



**Ruth 3**  
**A Hollywood Love Story: Ruth**  
**A Grand Plan**

**Rev. Brian North**  
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Today we're in Ruth 3, continuing our four-week journey through the book of Ruth. Last week saw Ruth going out and working in a field owned by Boaz. She is invited by him to continue working in his field until the end of the harvest season, which she does. Today we're in chapter 3, and it's a couple months later at the end of the harvest season. She's continued to live with Naomi, her mother-in-law during this time, while getting to know Boaz some as well.

It's another long passage, so let's dive right in. So, Ruth and Naomi know that: **On this night there will be the big celebration around the winnowing of the grain – which was the process they undertook to separate the usable part of the grain from the rest that would be discarded.** This was a big deal; it was a community event as everyone celebrated the culmination of the harvest. Boaz is going to be in a happy mood because of the atmosphere, the provision of grain, and because of the food and beverage (see Ruth 3:3, 7) and so forth, and so it's a good time for Ruth to get all gussied up and approach him.

Now, this plan is very bold. **Quite literally, Naomi is advising Ruth to throw herself at Boaz's feet.** It's not exactly what most of us parents would advise our daughters to do now-a-days – Right? I mean, if you're looking for advice on how to help your children get married, this isn't really the best stuff here. For one, it just looks kind of desperate, which is not the best way to win a guy over, quite frankly – we need a little more of a challenge than that.

Second of all, in their day: Just lying down at the feet of Boaz would have been entirely scandalous. If we were reading this in Jesus' day for example, we'd be covering the ears of the kids, and all blushing as we read this.

I realize that from the perspective of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century where romantic relationships frequently go against God's Word and his plans for us, and include sexual activity, co-habiting, and so forth, we just don't get this. It's like saying that the Beatles' "I Want To Hold Your Hand" is pushing the

boundaries of morality. This doesn't make sense in a 21<sup>st</sup> Century culture that's saturated with sexuality, sensuality, and permissiveness, rather than godliness. But the fact remains, for their Biblically-based culture and their Biblically-informed moral values, which is where we Christians ought to be as well, what Naomi is planning out here is risky and boundary-pushing.

**But, everything seems to be pointing Ruth toward Boaz.** All the road signs of life and faith are pointing in this direction. And Naomi isn't one to rest on her laurels in her faith; she steps out and takes action, and so does Ruth. So Naomi is willing to take this calculated risk to help Ruth secure a husband. She wanted that security and stability for Ruth, as well as wanting for her the honor – Lord willing – of having children. For many people today, marriage is seen as an antiquated institution, and children are seen as a hindrance, not a blessing. But not so for them. So Naomi figures that it's time to step out in faith and make some plans to bring Ruth and Boaz together, even if it means taking a risk.

In verses 7-9 we see the celebration and the winnowing draw to a close for the night. Boaz would sleep near his pile of grain as a way of guarding it during the night, and then normally would continue working with the grain, or transporting it to his home, the next day. Ruth comes in and lays down at his feet. We aren't told when she did this in relationship to when he fell asleep, but apparently it was a while afterwards, as we see that he was startled to find her at his feet when he woke up in the middle of the night.

Now up to this point, Ruth followed Naomi's plan to a "T." She watched him, took note of where he was sleeping, approached him once he was asleep, pulled back the blanket from over his feet, and laid down there at his feet. He probably woke up a short while later because his feet were cold. It was then, in the middle of the night, that he finds this woman lying there. I love how the narrator simply calls him "man" and her "woman": it highlights for us the darkness of the night, and the masking of their identities in that darkness.

And in fact, he doesn't recognize her. And once she tells him who she is, she deviates from the plan. Remember, Naomi told Ruth that *he* would tell *her* what to do after she lay down at his feet. But instead, we see here that *she*

tells *him to spread his cloak over her* because he is a *kinsman-redeemer*.

Now you may recall from last week that the kinsman-redeemer thing wasn't about marriage. Marriage is what Naomi is driving toward as she crafted this plan. **But Ruth changes gears here, and intertwines the notion of marriage with the kinsman-redeemer rules.** So here's what's going on. When she tells him to spread his cloak over her she is in essence, telling him to ask her to marry him. I know, it sounds strange that putting the corner of his garment or blanket over her would be an invitation to marriage. But it's true. Every guy in here who's ever proposed marriage to a woman with a diamond ring that he spent a lot of money on is sitting here thinking, "Man! I could buy a lot of blankets with the money I spent on that ring!" But that's the way it was – and still is in some cultures today as well.<sup>1</sup>

Then she tells him that he should do this because he is a "kinsman-redeemer." Kinsmen-redeemers were supposed to help out family members in times of economic trouble; they were not to continue the family lineage through marriage. She's bundling them both up together. This was highly unusual. In fact, nowhere else in Scripture does this happen like this. But that doesn't mean that it was un-heard of in history, or wrong.

In fact, Boaz's response shows us that it wasn't unheard of, or else he wouldn't have responded the way he did. He says, **"The Lord bless you, my daughter. This kindness is greater than that which you showed earlier: You have not run after the younger men, whether rich or poor" (Ruth 3:10).** What he recognizes is that by bringing in the whole kinsman-redeemer thing, Ruth is looking out for Naomi's interests, and not just her own in seeking marriage. Her "kindness" isn't toward Boaz, but toward Naomi. And Boaz recognizes that. What he's saying here is, "You're more loyal to Naomi now than you were in leaving your homeland to follow her here. You could have married any of a number of young men – either for love or for money – and yet you have come to me, a kinsman-redeemer, which is an act of loyalty to Naomi." You see, she put the whole marriage thing at risk by bringing up the kinsman-redeemer thing. What if he was unable to help out as the redeemer? What if he didn't want to – yes, it was a responsibility for someone to do, but that doesn't mean it always happened.

He continues on, and we hear the response that we wanted to: **“And now, my daughter, don’t be afraid. I will do for you all you ask. All the people of my town know that you are a woman of noble character” (Ruth 3:11).** So his response is affirmative! This is good news! He's going to do what she asks. He says that she's a noble and worthy woman, and others have noticed – in other words, even though she's from Moab, she has earned the respect of the people there in Bethlehem. In fact, the word translated here as “noble” is often translated as “worthy” or “good standing” and is the same word used to describe Boaz in 2:1. So this is good! They're compatible, they're admirable people, they're drawn to each other, the community affirms them both as individuals...

And so we're just about ready to get the wedding bells going, aren't we? In fact, if you close your eyes, and listen carefully you can almost hear them ***ringing in the distance (website link to ringing bells)***. ☺ But then we find out: there’s another guardian redeemer! There’s another relative who could also fulfill this obligation! Oh - The agony of it all! Here we thought we had wedded bliss at hand...Ruth is just waiting for him to unfold the corner of that blanket and put it over her...but like any good Hollywood love story, there's another person to make things a little more complicated. This probably explains why Boaz hadn't done anything about Ruth and Naomi's plight on his own previously, other than his generosity in her gleaning. The pecking order was such that someone else was first in line as Naomi's “guardian-redeemer.”

So he tells her: **“Stay here for the night, and in the morning if he wants to do his duty as your guardian-redeemer, good; let him redeem you. But if he is not willing, as surely as the Lord lives I will do it. Lie here until morning” (Ruth 3:13).** Now if you're like me, you're saying, “Boaz, you idiot! Who cares about the other guy!?! Isn't this a minor technicality???” Love is in the air...why would you mess it up now?....Just marry her for crying out loud...you don't even have to buy her a ring! Just unfold the confounded blanket over her!”

But you see, Boaz is a godly man. And godly men live by God's word. Godly women do, too, but I want to let Boaz's actions speak more concretely to us guys right now. You see, Godly men don't set aside Scripture and dismiss it

just because it goes against what we would want. **Godly men recognize that God's word guides us and nurtures us and keeps us on the right path, the path that God wants us to walk.** It's true in all facets of life: whether it's faith, finances, sexual purity, jobs, our marriages, in our singleness, or any other aspect. Jesus Christ is God's word made flesh, and Jesus said, "Follow me." In other words: "Do as I do, live as I live, minister to others as I minister to others." Godly guys don't set aside God's word – whether it's the written word in Scripture, or the word made flesh in Jesus Christ. Boaz models this for us and shows us that God calls us to live by His Word.

So, as Boaz tells her to do, she sleeps at his feet. Since the text doesn't tell us that he put the edge of his blanket over her, the natural thing to presume is that he in fact did not do that. They're keeping things pure and right as they ought to. They're waiting and taking things in the right order. As it says in Ephesians: **But among you there must not be even a hint of sexual immorality, or of any kind of impurity, or of greed, because these are improper for God's holy people (Ephesians 5:3).** That verse was written a long time later, but they knew it in their hearts, so she leaves before it gets light out. And when she goes, he gives her a bunch of grain in her shawl. This is probably for two reasons: 1) So that if anyone asked her why she was out and about in the dark before the sun came up, she could say something like, "I've been working and I'm carrying grain back to my home;" 2) It's a sign to Naomi and to Ruth that he is committed and will follow through and take care of things.

I've already highlighted some of the things for us to learn from this passage: such as the road signs that Naomi has seen earlier suggesting that God's hand bringing Ruth and Boaz together; Her assertiveness in creating a plan to see if God is indeed leading Ruth down that road; The risk she takes in formulating this plan and stepping out in faith; The way that Ruth carried out the plan as an act of faith as well, even stepping out further in faith and stretching it to bless Naomi; and the way Boaz responds in godliness and as an act of faith trusting that God will work this out rightly.

Do you see the common theme here? **All of these people are living by faith, that God has a grand plan, and that this plan includes them.** They're trusting God for their provision, their care, their livelihood, their future, their

relationships, their safety...and so much more. In what facets of your life, and my life, is “trusting God” needed more in our lives? Maybe it’s in our friendships, or our jobs, our finances, our financial giving to the Church as we’re going to pledge in just a couple of minutes, in our families, our use of our time...maybe we need to trust God more in our country going forward...

**There are different seasons of trusting God that we constantly find ourselves in, and the way in which we step out in faith and trust God for his care and provision varies throughout.:** From the college student who’s living away from home for the first time, to the couple who’s engaged to get married, to the husband and wife expecting their first child (or working on welcoming their fifth into their family – it’s always a step of faith), to the single parent raising a child while holding down a job, to the person who makes a career change after 20 years in the work force, to the person who enters into retirement, to the elderly couple who decide to move into a retirement community, to the person who says the final goodbye to their spouse at the Memorial service...

**Some of these come upon us and we don’t have much say in it, but many times we have the opportunity to pray about a situation and then decide: Do I step out and trust God here, and see where He’s leading?** What if God’s plan seems to be not what we really, really want to do? Do we trust God *that* much, to say “no” or “not now, but in God’s timing?” Do we trust the Bible, God’s word, as Boaz did, to guide and govern our lives?

There’s an example, and a challenge, here from Boaz to us to trust God at his word, when he tells Ruth that there’s another kinsman-redeemer. “Let’s not get ahead of ourselves, or ahead of God,” he’s saying to her. “Let’s follow His Word, and trust His timing.”

Maybe you’ve set aside God and His word in your life. Maybe that’s happened accidentally or through neglect over time, or maybe it’s been intentional because we haven’t wanted to allow the Jesus, the word made flesh, and the light of the world, to cast a light into the shadows of our lives and illumine the dark places – the sin, the doubts, the fears, the uncertainties, the instabilities, the desires, and more. But if we’ll live by God’s word, if we’ll let Jesus be lord of our lives and step out in faith, then we will live as God calls us to, as he created us to, walking in his light, following him where

he's leading, in his grand plan. That's living by faith, so His will would be done, and not ours.

Pledge Card Intro.

Let's pray...Amen.

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i "It probably reflects a marriage custom still attested among Arabs whereby a man symbolically took a wife by throwing a garment-corner over her." Robert L. Hubbard, New International Commentary on the O.T. - Ruth. Page 212.