

DHW
BIBLE STUDY CLASS
LESSON 3
RUTH 3

INTRODUCTION

Ruth chapter three is the climactic chapter of the book for it explains all that had happened in the previous two chapters—the uncompromising commitment of Ruth, Naomi’s return to Bethlehem, Ruth “accidental” gleaning in Boaz’s field. There were no coincidences in the lives of Naomi, Ruth and Boaz and the circumstances in which they found themselves. We are all familiar with Romans 8:28: *And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose.* The people, the places, and the phenomena that happened in Ruth evidence the providential working of the LORD God for the good of His people (don’t stop here, continue), who love Him and who are called according to His purpose or His will.¹ When God’s people love Him and co-operate with His plans, He intervenes and draws them to Himself.

¹ Many people who quote this verse to comfort themselves miss out the latter part which is as important as the first part for it establishes the basis of God’s working for good. It is therefore important to quote the verse fully and apply it appropriately to our circumstances in order to avoid self-deception.

The events in Ruth 3 need background information and careful explanations. The customs and cultural practices described in this chapter are quite different from those that people hold and practise today, particularly, the proposal of marriage—Naomi’s plan which put Ruth at great risk and pushed her to be “such a forward young lady”! Naomi, Ruth, and Boaz took risks in carrying out what they desired to do. These risks put them in sensitive and perilous situations which would destroy their credibility and reputation. Although they were motivated by love for one another, that would not ensure protection from their vulnerability. However, they trusted the LORD God, knowing that what they did was in accordance with His will and purpose.

The following is an outline of the chapter:

- (1) Naomi plans the marriage of Ruth and Boaz (3:1-5),
- (2) Ruth proposes to Boaz (3:6-10),
- (3) Boaz accepts Ruth’s proposal (3:11-15)
- (4) Naomi evaluates Ruth’s report of the encounter (3:16-18)

Note that the chapter begins with Naomi’s dialogue with Ruth, and ends with her talking to Ruth just like in chapter 2. The book of Ruth is not all about an alien young woman who left her people, land, and religion to be among the people of God, but it teaches that those who want to become a member of the Body of Jesus Christ must take the same route as Ruth when she resolved to follow Naomi to the time when she proposed to Boaz.

STUDY THE WORD

Naomi Plans the Marriage of Ruth and Boaz

About three months had passed and nothing much developed during that period. It was now the end of harvest and the next work would be to winnow the barley. Naomi felt it was time to end Ruth's period of mourning. She called Ruth and told her that she would find "rest" for her (v. 1). Naomi remembered what she had said to Orpah and Ruth in Moab, where she tried to encourage her two daughters-in-law to return to their own natural families. She said to them that the LORD (Yahweh) might deal kindly with them and that they might find "rest" having the security and love of a home and a husband (1:9). Naomi felt that it was the right time now to seek this "rest" for Ruth. The "rest" Naomi was speaking about was the same "rest" she had spoken earlier to Ruth—a home of her own having a husband who would spend his life with her to love, care, and protect her.

Naomi then explained her plan to Ruth. The suitor she had in mind was Boaz. Although he was much older than she, he was a clan relative. Naomi naturally would have explained to her the Levirate law stipulated in God's Word (v.9b).² She considered

² Deuteronomy 25:5-10 If brethren dwell together, and one of them die, and have no child, the wife of the dead shall not marry without unto a stranger: her husband's brother shall go in unto her, and take her to him to wife, and perform the duty of an husband's brother unto her. {her husband's...: or, her next kinsman} 6 And it shall be, *that* the firstborn which she beareth shall succeed in the name of his brother

that now was the best time, the end of harvest, when Boaz would be winnowing in the threshing floor of his barn. He would be in a happy mood. It looks like Naomi had done her homework. She instructed Ruth to wash, perfume herself, and put on her best clothes. This act would symbolize the end of her period of mourning for her late husband, Mahlon.³ Naomi continued saying to Ruth that she should go to the threshing floor privately and not let her presence be known to Boaz until he had finished eating and drinking, and retired for the night. Then she should go and *uncover his feet* and lie down at his feet. The phrase, *uncover his feet*, was customarily a symbolic act requesting marriage. It placed Ruth more of a bride-in-waiting.⁴ Naomi added that

which is dead, that his name be not put out of Israel. 7 And if the man like not to take his brother's wife, then let his brother's wife go up to the gate unto the elders, and say, My husband's brother refuseth to raise up unto his brother a name in Israel, he will not perform the duty of my husband's brother. {brother's: or, next kinsman's} 8 Then the elders of his city shall call him, and speak unto him: and *if* he stand *to it*, and say, I like not to take her; 9 Then shall his brother's wife come unto him in the presence of the elders, and loose his shoe from off his foot, and spit in his face, and shall answer and say, So shall it be done unto that man that will not build up his brother's house. 10 And his name shall be called in Israel, The house of him that hath his shoe loosed.

³ 2 Samuel 12:20 Then David arose from the earth, and washed, and anointed *himself*, and changed his apparel, and came into the house of the LORD, and worshipped: then he came to his own house; and when he required, they set bread before him, and he did eat. David performed this in the context of his child by Bathsheba.

⁴ Some have suggested that it was a euphemism for sexual intercourse. This is far from the truth considering the integrity of Boaz

Boaz would tell her what she should do (v.4).

Naomi's plan might succeed for it seemed legal and logical according to God's law, and that Boaz had been showing exceptional kindness to Ruth. But the plan was risky and dangerous for Ruth. First, it was to be carried out in secrecy. So far, Ruth's relationship and contacts with Boaz were in full view of everyone. Second, things could go wrong. Boaz could charge her for being an adultress because technically she was still the wife of her late husband, Mahlon. Or Boaz could view her request for marriage as her aspiration to be socially acceptable and respectable. Another risk was that Boaz could take advantage of the opportunity for sexual pleasure that would bring humiliation, and be maligned and charged for prostitution. The plan therefore was unduly dangerous. Ruth faced a critical choice, and she bravely and trustingly agreed to follow Naomi's plan despite all the risks. One wonders the real reason for her decision to go with the plan. Ruth knew Naomi whom she wholeheartedly trusted. Ruth believed that Naomi would do only what was morally right, and one who knew the custom and culture of her people. Ruth also trusted Naomi's love for her and that she would not put undue risk on her who could be sexually seduced. She trusted that Naomi had made a good assessment of Boaz's character. Finally, she trusted Naomi's good

and Ruth, who would not have agreed to the plan.

intention; it was out of love and a genuine concern for her future welfare. She was convinced that Naomi was not motivated by manipulating her for her (Naomi's) own selfish interest.

Ruth Proposes to Boaz

After hearing Naomi's plan to approach Boaz with a marriage proposal that could secure and settle her with a home and family, Ruth said she would carry out everything that Naomi had instructed her to do. So, she went to the threshing floor. She made sure that she was not noticed by Boaz while she was there. She might have stationed herself in a place where she could observe Boaz and yet remained unobtrusive. When Boaz had finished his work, he had his dinner and drink (not drunk). He was satisfied and happy, and turned in for the night *at the end of the heap of corn* (at the end of a pile of barley, v.7). Note the inclusion of this last minor detail which is suggestive that what Ruth was about to do could take place without interruption. Soon Boaz fell asleep. Ruth came quietly to *uncover his feet and lay at his feet*. In the middle of the night, Boaz *was afraid* (a bad dream?) and turned himself, and *behold a woman lay at his feet*. Boaz sudden reaction was one of shock, and asked (literally): "Who you?" And Ruth answered: *I am Ruth thine handmaid: spread therefore thy skirt* (Hebrew, *kanap*) *over thine handmaid: for thou art a near kinsman* (v. 9).

Now, Ruth described herself as Boaz's *handmaid*. It was a different word from the one she had earlier used

in her first encounter with Boaz (2:13). In the earlier usage, the word she used was *sipha* (translated, “handmaid”), and it means a female slave who is viewed as a possession and a labourer who stands ready to take orders. But the word Ruth used here is *ama* (also translated “handmaid”), but it means a female servant with the emphasis on her feminine qualities pertaining to her weakness and her need for protection with marriage in mind. It therefore aptly connects with her next statement requesting Boaz to *spread therefore thy skirt* (Hebrew *kanap*, can mean wing, skirt, cloak) *over thine handmaid* (v. 9). This Hebrew word *kanap* is the same word which Boaz used when he had earlier said about Ruth that she had come to the LORD God *under whose wings (kanap)* she had come to trust (2:12). Ruth’s choice of the word, *wing (kanap)* was purposeful. Boaz had earlier used that word about her, and so she was saying to Boaz that she now came to be protected under his wings. She immediately concluded by stating the important theological basis of her request that Boaz was a near kinsman (v. 9). Ruth made her desire for marriage perfectly clear. Her action was a symbolic act requesting for marriage! .

Boaz Accepts Ruth’s Proposal

Boaz understood Ruth’s intension perfectly. But he first responded immediately by blessing her: *Blessed be thou of the LORD, my daughter* (v.10). Boaz had called her “my daughter” (2:8) and twice here

(vv. 10, 11), It strongly implies that Boaz had considered himself much older than Ruth; probably about twice her age (if she was twenty-five, he could be around fifty or fifty plus). Boaz then continued by praising her that she had shown more kindness (Hebrew, *hesed*) *in the latter end than at the beginning* (v.10). The Hebrew word *hesed* has been used twice in the previous two chapters to designate the covenant-love and faithfulness of the LORD (1:8; 2:20). In this regard Boaz had noted Ruth’s first act of *hesed*—compassionate love, kindness, and loyalty to Naomi. But now her latest *hesed* to offer herself to Boaz as his wife was even greater. Boaz said to Ruth that she could marry one of the young men, whether rich or poor, either for money or love, instead of him. Boaz praised Ruth that her request for marriage to him was not for his money or love but for her willingness to marry him solely on the basis that he was a kinsman-redeemer (Hebrew, *go’el*).⁵ Boaz saw Ruth as showing unconditional *hesed* to him which was greater than the first *hesed*. But there was an obstacle because there was another kinsman who was a nearer relative. He would have the first priority.

⁵ The Hebrew word *go’el* refers to a kinsman-redeemer based on Leviticus 25:25-49. The law instructs the redemption of family property, houses, and relatives in difficulty or need. The underlying sense is that of “buy back.” This arrangement is described as “levirate marriage” (from Latin term *levir*, “brother-in-law.” New International Dictionary of Old Testament Theology & Exegesis, s.v. *ga’al*).

Ruth possibly could be anxious at this moment, but Boaz quickly calmed her, saying: *Fear not, I will do to thee all that thou request*, and added that the whole city folks knew that she was morally upright and a strong woman (v.11). Boaz made an unequivocal promise to accede to her request to marry her. Ruth now knew what Boaz thought of her. Boaz acknowledged that while he was her kinsman-redeemer, he knew another relative who was closer than he. In other words he did not have the first choice as a kinsman-redeemer. Until this obstacle was removed he might not accept Ruth's request. But Boaz promised that he would get to the bottom of the whole matter the next day. If the unnamed kinsman-redeemer refused to do his part, Boaz pledged that he would do the part of a kinsman-redeemer, *as the LORD liveth*, thus binding himself by an oath to take Ruth to be his wife (v.13).

In the meantime, he told Ruth to lie down until the morning. One wonders whether both of them could sleep that night. It is doubtful they could for they would be talking to each other through the night. Ruth could be thinking of Boaz's willingness to accept her request to marry, and the happy feeling of being cared for by him for the rest of her life. Boaz would be brainstorming how he would meet the other kinsman the next morning and providentially hoped that the hurdle could be overcome. Early in the morning while it was still dark, Ruth got up preparing to go home. Boaz cautioned her not to let any one

know that a woman had gone to the threshing floor that night (v.14). Boaz then asked Ruth for her shawl and bagged six measures of barley for her to take back home. This was a purposeful act on two counts. It was an indication to Naomi of his intentions. Naomi had openly testified that the LORD had brought her back "empty." But the LORD would now fill her emptiness through Boaz. The other purpose served as an explanation to curious neighbours why Ruth was out at such an hour. Boaz was truly a considerate and caring man.

Naomi Evaluates Ruth's Report of the Encounter

Ruth reached home in the city. As she stepped into the house early in the morning, Naomi asked: *Who art thou, my daughter?* It looks like Naomi also did not have a good sleep that night. She too must be anxious and thinking what the outcome might be having sent Ruth off on such a risky mission. She also did not expect Ruth to return that early in the morning, hence the need to ask who came into the house. Ruth came in and she told her mother-in-law *all* that Boaz had done for her.

Ruth showed Naomi her shawl and said that Boaz gave those six measures of barley so that she would not go back empty to her mother-in-law. Naomi responded by telling Ruth to sit tight and wait patiently for the outcome of the matter at hand. She added that Boaz would not "rest" (a different word from v.1) which means "at peace" until he had finished settling

the matter of the responsibility of a kinsman-redeemer. Naomi understood that the meaning of Boaz's gift of barley as his acceptance of Ruth's request.

PRACTICAL VALUE

Many things can be learned in this passage. The knowledge of the customs and culture of the Jewish people in those days. Naomi, Ruth and Boaz are admirable people whom we can emulate. And once again the chapter demonstrates the balance of the interplay between the providence of God and the responsibility of man

Naomi considered Boaz as a suitable husband for Ruth as he was a near kinsman despite their age difference. The levirate marriage according to God's law provided the basis to claim the right. Naomi was not passive. Instead she acted on the basis of God's law. She explained her plan to Ruth, who readily agreed despite the risks involved. Ruth went to meet Boaz with her proposal of marriage. Although the levirate law was clearly understood, Boaz was under no obligation to fulfil it. Yet he accepted Ruth's proposal willingly and without any reservation. It happened despite all the dangerous pitfalls and came out tops up, because God was in control. They were people who loved the LORD. They wanted to do what was right according to His Word. They loved and cared for one another. Their integrity was flawless. God was in control and protected them from all possible dangers and risks that could have humiliated and maligned them.

Indeed, all things work for good to them who love God and do His will. Learn this wonderful truth!

It pays to develop and have a character like Naomi, Ruth, and Boaz. We have seen their inherent love and consideration for others—Ruth for Naomi, Boaz for Ruth—Naomi for Ruth. However the moral integrity of Boaz and Ruth were spotless. They were in a situation in which there was a strong sexual temptation which they could easily yield and would have destroyed their mutual trust for one another and brought shame to the name of the LORD God and their family. Yet they did not succumb to the temptation but they emerged from it thumbs up. Such moral integrity and accountability are rare today among both the young and the elderly. Such character traits have their strength, as someone aptly states: *Personal integrity commands at least as much respect and admiration under cover of darkness as in broad daylight*

Another valuable lesson is that love is not feeling but action. We can't miss seeing the love shown by Naomi, Ruth and Boaz for one another. They expressed their love by actions not by feelings. Naomi planned and did her homework studying the Word of God, and Boaz's character and habits of his life. Having found him to be the right husband for Ruth, she moved into action to get him for Ruth. Ruth loved Naomi and she did what her mother-in-law told her to do, because the outcome of the plan which she had to carry it out would mean a

more comfortable and secured life for Naomi. She loved Naomi. Now Ruth loved Boaz too, and would marry him despite the wide difference in age. People might gossip and whisper among themselves, but she would not care. She loved him, and he was happy and that settled it. Her love was exemplified by action. Boaz on the other hand loved her. He was especially considerate for her reputation that she might be misunderstood and misinterpreted because of her visit to him at night. He loved her and took steps to protect Ruth. He loved Ruth and he would not rest until he removed the obstacle that stood between her and him. He promised to take care of the matter. We will learn of the outcome in the next chapter. Love is just expressing one's feeling even with the strongest of intensity. It is very cheap, and costs the one who professes almost nothing, just his breath. Love is action and doing things that show in practical ways a care and concern for the other. God showed it and will always show it. Boaz, Ruth, and Naomi showed it. *It is no chore for me to love the whole world, My only problem is my neighbour next door* (Anonymous).
AMEN