

A Worthy Man

Ruth 3

Pray

A. Introduction

I think the default setting for many of us is to work things out in our own strength, to take matters into our own hands, to potentially run ahead of God in our impatience because we perceive God to be not working at our pace. Whether it's making important decisions, matters regarding finance, relationships, jobs, ministry at church, family – many areas in our lives. We can struggle to really trust God in these things.

Here in Ruth 3 we see the difference between someone who runs ahead of God, on the one hand; and someone who trusts and obeys God, who walks in step with his Spirit – on the other hand.

B. Context

The book of Ruth begins with Naomi and her Moabite daughter-in-law, Ruth. They are returning to Naomi's home of Bethlehem in Judah after having lived in Moab, a Gentile land, for some years. Naomi returns home destitute – she has lost everything: her husband, her sons and her wealth. While her daughter-in-law could have stayed in her homeland she decides instead to follow her to Bethlehem. As widows, with no one to provide for them, and no children of their own to continue their bloodline, they are suddenly plunged into a life of poverty and hopelessness.

According to the Law of Moses (Leviticus 19:9-10, Deuteronomy 24:19), those who farmed the land had to leave some crops on their fields for the poor to reap harvest for themselves. Shows God's heart for the poor. Back in Bethlehem, this is precisely what Ruth begins to do.

One day as she is reaping in the fields, she catches the eye of what the Scripture calls a "worthy man" (2:1) - a man named Boaz. Boaz, an older man, shows her favour, adopts her like a daughter (probably old enough to be her father), letting her reap from his field and inviting her to eat and drink with him.

When Naomi hears that Ruth has found favour from Boaz, she tells her that he is actually a close relative of her dead husband, Elimelech. This means that he is a redeemer.

What is a redeemer? Term from the Law of Moses, Leviticus 25. If someone fell on hard times – whether it be the loss their land, falling into poverty, becoming a widow, or was sold into slavery – a close family member would be expected to help them out. They would be called a redeemer – as they would buy that person out of poverty and if need be provide the widow with an heir in order to continue the family line.

So when Naomi hears that Ruth has met a potential redeemer and that he's shown her favour, her mind begins kicking into overdrive as she realises that this could be her way out of her life of poverty.

C. Naomi scheming – vv.1-5

Read vv.1-5

Naomi begins to hatch a plan. She realises that Boaz is her ticket out of poverty. She can also see that there is already some love interest developing – Ruth has clearly caught Boaz's eye, as he's adopted her, as he calls her his daughter earlier.

Yet Naomi can't help but take matters into her own hands. She wants to force the issue and fast-track this relationship. So she directly intervenes. Verse 3 – tells Ruth to wash, anoint herself (put perfume on), dress up nicely and go down to the threshing floor at night where Boaz will be. Wait until Boaz has eaten his nice food and drunk his wine and goes to sleep. Then go and uncover his feet and lie down with him. Then **“he will tell you what to do...”** (v.4). Ruth agrees.

Is this what we think it is? Yes. Some believe that this was some ancient Hebrew custom of a marriage proposal. No, let's not over spiritualise things here. Naomi is shamelessly trying to get Ruth to seduce Boaz so that he will sleep with her and then be forced to marry her.

Have a bath, put on perfume, wear nice clothes, wait till evening, wait till he's merry with food and wine and in bed and then pretty young girl lies with him and we wait to see what

happens?! Is this God's way of doing things? No! Yet, as we shall see, God used the circumstances nevertheless for his glory.

What's Naomi's issue here? She doesn't fully trust God. Even despite all that's happened – how God has begun to provide for them by being able to glean in Boaz's fields, how Boaz has shown favour to Ruth and adopted her, she still feels she needs to take matters into her own hands. She still wants to manipulate the situation to get a quick-fix result that she wants.

What about us? Do we recognise any of this in our own lives? I know I struggle with this. Impatient. We run ahead of God when God doesn't do things fast enough for us, we take matters into our own hands. Sometimes this can even lead us to do things that are contrary to God's Word, to sin – if it means we achieve our end goal.

This reveals that deep down we don't really trust in God's goodness and his faithfulness. We need a greater vision of God – that he is indeed sovereign, all-powerful and able to do far more than we can ever think or imagine! (Eph 3:20). We can trust him!

D. Boaz – a Worthy Man

Read vv.6-18

Ruth obeys her mother-in-law and dresses up and goes down to the threshing floor where Boaz would be. Boaz eats and drinks, **“his heart was merry”** (v.7), lies down by the heap of grain and goes to sleep. Ruth comes to him softly and uncovers his feet (Hebrew word – can also mean legs, 1 Sam 17:6) and lies down next to him.

Spread your wings over your servant – for you are a redeemer

Midnight – Boaz wakes up and finds a pretty young girl at his feet! It's dark so asks who she is. In verse 9, Ruth replies asking him to spread his “wings” over her that he would be her redeemer.

What's going on here? “Spread wings” – double meaning. Firstly – asking Boaz to spread out his garment over her – take her under his covers, as she's been sleeping at his feet.

Secondly - She's quoting the same language that Boaz spoke to her when he showed her favour before, while she was gleaning in his fields. In chapter 2:12, he said to her,

“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!”

Being covered by God's wings is imagery that's used especially in the Psalms that communicates safety and protection under the hand of God. So when Ruth asks Boaz that he spread his wings over her, she's asking for his protection and that he would keep her safe – and to literally cover her with his blanket.

She then adds to this – **“for you are a redeemer.”** We've already seen earlier that the role of a redeemer in the Bible was to buy a poor relative out of poverty and if needs be, provide them with an heir so that they can continue their bloodline. Ruth had no children, she's in poverty – she knows, especially since Naomi has hatched her plan – that Boaz is the perfect man to redeem her. Basically by asking Boaz to spread his wings over her, for he is a redeemer, ***she's asking him to marry her.***

A Worthy Woman

Boaz then responds to this potentially awkward situation with Ruth with great grace. He's definitely startled to find her at his feet, yet blesses her and he is flattered that she has approached him and not a younger man.

He calls her a “worthy woman” (v.11). This is very significant. Boaz uses the same Hebrew word that the narrator uses to describe him in chapter 2:1 – “worthy man” *worthy* = cha'il = honourable, excellent, person of standing, integrity, of real substance. He can see that she's an honourable, worthy woman – observed her character in the fields – she's honourable, despite this awkward situation that Naomi has pressured her into. Boaz sees past that, sees Ruth's heart.

In fact – interesting that in the Hebrew Bible – order of the books is different to ours. Hebrew Bible, book of Ruth directly follows the book of Proverbs. What's the last chapter of Proverbs about? Chapter 31 – Proverbs 31 woman – a description of what godly, honourable woman looks like. In verse 10 of ch. 31 it uses the same Hebrew word that Boaz calls Ruth – “cha'il” – to describe the model, godly woman. It says,

“An excellent (worthy, *cha’il*) wife who can find? She is more precious than jewels.”

The book of Ruth directly follows this, in essence communicating that Ruth is an example of that excellent, worthy woman. Boaz, a worthy man, recognises that Ruth is this godly, excellent, worthy, honourable woman.

Then in verse 12 Boaz he says to Ruth that he is indeed a redeemer – he is interested in marrying her and redeeming her. Yet he says that there is another redeemer closer in relation to her that has the first right to redeem her. But he says that if that man doesn’t, he promises to redeem her the next day.

She stays with him until morning, but leaves before anyone can recognise her. Before she leaves, he gives her six measures of barley to take with her to Naomi – saying that she must not come back to her empty-handed.

Let’s take a step back and look at Boaz. In sharp contrast to Naomi, who has been taking matters into her own hands here – and who in many ways has been acting in an unworthy way, now we see Boaz – a godly man, an honourable man, a worthy man, who has a deep seated trust in God. He understands that God is able to bring about all his purposes in his own time.

We see him to be a “worthy man” (as he’s described in chapter 2:1). How do we see this?

- ***Boaz resists temptation.*** How many men are going to be able to resist a pretty young girl crawling into bed with them in the middle of the night? He could have done what he wanted with her and probably no one would have found out.

Yet he does not touch her. He is an honourable man, man of integrity. His heart is set on honouring God, not pleasing his own sinful desires.

We know the state of our hearts when we find ourselves in the heat of temptation or danger. How we react in those times – either by glorifying God by fleeing sin, or giving into our craving and running towards sin – reveals the true state of our hearts. Here we see how godly Boaz truly is!

John Calvin – one of my heroes of the faith: “For no one ever hates sin unless he has previously been seized with a love of righteousness.”

- **Boaz is gracious.** When he finds Ruth beside him, he doesn't rebuke her or demean her or condemn her, "what on earth are you doing here you loose, easy woman!" He's not self-righteous. Instead he is very gracious towards her. He blesses her, he calls her a "worthy woman", he agrees in principle to redeem her.
- **Boaz is wise.** Wise in handling Ruth's request for him to be her redeemer. Says that there's another guy first in line, he must have first choice, but if he refuses, he will redeem her.

He's also wise in handling Naomi. Vv. 16-17 - 6 bags of barley are a message to Naomi – I understand why you did this (sent Ruth to seduce me), I don't approve (I didn't sleep with her), but I'm showing you grace by giving you this gift. Learn to trust for God's provision.

- **Boaz is a redeemer.** He says that he "**will do for you all that you ask**" (v.11) – in essence agreeing to be her redeemer and marry her. This means that Ruth and Naomi will be rescued from their life in poverty and landlessness and Ruth will be married to him, providing her with the protection, safety and security she so desperately needed, and giving her the chance to have children – to continue the blood line of Elimelech. We see in the next chapter that this indeed happens – they have a son, Obed who will be the grandfather of King David.
- **Boaz trusts in God's providence.** Boaz trusts in God's will. Clear and vivid proof of this is that he doesn't take matters into his own hands – he doesn't have sex with Ruth. He knows God's will, and desires to obey him. Therefore he doesn't rush forward in his flesh, he trusts that God is working his plan out in this and does things God's way.

Many of us spend ages trying to "figure out God's will for our lives". How do we know that we are doing God's will? Not some mystical, super-spiritual thing. We know that we are in God's will when we obey his revealed will for us in the Scriptures. Boaz does this – worthy man. Naomi on the other hand takes matters into her own hands – actions are unworthy. We are always in God's will when we are obedient to his Word.

E. The Man who is Truly Worthy

Can see that Boaz is indeed a worthy man. Yet we know that Boaz, as worthy and honourable as he was, was still an imperfect sinner like you and me. The glimpses of worthiness that we can see in him surely point us to the Man who is truly worthy – our Saviour and Messiah, Jesus Christ.

How so?

- ***As Boaz resisted temptation - Jesus faced every temptation known to man***, yet he did not sin. Hebrews 4:15 says, **“For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin.”**

Jesus understands every weakness of ours because he was tempted in every way we are, but he did not sin! Boaz did not sin in the face of temptation, yet he was still a sinful man. Jesus is the greater Boaz who resisted every sin!

- ***Jesus came full of grace and truth*** (John 1:17). As Boaz was gracious to Ruth, Jesus was grace personified, giving us sinners exactly what we don't deserve – forgiveness from our sins, love from the Father, eternal life, gift of the Spirit, promise of resurrection.
- ***Jesus is the wisdom of God.*** 1 Corinthians 1:24, **“Christ is the power of God and the wisdom of God.”** As Boaz dealt wisely with both Ruth and Naomi, so is Christ God's perfect wisdom.
- ***Jesus is the true Redeemer.*** Ephesians 1:7 says, **“In him (Christ) we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace.”**

As Boaz redeemed Ruth from a life of poverty and misery into a life of hope & abundance, so Christ redeems us from God's wrath, death, slavery to sin into abundant life – forgiveness, grace and mercy.

In fact the Jesus, our true redeemer is a direct descendant from the redeemer Boaz, and Ruth – as he is in the line of David (Mt 1:5-6).

- ***Jesus obeyed God's will.*** Luke 22:42, Jesus prays to his Father before the crucifixion, **“not my will but yours be done...”** Boaz obeyed God's will in his conduct with Ruth, yet he was still a fallible man. Jesus fully obeyed God's will – his law in every respect while he was on earth and therefore is the only perfect and Righteous One.

F. Conclusion

Here in Ruth 3 we've seen the difference between Naomi, who runs ahead of God & acts unworthily on the one hand; and Boaz, who trusts and obeys God, walks in step with his Spirit – on the other hand. Boaz is revealed to us as the “worthy man”.

We may not want to admit it, but we're more like Naomi than we realise. We're prone to do things that are unworthy rather than worthy.

Because of this, we desperately need Someone who is Worthy!

Ultimately Jesus is the man who is truly worthy. Because he fully obeyed the law and followed God's will to the cross, died in our place as the only Righteous One, he counts the fruit of his obedience – his righteousness - to us if we believe in him. His worthiness covers our unworthiness.

Trust in Jesus and what he has done for us – in *his* good works! Our unworthiness and bent to disobey God separate us from him – and even our obedience, our good works can't restore us to him! It's only by believing in Jesus, in his perfect life which has makes us right – *makes us worthy* - before God.

Amen.