

Ruth

Lesson Three – Ruth's Tender Plea

"Take Your Maidservant" (3:1-18)

- I. For the past two weeks we've been looking at one of the most beautiful love stories in the Old Testament.
 - A. It's the story of a young woman by the name of Ruth who leaves her homeland in Moab after the death of her husband to live with her widowed Jewish mother-in-law, Naomi, in the land of Israel.
 1. We saw how God blessed Ruth for her devotion to Naomi by providentially providing for both women, and by leading Ruth to eventually become the wife of a wealthy landowner named of Boaz.
 - B. The story began when a man by the name of Elimelech and his wife Naomi left the land of Israel during the time of famine, and journeyed with their two sons to neighboring Moab – a land and a people known for worshipping idols.
 1. After Elimelech died, his two sons married Moabite women, and soon after, they also died.
 2. Since Naomi was now all alone with her two widowed daughter's-in-law, she decided to return to Israel following the end of the famine.
 - a. Although her two daughter's-in-law returned with her, Naomi urged the young women to return to the own homeland to find husbands again from among their own people.

- b. But Ruth pleaded with Naomi to be permitted to remain with her.
 - c. **Ruth 1:16-17** – *"Entreat me not to leave you, or to turn back from following after you; for wherever you go, I will go; and wherever you lodge, I will lodge; your people shall be my people, and your God, my God. 17 Where you die, I will die, and there will I be buried. The LORD do so to me, and more also, if anything but death parts you and me."*
 - d. And so, the women arrived back in Israel in Naomi's hometown of Bethlehem at the beginning of barley harvest.
- C. In the second chapter of Ruth, we see God providentially blessing Ruth for her great love and devotion toward her mother-in-law.
- 1. Since Ruth was not the kind of person to ask for charity as a young widow, she asks Naomi's permission to go into the fields and glean the barley sheaves.
 - a. The Old Testament Law of Moses required all landowners to allow widows, the fatherless and strangers of the land to glean the fields – meaning they were permitted to gather up whatever remained in the fields after the reapers had gone through harvesting the crop.
 - b. In fact, the Law of Moses prohibited landowners from harvesting the corners of their fields, or from going back through their fields a second time during the same harvest, or from picking up any grain or produce that was accidentally dropped by the reapers. **(Lev 19:9-10; Deut 24:19-22)**
 - c. All this belonged to the widows, fatherless and strangers to glean.

2. Probably by the providence of God, Ruth happened to end up gleaning in the field of a man by the name of Boaz who, unknown to Ruth, was related to Naomi.
 - a. When he learned that the woman who was gleaning his fields was the young Moabite woman who was caring for Naomi, Boaz took a special interest in her.
 - b. He not only invited her to join with him and his reapers for a noontime meal, but also urged Ruth to stay in his fields to glean along with his own women reapers, and even asked his servants to intentionally drop sheaves of barley for Ruth to gather up and keep for herself and Naomi.
 - c. In one day's time, Ruth gathered up an ephah of barley, which is a unit of weight equal approximately 22 liters or 9 US gallons – just about as much as a person could carry.
3. When Ruth returned home and told Naomi about her good fortune, Naomi asked the name of the landowner who had been so kind and generous toward Ruth.
 - a. It was then that Ruth learned she had been gleaning in the fields of Boaz, a close relative of Naomi – according to Jewish tradition, Boaz was the nephew of Naomi's deceased husband, Elimelech.
 - b. Of course, Naomi saw this as God providentially blessing these two widows – blessing Naomi for her undying faith and devotion to her God, and blessing Ruth for her great love and care for her mother-in-law.
4. The second chapter ends by telling us that Ruth remained gleaning in the fields of Boaz through both the barley harvest and the wheat harvest.

- II. In these first two chapters of the book of Ruth, we saw Ruth's noble choice, and her lowly service.
 - A. Ruth's noble choice was to leave her own family and her homeland to remain with and care for her widowed mother-in-law, even though Ruth was a young widow herself.
 - 1. She would make Naomi's people her people, and Naomi's God her God.
 - 2. And she would never leave Naomi until they were parted by death.
 - B. Ruth's lowly service was seen in her working hard to provide for herself and Naomi.
 - 1. She was apparently not the kind of person who would ask for charity, and believed if she had the ability to work to earn a living, she would do so – no matter how hard nor how demeaning the work may be.
 - C. As we move into chapter three, Ruth will follow the advice of Naomi and will make a "**tender plea**," asking Boaz to fulfill an obligation that was due the family of Elimelech. Thus chapter three begins with...]

BODY:

- I. Chapter three begins with Naomi, motivated by her own motherly instincts, expressing her concern for Ruth's future.
 - A. By this time in the story of Ruth and Naomi, it's clear that these two women love each other more as a mother and daughter than as a mother-in-law and daughter-in-law.

1. And like any mother, Naomi wants to see Ruth find happiness, companionship and security from having a husband again rather than see this young Moabite woman remain a widow for the rest of her life.
2. And since Naomi is sure Boaz has already taken an interest in Ruth, Naomi decides to play match-maker.
 - a. **Ruth 3:1** – Naomi asks Ruth, *"My daughter, shall I not seek security for you, that it may be well with you?"*
 - b. **Ruth 3:1 (NIV)** – *"My daughter, should I not try to find a home for you, where you will be well provided for? "*
3. Naomi then begins to explain her plan.
 - a. **Ruth 3:2-4** – *"Now Boaz, whose young women you were with [remember, Ruth was urged by Boaz to glean behind his own women reapers], is he not our relative? In fact, he is winnowing barley tonight at the threshing floor. 3 Therefore wash yourself and anoint yourself, put on your best garment and go down to the threshing floor; but do not make yourself known to the man until he has finished eating and drinking. 4 Then it shall be, when he lies down, that you shall notice the place where he lies; and you shall go in, uncover his feet, and lie down; and he will tell you what you should do."*

- B. To help us understand what Naomi is suggesting, there are several things we need to know about Jewish law and Jewish culture.
1. First, Naomi is NOT asking Ruth to do anything that is immoral, NOR is she suggesting – as some critics of the Bible have claimed – that Ruth should entice or seduce Boaz.
 - a. We have already seen the integrity of Boaz in wanting to do all he could to protect Ruth's reputation by having her glean in the fields with his own young women rather than be off somewhere gleaning among the young men.
 - b. We have also seen the godly character and moral integrity of both Naomi and Ruth.
 - c. So to assume, as some have done, that Naomi is suggesting Ruth do something immoral is simply out of the question.
 - d. In a moment we'll see what she actually advised Ruth to do.
 2. Second, the Old Testament Law of Moses made provisions for the care of a young widow who had no children.
 - a. **Deut 25:5-10** – *"If brothers dwell together, and one of them dies and has no son, the widow of the dead man shall not be married to a stranger outside the family; her husband's brother shall go in to her, take her as his wife, and perform the duty of a husband's brother to her. 6 And it shall be that*

the firstborn son which she bears will succeed to the name of his dead brother, that his name may not be blotted out of Israel. 7 But if the man does not want to take his brother's wife, then let his brother's wife go up to the gate to the elders, and say, 'My husband's brother refuses to raise up a name to his brother in Israel; he will not perform the duty of my husband's brother.' 8 Then the elders of his city shall call him and speak to him. But if he stands firm and says, 'I do not want to take her,' 9 then his brother's wife shall come to him in the presence of the elders, remove his sandal from his foot, spit in his face, and answer and say, 'So shall it be done to the man who will not build up his brother's house.' 10 And his name shall be called in Israel, 'The house of him who had his sandal removed.'

- b. To put it simply, if a woman's husband dies, and they have had no children between them, the brother (or next of kin – according to the way some commentators see it), is to honor the dead man by marrying his widow and father children to keep the dead man's lineage alive.
- c. A man who refused to do so would be considered dishonorable, and would be disrespected among his peers.

3. Third, it was common in Jewish culture in those days, and still is in many cultures even today, for parents to arrange the marriages of their children.
 - a. Naomi obviously sees Ruth more as a daughter than a daughter-in-law, and wants to ensure this young woman's long-term happiness and well-being.
 - b. Therefore, Naomi is going to do all she can to help bring about a marriage between Ruth and Boaz – a man of great generosity and moral integrity.
- C. Therefore, Naomi gave Ruth some very specific instructions to follow.
 1. Ruth was told to wash, anoint herself, and put on her best garment.
 2. She is then to wait until Boaz has eaten and fallen asleep; and then to uncover Boaz' feet, lie down, and await his response.
 3. And so Ruth agreed to do just as Naomi had instructed her.
 - a. **Ruth 3:5-6** – *And she said to her, "All that you say to me I will do." 6 So she went down to the threshing floor and did according to all that her mother-in-law instructed her.*

II. What was Naomi's plan?

- A. When his servants were thrashing the grain, Boaz was there as well.

1. It was common practice for Masters to supervise the winnowing process (when the grain is separated from the outer shell or chaff).
2. When the work was done, Boaz showed his appreciation and generosity by treating his servants to a feast.
 - a. Even though he was a man of wealth, he never considered himself beneath enjoying a meal with those who worked for him.
 - b. And, just as he had joined his reapers in the noontime meal in chapter 2 when he first met Ruth, he also joins his servants on this occasion.
3. **Ruth 3:7** – *And after Boaz had eaten and drunk, and his heart was cheerful, he went to lie down at the end of the heap of grain...;*
 - a. According to Jewish tradition, Boaz did not over-indulge himself in either food OR drink.
 - b. Furthermore, according to Jewish tradition, the phrase “*and his heart was cheerful*” meant Boaz would have ended the day in a traditional evening prayer thanking God for having blessed him by providing such a rich harvest – especially following the time of famine mentioned in chapter 1.

- 4 We also notice that *“he went to lie down at the end of the heap of grain.”* (v. 7a)
 - a. Since threshing floors were typically in the fields where they grain had been harvested, landowners would typically have servants set up a tent where the landowner could spend the evenings and be ready to rise early to continue overseeing the winnowing process.
 - b. However, in the case of Boaz, it may have been that he chose to sleep along with his servants out in the open field – probably on a mat of some kind at the end of the heap of grain to give him some privacy.
5. While Boaz is sleeping, Ruth does as she was instructed by Naomi, and quietly comes to Boaz and uncovers his feet and lies down.
 - a. Jamison, Fausset, and Brown, in their commentary of Ruth, suggest Ruth would have lain crosswise at the feet of Boaz, fully clothed, which was a customary manner for servants to sleep when sleeping in the chamber or tent of their master.
 - b. Even here, Ruth shows her humility in taking the position and posture of a servant.

- c. Since it was common for working men like Boaz to sleep in the same clothes they wore during the day, there would have been no hint of indecency involved in Ruth pulling aside the covering over the feet of Boaz so that she could lie down at his feet.
- B. At midnight Boaz was suddenly awakened, finding a woman laying at his feet.
1. **Ruth 3:9-15** – *And he said, "Who are you?" So she answered, "I am Ruth, your maidservant. Take your maidservant under your wing, for you are a close relative." 10 Then he said, "Blessed are you of the LORD, my daughter! For you have shown more kindness at the end than at the beginning, in that you did not go after young men, whether poor or rich. 11 And now, my daughter, do not fear. I will do for you all that you request, for all the people of my town know that you are a virtuous woman. 12 Now it is true that I am a close relative; however, there is a relative closer than I. 13 Stay this night, and in the morning it shall be that if he will perform the duty of a close relative for you — good; let him do it. But if he does not want to perform the duty for you, then I will perform the duty for you, as the LORD lives! Lie down until morning." 14 So she lay at his feet until morning, and she arose*

before one could recognize another. Then he said, "Do not let it be known that the woman came to the threshing floor." 15 Also he said, "Bring the shawl that is on you and hold it." And when she held it, he measured six ephahs of barley, and laid it on her. Then she went into the city.

- C. There are several important things we need to understand here.
1. First, under Jewish law, during this period of Old Testament history, a woman had no legal rights of her own, and therefore would have needed the protection and legal guardianship of a man.
 - a. Therefore, Ruth came to Boaz asking for him to become her legal guardian and protector.
 2. Second, the legal guardianship and protection a man like Boaz would be obligated to provide would be to ensure that the requirements of the Law of Moses be met concerning the care of a widow in finding a husband.
 - a. This means that, according to what we have already read from **Deut 25:5-10**, the man who is the next closest relation to Ruth's deceased husband would be required to take her to be his wife.

- b. And now, Ruth demonstrates her great kindness and generosity toward Boaz in asking him to be her husband.
 - (1). He was honored by her kindness and generosity toward him because rather than seek out a younger man (whether rich or poor), she chose Boaz instead – a man who was obviously older than her.
 - c. So, it was not youth that she sought, nor was it wealth, but rather she sought out a man of great generosity, virtue and moral integrity – regardless of his age.
2. Boaz also praises Ruth for her great virtue – for her own moral integrity.
- a. She has already gained a reputation as a virtuous woman throughout the entire city of Bethlehem.
3. Therefore, because of her great kindness and unquestioned virtue, Boaz assures Ruth that he will do as she asks.
- a. He tells Ruth there is another man who is a closer relation to her deceased husband than he is, but promises her that if this relative refuses to fulfill his duty toward her, Boaz will personally honor her request.

- E. Having assured Ruth that she will be taken care of, Boaz asks her to remain under his protection during the rest of the evening rather than return to the city in the darkness.
1. To return at that hour would have been dangerous at best for this young Moabite woman.
 2. Therefore, he encouraged her to remain the night and sleep at his feet.
 3. However, early the next morning before it became light enough for her to be recognized, she arises to return to the city.
 - a. Ruth had stayed the night under the protection of Boaz rather than risk danger by returning to the city between midnight and dawn.
 - b. But to also protect her reputation as well as his own, Boaz apparently instructs his servants to tell no one Ruth had spend the night with him.
 - c. No doubt, there were probably some in Bethlehem who would hear of this and begin spreading vicious lies and rumors to undermine and even destroy the reputation of Boaz and Ruth – more than likely suggesting something immoral had taken place.

4. However, before she goes, Boaz gives Ruth six measures of barley, placing it in the shawl she carried, and sending her on her way during the pre-dawn hours back to Bethlehem.
 - a. These six measures of barley would have been 6/10ths of an ephah (not six ephahs, as the NKJV seems to suggest).
 - b. Sending Ruth back to Bethlehem empty-handed would have been understood by Naomi as Boaz having rejected Ruth's request.
 - c. But sending Ruth back with grain would have been seen by Naomi as Boaz showing favor to Ruth.
- F. Once Ruth returns to the city, she tells Naomi all that Boaz had done for her.
 1. **Ruth 3:17-18** – ...*she said, "These six ephahs of barley he gave me; for he said to me, 'Do not go empty-handed to your mother-in-law.'" 18 Then she said, "Sit still, my daughter, until you know how the matter will turn out; for the man will not rest until he has concluded the matter this day."*

III. So, what can we learn from all this? There are several wonderful lessons we can draw from these events, but let's look at just a few.

- A. The first lesson we learn here is the value of parents becoming involved in helping their children date and eventually marry the right person.
1. Naomi became directly involved in helping Ruth find a suitable husband because Ruth had become more like a daughter to Naomi than a daughter-in-law.
 2. As we said earlier, in that culture, as in many cultures today, parents are involved in selecting their children's future mate.
 - a. Now before you young people turn your noses up at that idea think about this.
 - b. If someday your mom and dad try to discourage you from marrying someone, or from even dating them, there's a good reason.
 - c. The old saying, "Love is blind" is VERY true. People in love usually can't see past the fog of romance. But your mom and dad sure can.
 - d. They may be seeing something in that person you don't see. And since they care more about your long-term well-being than your short-term happiness, they may try to discourage you from getting into what THEY see as an unhealthy or unwise relationship.

- B. The second lesson we learn is the importance of looking at the internal qualities of our future husband or wife rather than simply focusing on their outward or external qualities.
1. From all we see in this brief book, it seems to suggest that Ruth was probably a very beautiful young woman. This is suggested by several things:
 - a. First, in chapter 2, Boaz wanted to protect Ruth by requesting that she glean in his field behind his own young women rather than glean in areas of his field near the male servants.
 - (1). Some take this to mean she was probably very attractive and might have become the target of some immoral young man.
 - b. But perhaps the best evidence for her apparent beauty is the fact that Boaz felt she could have had any young man she wished – rich or poor – but rather chose him.
 2. But here's the point – even though she may have been very beautiful her greatest desire was not to find a youthful man to be her husband (even if he were rich). She seems to have wanted to find a husband of character – a man of generosity, honor, respect, and moral integrity.
 - a. She saw those qualities in Boaz, and so did Naomi.

- b. Therefore, the fact that Boaz was well-to-do has no bearing on her decision – she could have found a younger man who was also well-to-do.
3. All too often, when people think of marriage, they look for all the **external** qualities in their potential mate – rather than look deep inside at their **internal** character.
- a. It's been said that garbage wrapped in beautiful gift wrapping with colorful bows is still garbage on the inside.
 - b. Ruth looked beyond the external and fell in love with the character and internal godly qualities of this man named Boaz.
 - c. The external changes over time, but the internal character of godliness and genuine moral integrity need never grow old or fade away with time.
- C. Finally, we see in Ruth all the qualities of what the book of Proverbs calls “a virtuous wife.”
1. **Prov 31:10-19** – Who can find a virtuous wife? For her worth is far above rubies. 11 The heart of her husband safely trusts her; so he will have no lack of gain. 12 She does him good and not evil all the days of her life. 13 She seeks wool and flax, and willingly works with her hands. 14 She is like the merchant ships, she

*brings her food from afar. 15 She also rises while it is yet night, and provides food for her household, and a portion for her maidservants. 16 She considers a field and buys it; from her profits she plants a vineyard. 17 She girds herself with strength, and strengthens her arms. 18 She perceives that her merchandise is good, and her lamp does not go out by night. 19 She stretches out her hands to the distaff, and her hand holds the spindle. 20 She extends her hand to the poor, Yes, she reaches out her hands to the needy. 21 She is not afraid of snow for her household, for all her household is clothed with scarlet. 22 She makes tapestry for herself; her clothing is fine linen and purple. 23 Her husband is known in the gates, when he sits among the elders of the land. 24 She makes linen garments and sells them, and supplies sashes for the merchants. 25 Strength and honor are her clothing; she shall rejoice in time to come. 26 She opens her mouth with wisdom, and on her tongue is the law of kindness. 27 She watches over the ways of her household, and does not eat the bread of idleness. **28** Her children rise up and call her blessed; her husband also, and he praises her: 29 "Many daughters have done well, but you excel them all." 30 Charm is deceitful and beauty is passing, but a woman who fears the LORD, she shall be praised.*

31 Give her of the fruit of her hands, and let her own works praise her in the gates.

2. If there were ever words that described the inner beauty, and godly character of Ruth it would be these words attributed to Solomon.
3. Young men, this is the kind of woman you want to look for someday to become your own wife – a woman who will do you good and not evil all the days of her life.
4. And young ladies, this is the kind of woman who finds favor with God and is not only blessed in this life, but blessed with eternal life in the world to come.

CONCLUSION:

- I. Look at the inner character of these two outstanding Biblical figures.
 - A. What do we see:
 1. In Ruth we see deep love, devotion, kindness, gentleness, moral purity, integrity, and a willingness to work with her own hands.
 2. In Boaz we see generosity, kindness, dignity, respect, moral purity and integrity, and a man who never let his wealth interfere with his trust and devotion to God.

- B. As we look at these qualities in the lives of these two remarkable people, we also see these same qualities in the life of Jesus – and more.
1. And these same qualities need to be seen in your life and mine if we're truly going to be Christ-like – if we're truly a Christian in every sense of the word.
 2. What about your life? Is it characterized by all these wonderful qualities?
 3. If not, you can begin today to add these to your life a little every day – by first truly giving your life to Jesus Christ and truly making Him the Lord and the King of your life.
 4. And if you once possessed these wonderful qualities, but along the way started serving your own interests rather than serve the Lord, you can change all that beginning now by repenting of those sins and allow the Lord to begin helping you add those qualities back into your life a little every day.