

Reading: Ruth 3:1-18

Theme: A great concern and a bold plan.

We have been looking at this little book of Ruth and have seen many things to encourage us. One of which is that God, the great God of heaven and of all creation has an interest in our little lives. He is concerned for us, for our day by day circumstances of life - our ups and downs, our fears and joys, our most seemingly insignificant circumstances and actions.

Naomi and Ruth were widows and Ruth goes gleaning - scavenging for food in the harvest fields, but God arranged things so she would be there at the same time that Boaz would be, he would notice her and provide for her. Yet God's plans were more than this - it would lead to marriage, a son, descendants and out of the descendants the Saviour would be born. We, as onlookers, see this, but they did not see it - certainly not as clearly as we do. Naomi and Ruth remained as widows for many weeks - some 6 to 8 weeks they lived together under the same roof as Ruth goes out gleaning in Boaz's fields throughout the barley and wheat harvest. See 3 things from v1-4:

1. Naomi's Sensible Concern. (v1)

Naomi as a widow herself knew Ruth had little security as a widow, especially a widow in a foreign land. Naomi had no intention or hope of marrying but she had wished, prayed for it for her daughters-in-law when she left for Israel (1:9). Ruth stayed with Naomi and had come to Bethlehem with her, but now again Naomi is concerned for Ruth and wants to see her at "*rest*" (AV), "*to find a home*" for her (NIV), "*to see her settled in life*" (Moffat). Naomi is not content that this precarious situation of being a widow should continue for Ruth. She looks for something better, more secure for her. She is concerned Ruth is well provided for, has security that it may be well for her. Naomi had no intention of

getting married again, but does not impose that on Ruth and is concerned to see Ruth is provided for.

In our days we have the view of people meeting, falling in love and marrying (*although society may omit the last!*) But in OT and NT times it was the responsibility of the parents, especially the father, to make the arrangements and say who their children married. Courtship etc and all those joys/heartaches were unknown. You were presented to your future partner, and sometime later you were married! Naomi, even though she was not Ruth's mother, still had this concern for her daughter-in-law and wants to see her at rest in marriage and things go well for her.

The married state can be a glorious state, and it is, or should be, as the Hebrew says here, a state of rest. Wandering affections should be fixed and the heart be at rest on their loved one. In a sense these things are easy for me to say as a happily married man, and while marriage is the norm in the Bible, it does not put down or consider odd those who are single through circumstances, choice or bereavement. We who are blessed with marriages should go out of our way to care for those who are in a state of singleness by including and encouraging them as much as we can and not exclude them in any way.

Naomi's concern was for Ruth. As parents, Christian parents, our desire should be for our children to be at rest and things be well with them - both in their lives and their marriages (*if God would have the married*). Ultimately their rest and their well-being have to be seen as that which is for their soul's eternal benefit, so although we would desire many things rightly for our children, grandchildren etc, we will have a priority of spiritual well-being and therefore salvation above all things.

2. Naomi's Shocking Plan. (v2-4)

As we read these verses we may be startled and shocked by Naomi's plan. Is this the best and wisest counsel that she came up with? It seems it was! These verses seem to be verses in which a dangerous and ill-advised plan is put forward - to send a foreign attractive young widow down to lie by a man in a barn after a celebration party - Bethlehem newspapers could have had a great time with that story! How can we advise young women to go and find a husband from this passage? We have to realise that this is a **descriptive**, not necessarily a **prescriptive** text of scripture - in that it tells us merely what happened **not that we must do it!** Writers and commentators can dismiss or ignore these verses very cleverly, but I'm not that clever and I feel we must look at them and not avoid or gloss over them.

Naomi is a godly woman and Ruth is a godly young woman and reflects the same godliness she has seen in Naomi. We have to realise that Boaz is a man of integrity and a godly man also. We need to understand that Naomi is not going to risk offending Boaz with an unseemly approach from Ruth; nor is she going to risk compromising Ruth. Naomi formulates the plan on the basis of what she knew of Boaz, Ruth and the practice of the day. Yet even as we read these things, this is not the counsel we would expect an older woman to give to an attractive young widow possibly in her 20s. Is Naomi really functioning as the woman who was restored by God's grace? She basically tells her daughter-in-law to dress herself up, look as glamorous and attractive as she can, to go down to the threshing floor in the middle of the night, lay beside a man to whom she is not married and then wait to see what happens!! In all the relationship talks I've heard or given on camps or to youth groups, I've never heard and certainly not given such advice!

Had Naomi's brain gone into overdrive and blown a fuse? It is so easy for us to judge this episode with our inherited Christian background and standard in society, from our modern viewpoint

and forget that they did not have our society's background, standards and viewpoint. They were people of their generation and would have carried out things in their own accepted ways and practices. Naïvely, Naomi saw no wrong in it; Ruth obeyed as she was instructed - presumably because Naomi instructed her in this unacceptable way; Boaz - godly Boaz, does not condemn her or her approach in this way, but seeks to fulfil his duty that this approach and request laid on him.

Realise for Ruth, with her Moabite background, this would not have been unusual. Moabite society would make our day blush with their sexual activities and practices. Yet to God's people, sexual immorality outside of one's own marriage was forbidden. God's standards haven't changed for our days and sex outside one's own marriage (*between one man and one woman*) is still classed as sin by God. I would not encourage any of us to advise or use such a Naomi-based method to get a marriage partner for ourselves or our children in these days! It would be unwise, almost immoral and most certainly morally dangerous to be the instigator or recipient of such an action.

Let's see of Naomi's plan in a bit more detail. She knew Boaz would be winnowing barley on the threshing floor that night. Grain has to be separated from the husk/chaff. The way it was done and is done in many countries, is to throw the grain up in a strong breeze, the heavier grain drops and the chaff - the light outer husk, is blown away. Boaz was doing that at the threshing floor which was a place for winnowing and was a raised area to catch the breeze. Probably he began the winnowing in late afternoon and went on until late evening which was the best time - for the evening breeze comes in from the direction of the sea and was constant for a good few hours.

Ruth is told to wash and anoint herself and put on, not her best clothes, as a number of translations have it, for they were poor widows and had little, but probably the clothes she wouldn't wear out in the fields i.e. not her working clothes and so even this poor widow could dress up. The Hebrew word here indicates a large mantle or cloak which would have served to cover her and keep her warm and Ruth is told to put it on. Ruth had no need to dress up to impress Boaz; he had already been impressed by her. Some have suggested that Ruth's preparation is like that of a bride - perhaps to give him a hint of her mission! The idea in these actions was to show herself as a clean, decent, sensible young woman and do not carry the idea of trying to allure or tempt Boaz.

Ruth was told to go down to the threshing floor and to wait until Boaz finishes his work, has refreshed himself and then lays down to sleep there. He was taking his turn at the work and also guarding the grain. He would not be able to get it home, or to his barns that late at night, so he is probably sleeping at the threshing floor to help guard the precious grain. Ruth was to note where he laid down to sleep and then, later we assume, when he was asleep, she was to go, and uncover his feet and lay down at his feet. I don't know about you, but when away, my feet often hang out of the bed and end up without a quilt or sheet on them and then they get cold. If it's not happened to you, I can tell you that you will wake up as your feet become cold! This was part of the purpose here with Ruth. Also, as she lay at his feet it was the position of the lowly one – someone who wanted to present a petition to him and could do so in secret and with confidentiality.

Naomi assures her that when she presents her petition to Boaz, he would tell her what to do regarding the laws, customs and procedures concerning her request – for he was far better qualified to know what to do than either Naomi or most certainly Ruth. For us who are Christians - have we laid down at the feet of the Lord

Jesus, to make our requests known? We don't dictate to Him, or instruct Him. Surely, we are to go with our requests, but we are to humbly listen to what He would have us do, because He knows what is best for us, even if that is not in accordance with our desires/plans as He may have other plans for us. We are to always listen to Him, His answers to our requests and always obey Him. But moving on, let's see:

3. Naomi's Scriptural Reasons.

Naomi didn't just pick a male, any male for her Ruth to hunt down to marry! Was this her old spiritual rashness raising its head again? Or has she wisely, carefully and no doubt prayerfully considered this matter and viewed the providences and connected them? If so, had she connected them wisely and correctly? She had seen that Boaz had shown great favour to Ruth; but more importantly she knows he is a near kinsman, a go'el – a kinsman redeemer. Her plan is not a rash one of cunning and scheming, but is based on Scriptural reasons. There were reasons why Boaz should take Ruth as his wife and they were OT biblical reasons and duties, set out by the Lord God to the people of Israel and as Ruth goes to Boaz, she is asking him to fulfil these God given reasons and duties. Boaz recognises this and points her to a problem of a nearer kinsman redeemer (v12).

Let's briefly consider the two main reasons why Naomi probably encouraged Ruth to approach Boaz in this way:

Firstly: the fact that Boaz was a kinsman redeemer, a go'el. We have mentioned this term before. The kinsman redeemer had a number of functions in an extended family. They, if they were wealthy enough, they had the obligation to buy back a piece of land if a member of the family had reason to sell it because of poverty - they had to redeem the property. Also, they had to redeem their relations if they had been sold as slaves to pay off debts etc. A kinsman Redeemer had the duty, when appointed by

a family, to act as the avenger of blood, if a member of the family had been murdered. They were also to collect what was due to a person on their behalf, or pay a debt. Also:

Secondly: is the biblical, OT provision of the levirate marriage - system of remarrying within a family. We read of this in Deuteronomy 25:5-10 and in Genesis 38 we have an example of it - not a brother, but the father-in-law, and here in Ruth it would appear that the next of kin were eligible also.

These reasons are to be borne in mind and we are not to consider them as wild actions of a desperate mother-in-law to help her daughter-in-law bag a wealthy landowner. I would still urge caution in adopting the Naomi practice and approach! Yet her reasons were sound as she had these Scriptural reasons in mind when Ruth is sent to approach Boaz. Perhaps with patience Boaz would have come to this decision and approached Ruth himself; but Naomi shows her impatience, even rashness, in using this very daring approach as a tangible reminder, a visual aid to Boaz of his duty and so Ruth is sent, possibly adorned as a bride in this way. Ruth is saying to Boaz as a near kinsman, a kinsman redeemer "*I want you to act as levir*", to fulfil the law. It was a big thing to ask. To be a kinsman redeemer was a huge responsibility, one that the nearer kinsman was initially happy to do, but to marry Ruth was too much for him, too large a responsibility and a step too far.

In the NT, the Lord Jesus is presented as our kinsman Redeemer. One who will perform all the functions of a go'el for us. We are sold into slavery - not only our persons, but all we have - our lives, minds, motives, desires and longings. The Lord Jesus as our Redeemer paid the price to free us from the slavery of sin, to pay all our debts we have run up in that state to God and to secure all that is rightfully ours. He did so on the cross of Calvary. Christians are free - no bondage to sin, or to the devil. No debts owing to

God's holiness and justice. The price is paid totally and there's no debt on our behalf.

One day death will strike believers also. Christians die, but our Redeemer will avenge our death and what it has done to His family. One day, the last enemy death, will be destroyed by the avenger of His people the Lord Jesus. 1 Corinthians 15:25-26; 56-58 *“For he must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet. The last enemy to be destroyed is death...The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law. But thanks be to God! He gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ. Therefore, my dear brothers, stand firm. Let nothing move you. Always give yourselves fully to the work of the Lord, because you know that your labour in the Lord is not in vain.”*

The Bible also presents to us that to be a Christian, is to be in a personal relationship with the Lord Jesus Christ. It is pictured as marriage - with Christ as the heavenly Bridegroom and believers as the Bride. This is offered to those who are no way qualified or related, who have no love for Christ at the present, yet He truly offers to and invites all to come and be partakers of this amazing relationship

As we close, are there any reasons why you should not claim the Lord Jesus as your own Saviour, to have Him as your Redeemer, to enter into this personal relationship with Him? He invites, He urges, commands you to come. Why will you not go to Him – surely, He is great enough, wonderful enough, powerful enough, has done enough and offers enough. Many of us here have such a one as our Redeemer, our Beloved One. If that is our state, then go on to live for Him, to tell others of Him and so bring praise to Him.