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# Finding - Of Maids and Men

## Ruth 3<sup>3</sup>

*Pastor Russ Kennedy*

What a difference three months of gleaning through harvest can make! From fullness to emptiness and bitterness, God's Fatherly love has directed His severe providences to bring two widows home at harvest. In the midst of destitution and neediness diligence and faithfulness are guided by the hidden providences of God to the fields of a kinsman-redeemer whose godliness and maturity is on grand display. His kindness and generosity provide fullness while his affections begin to attach themselves to the young maid from Moab. Could there be hope that this beautifully humble and honorable lady would accept or maybe even approach him?

How will Naomi's sense of God's purposes and providences turn for their good? There is a breathless sense of hope and trust that moves alongside of delicate planning and discrete execution. She knows that Ruth must present her case to Boaz, but decides to do it in a way to appeal to his gracious affection rather than to his sense of godly duty.

Just a word about the message this morning: I am following the chiasmic structure of the text. What will be before you is not an outline in the western sense, but rather a visible and verbal structure designed to bring us to the high point of the episode in verses 10-13.

So, what will these two ladies find when they cast themselves upon the promises of God and work diligently to see them unfold for them? Will the bitter providences complete their turn to sweeter ones still?

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## Anticipation by Planning

(v.1-5)

The episode opens and closes with *rest*. The word evokes a Sabbath rest. Naomi sees her responsibility to find a rest for Ruth. She no longer sends Ruth to the rest of her homeland and idols. She expresses her confidence the Boaz will find no rest until he has presented his case. Ruth's final rest depends on the labor of Boaz. This word places trust and work in the right relationship to one another. Trust in God should fuel initiative and effort. There are times to work (v.1) and times to wait (v.18).

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

Naomi recognizes that Boaz being who he is means that they must present their case. While it is not stated explicitly, it is fairly obvious that they see Boaz's age and maturity as restraining him from making an open overture to Ruth. He is the kinsman-redeemer. They will need to appeal to him to take his role. But it seems that they do not want it to be just a matter of Law, but of love.

Naomi formulates a plan that is designed to present Ruth, not as merely a field hand, but rather as a marriageable maiden. Her plan is that Ruth will go one evening, bathed, perfumed and dressed to highlight her beauty. They know that Boaz is not one to leave his workers in the hard conditions of their labor while he returns to the softness of his home – his practice must have been to rough it in the barns during the harvest. So, when Boaz retires after his evening nightcap, she is to go, lift the blanket off his feet and lay down at his feet. When he awakens and recognizes her, she is to do what he says.

Her plan is interesting in several respects.

THERE IS AN ELEMENT OF RISK. Without a doubt, both Ruth and Boaz's reputations are at stake here. That this is so is borne out in the story itself.

THERE IS AN ELEMENT OF TRUST. Ruth is presenting herself in a way and at a time that would make her very vulnerable to evil intentions. Yet, Naomi and Ruth both seem to trust Boaz implicitly. Certainly, he has demonstrated his concern for her purity and moral protection in the orders he gave his young men in chapter 2.

THERE IS AN ELEMENT OF WISDOM. I am struck by the fact that this allows her to present her own suit to him privately while not exposing him to the pressure or ridicule of his peers. She will come along, at night and simply present herself to him. He can accept her or reject her as he pleases.

Ruth responds to Naomi's plan with consent and commitment. We are left wondering about what she thought. Does she see this as being forward? Or is her own heart beginning to go out to Boaz in response to his kindness and generosity. The ambiguity seems to be a part of the author's intent.

So, how will this plan all work out?

## Approach to Boaz

(v.6-7)

<sup>6</sup> So she went down to the threshing floor and did just as her mother-in-law had commanded her. <sup>7</sup> 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 episode now begins the movements of approach. First, here is Ruth's approach to Boaz (v.6-7) in obeying her mother-in-law and later, her return to Naomi (v.16-17) in reporting to her.

Ruth's obedience is explicit in this text. She did exactly what was planned. The author points to the fact that it is not merely the implementation of a plan, but it is self-conscious and thought-through obedience to Naomi. Success in this enterprise is dependent on following the wisdom and insight of her mother-in-law while trusting in the purposes and providences of God.

She then watches and waits for Boaz to retire for the evening. He has had supper and his evening wine. The idea here is not that Boaz is drunk – he has had his nightcap. I know that for many Christians this sounds exceedingly odd if not outrageous. Some would say, "Ruth is taking advantage of his wickedness to put herself forward. See what alcohol does! It makes us vulnerable to all sorts of sexual temptations." The only problem here is that the Bible does not treat this event that way. There is in fact a sense of romantic delicacy here that is unmistakable.

Ruth slips in very quietly, uncovers his feet and lay down. While I would not recommend this as a Biblical method of courting for single women, there is cultural and personal modesty here. Her humility and submission is hinted at here as she lies, not at his side, but at his feet.

Now, I am sure that some of you are wondering about all this. Do we have here a scheming mother-in-law and a sexual advance by Ruth? Has the story now taken an ominous turn for evil? I think not. What unfolds here arises from:

- The recognition of Boaz's status as kinsman-redeemer;
- The evidence of both Boaz's attention and discretion;
- The difficulty of their age difference complicated by their humility;
- The necessity for a declaration of her need and his status,

I wonder if she slept or lay awake waiting.

## Awakens in Discovery

(v.8-9)

<sup>8</sup> At midnight the man was startled and turned over, and behold, a woman lay at his feet! <sup>9</sup> He said, "Who are you?" And she answered, "I am Ruth, your servant. Spread your wings over your servant, for you are a redeemer."

Boaz's snoring is interrupted by being startled. What do you think? Was Ruth tickling his feet? Or was God awakening him? Just as Ruth happens to land in Boaz's field, Bo-

az happens to be startled awake just at the darkest hour of midnight. The subtlety of God to startle Boaz to wakefulness is meant to bring a smile of trust to our hearts.

“What is this at his feet?” He rolls over and whoops, there is a woman curled underneath his blanket. “Who are you?” is the natural question in the deepest dark of night. He cannot see her face only her form to know she is woman.

What an identification this is.

Here is my NAME. I am Ruth. I am maid of Moab, a woman whose name you know.

Here is my NATURE. I am your servant. I am at your disposal to do with as you please trusting your kindness and generosity and godliness.

Here is my NEED. I am destitute needing your sheltering wings. As I have sought refuge under the protecting and sheltering wings of Yahweh, daring to be satisfied in His delights, so I ask you to be like our God and cover me with you care.

Here is my NOTIFICATION. You are my kinsman-redeemer. Here is my suit, my plea, my pledge and my case. Will you redeem me with your money and our marriage?

What do you think he will say?

### **Accepts in Delight**

**(v.10-13)**

What unexpected joy is his! How wonderfully ingrained is his habit of invoking the Lord’s blessing!

<sup>10</sup> 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. <sup>11</sup> 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. <sup>12</sup> And now it is true that I am a redeemer. Yet there is a redeemer nearer than I. <sup>13</sup> 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.”

THERE IS AMAZEMENT. He cannot believe her kindness to approach him, he who is old enough to call her “daughter”. She could have had any of the young men who moved through their lives. It is evident that she was prized and possibly pursued. She had her pick among the rich and poor. Yet she would choose him. I am awed by his selflessness and humbleness.

THERE IS ASSURANCE. He allays her fear with kind words of care and commitment. She is not to be afraid, but comforted and content. He will do all that she has asked. He will act as her kinsman-redeemer. He will cover her with the wings of his love and loyalty. He will not send her home in the darkness and danger – she may lie softly and safely at his feet till morning comes.

THERE IS ADMIRATION. He expresses that everyone knows that she is a worthy woman. She is someone to be admired and sought and loved. Though a foreign-

er, she has earned the respect of everyone in Bethlehem. Her character and conduct have been above reproach. No one will accuse her of wicked motives or means in this.

THERE IS AFFIRMATION. In all this there is a problem. He is not the nearest kinsman. There is another man who has the first opportunity. While he is deeply committed to her both in his affections and his actions, his honesty and integrity requires him to do what is right. The case must be presented to the other redeemer. He will present it himself. And he will so trust the sovereign purposes and sweet providences of God that he will stand ready and glad to submit.

### **Awakens in Discretion**

**(v.14-15)**

So she sleeps at his feet until the dawn. It was the just coming to light time before the sun has risen enough that people can recognize one another.

<sup>14</sup> 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." <sup>15</sup> 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. Then she went into the city.

HIS PROTECTION OF HER (v.14) – Just as he had in chapter 2, he now moves to protect her, particularly her reputation. It seems to me that the statement here at the end of this verse is made to the foreman who has arrived early for his instructions for the day. The words here are primarily to protect their reputations. They also may be designed to allow him to decide on the timing of his presentation of the case to the nearer redeemer.

HIS PROVISION OF HER (v.15) – Just as we had in chapter 2, Boaz also moves to provide for her. Assuming she does what was common in the day, she takes hem of her cloak, gathers up its corners to make a sack or basket and Boaz fills it with a weeks worth of barley. In other words, she is carrying home 6 days (6 measures) worth of gleaning. It points to the fact of her labor and diligence that will bring to Naomi and Ruth, rest. The rest of the seventh day and the seventh measure.

### **Approach to Naomi**

**(v.16-17)**

You can just see Naomi standing in the doorway waiting eagerly for Ruth's return.

<sup>16</sup> 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, <sup>17</sup> 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.'" <sup>18</sup> 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."

And yes, the immediate question, "How did it go?" Ruth relates all that happened telling of his promise to be their redeemer and the problem of the nearer redeemer.

Then she, probably with a real sense of irony, quotes Boaz directly. "Here are these 6 measures of barley. He told me that I must not return to you, Naomi, empty." Here is the resolution of the end of chapter one. Naomi returned to Bethlehem empty – even though

she had the love and loyalty of Ruth beside her. Now Boaz wants Naomi to remember that the one on whom she placed no value is now the one who will be sure that is no long empty. The giving of the harvest to Naomi is an intimation that Boaz will not only fill her need of food, but may fill her arms with grand-children. Naomi may return to Bethlehem empty, but if Boaz can help it, Ruth will never return to Naomi empty.

## Anticipation by Patience

(v.18)

So now, in verse 18, their work and action and doing is done.

<sup>18</sup> 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.”

They have taken initiative under the providence of God, now it is time to be patient and to wait on the providence of God. It is now out of their hands. But note the confidence in Boaz. He will not rest but will settle this matter today. So Ruth has rest being aimed at in the deeds of this episode. Naomi receives rest at home signified by the six days of harvest gain. Ad Boaz will not rest until his work as kinsman-redeemer is done. So here it is. When we go away full and return empty, restoration to fullness comes with someone’s redeeming labor and someone’s receiving rest.

And who knows what fullness may come when a Redeemer moves on behalf of His beloved?

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## Reflect and Respond

This is a story about God:

This is a story about the God who is sovereign over all, whose providences are working to serve the pleasures of His will and purposes of His glory.

This is a story about the God who provides for His people, whose wisdom ordains a way for those whose heritage in land and family is lost to be restored. He knows that devastation and death are the common lot of fallenness and arranges in His law for the perpetuation of life and property.

This is a story about the God who reveals Himself, whose revelation is often in models and types and analogies so that we will understand and in understanding, desire and delight in this God.

This is a story about the God who redeems His people, whose very life was given to pay the price and meet the penalty for their sin. He sent the great Kinsman-Redeemer, the Lord Jesus Christ, our heavenly Boaz, to live a sinless life and die a substitutionary death and rise again in a vindicating resurrection.

This is a story about the God who plans good for His people, whose glories and treasures and wonders are all laid up for the day when His people all come home, no longer empty, but with unimaginable fullness. And that day is called, rest.