it? He takes her shawl and fills it with six measures of barley, and for the second time we see Ruth walking home carrying a bundle. It wasn't a string of pearls or a ring or anything shiny; but it was a demonstration by Boaz that he cared for Ruth and wanted to be her provider. That's romantic, isn't it?
- One last thought about this story. When Ruth gets back home the narrator says, "she told her all that the man had done for her." Be careful, young people, doing anything in the dark that you cannot come straight home and tell your Mom every detail. I love the balance here between keeping things concealed and keeping other things in the open. Boaz did everything he could to keep this whole matter concealed, because he wanted to protect Ruth's heart. Ruth did everything she could to tell the whole matter to Naomi, because she was accountable to her and wanted to protect both of their hearts.