

Finding Rest Under His Wings

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[0 : 00] Let's read together from Ruth chapter 3. 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. So he 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? And she answered, I am Ruth, your servant.

Spread your wings over your servant, for you are a redeemer. 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.

[1 : 24] 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. And now it is true that I am a redeemer. Yet, there is a redeemer nearer than I.

Remain tonight, and in the morning, if he will redeem you, good, let him do that. But if he is not willing to redeem you, then as the Lord lives, I will redeem you. Lie down until the morning.

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.

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. 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, 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.

[2 : 24] She replied, Wait, my daughter, until you learn how the matter turns out. For the man will not rest, but settle the matter today. This is God's holy word. We've been preaching through the book of Ruth for a couple of weeks now.

And if you've been here for the last couple of weeks, even if you haven't, maybe you know the book of Ruth a little bit, you'll maybe remember that we spoke about that and how in our Bibles, the book of Ruth comes right after the book of Judges.

And that's important to the book of Ruth, because the book of Judges gives us the context in which the book of Ruth is set. And you'll maybe remember we said that this was a time of lawlessness, of recklessness, of violence, spiritual chaos reigned.

And yet into that darkness, that horrible time comes this beautiful, redemptive story that we're going to read through tonight of courage, kindness, and redemption.

But there's another fascinating detail about the structure of the Bible. And in the Hebrew Bible, the book of Ruth actually follows the book of Proverbs.

[3 : 28] So Proverbs is God's book of wisdom for life. And in it, in the book of Proverbs, we're introduced to lady wisdom, the personification of what wisdom is.

It ends with this woman, it's called an eshet hayl, which we translate as a woman of character, a woman of excellence. And the only other place in the Old Testament that we see this exact same phrase is here in Ruth.

And we're going to look at that tonight in verse 11. It's translated in our ESV as a worthy woman. So it's like Proverbs is giving us a portrait of what this ideal woman, this woman of excellence, looks like, this woman of wisdom.

And then if we read Ruth, we see this woman, this woman of wisdom personified. She comes to life. And we're going to see it. We've seen it throughout the book of Ruth so far. And we're going to see it tonight in Ruth's actions.

We're going to see Ruth as wisdom embodied, not because she's powerful, not because she's impressive by worldly standards, although she is an impressive woman, but because she entrusts herself completely to the one who can provide for her.

[4 : 37] The one who gives her her daily bread, the one who offers her protection, the one who can secure her entire future. You'll remember Ruth and Naomi, they know that they're in dire straits, that she knows that she can't save herself.

Both Ruth and her mother-in-law, Naomi, who've come back from Moab to Bethlehem, they're helpless to change the situation they're in by themselves. They need someone willing to act on their behalf.

And in Boaz, who we met last week in chapter two, they see someone who can provide, who can protect, who can offer them rest. And as we go to the threshing floor tonight to meet this interaction between Boaz and Ruth, the question that's hovering over this chapter for all of us in the room is this, are you willing to submit yourself to the one who can save you from your danger, from your poverty?

Because Ruth finds someone under whose wing she can take rest. And in the turbulence of life, in the joys and the disappointments, whose wings are we looking to rest under for tonight and for all of eternity?

So we're going to look through this book, this chapter of the book, in three parts. In the first part, we've entitled Ruth Risks It All. So we open with Naomi hatching a plan.

[6 : 07] Remember, Naomi has left Bethlehem. She's gone to Moab and she's come back. She's lost her husband. She's lost her children. And she came back to Bethlehem and she said, I'm bitter and I'm empty.

But now she's seen God's hand at work in her life. And she's seen that through Boaz, God could bring even more blessing to her and her daughter-in-law.

And she sprung into action. Verse one in Naomi says, my daughter, should I not seek rest for you? And when Naomi says, should I not seek rest for you?

She's not advising Ruth to have a lie down after a busy day of gathering up the sheaths in the field. And she's not saying, take a night off, put your feet up, watch some telly.

The Hebrew word is much bigger, much greater than that. It's about security, about settledness and about home. So back in chapter one, if you are familiar with the book of Ruth, Naomi had two daughters-in-law and she says to them both, go home.

[7 : 11] She says, go back to your own families and your own people. And then she prayed that Ruth and her sister-in-law Orpah would both find rest in the house of a husband.

So what Naomi's talking about here is marriage. She's using marriage language for offering true rest, proper rest to Ruth. Naomi knows that Ruth needs the provision, the safety, the security of a good marriage to a good man.

And, you know, we remind ourselves the desperateness of their situation. They're both widows. They're impoverished. They're incredibly vulnerable. If we were putting it into modern terms, Naomi is a woman who's getting a bit older.

She's got no income. She's got no pension. She's got no family support. There's no government benefit system for her to fall back on. And Ruth is just as vulnerable.

Except Ruth is also a foreigner. She's an outsider from a group of people who are not liked in Bethlehem. We find out in chapter four, Naomi's at the point where she's going to have to sell the family land in order to survive.

[8 : 25] So she makes a plan. And all the way through this story, since Ruth chapter one, we've seen that Naomi knows that God is in sovereign control. She knows that he is over all things.

And yet, her faith in God's sovereignty and his power doesn't mean that she sits down and waits for God to solve the problems for her.

It doesn't mean that she doesn't act. She knows that God's in control. But she also knows that this is not an excuse for passivity. Knowing that God is in control doesn't relinquish you of the duties of exercising wisdom.

That wisdom that we've seen in the book of Proverbs. In fact, it's the very opposite. It's the fact that God is in sovereign control over all things that allows us to make plans.

That allows us to work. Knowing that it's success or failure of the things that we do is not all down to us. And not a reflection on who we are. So Naomi tells Ruth that Boaz, who by now Ruth has been working with and around for a couple of months.

[9 : 33] Through the barley harvest, through the wheat harvest. Is a relative of theirs. Or we might say in Bible language, a kinsman. A member of Naomi's husband, Elimelech's family.

And under customs and laws of Israel, a close family member could step in to preserve a family line. And protect vulnerable relatives when they get into dire straits.

So Naomi says to Ruth, this is the plan. She says, go take a bath. Get your nice perfume on. And sneak down to the threshing floor.

And the threshing floor is outside the city gates. In a kind of open space. Where they would take the harvested grain. And they would kind of toss it up in the air.

And the wind would pass through. And it would blow away the lighter chaff. Leaving the grain on the ground. So the men would be doing this outside the city. So she's saying to her, get all dressed up and get out of the city. Go down and see where the men are.

[10 : 42] Where we know that Boaz is going to be tonight. Now we have to remember, we're in the time of the judges. Lawlessness and violence reigns. A woman on her own in the fields is incredibly vulnerable.

And a Moabite woman alone is even more vulnerable. There's a shadow that's hanging over Moabite women in the Old Testament.

And we've seen that so far in Ruth. Whenever Ruth is named, she's called Ruth the Moabite.

Qualifying who she is. But in chapter 3, that label begins to disappear.

But the women of Moab. So Moab itself came about from the incestuous relationship from Abraham's nephew Lot and his own daughters.

And then, as if that isn't bad enough, in Numbers 25, we read about how the men of Israel got entangled with Canaanite sex rituals. With Moabite women.

[11 : 44] Women who are called in the Bible daughters of Moab. So these are not women who are looked unfavorably in Bethlehem at this time. And also, what kind of women get dressed up, they put on perfume.

They go heading out in the darkness trying to meet men. From the outside, this looks potentially scandalous. Ruth's putting everything on the line here.

Her safety, her dignity, her reputation, her entire future. And she goes. And she can go because she trusts the Lord.

She's seen the Lord's hand at work in all that's happened since she came back to Bethlehem with Naomi. And because she knows that faith often requires costly vulnerability.

In order to gain redemption, Ruth was going to have to surrender her own control. And that raises the question. It has to for us tonight.

[12 : 47] What are we willing to risk ourselves for our obedience to God? When we're at the school gates on Tuesday morning, because it's a holiday tomorrow. When somebody says, what did you do this weekend?

The safe answer, the easy answer is to say, not much. The risky answer is to say, we were at church. Because you know that people are going to make a judgment about you based on those words.

Or when you meet a brother or sister in Christ who you know has patterns of sin in their life. The easy, the safe thing to do is keep quiet. The risky thing to do, the difficult thing to do is to say, hey, can we meet and have a coffee?

Something I need to talk to you about. We don't live in the time of the judges. Or even in the kinds of places that some of our Christian brothers and sisters do all over the world.

Where life-threatening situations arise. Comparatively, our risks are pretty small. Social embarrassment is sometimes the most that we pay at risk in order to follow Jesus.

[13 : 54] Being overlooked for a promotion at work, maybe. Maybe losing a friend. And these are real and difficult things for us to do. But in Ruth, we see a woman who knows that God is our only hope.

And so there's nothing that she won't risk in order to follow him. Okay, part two. A wing and a prayer. Ruth does what Naomi tells her. She sneaks down to the threshing floor and she watches. And when Boaz has finished his dinner and he's had a nightcap and he's feeling good, Ruth waits for him to fall asleep. And she creeps over and she takes the blanket off his feet while he's sleeping. And again, there's ambiguity here. Because it feels again that this is potential to be scandalous. The word for uncover is used in other parts of the Bible for sleeping together, for having relations together.

And then the word feet is sometimes a euphemism for another part of the body. There's a suggestion from the language here that something less than innocent is going to take place.

[15:03] Boaz wakes up. Maybe because he's got cold feet. Or maybe because he senses that somebody's beside him. And because it's dark, he says, who is it? And Ruth says, it's Ruth, your servant.

And then she uses this particular phrase. She says, spread your wings over your servant, for you are a redeemer. And that word wings in Hebrew, *kanath*, that's the same word that Boaz himself used when he prayed for Ruth in chapter 2 when they were in the field.

He said to her, I've heard what you've done for your mother-in-law coming back from Moab to Bethlehem with her. And he says, may you find shelter under the wings of God to whom you've entrusted yourself.

And the idea of being under God's wings is also used in Ezekiel. It's used in other places too. But in Ezekiel, God says to his people Israel, he says, Later I passed by, and when I looked at you and saw that you were old enough for love, I spread the corner of my garment over you.

And that same word corner is the word wings. I spread my wings over you. This is covenantal language that God's using. He's binding himself to his people.

[16:21] So what is Ruth saying to Boaz? He's effectively saying, you prayed for me to be covered by God's wings. Okay then, you do it.

You be the answer to that prayer that you prayed. Commit yourself to me. Be the wings of provision and protection that you prayed that I would receive from God.

Ruth knows that Boaz is a man of means. He's a God-fearing man. And she says he's also a redeemer. And that word redeemer is important. In Leviticus chapter 25, it speaks about a kinsman redeemer.

It's if an Israelite became so destitute, kind of like the situation that Ruth and Naomi are finding themselves in. They had to sell their land. They had to sell themselves into slavery.

Somebody who was closely related to them has an obligation to buy back the land or the person to redeem them. This is a redeemer.

[17:25] Somebody who can help preserve the family inheritance. And Ruth is saying to Boaz, you're the one through whom God is going to protect me, give me rest, and redeem Naomi's land.

As unorthodox as it is, this is a marriage proposal. And this time, Boaz definitely doesn't have cold feet. There's no hesitation in his desire to redeem Ruth.

He says, may you be blessed by the Lord, my daughter. You've made this last kindness greater than the first in that you've not gone after the young men, whether rich or poor.

And that word kindness is that recurring Hebrew word *hesed* that we've spoken about a few times. It keeps coming up again and again in Ruth. This committed, loyal, steadfast love.

The first, he said, when he says this kindness is, this *hesed*, this love, this kindness is greater than the first. The first is when she came all the way from Moab, left her people, her family, to be with her mother-in-law.

[18:34] And he's saying, now you're willing to marry an old man like me, rather than try and find somebody your own age. And you're willing to do this because you know that I'm able to provide for both you and for your mother-in-law.

And then he says, the whole town knows that you're an *eshet chayel*, a woman of excellence. When we first met Boaz in Ruth chapter 2, verse 1, we read that he was an *eshkabor chayel*, a mighty man of strength.

So on paper, this old guy from Bethlehem and this young woman from Moab seem like an odd match. But this woman of excellence and this mighty man of strength are, in fact, a perfect example of biblical love between two people.

What we see with Ruth and Boaz is not Hollywood love. In Hollywood love, so often we see that it's the consequence of the unstoppable consequence of lust, bringing people together no matter what the cost.

But biblical love is different. And what we see in the book of Ruth is biblical love, this hesed love, committed, loyal, faithful.

[19 : 59] A man and a woman who commit themselves to each other sacrificially. Because both Ruth and Boaz enter into this marriage agreement so that they can protect and provide for other people.

Because Boaz protects and provides for Ruth and Ruth protects and provides for Naomi. They can redeem the land, they can redeem people, restore things to the way that they were supposed to be. I do think that Boaz is delighted to be marrying Ruth. But it's also going to cost him. He's going to pay to redeem Naomi's family land. And sacrificial love is what the Bible demands from husbands. In Ephesians 5, it says, husbands, love your wives as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her. How did Christ love the church? He died for her.

He went to the cross to redeem her. Despite the cost, he loved her with an everlasting love. And this is why, this is what Christian wives are entitled to expect from Christian husbands.

[21 : 11] Husbands, imperfectly, of course, but a picture of sacrificing yourself for the one that you love. Husbands and husbands to be, Christ requires you to give yourself, give up yourself, your own ambitions, your desires, so that you can provide, so that you can protect your wife.

Even when it feels like it costs you. Just when we thought that Boaz and Ruth are going to walk off happily into the sunset together, there's another twist in the tale.

Because Boaz is such a good, upstanding citizen, a good man, he couldn't possibly fulfill his desire, his own desire to marry Ruth at the expense of following protocol.

He's going to do it, but only if it's the right thing in the right way. And he says, there's a redeemer who's closer to you than I am. It's only fair that he gets the opportunity to redeem Ruth first.

He says to Ruth, stay here until the morning, and then I'll take care of business. We think that this woman of excellence and this mighty man of strength are made for each other.

[22 : 25] But is this going to be God's plan for Ruth and for Boaz? Is this how God is going to continue filling up Naomi? Naomi. Thirdly and lastly, the patience of a saint.

Before Ruth leaves Boaz, he says, before Ruth leaves, Boaz says, don't let anyone know that the woman was here. He's keen to protect her reputation.

And he also says, hold out your clothes. And he pours six measures of barley into it. I'm not sure how much that is. It doesn't tell us what the measure is.

Different commentators say different things. But I think it's interesting that Boaz just can't let Ruth leave without blessing her in this material way.

To lavish her with grace. So that he can also take care of her mother-in-law, Naomi. So Ruth goes home with the grain, and Naomi wants a debrief.

[23 : 26] And she says, how did you fare, my daughter? And Ruth says, he said, yes. He said he'll marry me. He said he'll redeem us. He's going to save us from our poverty. He's going to protect us from danger.

He says he's going to accept us into his family or into somebody else's. Except there's one closer. He has to speak to him first.

But look at all this barley he's given me. And when Naomi sees the barley, she says to Ruth, he said he'll do these things, and he'll keep his promise.

Just you wait and see. It's interesting, I think, that he gives her six measures of barley. It says six measures of barley twice, which is oddly precise and repetitive.

It's as if it's emphasizing the point. We know that in the Bible, the number seven is the number of fullness of completion. So it's like this gift is a sign that there's more goodness to come.

[24 : 26] I think we can see the barley as two things. First, it's a sign of Boaz's generosity. His provision for Ruth and for Naomi. But secondly, it acts almost like a deposit.

Similar to how a dowry might be paid. A down payment of a fuller provision that's going to come. Boaz is saying to Ruth, I promise I'll redeem you, and to show you how serious I am, take this barley as a seal of the promises I've made.

And because of Boaz's character, and because of this seal of the promise, Naomi is certain that it's going to be fulfilled.

And she says, he'll not rest until he's done this. Naomi, who in chapter one was bitter and empty, she now has the faith to reassure her daughter-in-law that the promises that have been made will come true.

This passage, which began with an unorthodox plan for finding rest for Ruth, ends with the sure and certain hope that rest is coming.

[25 : 35] And all of this speaks to us as Christians today. Because we have a kinsman redeemer.

A true and better redeemer. Our elder brother, Jesus, who followed in the eyes of the world a foolish plan. God himself to enter into creation.

Just like Ruth said to Naomi at the beginning of our chapter, Jesus said, I'll do everything you say.

Jesus said to his father, Thy will be done.

He followed the plan perfectly. He came, he lived, he died. He rose again to redeem rebels, giving eternal rest to everyone who will put their faith in him.

And we now live in what theologians call the already and the not yet. The kingdom has already begun. When Jesus died on the cross, the kingdom was inaugurated.

[26 : 37] Christ already won. Redemption has already been secured for God's people. But the fullness of that rest hasn't yet arrived. We're like Ruth, waiting to hear back from Boaz in some ways.

Every saint, everyone whose hope is in Jesus, is secure in Jesus. And we'll enter God's perfect forever kingdom.

Yet while the new kingdom's been inaugurated, and we wait its consummation. We wait similar to what Boaz did for Ruth. Christ's given us assurances that he'll come again.

He's given us a down payment, as it were. A provision and a down payment that strengthens our faith so that we can continue waiting with confidence despite the trials of life.

When Jesus ascended into heaven, he sent his Holy Spirit. His Holy Spirit that dwells in us, shaping us, changing us, preparing us for our eternal state. And Jesus instituted the sacraments as well, the seals of the promise of his return.

[27 : 43] The sacrament of the Lord's Supper, which we're going to celebrate tonight, is a visible sign and seal of God's covenant promises. Promises that we can see and taste and touch.

Every bite of that barley bread that Naomi and Ruth could have baked with the six measures of grain that Boaz gave to them, it must have been reassuring in their mouths.

They knew that he was going to keep his word. In the Lord's Supper, God stoops to us in our weakness and gives us the promises of the gospel in forms that we can see, touch, taste, even smell.

If you're a believer in the Lord Jesus tonight, you're coming to the table in just a little while. Know that whether, when you take the bread and the wine, this is a foretaste of the ultimate table.

Whether you feel full tonight, whether you feel empty like Naomi did, whether you feel like your faith is hanging by a thread, know that this meal is a sign and a seal that the promises that Jesus made, that he's going to come back and take all his people to himself, are true.

[28 : 57] A taste of the feast that's coming and we'll share with him. A glimpse of the eternal rest under the shelter of his wings.

And if you're not a believer tonight, this meal is a sign of the promises that are an offer to you too. In Matthew 23, Jesus looked over Jerusalem and he said, how often have I longed to gather you like a hen gathers her chicks under her wings.

And he says the same thing to you tonight. Come, take shelter under my redeeming wings and be blessed and find rest.

Let's pray. Lord God, our Father in heaven, we thank you for sending Jesus, Jesus, our only redeemer.

Lord, we thank you for his life, his redeeming sacrifice. We thank you for the promise that he will come again and take his own people to himself. And Lord, we ask that you would help us even tonight, those of us who are struggling, those of us who feel full and positive, help us to take shelter under your wings.

[30 : 14] Help us hold fast the promises of the eternal rest that will arrive when he comes. And we pray in Jesus' name. Amen. Amen.