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God's Faithfulness

Ruth 3

Prayer: *Father, I just thank you and I praise you for your church, I praise you and thank you that we can go out over the airwaves, we can go out over You Tube, we can continue to grow the effort to get back together again as a family and we just again thank you for enabling us to do that. And we thank you, Lord, that it was your Son who enables us to have this relationship in the first place. It is your Son's death on the cross that gives us the hope that in spite of whatever chaos is taking place in the world we know that there's a rock solid foundation under us and we know that you are there and that you are real. And so this morning, Lord, as we again we go to your book, we pray that you would give us the presence of your Holy Spirit, that you enable us to hear and understand and take in your word and again, it would have permanent value. We pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.*

Well we are back in the book the Ruth, it's been a while since we've been there, couple of weeks. And when we last left Ruth and Naomi, Naomi was celebrating God's goodness and blessing after Ruth

had returned home from gleaning in the field of Boaz with a month's worth of grain and a meal already prepared. And this is the best news that Naomi has heard literally in years. And so her first reaction is to instantly thank God for his provision for her through Boaz. She says: *"May he be blessed by the LORD, whose kindness has not forsaken the living or the dead!"* And we spoke of how Naomi's response contrasted with her bitter statements about God's place in her life when she first got there to Bethlehem. If you remember the townspeople come out to greet her and she says she no longer wants to be known as Naomi or pleasant, she now wants to be known as Mara or bitter because in her view God was still present and he was still real, but he had clearly abandoned her. This is how she put it back in *Ruth 1:20*, she says: *"Do not call me Naomi; call me Mara, for the Almighty has dealt very bitterly with me. I went away full, and the LORD has brought me back empty. Why call me Naomi, when the LORD has testified against me and the Almighty has brought calamity upon me?"* Well Ruth's arrival with prepared food and provisions, that changes everything for Naomi. She instantly reverses her opinion that *"the Almighty has brought calamity upon me"* and she acknowledges now that it's the hand of God working in her and Ruth's life that have made all of these events take place.

Well we're about to see that Naomi is going to receive yet another

pleasant surprise. This is *Ruth 2:19*, it says: *And 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 worked 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." Now that word "redeemer," it requires a little bit of explanation. In Hebrew the term is a *goel*, it means kinsman redeemer. Now the kinsmen redeemer was a male relative responsible for helping a fellow relative who was in some kind of trouble, usually financial. You see in Israel land was a gift, it was something sacred, it was something that God gave and protecting it from falling into outside hands was the obligation of the *goel* or the kinsmen redeemer. Carolyn James says this: "When a man fell onto hard times and was forced to sell his land, his nearest relative (or kinsman-redeemer) was called to step in and purchase the land (or buy it back from an outsider) to keep his relative's property from coming under the ownership of someone outside their tribe." Well Boaz was in some way related to Elimelech and so Naomi clearly sees God's providential hand in the very field that Ruth has stepped into. Verse 21 says: *And Ruth the Moabite said, "Besides, he said to me, 'You shall keep close by my young men until they have finished all**

my harvest.'" And Naomi said to Ruth, her daughter-in-law, "It is good, my daughter, that you go out with his young women, lest in another field you be assaulted." 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.

Well so ends the second chapter of the book of Ruth. Ruth is living with her mother-in-law, she goes about the daily business of gleaning until the end of the barley and wheat harvest, that's something that takes about six or seven weeks, and that ends the chapter. Chapter 3 opens up with some Naomi-inspired intrigue. This is *Ruth 3* starting at verse 1. It says: *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."* Well at this point in the story things get very, very murky. And one of the problems here is that the language here is just filled with double meanings. You can survey a half dozen different

commentators and you'll find half of them think this is very clearly describing an explicit sexual encounter that Naomi is trying to talk Ruth into. I mean it's almost as if Naomi was trying to get Ruth to seduce Boaz into providing a home and security for her. Naomi wants Ruth to put on her perfume and her best dress and to meet Boaz in this far off place in the middle of the night. She actually wants Ruth to wait until Boaz is asleep and just kind of innocently snuggle up to him, uncover his feet and lie down. Well even the best possible reading of those words presents a highly compromising situation. And you have to remember now, I mean Ruth has only been in Bethlehem for a couple of months now. She's been working the barley harvest which is coming to an end and she's not just the new girl in town, she's the new Moabite in town. She's an outsider. She's coming from a city that was famous for seducing Israelites. In *Numbers 25* it says: *While Israel was staying in Shittim, the men began to indulge in sexual immorality with Moabite women, who invited them to the sacrifices to their gods. The people ate the sacrificial meal and bowed down before these gods.* Well Naomi's now sending a Moabite woman into what looks for all intents and purposes like a seduction. And Naomi's also sending Ruth to a place that is fraught with danger. I mean the threshing floor is not exactly a church social. The harvest is over and it's been a very good harvest and Naomi knows there's going to be celebration, there's

going to be eating, there's going to be drinking, and yet she foolishly puts Ruth into the center of this incredibly dangerous situation not just for Ruth's reputation but also for her personal safety. And Ruth for her part maintains the steadfast loyalty that she's always had towards Naomi. She says: "*All that you say I will do.*" Well it's apparent that Naomi is still Naomi and God is still God working with sinful vessels who sometimes make incredibly bad choices.

You know it's very easy to write Naomi off as bad news because she's made lots of these bad choices. We catalogued them the last time. It was a bad choice to leave Bethlehem for Moab in the first place, and it was a bad choice to allow her sons to marry outside of the covenant community. It was a bad choice to send Orpah back to her own people and her own gods and it was a bad choice to accuse God of abandoning her as she returns to Bethlehem. And here we have yet another bad choice by Naomi. But before we write her off as hopeless, we have to ask ourselves, how many bad choices have you and I made in the course of our lives? I mean it's remarkably easy to spot Naomi's bad choices and wonder why God doesn't give up on her, but how many bad choices have you and I made in our lives before we just moved on and forgot them? If your life was put on display like Naomi's was and every bad choice that you've made over the last ten years was put out there like Naomi's

was, how would your life look? See, we think of faith and faithfulness as something that we need to grow, we need to develop and we certainly do but we seldom reflect on the other side of faith and that is God's faithfulness towards us even when we make bad choices.

You know I just finished reading the story of Solomon as he completes the temple that he built for God. You know David wanted to build it but God said no, David, you're a warrior, you're a man of blood. God said I will bring peace to Israel and during that time your son Solomon, he will build the temple for me, and he did just that. And it was a magnificent undertaking, required hundreds of thousands of laborers, many years to complete. And Solomon, as you probably recall, he's the one who asked God for wisdom at the start of his reign as king and God was very pleased with him for asking that. And at the completion of the temple this is what God says to Solomon. This is *2 Chronicles 7*. He says: *"As for you, if you walk before me faithfully as David your father did, and do all I command, and observe my decrees and laws, I will establish your royal throne, as I covenanted with David your father when I said, 'You shall never fail to have a successor to rule over Israel.'* But if you turn away and forsake the decrees and commands I have given you and go off to serve other gods and worship them, then I will uproot Israel from my land, which I have given them,

and will reject this temple I have consecrated for my name. I will make it a byword and an object of ridicule among all peoples. This temple will become a heap of rubble. All who pass by will be appalled and say, 'Why has the LORD done such a thing to this land and to this temple?' People will answer, 'Because they have forsaken the LORD, the God of their ancestors, who brought them out of Egypt, and have embraced other gods, worshiping and serving them -- that is why he brought all this disaster on them.'" Well you probably know all about the reign of Solomon, that God gave him this incredible wisdom and peace and security and an abundance of material blessings, and that Solomon, just like his father David, well, he had a wandering eye and his love for women eventually turned that eye away from God. *1 Kings* says this: *For when Solomon was old his wives turned away his heart after other gods, and his heart was not wholly true to the LORD his God, as was the heart of David his father. For Solomon went after Ashtoreth the goddess of the Sidonians, and after Milcom the abomination of the Ammonites. So Solomon did what was evil in the sight of the LORD and did not wholly follow the LORD, as David his father had done. Then Solomon built a high place for Chemosh the abomination of Moab, and for Molech the abomination of the Ammonites, on the mountain east of Jerusalem. And so he did for all his foreign wives, who made offerings and sacrificed to their gods.*

Now you might remember Chemosh, Chemosh was the god of Ruth's people, remember the Moabites, this is this horrific false god who demanded child sacrifice. Well Solomon went so far as to build a high place for that monster and he did it simply to please some of his many foreign wives. I mean he went from being a wise and faithful servant to this ungrateful unwise fool, someone who was mocking God, the very God who had given him everything. But here's the part that I find so extraordinary about God's love for Solomon and how it applies to his love for Naomi and for you and for me. You go back to the celebration of the temple and in the midst of the celebration of the completion of the temple God's telling Solomon all about the dangers of turning away, knowing full well that that's exactly what Solomon was going to do. I mean not that day or not even the next day or the next year or for many years but nonetheless God who sees the end from the beginning clearly saw this intense wickedness that Solomon would engage in and yet God still continued to pour out his love on Solomon. And at the very end of Solomon's life he recognized his own personal wickedness and the terrible side road that he's gone down and he says this in Ecclesiastes. He says: *Remember also your creator in the days of your youth, before the evil days come and the years draw near of which you will say, "I have no pleasure in them."* And then he goes on to conclude in verse 13: *The end of the matter; all has been heard. Fear God and keep his commandments, for this is the whole*

duty of man. For God will bring every deed into judgment, with every secret thing, whether good or evil. And what's extraordinary absolutely in considering the faithfulness of God in this is that understanding that God knew with absolute certainty that Solomon was going to forsake and abandon him, and it didn't matter. I find that astounding. I've been a Christian for 47 years and I may not have reached the depths of wickedness that Solomon did, but I confess I've had more than my share of Naomi moments over the years. And the one thing that remains in all of this is the rock solid foundation of God's faithfulness towards Solomon, towards Naomi, towards me.

There are two thoughts that a Christian needs to hold in his spirit simultaneously to have any measure of real spiritual health. I've spoken about this many, many times. And they center on God's rock solid faithfulness on the one hand and our sinfulness on the other. And the first thought is "God loves me" and the second thought is "I am full of it." You probably remember me speaking about this. And it is precisely what you think it is. Paul himself referred to it in the Greek as *scubalon*. Dung. This is the way Paul put it in *Philippians 3*. He said: *But what things were gain to me, those I counted loss for Christ. Yea doubtless, and I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord: For whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and do count them*

but dung that I may win Christ. See, compared to the excellency of Christ, even the best that Paul has to offer was but dung. And again, do you think Paul's any different than us? I mean we all have this limitless capacity to take that dung and treat it as if it was gold or silver or precious stones and God knows exactly what it is and yet he still remains absolutely faithful to his sheep.

Speaking of dung, in Zechariah 3 we have Joshua pictured as the high priest. He's representing the very nation of Israel. The high priest had to stand before God and he was to be clothed in only the very finest of white linen. So Joshua is standing there clothed just like that and that's what the people see, but the scripture tells us what God saw. This is what he sees in each of us. This is Zechariah 3. He says: *Then he showed me Joshua the high priest standing before the angel of the LORD, and Satan standing at his right hand to accuse him. And the LORD said to Satan, "The LORD rebuke you, O Satan! The LORD who has chosen Jerusalem rebuke you! Is not this a brand plucked from the fire?"* Now Joshua was standing before the angel, clothed with filthy garments. Well that's being kind of pleasant, I mean the Hebrew here is very explicit. The filth of the garment that Joshua is clothed in is described as excrementious. Again that's a polite way of saying that God saw Joshua's beautiful white linen as filthy with human excrement. Verse 4 says: *And the angel said to those*

who were standing before him, "Remove the filthy garments from him". And to him he said, "Behold, I have taken your iniquity away from you, and I will clothe you with pure vestments." I mean God's telling Joshua the very same thing he's telling us. He's telling us, "I love you but you are full of it." And it's absolutely critical to hold both of those thoughts equally important because if one of them or the other becomes dominant, you will become spiritually sick. You see if your dominant thought is only "God loves me," you will become a self-centered, self-absorbed, 21st century North American evangelical and you don't want that. And if your dominant thought is only "I am full of it," well you're going to despair, you're going to be filled with doubt, you're going to wonder why God could ever love you. If you hold both of them equally then you know you're loved and accepted, completely and totally by the grace of God even though you and I are full of it.

Justification is a biblical term, justification is a public declaration by God to God that on the basis of Christ's finished work on the cross, the just demands of the law have been fully met. It means that you and I now have been made righteous in his sight by appropriating by faith the righteousness of Jesus given to us through the cross. And *Romans 3* tells us how we got that. It says *we are justified freely, freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus*. Well the word translated "freely" here,

it means "without a cause." "For no reason." What he's saying is basically that you and I were justified by God himself for no reason whatsoever that could be found in us. And furthermore *Romans 5* goes on to tell us: *But God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.* I mean this is the acceptance, this is the approval that the world can only dream of. It's an acceptance and approval that ended in the Garden of Eden, was restored at the cross, and presented to us as a gift. I mean it is stunning to realize that we really are full of it, full of self, full of pride, full of blind self-seeking that only wants to worship oneself, and yet, and yet for some wonderful reason God has chosen to fix his love on me just like he fixed it on Solomon, and just like he fixed it on Naomi and Ruth. You see Naomi, Naomi is us. And in spite of the fact that she makes all kinds of bad choices, God continues to steadfastly love her. And justification is a declaration by God that on the basis of Christ's payment for us on the cross that we now belong to him, and immediately thereafter begins the process of sanctification. Well, that's God setting us apart, that's God using every single event in our lives to shape and mold us uniquely into the image of his Son. And it's a life long process of discovery and much of the discovery is how full of it you and I are. That's not just my opinion. It was Tim Keller who summed up the gospel beautifully this way, he says this, he says: "The gospel is this: We are more sinful and flawed in

ourselves than we ever dared believe, yet at the very same time we are more loved and accepted in Jesus Christ than we ever dared hope."

You know I tell folks all the time that my life and I look back on my life and how God worked sanctification in me, my life was like peeling an onion. When I was a brand new Christian I thought, okay, I thought I have arrived, I got this sin thing all taken care of. And, you know, the first one to go were the sex, drugs and rock and roll type stuff, and for me that was frankly easy, that was simple. But when those layers got peeled off and I felt like this brand new shiny onion, you know, you peel all the layers off and it's nice and green and shiny, it's got no defects at all but then those layers were followed by layers of far more deeply entrenched sins that I knew very little about at the time. You see time and again God would show me aspects of myself that he saw with crystal clarity that I didn't see at all. God would lovingly confront me with the heavy duty sins, the big ones, ones like pride and envy and jealousy and gossip and those kind of things. And each time I would make progress, God would invite me to see another layer of the onion, another layer of deeper, more entrenched sins that he wanted me to deal with. And each new layer of the onion that I thought was spotless became more and more foul as God showed me my folly. But as he showed me my folly, he also showed me that

he's never loved me less.

You know I think it's important to understand how that works. We always tend to think of things in linear fashion. That you know what, I've been a Christian for a lot of years so God must love me a lot more now than he loved me back then 'cause back then I was a basket case but now I've been so much more Christ like, he must say, look at that guy, I love him a lot better now. It doesn't work that way. The moment God fixed his love on us was the moment we received the maximum love God could ever love and that happened before you were born. When God decided to fix his love on you, you got the maximum of God's love. You don't earn any more of it by your behavior. You simply are going through the process of God peeling away those layers of garbage, of it that's in you and working through them. And so all of the discoveries about my own personal wretchedness, they are discoveries to me. They're not a discovery to God. He saw the very worst from the beginning. In fact, he saw the very worst before you were even born and still he decided to fix his love on us. I mean that's an approval you can never lose. It's an approval that will never go away. It's an approval not unlike the approval God gave to Solomon, knowing he was going to turn and betray him. I mean God never gave up on Solomon and he never gave up on Naomi in spite of the fact of her bad choices and the fact that her bad choices put Ruth in an awful

position.

So here we are, we're back at the threshing floor, it's the middle of the night and Boaz has just finished threshing, he's eaten and he's drunken freely and he's feeling good and he's gone to sleep. Ruth is doing exactly what Naomi told her to do. We pick up at verse 6. It says: *So she 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 was startled and turned over, and behold, a woman lay at his feet! He said, "Who are you?"* Well this is the point where Naomi told Ruth, just play everything by ear. This is what she told Ruth, she said: *"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."* But that's not what Ruth does! You know, Ruth being the radical truth teller that she has always been, the one who's really unafraid to state what is right and true no matter how dangerous it is to state it, she comes right out and using the language of the day, she tells Boaz, you're my kinsman-redeemer. You need to marry me to restore Naomi's property. This is how she said it, she said: *And she answered, "I am Ruth, your servant. Spread your wings over your servant -- that*

is in that day's language, 'marry me' -- *for you are a redeemer.*" Boaz responds: *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."*

Well there's no way that we Westerners can really look at this exchange and not think that this is at the very, very least, it's just bizarre. This is a proposal of marriage made not by Boaz, this is made by Ruth and it's accepted by Boaz much as you would consider it another business arrangement. There's no romantic setting, there's no elaborate proposals, there's no "I love you," there's certainly no engagement ring. It's an altogether foreign way of doing things. And you know it wasn't until I went to India and spent some time there that I began to grasp the difference between Eastern and Western ideas of marriage itself. You see in India husbands and wives are frequently introduced to each other on the day of or certainly one or two times maybe before the actual marriage takes place, because in India many of the marriages are still arranged. And you think that that's going to be an absolute disaster but there's a reason why it's not. In fact Pastor Papaf and I used to have discussions about marriage and he actually used to laugh at what he called our "romance marriages." That's what he

called them. I mean he genuinely thought that courtship and dating and romance and all of those Western things, they were amusing if not silly compared to a marriage made in the very best interests of the families of both the bride and the groom. Now I'll tell you what's astounding about these things is that most of these marriages work. And there's a reason why, the reason is that you see in India, the idea of marriage is incredibly esteemed and marriage itself is esteemed. I mean in the West it's the individual who's esteemed. And the reason why lots of marriages in India endure and prosper is because they start out really kind of like a business relationship. I mean the husband acknowledges that he receives physical intimacy, a household that's run and managed and children. And the bride sees that she receives someone who's going to work to provide for and protect the family. And what happens in these arranged marriages is that often because both parties are committed not necessarily to each other 'cause they don't know each other, but they're committed to marriage itself. And because they're committed to marriage itself, it works.

I remember going to a village once. They asked us to go to the village to minister to this poor woman, young woman probably in her late teens, early 20s who had tried to commit suicide by drinking insecticide and she was desperately sick trying to recover. And I said what was the story behind this? And she was in a deep, deep

depression because her marriage had failed. I mean marriage was that sacred to her that if you fail that, you failed everything. She felt there was no reason to go on. And what Pastor Papaf pointed out, what I certainly observed in many cases is that in the end, these folks that are in these arranged marriages, they wind up falling in love with each other, and hence they see this Westernized idea where folks get married and divorced at the drop of a hat, they see that as something that's worthy of scorn, something inherently weak and emotional and not at all to be emulated, something that they call "romance marriages."

Well if you look at Ruth's encounter with Boaz, if you look at the marriage that she proposes, it looks like a business proposal a lot more than a romance marriage. And Boaz, recognizing that Ruth's proposal is not at all based on romance but on a practical application of her desire to see Naomi blessed and his obligation to be part of that process, well he agrees to Ruth's proposal. But this is not a simple thing for Boaz. You see for him to agree to marry Ruth would be for him to take on the responsibility of Naomi's estate which is bankrupt. So it requires purchasing it back. And moreover, it's adding Ruth and her potential offspring as competitors for the estate that Boaz is going to leave potentially to his other children. Now there's no mention of any other children in the book of Ruth in Boaz's life, but as has been

pointed out before, the premium on having sons in that culture was so great that it's very hard to imagine Boaz being seen as such a pillar in the community without having raised up sons. I mean Boaz was a person of great standing in Israel. If you go back to *Ruth 2* it says: *Now Naomi had a relative on her husband's side named Boaz. He was a prominent man of noble character from Elimelech's family.* Well here's the problem. If you were childless, if you were unmarried in that community, you weren't like some dashing wealthy bachelor that you might run into in the West. You were considered a complete and utter failure. Carolyn James says this: "A central thesis of the book of Ruth is the utter necessity of sons. Israelite parents would be desperately wringing their hands over a son who neglected his primary family duty, no matter how successful he happened to be in other arenas. The family had no future without sons. Instead of being a man of valor, Boaz would be a disgrace and grief to his family if he had no sons. And instead of admiration, the whole community would show pity toward him." Well Boaz is highly esteemed. So whether or not he engaged in polygamy or was a widower, it's also likely that he, too, had other sons to consider as his estate is about to take a major hit. This is going to make his decision very costly. And again Carolyn James goes on to say: "The kinsman-redeemer faced a conflict of interest, for rescuing his relative's property involved the outlay of large sums of money. In the process of redeeming his relative's

land, the kinsman-redeemer was siphoning off financial resources from his own estate, so his sons would inherit less. The law wasn't simply a legal code, but a heart-piercing call to a higher way of living. It was a call to sacrifice. It is the gospel in the Old Testament." And as we said, Boaz is not just a prominent Israelite, he is an honorable one as well. So He goes on to say in *Ruth 3:12*: *Although it is true that I am a guardian-redeemer of our family, there is another who is more closely related than I. Stay here for the night, and in the morning if he wants to do his duty as your guardian-redeemer, good; let him redeem you. But if he is not willing, assuredly as the LORD lives I will do it. Lie here until morning."* So she lay at his feet until morning, but got up before anyone could be recognized; and he said, "No one must know that a woman came to the threshing floor."

Well the first thing you notice about Boaz's reaction is just how businesslike his response is to Ruth's proposal of marriage. You know Boaz recognizes there's a kinsman-redeemer who's got an even closer blood connection than him and because he is an honorable man, he acknowledges that this guy has "first dibs," over whether or not he wants to marry Ruth. He says, "*If he wants to do his duty as your guardian redeemer, good; let him redeem you. But if he is not willing, assuredly as the LORD lives I will do it.*" And I would ask, ladies, how would you like that for an answer to a

marriage proposal? If he doesn't want to, okay, I'll do it. That's not exactly a stunning agreement. You know, if you're looking for a Western style romance in the book of Ruth, you're going to be sorely disappointed because it's foreign to our Western way of thinking to see two people enter into marriage the way Ruth and Boaz seem to be. Because we want it to play out romantically. But Boaz is not the type of silent hero who never lets his emotions show. In fact he is a type of Christ. And he recognizes that redeeming someone, anyone, is a costly enterprise. And for Jesus it cost him his entire life. It cost him his absolute perfection. In order to ransom and rescue us, he who knew no sin became sin for us. And having purchased us with his own blood, he's not about to let something so precious as his sheep go untended and uncared for. And Naomi is just such an example, so is Ruth. You see in the book of Ruth we get to see God's intent in the end and so it gives meaning to all of the struggles and the hard times that both Ruth and Naomi had undergone. We see that Naomi's bad choices never stopped God from fixing his love on her. And what we need to see is God's absolute faithfulness to you and to me as well. You see, having paid the ultimate price for us, he will not let us go. Now the bad news for us is that God sees us just like he saw Joshua. Instead of clothed in pristine white garments, he was clothed in his own excremental filth, and yet it was God who said: *"Behold, I have taken your iniquity away from you, and I will clothe you with*

pure vestments." Well there's only one way for God to take that iniquity away from us and that was by him taking on that iniquity and bearing it all for us at the cross and there Jesus took off the filthy garment that was on all of his sheep and he put it on himself as he bore the wrath of God the Father. He did it so he could clothe us in his perfect righteousness. And having paid such a price to ransom and rescue his sheep, do you think he's going to walk away when we wander? Sanctification is God's absolute determination to mold us into the image of his Son, and so layer by layer God is determined to peel the onion of our lives, getting deeper and deeper into the sin that so easily besets us.

Oftentimes his recipe for rooting out sin in our lives and making us more like his Son is painful, it's difficult and sometimes it makes us wonder if he really cares. See, unlike the book of Ruth we don't get to peek to the end of the book to see how the story's going to turn out, we've got to wait till the end. I have no doubt that we will find God's absolute faithfulness was there at every turn including both the bad choices we made and the times when we doubted God's good intentions. And I have no doubt that every one of us in the end will agree a hundred percent with Tim Keller when he said: "The gospel is this: We are more sinful and flawed in ourselves than we ever dared believe, yet at the very same time we more loved and accepted in Jesus Christ than we ever dared hope." Let's pray.

Father, I thank you for Naomi, I thank you for the fact that Naomi messes up all the time and yet Naomi was the object of your love. And Lord, it just helps us to think that you fixed your love on Naomi and nothing could change that. You fixed your love on Solomon and nothing could change that. You fixed your love on us and all the bad choices that we make don't change that. And yet we do experience in sanctification, Lord, layer by layer your peeling off each layer and your exposing to us sins that were there from the very beginning that you saw with crystal clarity that we are just discovering. We are incredibly full of it, and yet at the same time you assure us there is nothing we can do to make us love you less and make him love us less. And so I just praise you and thank you, Lord, for the incredible gift that we have of your salvation purchased for us by your Son. And I praise you in Jesus' name. Amen.