

FBC POWELL, 12-3-17 AM  
"Persevering Hope"  
Ruth 3:1-18  
# 3 in Series, "A Surprising Branch on Jesus' Family Tree"

**Ruth 1:16 (NASB)** "But Ruth said, 'Do not urge me to leave you or turn back from following you; for where you go, I will go, and where you lodge, I will lodge. Your people *shall be* my people, and your God, my God.'"

Hope is the joyful confidence and expectation that what God has promised, He will accomplish in His perfect timing.

*levirate* (from Latin) means "husband's brother"

"Goel" or "the kinsman redeemer"

I. The Plans of Hope (vv. 1-5)

**Ruth 2:19-20 (NASB)** "<sup>19</sup>Her mother-in-law then said to her, 'Where did you glean today and where did you work? May he who took notice of you be blessed.' So she told her mother-in-law with whom she had worked and said, 'The name of the man with whom I worked today is Boaz.' <sup>20</sup>Naomi said to her daughter-in-law, 'May he be blessed of the Lord who has not withdrawn his kindness to the living and to the dead.' Again Naomi said to her, 'The man is our relative, he is one of our closest relatives.'"

II. The Risk of Hope (vv. 6-9)

III. The Respect of Hope (vv. 10-11)

**1 Corinthians 7:32-35 (NASB)** "<sup>32</sup>But I want you to be free from concern. One who is unmarried is concerned about the things of the Lord, how he may please the Lord; <sup>33</sup>but one who is married is concerned about the things of the world, how he may please his wife, <sup>34</sup>and *his interests* are divided. The woman who is unmarried, and the virgin, is concerned about the things of the Lord, that she may be holy both in body and spirit; but one who is married is concerned about the things of the world, how she may please her husband. <sup>35</sup>This I say for your own benefit; not to put a restraint upon you, but to promote what is appropriate and *to secure* undistracted devotion to the Lord."

**1 Peter 3:1-6 (NASB)** "<sup>1</sup>In the same way, you wives, be submissive to your own husbands so that even if any *of them* are disobedient to the word, they may be won without a word by the behavior of their wives, <sup>2</sup>as they observe your chaste and respectful behavior. <sup>3</sup>Your adornment must not be *merely* external—braiding the hair, and wearing gold jewelry, or putting on dresses; <sup>4</sup>but *let it be* the hidden person of the heart, with the imperishable quality of a gentle and quiet spirit, which is precious in the sight of God. <sup>5</sup>For in this way in former times the holy women also, who hoped in God, used to adorn themselves, being submissive to their own husbands; <sup>6</sup>just as Sarah obeyed Abraham, calling him lord, and you have become her children if you do what is right without being frightened by any fear."

IV. The Waiting of Hope (vv. 12-18)

A. Boaz Waiting (vv. 12-15)

B. Naomi Waiting (vv. 16-17)

C. Ruth Waiting (v. 18)

## Sermon 3: Persevering Hope

### Ruth 3:1-18

One of the most prominent words in Scripture is also one of the most misunderstood words. The word that I am speaking of is “hope.” There are several major and minor themes that run through the book of Ruth, but my favorite theme is biblical hope. The book of Ruth spotlights two women who are both widows living in abject poverty, and from a human perspective they have no hope. The book ends with those same women prospering and filled with joy. The two women are Naomi and her daughter in law, Ruth. In chapter 1 we find these two women in grief because their husbands (and Naomi’s sons – her only children) have died and Ruth and Naomi are left in poverty. Though Ruth grew up in a pagan land (Moab) worshipping pagan gods, she had become a believer of the one true God – Jehovah. When Ruth’s mother in law, Naomi, announces that she is going back home to the land of Israel (to Bethlehem), Ruth announces that she is going with her. The best-known verse in Ruth is when Ruth tells Naomi why she is going back to Israel with her. We read in Ruth 1:16: “But Ruth said, ‘Do not urge me to leave you or turn back from following you; for where you go, I will go, and where you lodge, I will lodge. Your people *shall be* my people, and your God, my God.’” This was not just Ruth’s declaration of loyalty to her widowed mother in law; it was also her profession of faith in the God of Israel, the one true God.

Naomi is not walking in hope when we first meet her in chapter one. In fact, she has unofficially changed her name from Naomi to Mara which means “bitterness.” Ruth, however seems to live by hope from the first time we meet her and in spite of all her trials? What changed in Naomi’s life that moved her from bitterness to joy producing hope? Let’s begin the answer to that by making sure that we understand the biblical meaning of hope. I warn you that it is quite different from the world’s definition of hope. In fact, hope may be *the* most misunderstood word in the Bible. In our every day (unbiblical) use of the word, it means to wish or desire. Many times those wishes, and desires are things we really don’t expect to happen. We say, “I hope the Tennessee football team will go undefeated and get into the playoffs next year,” when we are pretty sure they won’t. That does not even resemble the meaning of hope in the Bible. In the midst of pain and disappointment and loss, biblical hope brings joy because hope is focused on God, *His* sovereignty, *His* promises, and *His* ability. In the midst of confusion, uncertainty, and pain, there is the confidence that God is sovereign, and He *WILL* through His providential working in circumstances and people bring His promises to pass. In the midst of what looks like failure, hope brings expectation – expectation that God is sovereign, God is in control and He can turn what looks like failure into what looks like success from Heaven’s viewpoint (and that is the only viewpoint that counts). Putting all of that together, we can define hope this way: *Hope is the joyful confidence and expectation that what God has promised, He will accomplish in His perfect timing.* The book of Ruth is about hope in hard times.

Before we get into this really exciting text there are two principles from the Old Testament that we need to understand. In fact, it is impossible to understand Ruth chapters 3 & 4 without understanding the words *levirate* and *goel*. The word *levirate* (from Latin) means “husband’s brother.” You can read about the “*levirate* law” in Deuteronomy 25:5-10. If a woman’s husband died without children, and if the brother in law (the dead husband’s brother) is not married, he was expected to marry his sister in law and raise up the first child born for his deceased brother. If there was no brother who could or would carry out this responsibility, then it could be a near relative. This perpetuated the dead husband’s name.

The second word we need to understand is *goel* or as it was commonly called, “the kinsman redeemer.” Every Jewish family had a piece of property that was theirs by virtue of their inheritance. Even if a person became destitute and sold the property to another person, a near relative to the one who sold it had the right and obligation to buy it back to keep it in the family.

In addition, every 50<sup>th</sup> year was called “*The Year of Jubilee*” and all the property reverted to the family of the original owner. As the levirate perpetuated the family name, the kinsman redeemer perpetuated the family property. File all of that in your mind and we will be referring to it later.

## **I. The Plans of Hope (vv. 1-5)**

Allow me to begin with a short review. The first chapter ends with Naomi overwhelmed with the loss of her husband, her two sons (her only children) and most all her possessions. She has no hope. In that state she is blind to the promises of God and the providence of God and, sadly, to the value of her dead son’s wife whose name was Ruth. In this state of hopelessness, Naomi and Ruth return to Israel, to the town of Bethlehem, Naomi’s home town that she and her husband had left ten years earlier. When we get to chapter 2, hope begins to slowly rise. After finding a place to stay, Ruth knows that they had to eat, and it seems that they had no money to buy food. Fortunately, it was at the time of the harvest and Ruth takes advantage of a Jewish law that allowed the poor to go into the fields of the property owners and pick up the grain in the corners of the field and along the edge of the fields. By the providential, supernatural working of God, Ruth ended up in the field of Boaz – a wealthy man who was godly, generous, and kind. It seems that Boaz was considerably older than Ruth, but he was a single man. Bethlehem was not a large town, and Boaz had heard about this the Moabite woman who was so kind to her Jewish mother in law.

At the end of chapter 2, we find Ruth coming to the place where she was staying with Naomi, not with a gallon or so of grain which would have been the normal amount from a day of gleaning, but with about fifty-sixty pounds of grain. Boaz had given her enough to last the two of them for many weeks. We read Naomi’s response in Ruth 2:19-20: “Her mother-in-law then said to her, ‘Where did you glean today and where did you work? May he who took notice of you be blessed.’ So she told her mother-in-law with whom she had worked and said, ‘The name of the man with whom I worked today is Boaz.’ Naomi said to her daughter-in-law, ‘May he be blessed of the Lord who has not withdrawn his kindness to the living and to the dead.’ Again, Naomi said to her, ‘The man is our relative, he is one of our closest relatives.’” In other words, he qualifies to be both the levirate (a close relative who could marry Ruth) and the kinsman redeemer who could buy back the property that Naomi and her husband had sold before they moved to Moab ten years earlier. That brings us to today’s text.

In chapter 3, Naomi is like a new woman. All the darkness of chapter 1 is gone. Her focus is turned away from herself and she is focused on Ruth. It is amazing what can happen when we quit feeling sorry for ourselves and focus on others. Ruth listens carefully to her mother in law. Ruth’s life has been spent in Moab and this is all new to her. Naomi has a strategy. Her discouragement vanishes and now she begins to strategize in hope. To have no hope, no promises you are believing God to fulfill is a horrible way to live. If you are in that condition and maybe have entertained thoughts about ending your life, I want to speak to you as firmly as I can. There is always biblical hope. God has so many promises that apply to your life – promises to save you if you have never come to Him in repentance and faith is Christ alone to save you, and promises that He is in control, He is providentially working behind the scenes and you can trust Him.

Let’s examine Naomi’s plan. Make no mistake; it is a plan that Naomi and Ruth desire to culminate in matrimony! Naomi seems to us to be a little “pushy,” but in that culture, the parents arranged marriages for their children, and though Ruth was her daughter in law, since Ruth did not know the customs it was appropriate for Naomi to take the lead in all of this. Hope is not passive – it is active. Naomi knew that Boaz would spend the night where the grain was being threshed (separated from the husks). Boaz would sleep there to protect it from thieves. Naomi gives Ruth some wise counsel. She tells her to make herself as clean and attractive as

possible. That included some fragrant oil that was used in that culture. Next, she was to put on her best clothing. In her poverty, it is likely that Ruth didn't have many changes of clothes, but there was certainly that one special dress for festive occasions ... like a wedding! Naomi has a whole new zeal in her life; she's planning a wedding. Ruth was to stay out of Boaz' sight and then at dusk or dark, Boaz would go to the place he would sleep. When he was asleep, she was to lie down at his feet and wait until he awoke and then he would tell her what to do.

Why is Naomi guiding Ruth to take the initiative with Boaz, rather than allowing him to be the initiator? In examining the customs of the time, here is what was almost certainly going on. Being considerably older than Ruth, and the fact that there was someone that was a closer relative than he was (as we will see in a moment in verse 12), Boaz would never have approached her about marriage and made the proposal to her. He had shown great kindness to her, but he would never have initiated a proposal. We will see that when we examine Boaz' response to Ruth. All of this that seems so strange to us was simply a way for Ruth to say, "I am available if you would be interested in marriage." There was nothing immoral or seductive in what Ruth was doing.

## **II. The Risk of Hope (vv. 6-9)**

Let's set the scene of this historical event. The harvest time in ancient Israel was a time of "all out" celebration. They celebrated God's gracious provision for them for the lean months. Boaz eats and drinks his fill and gets sleepy and goes to bed there at the threshing floor. Ruth does exactly what her mother in law told her to do. Boaz suddenly wakes up and there is someone lying at his feet under his blanket. Verse 8 says he was startled. Well, I guess so! Unable to see at all in this darkness, he asks in verse 9, "Who are you?" Ruth answers him and then says something very important. She says in verse 9, "spread your covering over your maid." The ESV says "Spread your wings over your servant." The NIV says, "Spread the corner of your garment over me." That was an Old Testament phrase meaning "take care of me." The literal translation is "wings." It is the picture of a mother bird such as an eagle that spreads her wings over the eaglets in the nest to protect them from storms and predators. This is Ruth's proposal, her letting him know that she has chosen him to be her Kinsman Redeemer, her levirate who would give her children.

Why is this point labeled "the risk of hope"? It is because from a human perspective there is a risk in obeying God. From God's perspective, as with "luck" and "chance" that we examined last week, there is no risk with a sovereign God. However, Ruth had no human reason to think that Boaz would accept and propose to her. Also, from a human viewpoint there was the possibility that Boaz would use this opportunity to take advantage of Ruth sexually. Threshing floors were known for the immorality that took place there. Risk is only from a human perspective. Even the wrongs done to us are allowed by our all-powerful God to do a work in us that conforms us to Christ (Romans 8:28). Worry not Ruth! This is of God and with God, in reality, there is no risk.

## **III. The Respect of Hope (vv. 10-11)**

Boaz is a man of great integrity. What was it that impressed and even attracted Boaz to Ruth? Was it her good looks? No. Was it her wealth? No, she lived in poverty. It was her "excellence" (v. 11). The Hebrew word translated "excellence" means virtue, strength, noble character (NIV). Human beauty is fleeting. There is a disease that affects human beauty – aging! There are indications that Ruth was a physically attractive woman, but Boaz, an older man himself, knew how fleeting that human beauty is.

Single women, allow me to speak to you for a moment. If a suitor, a man seeking a relationship with you, does not respect you in every way *dump him immediately*. I am not going to promise you that a Boaz is waiting out there for you, but even if there is no Boaz in your future, embrace your singleness. Paul said to those who are single in 1 Corinthians 7:32-35:

But I want you to be free from concern. One who is unmarried is concerned about the things of the Lord, how he may please the Lord; but one who is married is concerned about the things of the world, how he may please his wife, and *his interests* are divided. The woman who is unmarried, and the virgin, is concerned about the things of the Lord, that she may be holy both in body and spirit; but one who is married is concerned about the things of the world, how she may please her husband. This I say for your own benefit; not to put a restraint upon you, but to promote what is appropriate and *to secure* undistracted devotion to the Lord.

For both men and women, there are advantages to being married and there are advantages in relation to the Lord's work in being single. If you have the approach of "I've got to be married." you will probably get one you will later wish you had passed by. There are advantages to singleness, and there are advantages to being married. Seek the Lord. A very attractive young woman who used to be active here in our college ministry while she was attending UT took a job in Memphis (I think) after graduation. She became active in a church in Memphis and yet was not married. I heard about her through her brother and sister in law who attended here. They said that she was getting married to a godly young man in Memphis. At either their reception or rehearsal meal she shared this testimony: "I decided that I would run as hard as I can after Jesus and if I looked around and saw a single man that was running as fast as me, that might be one to consider as a spouse." She got it (and she got him). Ruth was following hard after God and He gave her a man who loved Him as much as she did.

If you are already married, this doesn't apply to you. Disrespect is not a ground for divorce. You need to read and apply 1 Peter 3:1-6:

In the same way, you wives, be submissive to your own husbands so that even if any *of them* are disobedient to the word, they may be won without a word by the behavior of their wives, as they observe your chaste and respectful behavior. Your adornment must not be *merely* external—braiding the hair, and wearing gold jewelry, or putting on dresses; but *let it be* the hidden person of the heart, with the imperishable quality of a gentle and quiet spirit, which is precious in the sight of God. For in this way in former times the holy women also, who hoped in God, used to adorn themselves, being submissive to their own husbands; just as Sarah obeyed Abraham, calling him lord, and you have become her children if you do what is right without being frightened by any fear.

To every man – married or unmarried – respect your wife! Treat her as a "a woman of excellence" and pray for her and disciple her if she still has a way to go.

#### **IV. The Waiting of Hope (vv. 2-18)**

Let's go back to the definition of hope that was shared earlier. Hope is the joyful confidence and expectation that what God has promised, He will accomplish in His perfect timing. Hope always involves waiting. We don't like to wait. Our generation is probably the most impatient generation in the history of the world! Yet, by definition, hope involves waiting.

### **A. Boaz Waiting (vv. 12-15)**

This is really the first statement from Boaz as to his desire to marry Ruth. There were some strong hints, but now we see that Boaz has been thinking about her. He has already researched this thing and knows that there is a relative that is closer than he is. Boaz is no doubt praying that this nearer kinsman isn't interested. While Boaz is waiting, he is considerate of Ruth. He is considerate of her reputation in verse 14. He is also considerate of her provision. As she leaves in that partial darkness just before dawn, he gives her more grain – lots of it. The gift of the grain was not to meet an immediate need. He had earlier given her a large amount of grain. This gift was just because he loved her. He didn't want his perspective bride gleaning the fields for grain that was left behind.

One of the reasons that God causes us to wait is to draw us close to Him. Waiting is no fun, but it serves as a motivation to draw near to the Lord, trust Him, and ready our heart for whatever He chooses in His sovereign working in our lives.

### **B. Naomi Waiting (vv. 16-17)**

Naomi had at least two things she was desirous of. First, she knew that as the Kinsman Redeemer, Boaz could buy back the property that the husband Elimelech had sold during the famine that motivated them to leave Bethlehem and go to Moab. But second, Naomi loved Ruth as she would have loved her own daughter. She knew that Boaz was a godly man who would care for and love Ruth. Now Naomi had to wait for Boaz to talk to this kinsman who was more closely related to Ruth's deceased husband. This is another opportunity to trust God in her waiting.

### **C. Ruth Waiting (v. 18)**

Some of our greatest growth comes in waiting upon the Lord. Hebrews 6:12b: speaks of "... those who through faith and patience inherit the promises." Because in God's waiting room is where much transformation takes place, God does not get in a hurry in fulfilling His promises. Psalms 46:10a (KJV): "Be still, and know that I *am* God..." The Hebrew word for "Be still" literally means to take your hands off. There are certainly times that we are to move into action as Ruth did when she went to Boaz and let him know that she was interested, but there is nothing that Ruth can do when it comes to the closer relative, so she waits for the Lord; she takes her hands off.

### **Conclusion**

Have you lost hope? Really, lost hope is unbelief and unbelief is a sin. To leave things in God's hands means that we must take our hands off. Certainly, there are things that God tells us to do, but when we have obeyed, we wait on the Lord.