

Ruth 3 Naomi's Perilous Plan, Part 2

Last time, I'm sure you remember, that we began looking at the "perilous plan" that Naomi had put together. She told Ruth to go to the threshing floor, wait until Boaz had gone to sleep, and then uncover his feet and lay down near him. Naomi believed that Boaz would wake up, find Ruth lying there, and respond appropriately.

This whole plan depends on Boaz's good character and wisdom. That's why this is a rather delicate and dangerous plan—how is Boaz going to respond to Ruth and her request? What's going to happen when he wakes up and finds Ruth lying there?

Naomi seems to be confident that Boaz will do the right thing. He's proven himself to be a good and godly man; he's a man of virtue and good reputation. He was not like so many others of that era who did whatever was right in their own eyes. Naomi had confidence in Boaz; he will tell Ruth what to do next; he'd do the right thing.

We, like these characters, must respond to the challenges and temptations of life with virtue and honor. When given the opportunity to do wrong, we must do right. We may think we have virtue until we are put into a situation that tests our virtue. We may think we'd withstand temptation until we are tempted. How we respond to these situations demonstrates whether we have virtue/honor or not.

Before returning to the text, we should remember that the theme of the book is how God demonstrates His faithfulness by loving, superintending, and caring for His people. Chapter 3 shows how God will provide a home and security for Naomi and Ruth. And he's going to do it through, or perhaps in spite of, Naomi's perilous plan.

We should also note that this passage uses two words we have defined previously—*goel* and *hesed*. Boaz is the *goel*—the near kinsman, and he is impressed with the *hesed*—the loving loyalty—that Ruth shows toward Naomi and toward him.

We've seen previously that

- I. Naomi hatches a plan. .1-4
- II. Ruth agrees to follow the plan. .5-9

In this next part of the passage, we'll see if Naomi was right to trust Boaz. Will he respond to Ruth appropriately?

- III. Boaz responds to the plan. .9-15
 - A. He recognizes Ruth. .9
 1. He wakes up because of his cold feet and sees a woman lying near him. In the dim light, he can't identify the woman.

2. Ruth quickly identifies herself and makes a critical request: “Spread therefore thy skirt over thine handmaid; for thou *art* a near kinsman.” What is she asking for?
3. The word “skirt” here (רִיבּוֹ) is often translated as “wing.” In fact, that’s how the word is translated in Ruth 2:12 (read). To spread one’s wing over someone is to extend protective care over that person.
4. Ruth had sought the protection and security of the “wings” of the God of Israel, and now she is seeking protection and security under the “wing” of Boaz.

This kind of language is used elsewhere in the OT:

Ezekiel 16:8 ... ***I spread My wing over you and covered [you]. Yes, I swore an oath to you and entered into a covenant with you, and you became Mine,***” says the Lord GOD.

5. Ruth’s request amounted to a proposal of marriage; she is “popping the question.” The request to “spread your skirt/wing over your handmaid” is a request that Boaz would extend protection and care over Ruth, and the normal way to do that would be to marry her.

App: One of the key responsibilities for a man in marriage is protection and care for his wife. When you get married, you are taking a wife under your wing. That’s the biblical expectation—that the man would provide for and protect his wife.

Culture today tells us that we should reject traditional roles in marriage. They tell us today that there are no roles for the husband and the wife; men and women are interchangeable. They tell us that there is no need to get married. You can have all the benefits and behaviors of marriage without the commitment.

But that’s not biblical. We must retain our dedication to the biblical pattern for marriage, and that includes different roles for husbands and wives.

And the husband’s primary role is to provide for and protect his wife. If a man cannot do that, then he’s not ready to be a husband.

6. Also, another interesting detail in this exchange between Ruth and Boaz is the lack of expressions of love and romance. In our culture, people get married because they fall in love. Romantic feelings and high emotions play a large part in bringing a couple together.
7. In the case of Boaz and Ruth, we don't know what feelings they had for one another. Boaz seems to be interested in Ruth, but his interest might not have been romantic. It perhaps never entered his mind that he should pursue Ruth as a spouse. Or perhaps he was interested but reluctant for some reason.
8. In any case, we find no declarations of love here. The scene is not very romantic. Boaz literally has cold feet.
9. But of course, the biblical definition of love is not primarily romantic. Biblical love is doing what is best for the other person. Boaz shows his love for Ruth by doing what is in her best interests. Because of his love for Ruth, he wants to provide security and a home for her. That is an expression of godly love.

App: Emotions and passion will not hold a marriage together. The feelings of romantic love are wonderful, but you can't base a long-lasting relationship on feelings alone. Feelings/emotions go up and down. If your marriage is based primarily on how you feel about your spouse, your marriage is on thin ice.

The basis of marriage must be the commitment of a covenant. When you agree to get married, you are entering into a binding contract, a life-long commitment to your spouse. That kind of commitment is what keeps a marriage together over the long term.

By asking Boaz to spread his "skirt/wing" over her, Ruth is asking if he will make that kind of commitment to her. Will he play the role of the *goel*?

B. He complements Ruth. .10

1. First, Boaz refers to Ruth as "my daughter." That expression has led many to speculate regarding the difference in ages between Boaz and Ruth. It seems likely that Ruth is in her late 20s or so. Some have thought of Boaz as much older, perhaps in his late 30s or older. Perhaps Boaz was a widower; that would make sense.

No one knows for sure, but the language here seems to suggest that Boaz is somewhat older than Ruth, but probably not old enough for Ruth to be his actual daughter.

2. Next, Boaz states that Ruth has shown “kindness” in making this offer to Boaz rather than to younger men. TShe could have sought marriage with a man of her own age, but instead she is seeking marriage with a man who is connected to her family.
3. Remember the word “kindness” is *hesed*, usually translated as mercy or lovingkindness. When referring to people, *hesed* means faithfulness or loyalty. Boaz commends Ruth for showing loyalty to the family of her former husband.

Quote: She has not followed natural inclinations (in seeking a young man in marriage), but has shown a responsible attitude to the family in looking to her *gō’ēl* [i.e., Boaz] as her marriage partner.¹

4. He uses this interesting expression, “in the later end than at the beginning” – Ruth has shown kindness/*hesed* on at least two occasions:
 - a) “in the later end” refers to what she is doing now, i.e., contracting a marriage within the family of Elimelech. By marrying within the family, Ruth is being loyal or faithful to both Naomi and to the family of her dead husband.
 - b) “than at the beginning” probably refers to what she did in gleaning on behalf of Naomi, i.e., caring for her MIL.

Boaz clearly interprets Ruth’s request as a proposal of marriage.

So, I guess if a young woman wants to get married, she should just ask the fellow that she’s interested in!

C. .11 He accepts Ruth’s proposal (provisionally).

1. He notes that everyone in town knows that Ruth is a “virtuous woman,” i.e., a woman of noble character. Even though Ruth was a foreigner, people gave her credit for her care for Naomi.

¹ Cyril J. Barber, *Ruth: A Story of God’s Grace: An Expository Commentary* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2003). Quoting Morris.

2. .11b An interesting detail here is that Boaz says, literally, “all the gate of my people know...” The gate of the city is where the leaders of the city conducted business. Boaz was one of the leading citizens of the city; he knew all the influential people of town. All of them knew about Ruth; they all knew that she was a virtuous woman (same phrase as in Prov 31:10).

App: I hope that all the women here strive to be known as women of high and noble character. And women demonstrate virtue like Ruth did—through honorable and kind behavior.

3. Before going on, we should note that some people have looked at this story and suggested that something improper or even immoral happened here between Boaz and Ruth.
4. However, the fact that Boaz praises Ruth as a “virtuous woman” shows that nothing inappropriate or immoral happened here.

Quote: There is not the slightest hint of impropriety between Ruth and Boaz. ...; the actions of [the two] are entirely righteous²

5. Biblical writers, as we know, are not squeamish about describing acts of immorality; they are not reluctant to include such sordid matters in their accounts. If anything immoral happened here, we would expect the writer to tell us.
6. But the text does *not* even hint that the interaction between Boaz and Ruth was inappropriate. These are both honorable, faithful, virtuous people. Even when given an opportunity for immorality—this happened in private and at night—they did not indulge themselves or sully their reputations.

Boaz easily could have taken advantage of Ruth in this situation, but he did not. He proved that he was a man of virtue and honor by the way he treats Ruth here.

² David Schrock, “One Beautiful, Scandalous Night: How God Brings Redemption through a Foolish Plan, A Faithful Woman, and a Righteous Man (Ruth 3:1–18),” *The Journal for Biblical Manhood and Womanhood*, Spring and Fall 2013 18, no. 2 (2013): 24.

Quote: Both Ruth and Boaz acted virtuously in a situation they knew could have turned out otherwise.³

7. Remember that the purpose of the book is to show how God provides for those who are faithful to him. Even when given the opportunity for immorality, these two characters behaved themselves with godly virtue and honor.

App: All of us encounter opportunities for immorality. It's inner virtue, good character, and reputation that prevents us from giving in to temptation. It's commitment to God and to God's commandments that prevents us from acting immorally when we have the chance.

It's very common today for people to indulge their appetites and desires sinfully. When an opportunity presents itself, many people simply indulge their passions; they give in to temptation. It's very common for those with power and money to abuse and take advantage of the weak.

Christians must not use their power to abuse others. The Bible in no uncertain terms tells us to flee fornication/immorality. And it's strength of inner character that prevents us from falling to temptation. We may think that we are strong, virtuous people—until facing a temptation.

“Let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall” (1 Cor 10:12).

D. He notes a potential problem with the plan. .12-13

1. Boaz is aware of a *goel* that is a nearer relative than he is—perhaps a first cousin of Ruth's former husband. Under the Jewish system, the closest relative had the responsibility to fulfill the role of the *goel*.
2. The fact that Boaz is willing to defer to the nearer kinsman shows us that he is a man of integrity and honor. He's going to keep the laws of his people even if it means that he can't have Ruth as his wife. He's not going to break tradition for the benefit of himself.

³ F. B. Huey Jr., “Ruth,” in *The Expositor's Bible Commentary: Deuteronomy, Joshua, Judges, Ruth, 1 & 2 Samuel*, ed. Frank E. Gaebelain, vol. 3 (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1992), 538.

App: Many people today don't care about laws and traditions. They care only about themselves and getting what they want. If they have to violate long-standing customs and traditions to get what they want, so be it. Christians should not be so self-centered as to violate long-standing traditions/customs just to get what they want. Even if it is costly, we should do what is virtuous and honorable.

3. .13 Boaz states that if the closer relative is unwilling to play the role of the kinsman redeemer/*goel*, then he will take on that role.
4. .13end Boaz seals this agreement with an oath: "as the Lord liveth." This was the strongest oath a Jewish person could take. He invoked the name of the Lord as a solemn, binding promise that he would do as Ruth asked him if he were able.
5. So Boaz accepts Ruth's offer of marriage, at least provisionally/tentatively. I don't think that she gave him an engagement ring. I don't think they took any engagement photos or sent out announcements. They didn't post any announcements on social media. But they had a provisional agreement that they would be married if possible.

E. He protects Ruth's reputation. .14

1. Boaz is concerned that no one found out that a woman had come to the threshing floor.
2. It was not uncommon for certain women to visit men at the threshing floor at night. But typically the women who did that were not virtuous women; they were just the opposite.
3. Boaz wants to prevent any damage to Ruth's reputation. He wants to avoid the appearance of evil or the potential for gossip, so he sends her away while it's still dark.
4. Boaz again proves himself to be a virtuous and honorable person because he wants to protect Ruth's reputation.

App: I hope all of us would follow his example. We should strive to protect the honor and reputation of those we love. And if we do hear of some questionable activity, we should give people the benefit of the doubt and think the best of them instead of immediately assume that they had done wrong. We should assume the best about people until proven wrong.

F. He provides more barley for Ruth. .15

1. Women at this time wore a veil or a shawl, almost like a large sheet that they would wrap around their head and shoulders when they went outdoors.
2. The “measure” here is probably just a scoopful. If Ruth is wearing a shawl or cover of some kind, it could easily hold six scoops of grain.
3. I think that Boaz gave her the grain out of simple kindness. This was not a dowry or a payment of some kind. Boaz was a generous man, and Ruth would potentially be his wife very soon. So giving her some grain is entirely reasonable.

IV. Ruth reports on the plan. .16-18

A. When Ruth gets home, Naomi asks how things went. .16 “Who are you?” in this context probably means something like “How did it go?” Or perhaps Naomi is asking whether Ruth’s status had changed. “Are you still Ruth the Moabite widow, or are you now Ruth the wife of Boaz?”

B. Ruth reported what Boaz had said and done. .16b-17

C. .18 Naomi is sure that Boaz will resolve the issue quickly. Boaz was the kind of person who would settle the matter ASAP. She was convinced that Ruth would not have to wait long to see what the outcome of would be.

D. Naomi tells Ruth to “sit still” and wait to find out how it will all work out.

Quote: Her advice to “wait” reveals a stance of faith—a confident, expectant belief that only God could bring the venture to a successful conclusion.⁴

Naomi changed her name to Mara/Bitter, but she still has an underlying confidence/faith in God that has not been shaken by the bitter events of her life. She still believes in the providential work of God on behalf of those who live virtuous, faithful lives.

⁴ F. B. Huey Jr., “Ruth,” in *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary: Deuteronomy, Joshua, Judges, Ruth, 1 & 2 Samuel*, ed. Frank E. Gaebelain, vol. 3 (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1992), 540.

We often face times when we don't know how things are going to work out. It's during those times that we need to follow Naomi's advice—"sit still" and wait to see how the matter is going to fall. We must be patient and wait on God's providence. That's especially true when we have no control over matters. All we can do is wait and trust that God will work things out for his glory and for our good.

So it looks like Naomi's perilous plan worked out. Naomi trusted that Boaz would do the right thing, and he did; he knew what to do. Naomi's trust in Boaz was not misplaced; he proves himself to be a man of virtue and honor.

Likewise, each of us should strive to be virtuous and honorable people who know the right thing to do and strive to do it. When given the opportunity to sin, we should instead make the right choice and do the right thing.

Often we have to wait to see what the outcome of our plans will be. Are things going to work out as we hope, or will our plans come to nothing? That all depends on the providence of God. We should trust that God will work out his plan according to his own purposes.

The Bible affirms that "the steps of a good man are ordered by the Lord" (Ps 37:23). If we are people like Boaz and Ruth, we can be confident that God is working behind the scenes to order and guide our steps. If we are honorable and virtuous people, we can sit still and wait as God works out his plan in our lives.

Ps 27:14 Wait on the LORD: be of good courage, and he shall strengthen thine heart: wait, I say, on the LORD.