

An Unusual Request (Ruth 3)

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[0:00] Ruth chapter 3, I'll be reading from NIV. Cool, so follow along. One day, Ruth's mother-in-law, Naomi, said to her, My daughter, I must find a home for you, where you will be well provided for.

Now Boaz, with whose woman you have worked, is a relative of ours. Tonight, he will be winnowing barley on the threshing floor. Wash, put on perfume, and get dressed in your best clothes. Then go down to the threshing floor, but don't let him know you are there until he has finished eating and drinking. When he lies down, note the place where he is lying. Then go and uncover his feet and lie down.

He will tell you what to do. I will do whatever you say, Ruth answered. So she went down to the threshing floor and did everything her mother-in-law told her to do. When Boaz had finished eating and drinking and was in a good spirit, he went over to lie down at the far end of the grain pile. Ruth approached quietly, uncovered his feet, and lay down. In the middle of the night, something startled the man. He turned, and there was a woman lying at his feet. Who are you? he asked.

[1:06] I am your servant, Ruth, she said. Spread the corners of your garment over me, since you are a guardian-redeemer of our family. The Lord bless you, my daughter, he replied.

This kindness is greater than what which you showed earlier. You have not run after the younger man, whether rich or poor. And now, my daughter, don't be afraid. I will do for you all you ask. All the people of the town know that you are a woman of noble character. 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, as surely as the Lord lives, I 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.

[2:05] He also said, Bring me the shoal you were wearing and hold it out. When she did so, he poured into it six measures of barley and placed a bundle on her. Then he went back to the town.

When Ruth came to her mother-in-law, Naomi asked, How did it go, my daughter? Then she told her everything Boaz had done for her and added, He gave me these six measures of barley, saying, Don't go back to your mother-in-law empty-handed.

Then Naomi said, Wait, my daughter, until you find out what happens, for the man will not rest until the matter is settled today. And we'll see. Thank you.

Right, Ruth 3. When you've heard what Fran has just read, what was going through your mind? That's a bit unusual. You know, someone labeled this chapter 3 called bittersweet kind of experiences.

[3:10] Now, from the first chapter, second chapter, first chapter from Pastor Barry, second chapter from Pastor William last week, we kind of, you know, we felt that we got some understanding about the book of Ruth.

Okay? It was interesting. It was hard for this woman. But when she came back, was gleaning, you know, the leftover grains. And now, to chapter 3.

A lot of things we, you know, we don't understand. I mean, we admire the relationship between this daughter-in-law and mother-in-law. All right?

Now, this is an interesting relationship, especially for Chinese culture. All right? Mother and daughter is fine. Well, mostly, yeah.

But mother-in-law and daughter-in-law, two tigers cannot be in one mountain. Right? That's the kitchen. Right?

[4 : 12] And, you know, wow, you stay, I stay. You die, I die. You're God, my God. Wow, this is only a desirable, very ideal relationship.

But it happened. I know we can in Christ. I know there's a couple of families from our church on Sunday. They enjoy this kind of mother-in-law relationship, daughter-in-law relationship, living in not one house, but just right next door.

Can be done by God's grace. All right? But after chapter 2, we see now chapter 3, very unusual. You go shower yourself, perfume yourself, put on some clothing and go down to meet this man at night. What are you saying, mother-in-law, Naomi?

Naomi, if your mother-in-law tells you to do this, how would you respond? How would you have felt? Right? Now, in Ruth 3, thank you, friend, for reading that for us.

[5 : 22] And I believe that Naomi, this kind of unusual idea, which we don't quite understand, right?

But Ruth did. And certainly, Boaz knew. And this kind of unusual idea, and Ruth went along with it. Okay?

Okay? And Boaz, he was willing to accept it. Now, it will take a bit of explanation.

It's very, a lot of cultural stuff, and a lot of biblical things went on in biblical times, what we, here in New Zealand, this 21st century, we cannot fully understand.

But the background is so rich. In this 30 minutes, I can't explain all, you know. But if you want to study it, it's very fascinating.

[6 : 21] I'll just explain it very briefly and simply so that we can kind of understand it a bit. All right? And I think for us, this chapter, it's God's blessing surely is for all of us.

He can bless in a very rich way. But somehow, His blessings come through different individuals. How do I act or react? Can bring forth His blessings to me and to the people around me.

To Naomi, to Ruth, and to Boaz. I'm sure that many of us here, it will be at times where we're like Naomi's.

We have our needs. And there will be at times our faith are challenged to act like Ruth. And there will be at times that we need to carry out some of our obligations like Boaz.

[7 : 30] So maybe all of us, this has something, God has something to speak to me this evening. All right, let's have a look at it. Now, last week, Pastor William, you spoke about three persons, right?

I'll be speaking about these three persons as well. So you spoke about Ruth was seeking favor from the fields of Bethlehem. And Boaz was extending generosity.

And Naomi, she discovered loyal love. So today, I want to speak about these three people as well. For Naomi, it was a suggestion.

And for Ruth, she had to submit to that suggestion. And Boaz affirmed that particular suggestion.

Let's have a look at it a little bit in detail, okay? I would say chapter 3 is kind of a climax of the book of Ruth.

[8 : 33] Now, you should see Pastor Barry in chapter 1, it started off from a famine, right? Nothing to eat. They went away and they came back to find food.

The last week you spoke about food to family. Yeah. From famine. And you can see in chapter 3, you can kind of vaguely see a family being established.

Marriage. All right? But it was bittersweet. Not sure. What happened if Boaz rejected? All right? Right? It was from funerals.

Three people died. You know, Naomi's husband, two sons. I don't know how long ago was that. But it was funerals. But now, you can almost see a wedding coming.

Bittersweet. And it was all in God's sovereign plan. But the interesting thing was, he allowed human involvements.

[9 : 40] Boaz, Naomi, Ruth. And interestingly, it was in a couple of cases, it was the author mentioned something about, Behold, coincidentally, it happened this guy was here.

It happened Ruth was leaning at Boaz's field. And, you know, at times we feel that, oh, how come is it so coincident that this happened to me?

And I somehow, I met Johnson, and Johnson shoved me a cup of coffee, and then I found us a little bit more. And then something happened. And then, here, this is how God had brought me, and this is something that's just fulfilled.

Of course, we do not believe coincidence in our lives. It's all behind God's plan. But it's somehow, we didn't know, but God has brought it.

And if we act or react according to his will, the blessings will flow. So, let's have a look at it. Naomi's suggestions.

[10:54] All right. One day, I won't read it because Frank read it before. You know, it was, it was, she just suggested that, Ruth, go, perfume yourself, get dressed.

Now, this is, I believe Ruth really knew what it was about. It was a marriage proposal. All right. Why do you have to put dressed in best clothes? Some interpreters said it could be best clothing, but also, but it was more than just best clothing, but maybe the coat, the cloak that all Jewish people wear, because she's going there at night.

It will be cold. All right. But there was something, for us, it's strange. Why go to this field at night? And Boaz was there after drinking and eating. What was the purpose? You know, when I first read the story, I thought it was like, you know, Naomi telling Ruth to go to a party after eating and drinking.

[12:13] And, you know, it was something I didn't understand. But have a look at it.

Tonight, in verse 2, tonight, he will be winnowing barley on the threshing floor. So it was actually not a party. It was hard works.

It was hard works. Winnowing barley. Now, we don't understand what it was. But it was hard works. Okay.

It was, they were separating the chaff from the barley itself. It was in the evening in Palestine, in Bethlehem. It was because on the higher ground. Usually, there was some breeze, maybe some wind, like us, like what we have now.

And they would just throw all this barley in the air and all this chaff because the wind would just blow them away. And the barley would just drop on the ground. They had to carry on these hard works because it's harvesting.

[13:17] Right? And they had, it was hurry. They had to do, during the daytime, they were doing other works. So the nighttime, when the wind, the evening, afternoon, evening, late afternoon, evening, when the wind came.

And they had to do this until night. And tomorrow morning, they had to work again. So they might as well stay there. The men, most of the men stayed there.

There was no woman there. Okay. And because Boaz was the owner of the field, he and maybe a few other servants, they had to stay there because people might come to steal.

So it was not a party. All right? It was hard working. And what Naomi told Ruth there, it was in the situation was when Boaz was working hard and at night when he was sleeping.

Now, Ruth was there to propose herself to this man. Okay?

[14:27] Why would she ask Ruth to do it? Because the cleaning season is over.

Right? The chapter tells us that because there's no more barley to glean. But we remember, no, she gleaned, you know, she picked quite a bit, even just one day.

It'll be enough for the rest of the year. Now, all these two or three months you have gleaned every day, she could have collected enough for the whole year. Yes, she might have to. She might have had enough.

But what about next year? We'll glean again. But can Naomi, could Naomi be sure Boaz will continue to be there?

Right? Circumstances could have changed. So, Naomi, in her mind, in her plan, she just had, you know, the immediate needs are solved.

[15:38] But the long-term stability need to be resolved. And she had this idea. Naomi, get yourself married.

So, you'll be stable, and I will be secured. I'm getting old. You know, I can't marry her. I can't marry him.

But you can. Now, think about it. Think about it. Naomi is not super spiritual. She's just an ordinary woman.

She had been through quite a bit. Husband died. Two sons died. Right? And she had to make plans. Like all of us.

I mean, Christians, we are not super spiritual people. We are ordinary people. We make mistakes. We think about different things.

[16:37] I mean, we are fallible beings. We need to plan in tangible ways. You know, studies, relationships, work, housing, family, kids growing up.

I'm getting old. Will I get dementia when I'm 10 years later? I don't know. I mean, these are very ordinary concerns. I mean, these are very ordinary concerns. Right?

So, it's not non-spiritual, unspiritual to make plans. But think. But think.

All these practical matters, matters to God. God. If we allow God to intervene.

God cares about our daily things.

[17:38] God. For me on 2021. God cares about his life. I think for the sake of the deal, you know, on your mother. When it was 1962. She was about 40-something. Taking my three brothers, my one sister and two brothers.

her husband died early on, but that was not my father. But she remarried, but my dad couldn't come because he was a national officer.

So he got arrested. He got deported to somewhere and he couldn't come. So why would she come to New Zealand? Because it was hard, hard life in China at that time. I'm the ninth kid, alright, of a different father.

But my first, second, third, and fifth brother or sister, they all passed away when they were young. A bit like Naomi. So it was hard. It was, she didn't know God then at the time, but God knew her.

Right? So when she came ten years later and I came, and somehow, somehow, somehow, God intervened in her difficult times.

[18:54] And somehow God had his plan for our family. To make it short, after 50, 60 years, this extended family, 50 something old and old, half of us have become Christians.

Which in China, would never, would not have a chance at all. So, you know, all these practical stuff, difficult things, tangible things, God cares.

So what, maybe, some of the things that we're worrying about, let God, He cares, place it before Him. Just like Naomi.

He had, I mean, she vaguely remembers, yeah, I mean, Boaz is our next, our kinsman redeemer. He may be able to help us.

That was, that's why he had this idea. She had this idea. But she wouldn't know, she, she had no guarantee that Boaz would respond.

[20:05] Right? So she told Naomi. And for Naomi, that was, that was nerve-wracking. I'm sure. She would be very restless.

Even though she would, she, she, she submitted to this idea. She was willing to do it because she, she believed that her, her mother-in-law would not push her to die.

And because she trusted, in a way, her mother-in-law. So she said, I would do it, whatever you say. All right? And then she did it. She did not just respond it.

And she actually did it. So she went down to the threshing floor and did everything that her mother-in-law told her to do. So, wait until, at night, she kind of went in there, uncovered his feet. There's something we could never understand. What on earth was she doing? A man and a woman in the, in the middle of the night, in the field? Wow!

[21:11] What happened there? Now, I'm sure the author of the book of Ruth will tell you that nothing immoral happened there. Because Ruth was a very reputed lady.

And, and Boaz was a noble man. All right? So, everything was moral, everything was clean. And what is that uncovered defeat meant?

And this is exactly what, what Ruth was telling, telling Boaz. I am your servant, Ruth, she said.

Spread the corner of your garment over me, since you are a guardian, redeemer of our family.

Now, what does that spread the corner of your garment over me mean? I'm getting cold, you know, give, give me some of your cover so that you can, I can feel warmer.

Now, what did it mean? The, the Jews would know. Okay? Actually, in, in this, um, chapter 2, it was actually the, the verse of a month.

[22:29] All right? tells us that, um, spread, that was in, yeah, 12, verse 12. When Boaz was quoting that, was, was saying to Ruth, may the Lord repay you richly and reward you because you come, you have come under Yahweh's, whose wing you have come to take refuge.

that wing, that cover is exactly the word spread the, the, the corner of your garment over me.

Spread the, the garment over me.

That, that's covering me. Same word. So what, what, what was Ruth saying to Boaz? Okay, Boaz, you said, I've come under Yahweh's wing, all right, so that he can protect me, cover me, now you act as that covering.

I come to you, you cover me. You act for God to cover me. Now, that was very clear as a marriage proposal.

The Jews would know, now, in Ezekiel 16, it says something about God was actually acting that, love to the people, the nation of Israel.

[23 : 59] Israel was like a baby was in the blood, was in the middle of the field, no one took notice, no one had mercy on them, it was, it was, it was there, and the Lord just came over and, and took, and took him and gave her life and, and, and cover her with his garment.

And that is the, that is the picture. So for Ruth, doing all that, okay, according to her trust to Naomi, it was a, a submission of faith, of trust.

I'm sure she knew a little bit about Yahweh, God, the God of Israel, but it was through Naomi that she was exercising the faith.

She knew that her mother-in-law won't push her to die. It was something she may not understand fully, but she would do it anyway. I think, I think there was, there will be times for us, even our faith is not great, okay, but there will be times that we need to exercise our faith.

That we can experience the blessings of God. And even at times, you know, we can't even see the blessings in, in, in a new, in the near future.

[25 : 31] Maybe, even we cannot even see it in our lifetime. Now, let's, let's think. Boaz, I mean, Ruth was the grandmother of David. All right, in chapter four, I'm sure Pastor William will, will, will explain it to us.

It ended with a genealogy. And it says that Ruth was the great-grandmother of David. Now, could Ruth save her great-grandson?

She might. Fourth generation is not that bad, not that hard, okay. How many of us have, actually have four generations with us here? No?

Yes? I have, I had, when mum was there, we had four generations, yeah. But could Ruth see David became a king?

May not. Now, you know what I mean? Sometimes our trust, our faith cannot actually bring us to see the reality, but we trust anyway.

[26 : 41] Right? Maybe times that God is challenging us to step out of our comfort zone. The things are we so used to.

We never experience things like that. Nah, nah, not for me. Yeah. But maybe God could challenge you. Do something different for him.

Okay? And that's what Ruth was saying. Spread the corner of your garment over me. Since you are a guardian redeemer of our family.

Spread the corner of your garment. Boaz, I want you to marry me. Wow, that is something that is so extraordinary. It's out of Ruth's I mean, it's something that she had to step out.

Alright? Have a look at this. Maybe God is speaking to you at times. What is something that you want? He wants you to step out. You'll be very comfortable in that little ball of water.

[27 : 55] Eventually, he wants you to do something like this. Are you willing to trust him? Go, go, go, go, go, go, yes.

And you might think I cannot do it. It's so risky. Right? It is. If it's not, if it's not, you know, if it does not take courage, it's not faith.

And God wants to challenge us. And Ruth was willing to respond. Now, she would be pretty restless until Boaz woke up and she told her everything.

Now, what if he didn't respond? What if he doesn't want to? Right? And Boaz, we know the story, he affirmed that decision.

All right? The Lord bless you, my daughter. Now, Boaz, it was not an instant romance. Okay? So, this story is really, really, I believe, it's not a love story.

[29 : 16] All right? Because I believe Boaz was pretty well stable at the time. he did not have to. Now, I'm sure Boaz, he was not like, you know, I think he was pretty okay.

The author did not say that he, whether he was married or not married, don't know. Okay? But, it's not something that Boaz was, looked, looked at Ruth and suddenly he just, oh, I want to get this woman.

I don't think Boaz was like that. But, I'm not saying he didn't like her, but it was something that he was willing to step out his way.

Because there was something in between, before he made the decision to marry her. Because that was not an ordinary proposal.

It was something that he had to buy the land and also he had to marry the marriage. It actually, if there was a son born, the name was not under Boaz.

[30 : 42] It would be under Ruth's previous husband. And that's why the relative closer to Boaz, closer to Naomi, was not willing to do it.

And it was an obligation Boaz was willing to take. He was willing to walk the extra mile to accept this marriage proposal.

And that's what he said. But if there was someone who would be closer to me, but if he's not willing, I would do it. And there will be times that God could be challenging us to fulfill certain responsibilities.

we probably had no idea. But as a Christian, as a child of God, there will be opportunities that God wants us to just to step out and to not even a responsibility but something gracious to extend to others.

Maybe to shout someone a cup of coffee and listen and chat. And we don't know how far God can take and to bring blessings to the family.

[32 : 25] Or maybe just invite someone to come to your home for a meal and it would go a long way. And Boaz, he was willing to take this responsibility and God just blessed.

My brother-in-law, Rodney, he was, when he was studying in university, he had a friend, he had a friend who was a Christian who was really, really wanted to share the gospel to him.

But he was not willing to listen. but he was so dedicated and he took every chance, all right, and to bring him to a gospel meeting, to chat, to stay at night in the dorm, and to help in whatever ways.

And my and Rodney just wanted to respond and just argue through. But at one time, he was, okay, he said, all right, okay, I'll just go to this meeting.

And it was in that meeting, he gave his life to Christ. And it was through him, our family, 20-something old, 26, 27, kind of indirectly became Christians.

[33 : 57] That friend, he couldn't see it. He wouldn't know the impact of it. but he went, he was willing to show graciousness.

And God took it and blessed. So, Ruth, Naomi, Boaz. There were times in our lives that God could use us.

Ordinary things that concern us, we place it before God. even though we have our thoughts, our ways, sometimes we can hinder God's plan, but God knows.

And for Ruth, just a small faith, willing to carry out, wouldn't even know the result.

God honored. God. And like Boaz, he was willing to walk the extra mile. And God just made it.

[35 : 04] Wow. There was David's royalty, the line, the ancestry that went through. and even in the New Testament, the first chapter of Matthew, the generations, it was from Boaz, David, Christ.

Just in our time, in our space, in our limitations, we cannot see that far. But God knows. Let us respond with faith, and he will bless.

Let's pray. Father, I just want to thank you. Yeah, just thank you for that. Even very ordinary people like us, we have our concerns, we have our, yeah, we make mistakes, we can't see that far.

But Lord, before we knew you, you know us. And even now, I don't know my plan for today, tomorrow, but you do.

And in you, you are willing to bless, and your plan is to prosper us, not to harm us.

[36 : 33] So help us to have faith, just to trust, and act accordingly. Thank you, Lord, in your mighty name we pray.

Amen.