

RUTH – A Tapestry of Redemption

RUTH CHAPTER 3

We have been in the book of Ruth and today we will be in Chapter 3. I really enjoyed the vacation [and] getting away, but it is always great to be back with you all. [Each one of you] are a blessing to both me and Robin. I just want you to know that.

So, as we left off last time (it has been several weeks), in Chapter 2, Ruth met a man named Boaz. He owned some fields, right? He was a rich guy. As it turned out – I believe that this was divine intervention – Ruth ended up gleaning barley in Boaz's fields. I do not think it was just a coincidence. I think it was God directed and she met him. He is a wealthy man and he is very prominent in the community. But more importantly – this is what the author emphasizes – he is a God-fearing man. He notices Ruth, asks about her, shows kindness toward her. And he is going to be, as we see played out through the book of Ruth, a key figure and the subject of Q1. According to Ruth 2:20, what is his [Boaz's] most significant role? It is something that Naomi said. Redeemer, right? Naomi tells Ruth (when she mentions that she met this guy Boaz) that he "is a close relative of ours, one of our redeemers." So, Naomi sees Boaz as potentially being her family's redeemer. We are going to talk more about what that means here in a minute. But before we do, I want to make a point [because] it brought up before in our study...

I find the book of Ruth fascinating because [although] it is certainly a love story, that is not what the author focuses on. Who is the author of [the book of] Ruth? Does anyone know? Samuel. Most people think Samuel wrote Ruth. If that is the case, [the author] is a prophet and he will be focusing on God. But whoever wrote Ruth the focus is not on this love story. So, are Boaz and Ruth attracted to each other physically? Probably. But the author never actually says, does he? It is implied by their actions. Their relationship to each other seems less important to the author than their relationship to God. So, yes, while this IS a love story, the emphasis is on God's love rather than on their love. Does that disappoint you hopeless

RUTH – A Tapestry of Redemption

romantics? I love the book of Ruth. It is a love story but it is a love story of a different kind.

Let's talk about Boaz's role as the family redeemer. Ruth, being from Moab does not yet fully understand Israelite laws and customs. So, when Naomi points out in Chapter 2 to her that Boaz is "one of our redeemers," she would not have fully understood the significance of this. Not yet anyway. Instead, in response to Naomi, Ruth is focused on something else about Boaz. I want to skip Q2 for now and go on to Q3. Q3 asks, according to Ruth 2:21 what was it about Boaz that most impressed Ruth? His kindness, right? His concern for her.

Now, let's go back to Q2. Q2, based on Ruth 2:11, what was it about Ruth that most impressed Boaz? [It was] her treatment of her mother-in-law, right? So, while they may well have been physically attracted to each other, that is not what either of them are focused on initially according to the writer. They are focused on something else.

The word that Naomi uses, "redeemer" in the ESV actually translates as "kinsman redeemer." For us to fully understand the events that are about to take place in today's lesson, in Chapter 3, we need to unpack what a kinsman redeemer is and how important he was in that culture. Jewish family law – you can read all about this in Leviticus Chapter 25 – it gave the kinsman redeemer several possible roles. They could redeem a relative from slavery or buy back their fields. Another duty of this person, which is focused on here in the book of Ruth, was to marry a childless widow [of] a near relative, and then have a child with her. The child would then be considered the offspring of the dead husband. This allowed the dead husband's line to be carried on. That was important in that society. It also preserved his property within the family. Now, this seems strange to us because it is not something that we practice today in America, is it? But it was extremely important in Old Testament Israelite culture.

OK, so at this point Naomi, Ruth's mother-in-law, formulates a plan. She sees the big picture. She understands Israelite law. She sees Boaz as a

RUTH – A Tapestry of Redemption

solution to her family's problem. Remember, Naomi's husband and her sons (one of them had been married to Ruth), they have all died. We saw that in Chapter 1. So, she [Naomi] has no heir. Naomi has figured out a way to get Ruth a husband, to have a child, and therefore, carry on the family name. The only question is – and this is a big one at this point in the story – how can she get this kinsman redeemer, this man Boaz, to go along with her plan? How can she get him to agree to be the family's redeemer? It sounds good to come up with a plan, but now you have to figure out, "how am I going to carry this plan out?"

Well, she comes up with an idea. She lays out all the details for Ruth. Naomi tells Ruth exactly what needs to be done. Timing is important. As Naomi sees it, NOW is the time to put her plan into action.

So, let's pick it up in Ruth Ch 3, v 1...

READ Ruth 3:1-5

"With whose young women you were" – Ruth has been out working in the fields with them. Naomi assures Ruth that she cares about her and that she has her best interests at heart. So Q4, what did Naomi ask Ruth to do at the threshing floor this night? [She tells Ruth to] uncover Boaz's feet and lie down. What? Not sing him a love song? If Hollywood was writing this, that would have been what she did. She would have gone and sang him a love song, right? [Instead], she goes and uncovers his feet and lies down. Now, while this seems strange to us in modern day America, it was actually a common practice of that day and in that culture. I am going to talk more about it as we go through the chapter.

Q5, True or false? Ruth was afraid to follow Naomi's plan at the threshing floor. False. We know this from the very next verse...

READ Ruth 3:6

There is no fear, no hesitation, no argument. "What? Do what?" There is none of that.

RUTH – A Tapestry of Redemption

OK, so why would Boaz be at the threshing floor in the middle of the night? That doesn't seem normal. Why would he be there? *[One class member responded that, "he was protecting his crop."]* He has a lot of money tied up in this investment of his, this grain. [He and his workers] have been working down there "winnowing." That is where they separate the husks from the grain. After he and his workers have completed the task and have finished celebrating with a little wine and food, Boaz will be lying down there at the threshing floor in order to guard his investment. He will be alone after his workers have left and gone home. Naomi knows this from experience, having been raised in that culture, right? So, she knows this.

READ Ruth 3:7

Ruth does what Naomi told her to do. Now, let me stop here and say something about this because some people who read this might misconstrue it as being borderline immoral. It is kind of risqué. Let me remind you that both Ruth and Boaz are godly people. Naomi who devised this plan is also a God-fearing woman and she would never suggest that Ruth do something dishonorable. What Ruth is doing here was a perfectly normal and accepted practice of that day, strange as it may sound to us. So, there is nothing nefarious going on here. I just wanted to point that out.

READ Ruth 3:8

Q6 asks, what was Boaz's reaction when he awoke and found Ruth at his feet? He was startled. Remember, it is the middle of the night and it is dark and Boaz has no idea who this woman is. So, naturally he is a bit surprised when he sees her. Putting myself in his place, I would have been too!

READ Ruth 3:9a

Good question. Q7 asks, why do you suppose that Boaz did not recognize Ruth at first? Pretty obvious reason. It was dark. He is also awakening from a deep sleep [and] probably a little hungover (the wine

RUTH – A Tapestry of Redemption

still had a little effect on him). He just woke up and it is dark. There are a lot of possible reasons.

Then Ruth says this...

READ Ruth 3:9b

I want to point something out. Ruth is using the same imagery that Boaz had used with her a few days before back in Chapter 2. If you recall, in response to Ruth's kindness to Naomi, Boaz told Ruth "The LORD repay you for what you have done, and a full reward be given you by the LORD, the God of Israel, under whose wings you have come to take refuge" (Ruth 2:12). So, in that statement Boaz was pronouncing a blessing. He was wishing God's protection over Ruth. Here Ruth is basically telling Boaz, "I want YOU to be my protector, Boaz. I want you to serve as that person that God will use."

So, that takes us to Q8 which I told you was a bit tricky. I like to get you to think a bit. This is where having a good Bible commentary helps. What did Ruth request from Boaz here in v 9? The answer may surprise you. I told you it was tricky. This is from the MacArthur Study Bible; listen to what he says: "Ruth righteously appealed to Boaz, using the language of Boaz's earlier prayer, to marry her according to the custom [laid out] in Deuteronomy 25." So, that is the answer. Does that surprise you?

Here she [Ruth] is making her intentions clear. Ruth is asking Boaz to marry her, to be her husband. Yes, Ruth is proposing to Boaz. Now, this is completely different from our culture, isn't it? Guys, did your wives propose to you? Probably not. In our culture we [guys] propose to the woman. That is the way we do it. Now, I am going to explain why Boaz would not have proposed. There is an actual reason for that. Let me read the next verses and I will get to that.

READ Ruth 3:10-11

Q9, True or false? Boaz rejected Ruth's proposal, her request. That is false. We know this from v 11, "I will do for you all that you ask." So far,

RUTH – A Tapestry of Redemption

so good. Boaz is pleased with Ruth. He is open to the idea of being her kinsman redeemer.

Now, let's talk about why Boaz could not have proposed to Ruth. It says this in one of the commentaries I read: "This is an ancient Near Eastern custom. Since Boaz was older by a generation [he was closer to Naomi's age], he would not ask her. That's not what was done. She would have to make an overture to him." Very interesting.

So, Q10 asks, what was it that Boaz commended Ruth for? For not what? For not pursuing after younger men.

Boaz does NOT reject Ruth's proposal. In fact, he seems to be pleased by it. BUT there is just one small problem and at this point Boaz points it out to Ruth.

READ Ruth 3:12

"I am not the closest relative. There is actually a person who is closer than I am." Q11 asks, who did Boaz say was a nearer kinsman than himself? An unnamed guy. It never actually says in the text who that is.

So, end of story. [THE END] and the credits begin to roll and the music starts to play, right? NO!! We are only in Chapter 3. We have another chapter to go. That is not the end. Boaz tells Ruth something intended to encourage her, to give her hope.

READ Ruth 3:13

So, Q12, how does Boaz intend to solve this little problem of this nearer kinsman? Is he going to knock him off? Bribe him? File a legal injunction to prevent him from exercising his right? Is he going to go talk to his father and maybe talk some sense into him? How about this – how about we don't say anything and maybe let it slide. What does he do? None of these. You see, Boaz is a righteous person. There is a legal process that he knows must play out. So, Boaz tells Ruth that he will go to this nearer kinsman and make him aware of the situation, explain it all [to him]. Ruth is going to get a husband one way or the other. She is going to

RUTH – A Tapestry of Redemption

get a protector. It is either going to be that other guy (that is unnamed) or Boaz. If the nearer kinsman is not willing [to redeem Ruth], Boaz assures her that HE WILL. Good news, right? So, for now they can only take this “wait and see what happens” approach to the situation.

While the author never tells us this, we can safely assume that both Ruth and Boaz are secretly hoping that the nearer kinsman will say “no.”

READ Ruth 3:14

Now, remember, it is very early hours of the morning. Nelson’s Commentary says this about what we just read in v 14: “Ruth left at early dawn in order to avoid anyone who might recognize her. Boaz probably did not want anyone to misconstrue what had taken place.” So, in other words, Boaz and Ruth are being very discreet. Alright? People like to talk.

READ Ruth 3:15

Q13 asks, what present does Boaz give Ruth to take back home with her? An engagement ring? No. Barley. Wow! what a romantic guy! Boaz gives Ruth a gift of barley grain from his personal stockpile to take home to Naomi. This demonstrates Boaz’s affection for Ruth and for Naomi. He cares about them. This is actually a good faith gesture on his part.

[There was an impromptu class discussion about barley and the many uses for it. This is what I found from foodreadme.com: Barley is often used as a base for soups and stews, or as an ingredient in casseroles and risottos. It can also be used in baked goods, such as breads and muffins. Barley flakes are another form of the grain that can be used in breakfast cereals or granola bars.]

So, Ruth goes home, right?

READ Ruth 3:16-18

[Naomi] knows Boaz pretty well. Q14, what is it that Naomi asked Ruth upon her return? “How did things turn out for you? How did it go? Tell me what happened.” So, Naomi is curious to know if her plan worked.

RUTH – A Tapestry of Redemption

She wants to hear all about. Well, of course, after Ruth gets done telling her this whole story, all they can do now is wait.

Q15, True or false? Naomi is confident that Boaz will settle the nearer kinsman issue quickly. True. She says that the matter will be resolved this day, probably in a matter of hours, knowing Boaz. She knows he is the kind of man that doesn't procrastinate. He is a go-getter. He is going to get right down to business and we will see that next time in Chapter 4.

As Chapter 3 closes, there are several uncertainties that we as the readers are left with. Q16, the questions that remain for us as Chapter 3 ends are what? There are several. *[One class member said, "all of them."]*

OK, let's talk about them one by one. "Who will be the kinsman redeemer?" We don't know. It is one of two guys, right? "Will Ruth marry Boaz?" Again, we don't know. "What does the future hold for Naomi?" That is up in the air as well. What about that last question – "Does God really care what happens?"

[As a whole the class seemed unsure as to whether this particular question has been answered or not. Some thought "Yes it had" and others were not so sure.]

At this point I believe – this is me just reading the text – I believe THAT question, that last question, has already been settled in the first three chapters.

Naomi is sure of two things: Boaz is a good man [of] high moral integrity who will do the right thing. So, that is one thing. She knows Boaz. The other thing [she knows] is God. Her God is a loving God and He has and will continue to provide for her and Ruth. Now, if you read Chapter 1, this is a 180-degree pivot for Naomi. It is a complete turnaround from earlier in the book. Based on the events that have transpired so far, through three chapters that we have studied, not knowing yet what will happen in Chapter 4 because we never read ahead, do we? They don't know what is going to happen. So, let's put ourselves in their position – [Just based on the first three chapters of Ruth,] there is no question that

RUTH – A Tapestry of Redemption

GOD DOES CARE what happens. You can get that just from reading the first three chapters. We have seen that already.

So, my challenge for all of you here today is come back next time and see how it all plays out.