

Background

It is now the end of the harvest season for barley and wheat and Boaz has begun to thresh the gathered barley. The horizon of hope has now ended for Ruth who was given opportunity to glean during the time of harvest, but not for Naomi. Having recognized the Lord's hand of providence on Ruth's opportunity to glean in Boaz's field, Naomi now will seek to pursue a greater blessing for her daughter-in-law. As we discussed in the last lesson, Naomi has emerged from her bitterness and anger with God and has a renewed concern and love for Ruth. This "new" Naomi will become a great blessing to Ruth.

Ruth 3:1-5 – Matchmaker, Make Me a Match

The "rest" Naomi seeks for Ruth is the "rest" she prayed for in chapter one, verse nine. She desired security for both Ruth and Orpah in the house of their husbands. In that culture, having a good husband was a source of rest and security. Naomi also desired happiness for Ruth, stating that she sought for things to be "well" with Ruth.

Is Naomi meddling by getting involved in Ruth's love life? **No, it was customary in that culture for parents to become involved in finding a suitable mate for their children (see Genesis 24). It signified the transition of their children into adulthood and societal productivity. Especially in a culture and community to which Ruth was foreign, Naomi would be essential to provide guidance and make appropriate connections that would help Ruth connect with the right man.**

What is the advantage to Ruth of hearing and heeding Naomi's advice? **Naomi was older, more experienced, and more connected to people in that community than Ruth. Naomi also had Ruth's best interests at heart and would not purposefully lead her astray.**

Does that advantage apply today regarding parental involvement in a young adult's romantic life? **Absolutely! While I am not arguing for a return to the day of arranged marriages (there are dangers in that practice too), I believe it is thoroughly biblical for a parent to counsel a young adult as they are searching for a suitable spouse and that parental blessing should be essential (with few exceptions) to initiating a dating/courtship relationship and commitment to marriage. The initiation of marriage is described as leaving father and mother and joining to a spouse (Genesis 2:24). The sentiment of the passage is this: until marriage occurs, parental responsibility continues. Why wouldn't a young adult seek and desire this guidance, unless they do not want to follow wisdom.**

Naomi instructs Ruth to wash herself, put on perfume, and put on her cloak (not her "best garment" as translated by some versions but an outer garment used for warmth). What was the purpose of this instruction? **Obviously, being cleaned and smelling good would make Ruth more attractive to Boaz, but the purpose is not sinful seduction. There is no indication of promiscuity at all in this passage. It is very possible that as a widow, Ruth had been wearing garments of mourning (see 2 Samuel 14:2) and therefore was not "on the market" for a husband. Naomi was likely instructing her to put away her mourning clothes and move forward.**

Was it appropriate for a woman to propose to a man? Review *Deuteronomy 25:5-10*. Ruth was coming to claim the right of kinsman redeemer. In this circumstance, the widow is to be taken as a wife by the kinsman (her husband's brother in this passage). If he does not, she is to take the case to the elders of the city and prosecute it. We see direction for some female leadership in this process and given the circumstance, it is appropriate for Ruth to initiate the proposal.

Why would Naomi instruct Ruth to approach Boaz in the middle of the night? In my opinion, Ruth needed an opportunity to speak with Boaz alone because of the nature of the conversation, but such a meeting would not be considered appropriate under most circumstances. By approaching Boaz at the threshing floor at night (while everyone slept), she would be meeting him in a public place but with the privacy necessary for their conversation.

Ruth 3:6-13 – A Decent Proposal

Typically, the residents of a city would sleep within the walls of the city at night for protection. However, threshing season was an exception when the work could be done most efficiently by utilizing the night breezes and after separating the grain, it was necessary to guard the produce against thieves and animals. Sleeping at the threshing floor during the time of threshing was a common occurrence in those days. As we will see later (verse 14), Boaz was not alone.

What was Boaz's mental and physical disposition when Ruth approached him? See *Psalms 4:6-8*. He had been engaged in probably the most satisfying part of his work, collecting the harvest. He worked hard, enjoyed a good meal, and fell asleep in warmth out under the night sky. He was probably in a state of contentment and rest. In the passage from Psalms, David compares how much BETTER the Lord is than one of the greatest states of contentment he has experienced: when grain and new wine abound. We should note that it is clear by the way Boaz will soon respond to Ruth that he was NOT drunk in any way.

In obedience to Naomi, Ruth uncovered Boaz's feet (probably his lower legs) while he was asleep and then laid down at his feet. We don't know how long it took him to awake, but Boaz was "startled" when he did. Literally, he "shivered." Boaz had been covered to stay warm in the cool night air. He was now cold and uncovered and as he sat up to put the covering back on his feet, he saw the form of a person lying at his feet. He asked who it was and Ruth responded with her name, her identification as his handmaid, and a request for him to "spread your covering over your maid, for you are a close relative." What is Ruth's request? Ruth is clearly requesting marriage in the context of Israel's kinsman-redeemer laws. According to commentator Daniel Block, "*The gesture of a man covering a woman with his garment was a symbolic act, which according to Near Eastern custom signified 'the establishment of a new relationship and the symbolic declaration of the husband to provide for the sustenance of the future wife.'*"¹ The picture is of two becoming one by being joined under the same covering, the committed bond of marriage.

¹ Block, Daniel, *The New American Commentary, Volume 6, Judges, Ruth*. Nashville, Tennessee: B&H Publishing Group. 1999, p691.

Why would Naomi instruct Ruth to uncover Boaz's feet while he slept in the middle of the night and then lie down next to him? Some would interpret this gesture in a sexual manner, but the narrative surrounding this text indicates nothing of the sort. There is also no clear custom that we are aware of that would dictate Ruth uncovering Boaz's feet while he slept. This appears to be a unique incident. My belief is that the act was symbolic, intended to create empathy. Ruth's request to Boaz is to be covered in marriage. Right now she is uncovered, making her vulnerable and without protection. By removing the covering from Boaz's feet, she is making him vulnerable to the cool night air and he awakes with a shiver. **Ruth is helping Boaz empathize with her position and stir up compassion in his heart.**

Is there scriptural warrant for this opinion? See *Hebrews 2:17-18* and *4:15*. We know the events recorded in this book foreshadow the love and work of Jesus Christ. Boaz serves as a picture of Christ. Boaz experiences Ruth's vulnerability in a visceral way, if only for a moment, and then is presented with an opportunity to extend compassion. This clearly represents our Savior who took on human flesh, experienced our temptations and weakness, and then extended the greatest compassion of all by offering Himself as a sacrifice for our sins. The just for the unjust.

How was Ruth's kindness (*hesed*) to Boaz greater than the initial kindness she had shown to Naomi? Ruth's commitment to Naomi defined her life by Naomi's choice of a dwelling place. *"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. Where you die I will die, and there will I be buried."* (Ruth 1:16b-17a) Ruth was faithful to this commitment, but now as she proposed marriage to Boaz, she is further committing her life to "the family" and prioritizing character above all by seeking to marry a godly kinsman redeemer, despite his age. This is another level of devotion to both the family and the Lord. Boaz indicates she was free to marry a younger man (closer to her own age), but she sought out Boaz instead. To this man who had probably given up hope on marriage, Ruth's *hesed* was astounding.

By calling Ruth a "worthy woman" (vs 11), Boaz elevated her from the status of servant to a moral equal (see *Ruth 2:1*). Her reputation was as stellar as his. Was Boaz's commitment to marry Ruth unconditional? If not, why? **No. His unconditional commitment was to be obedient to God's Word and respect the laws of his people. There was a kinsman nearer (of closer relation) than Boaz who had the right to redeem Ruth. Despite their mutual interest, they had a higher commitment to obey the Lord. Boaz didn't want any marriage; he wanted a marriage that was fully pleasing in God's sight. Boaz had a love for Ruth, but his love for God was even greater.**

Consider this wisdom. Who loves you more than God? No one. Typically, next in line will be your parents. To this point, no other person on earth loves you (as defined in scripture) more than them. When you have direction concerning from the Lord and your parents concerning a relationship that is contrary to what you want, what will you do? If you would reject the Word of the One who loves you most (God), and the counsel of the ones on this earth who love you most (your parents), in order to pursue a relationship, what type of committed and faithful spouse are you preparing yourself to be? I suggest that your commitment to the relationship will only last as long as your future spouse is pleasing you and telling you what you want to hear. **This is not the commitment of marriage.**

Likewise, what kind of spouse are you getting if they will also dishonor God and godly counsel from loving people in their life to pursue you? Don't be fooled by smooth talk, emotions, and physical attraction. All of those things are temporary. Look deeper at proven character. Ruth was getting a treasure in Boaz and Boaz was getting a treasure in Ruth. Too many relationships today are shallow and therefore temporary. Don't set yourself up for unnecessary pain and failure!

Model the kind of marriage relationship you want in your relationship with Christ and with your parents. If you want to marry someone who will love and honor and remain committed to you, even in the difficult times, cultivate those character qualities in your relationship with the Lord and your parents. This will bear fruit for years to come.

Boaz ended his talk with Ruth by voluntarily making an oath. What was the substance of the oath? What was the security of the oath? What is the significance of the oath? **The substance of the oath was that one way or another, Boaz would see to it that Ruth is redeemed according to the kinsman laws. The security of the oath was "as the Lord lives", meaning the oath was intended to be as certain as the eternal nature of God and sworn in His name. The significance of the oath was to provide immediate security to Ruth. Boaz was totally committed to making certain that she would be covered. Ruth's horizon of hope was now indefinitely extended. This is a commitment of true sacrificial love. Regardless of the benefit to Boaz, he would ensure Ruth is blessed.**

Ruth 3:14-18 – Protecting a Reputation

After swearing the oath, Boaz instructed Ruth to lie down and rest until the morning at his feet. Why would he do this? Why not send her back to town? What was the risk in this decision? **By resting at his feet, she would be protected from any danger of animals or thieves and would not have to venture a perilous and difficult journey back into town in the dark. The risk of this act however, was that the reputations of these two blameless individuals could be tarnished by ungodly assumptions about their actions. Boaz was willing to take this personal risk in order to protect Ruth from bodily harm.**

Despite taking this risk, Boaz would do all in his power to their reputations as well. His first charge in the morning was to the others who spent the night at the threshing floor (likely his servants). He charged them that it should not be known that Ruth had come to the threshing floor at night. Why did he then fill Ruth's cloak with barley? **There is one explicit reason provided and another likely implicit reason. First, he said that she should not go back to Naomi empty-handed. By sending Ruth back with this barley, he communicated his appreciation to Naomi for her part in Ruth's proposal and perhaps also as a type of dowry that was commonly provided by a groom to the parents of a bride. Secondly, by sending Ruth back to town with barley, there would be no suspicion as to why she had ventured to the threshing floor. She returned with barley. This may have served a secondary purpose to protect their reputations.**

There is no way to know exactly how much grain Boaz gave Ruth. The measurement of the six "measures" of barley is not specified. It would not have been the ephah, because six measures would have been 180 to 300 pounds of grain. Not only is that unlikely for Ruth, but also for her cloak which would have ripped under that weight. It was almost certainly a much smaller unit of measurement.

Upon recounting the events of the night to Naomi, her instruction for Ruth was now to wait. Ruth was the initiator of gleaning, which the Lord used to initiate a relationship with Boaz. Naomi was the initiator of the proposal, which the Lord used to solicit a commitment of security from Boaz. Now, Ruth had to wait upon Boaz (and the Lord) to resolve the issue. By all the evidence provided, Naomi was certain Boaz would not rest until he had fulfilled his oath. This is a great example for us!

There is a time to move forward and fulfill our part and then a time to wait upon others and the Lord to work in a situation. We need spiritual wisdom to discern the times and choose what would please Him in each circumstance. Our “evidence” that the Lord will provide is that we live in obedience to His Word and trust His promises to bring our obedience to fruition. We seek first His kingdom and trust Him to provide our needs (*Matthew 6:33*). We proclaim God’s truth and leave the effects in His hands (*Isaiah 55:11*). We return blessings for insults and trust the Lord to bless us in return (*1 Peter 3:9*). We withhold vengeance for offences and leave recompense in His hands (*Romans 12:19*). **We must learn to both act and wait in faith.**