

Ruth 3

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[0 : 00] So, the book of Ruth, we're in chapter 3. It's been a great series. I've really enjoyed looking through it together. And really, I've mentioned this every time as we've started off going, that often, you know, we think it's all about Ruth, but really, the central character in Ruth is Naomi.

And really, the book is about her redemption. It's about how she goes through an awful tragedy, and she's very bitter with God, but the living God redeems her as we go through the four chapters.

It's a great thing to think about. There's lots of big themes that go on, lots of themes that are relevant for today's world that we live in. It's a love story. There's a story of redemption.

Everybody loves a rescue story as well. And so it's great to look into it. And today, it's probably the height of one of the passage, perhaps some of the things that are well known about the book.

The provocative nature of things that go on. It's a dating sort of scenario that has started. And so why not start off with something from a true, you know, dating story.

[1 : 13] I have to go to... When me and Annabelle started dating, one of the things that we did was we had a film... One of the things we did when we started, we were aware and we decided we'd have a film TV series trade-off.

Sounds worse. What is that? Well, I couldn't believe that Annabelle had never seen Star Wars, and Annabelle couldn't believe that I'd never seen Pride and Prejudice. And so we agreed that we'd both watch each other's together with one another.

And I'll let you make up your mind about who got the better deal out of that. But I do wonder, I do wonder, maybe in relationships or in friendships, we kind of can approach it with that kind of attitude, can't we?

It's a bit like, is it a bit like a trade doing a deal? Now, for the film trade, it's just a bit of fun. There's nothing... Don't read too much into that. But it's perhaps not so funny, is it?

If that's the way that we approach all our relationships. What's in it for me? Why should I bother? Do we base things on how we...

[2 : 27] Is it a trade? Should I bother with it unless I... Unless I benefit? And maybe, maybe, we might even approach Christianity like that.

What's in it for me? What's the trade involved? Is there a catch? Does it just sound a bit too good to be true? And it's, there's actually a catch where we're going to be left shortchanged.

I want to tell you this, mind, there is no catch. There is no catch with the gospel of Jesus Christ. But he came down, not because he wanted anything from you. He didn't come down to make a deal or do a trade.

But he actually came to selflessly serve you. One of the things we've been talking about was that the way that Jesus serves you and the way that he demonstrates love for you, which we demonstrated last week, is that he uses his people as his instruments.

That he plays the melody of love through his people. And this week, what we're going to see is how the living God demonstrates his selfless service to his people by the selflessness that we see in his people to one another.

[3 : 46] And his service demonstrated by selflessness. It's not a trade, but it's purely giving of oneself without anything expected in return. And we're going to see that by looking at three points.

Three observations made in our passage. We're going to see selfless repentance, selfless risk-taking, and then selfless service at the end. Selfless repentance, selfless risk-taking, and selfless service.

So, just a reminder of what has happened. Where have we got to in our story so far? I started just a little bit, giving a brief overview. There's a terrible tragedy at the beginning.

Naomi and Ruth, they both lost their husbands, Elimelech and Marlon. And then they returned.

They were left with the widows in that day. They were left with absolutely nothing. They were destitute. And they returned back to Bethlehem, the house of bread, which was now not in famine, but had a plentiful beginning of the barley harvest.

[4 : 48] And Naomi was so bitter at God, yet Ruth was so faithful to God. And then we saw last week, how Ruth went out to, in the fields to collect food for her and her mother-in-law.

And now she met Boaz. And through meeting Boaz, Naomi's attitude, a disposition, totally changed towards the living God. There was a hinge in that passage, chapter 2, verse 20, where she realised that maybe God, the Lord had been looking after her the whole time.

That he had showed kindness to the living and to the dead. And her attitude had completely changed as she saw that maybe Boaz would be the one who could help them.

And so that's what we've got to in our passage. And in this passage, we see that these, a plan come from Naomi as to how this is all going to take shape. And the first thing that I want us to notice though is in the making of the plan, we're going to look at Naomi.

What I want us to see is that she has genuine repentance, a selfless turning away from sin, turning back to God. And we see that because her concerns are for Ruth.

[6 : 06] Her concerns are not, as you might expect, which they might have been previously, they might have been previously for the name of her deceased husband or sons.

But here, she's totally concerned with Ruth's welfare. There is no mention of her actual family, her sons at all.

You see that straight away in verse 1. She clearly spells out her intentions. Verse 1. My daughter, I must find a home for you where you will be well provided for.

That is her main focus. Naomi demonstrates a true repentance. And true repentance is always observed in some form of change within a person.

It can be seen in how some people like, but it is a change in how we think or how, or how, as I've said, how we act. It's why people often say about repentance, they often say that it is the opposite side of the coin of faith, because in turning away from sin, it requires active faithfulness.

[7 : 16] In Naomi's case, that's turning away from bitterness at God, the turning away from considering only herself to actively loving Ruth, from only having a heart for Ruth.

You remember Naomi in chapter 1. Do you remember Ruth? She made this huge profession of faith and promised to cling to Naomi through thick and thin, that she would go with Naomi, that Naomi's God would be her God, that she would go even to death.

How did Naomi react in chapter 1? She didn't say anything to her. She was so bitter. She doesn't even acknowledge what Ruth said.

Ruth poured out her heart and her soul, but Naomi's not interested. You see how she's changed? Now she's clinging to Ruth.

Ruth was clinging to Naomi, and now it's all come full circle. They're clinging to one another. She's considering Ruth's future, not her own, thinking of Ruth as more important than herself.

[8 : 22] She's repented, and God has changed her. In 2 Corinthians, the Apostle Paul talks about repentance like this. He says that godly sorrow brings repentance that leads to salvation and leaves no regret, but worldly sorrow brings death.

Naomi must have felt some sort of grief over how she treated Ruth, and maybe how she treated her God. She felt a godly sorrow, a weighing on her heart that made her turn away from how she lived towards the living God, knowing that he was where she would find life.

Because repentance is, it's not about making amends for the wrong. It is much more than behavior modification, which actually never brings lasting change. Repentance is having a godly sorrow for what you've done or thought.

Knowing that it's against God, and seeking deep change from him, knowing that he's the only one who can actually change you. It's recognizing the wrong, and allowing God to change you.

The good news of the gospel is that this type of lasting, deep change, not superficial change that seems like we've changed on the surface, but deep down we have it. This deep spiritual change is on offer.

[9 : 47] There are lots of things that we've done, perhaps that we've been embarrassed about, that we regret, but sometimes that, I wonder, and I know this is true of myself, the reason we want to change the past is because we don't like the negative feelings of guilt or embarrassment.

And if we were being honest, if we could take those feelings away, or those memories, we'd be quite happy staying as we are. We're happy sometimes, as long as we appear good on the surface, thinking that that's what really counts.

But you know, Jesus isn't really that bothered about what you look like on the outside. He cares about the root. You know if a tree ever gets disease into its roots, which it can easily happen, but the way that the disease often works is that it doesn't actually move up the tree, but it can stay in the root.

And at first glance, if the disease is only just set in, you might see the tree on the outside and think that it was healthy. However, over time, as the disease settled into the root, you'd notice something was up.

Because the fruit it produced wouldn't be right. There'd be something off with it. There's something not right with that tree. Look at its fruit. It's all, it's diseased, the fruit produced. The fruit produced would be affected by the root issue.

[11:18] And Jesus cares about what's going on in the inside. He cares about your heart. Good roots produce good fruits. He cares about what's going on underneath.

Naomi's roots have changed. And good fruit comes. And I wonder, where might the living God want us to look at our roots?

Maybe you've noticed in yourself roots that you don't like. For Naomi, it was bitterness. But there are lots of ways how the bad root problems control themselves.

The encouragement for us today, though, is Naomi doesn't stay there. She doesn't stay there. God is committed to changing Naomi and he's committed to changing us too. And I don't want you to feel hopeless today if there's perhaps a sin or a way of thinking that you can't seem to shake.

Because the living God is committed to making you more like his son. He's committed to that. Just as much as he was committed to Naomi, to changing her, he's committed to you too.

[12:35] To making you look more like Jesus. So that's selfless repentance. Selfless repentance. The next thing that we're going to see is selfless risk-taking.

Selfless risk-taking. Naomi and Ruth show themselves to be risk-takers. Because the plan, the plan that Naomi comes with is, it is pretty, it is a risky one to start with.

And Ruth takes it, she takes a huge risk in listening to Naomi and following through exactly what she says. You see the plan that she has. Just look with me from verse 2. Naomi outlines the plan of what she tells Ruth to do.

Verse 2, Now Boaz, whose women you have worked is a relative of ours. Tonight he'll be winning barley on the threshing floor. And here we have it. Wash, put on perfume, and get dressed in your best clothes.

Then go down to the threshing floor, but don't let him know you're there until he's finished eating and drinking. When he lies down, note the place where he's lying, then go on and cover his feet and lie down.

[13:44] He will tell you what to do. And you notice there's no debate. Ruth doesn't ask any questions. Verse 5, she says she'll do whatever he says. The plan is highly provocative.

Now, I mentioned earlier it's now that it was when they first arrived in Bethlehem, it was the beginning of the barley harvest. It's now, as we read, it's the end of the harvest season.

And at the end of the harvest season in those days, it was quite normal for the men to sleep with their harvest. That was to protect it from thieves and people who wanted to get a hold of it.

However, there was also something else that went on with the men when they were sleeping with the harvest. It was well known that certain women would go to see the men, especially after they had had a few drinks.

Given that context, what Naomi suggests is highly provocative. And it is risky. there is a lot of unknowns.

[14:48] How might Boaz react? He could be appalled at this brazen foreigner. Tell her to shove off. He's not that kind of man. After all, he's a man of great honour, a godly man of faith.

What courage it took to follow all this through, to listen to her mother-in-law. But also, I want you to know there's a twist. Ruth doesn't stick to Naomi's script.

You remember, Ruth tells her to wait for Boaz to tell her what to do. But following Boaz asking who she is, she does exactly the opposite.

She blurts it all out and her true intentions are revealed. Verse 9, I'm your servant Ruth, she said. And then she blurts out, spread the corner of your garment over me since you are a guardian redeemer of our family.

She was supposed to listen but she can't take it. She just blurts it out. And I just want us to focus, key phrase in this is that what she tells Boaz, spread the corner of your garment over me.

[15:59] It's a really important phrase to understand what's going on in this passage. The phrase, the phrase corner of the garment is one word in Hebrew, kanap, but it is also the exact same word for wings.

The exact same word. So it could read, instead of spread the corner of your garment over me, it could read, spread your wings over me.

Now that's really important to understand. A small detail, because of what Boaz said to her, previously. Just flick over to me chapter 2 verse 12. That is exactly what Boaz prayed for her. I'll read it again. Boaz prayed for her when he met her in the fields. May you be richly rewarded by the Lord, the God of Israel, under whose wings you have come to take refuge.

And now, she says, spread your wings over me. She's saying to Boaz, Boaz, don't you realise you're the answer to your own prayer?

[17:07] The Lord's refuge, his protection, I'm asking you now that the Lord's protection would come through you to me. I want you to be the embodiment of the Lord to me.

I want you to protect me. Now there is only one thing that she can mean. Because in addition, alongside all of that going on, alongside the ancient Near East, for a man to spread his garment over a woman was to take them as his wife.

Ruth has one thing in mind, one thing. She's proposing to him. She's saying, take me as your wife, rescue me, protect me.

At the heart of it all, what we have is a love story. No, it probably doesn't quite fit the script for a Hollywood rom-com. It's not got as many gags as Made in Manhattan or as tear-jerking moments as the notebook.

Because actually this story is not about emotional manipulation to make you feel good. At the heart of this story, the reason it's so, it draws us in is because it really pulls on our deepest desires.

[18:28] All of us, every single one of us, needs rescuing, needs desires, deep relationship and to be loved. I don't mean romantic love necessarily.

Ruth's proposal in that time as well, even perhaps in our time, it's not the dumb thing, isn't it? For a woman to propose to a man, it goes against the conventions of societal norms and that the beauty of it speaks to us so profoundly.

And the reason, the real reason, is because the way Ruth comes to Boaz is just like how he comes to Jesus. Ruth has nothing to give Boaz, nothing.

She's a foreigner, all that she has is debt, she's a nobody. At the beginning we heard about her getting dressed in her best clothes, but we see later that her best clothes was a short.

She's in rags, she can't support herself, she needs hands-outs, if she is going to survive or her mother-in-law is going to survive, she needs Boaz.

[19:40] She needs Boaz to take on her debt, she needs Boaz to treat her as a somebody, she needs to be taken from rags to riches. Everything that Ruth needs from Boaz we need of Jesus.

We have a debt we can't pay, we're foreigners in God's place, we have nothing to give Jesus and we're spiritually naked. In marriage, Ruth wants to be to be, she wants to be united to Boaz.

And that is a picture of how we're united to Jesus Christ in joining him. He covers our spiritual nakedness with the hem of his garment.

He gives us a cloak of righteousness. He takes on our mess, our sin, our rags and clings to us. Makes us worthy and acceptable.

Acceptable at his expense, at the expense of his own life he takes on our sin. If you're not a follower of Jesus today, it might seem like a big risk giving yourself to Jesus in this way.

[21:01] But this is what he gives you in return. He clings to you. Everything that he has becomes yours.

Imagine that. Everything that the king of kings has belongs to you because you're joined to him. The debt is taken away.

From rags to riches. Not spiritually naked but spiritually clothed so that when the living God looks at you, he looks at you and he sees the same things he does when he looks at his own son.

It's a risk worth taking. Why not consider today afresh what Jesus has to honor us? Now yet again, we're not quite sure how Buzz is going to react, are we?

Is he going to be the man we all hope he's going to be in this story? And his response is better than we could hope for. It's better than we could hope for because he devotes himself to serving Ruth.

[22 : 17] Just look with me. Verse 10. The Lord bless you, my daughter, he replied. This kindness is greater than that which you showed earlier. You have not run after the younger men, whether rich or poor.

And now, my daughter, don't be afraid. I will do for you all you ask. He serves her. The tables have been turned.

In verse 9, Ruth said that she said to Boaz, I'm your servant. And now Boaz says to her, I will do all you ask. However, like any good romantic story, there's a last minute problem that comes up.

There's another man in the same who could potentially steal Ruth from Boaz. It's like that moment in a wedding ceremony and the minister says, is there any reason why these two can't be lawfully married?

So speak up now. And on those occasions, it's not a done thing. You should have said something earlier. But Ruth already knows.

[23 : 25] She already knows that there's another closer to the family who therefore has the first say. Now, this way of marrying, and it might seem a little strange to us in our day.

It might come across like Ruth's, you know, just comes as a piece of property. But actually, what it really highlights is that Boaz is devoted to even more than we thought.

Because at this stage, when he finds that out, he could walk away. There's no obligation for him to carry this out because there's a man who's got first say. But Boaz selflessly says he will serve Ruth. He will do whatever it takes to ensure that she's taken care of. Boaz serves Ruth. And let's just show what he reminds us that in the same way we see Boaz.

He'll do whatever it takes. Jesus will do whatever it takes to serve us. There's this wonderful picture of Jesus as a servant. It comes in John 13 before he goes to the cross where he washes the disciples' feet.

[24 : 28] And Peter can't believe he wants to serve Jesus. He wants to serve Jesus after all. It's Jesus who's the master. The Lord washing someone's feet was a job for the lowest of the low.

In those days it wasn't like we expect. It's not that people have highly manicured feet but people either walk with no shoes on or basic sandals and their feet would have been covered in mud or worse.

And Peter says to him you shall never wash my feet. When he says that he's effectively saying to Jesus you shall never serve me. But of course, of course that's the reason Jesus came.

Not to be served but to serve, to give his life as a ransom, as payment to redeemers. Jesus' kingdom is often described as an upside down one because the king of the kingdom is the one who goes to the very bottom to serve everyone else.

And we must realise, we must realise that he is still your servant today. And maybe like Peter we find that difficult to comprehend. Does it seem too irreverent to ask Jesus to do something for you, to serve you?

[25 : 42] How could I approach the king of kings, God himself, and ask him to serve me? How could I do that? He would be absolutely delighted. Whether we go to him for the first time or the 101st time, Jesus' desire is always to serve you.

It is always to serve you. He wants to serve you today. how might that change how we pray?

When we pray, we're praying to a king who wants to serve you more than you want him to serve you. He wants to get on his knees and wash your feet and do the most menial task for you to lift you up.

Jesus' desire is always to serve you. we started by talking about relationships and sometimes we might take how we think about relationships.

What's in it for me? Is there a catch? And maybe we take that into how we feel about the living God, how we feel about Jesus Christ, about Christianity and say maybe there's a catch with God.

[26 : 59] Let me tell you again, there is no catch. Jesus offers this relationship to you freely because Jesus is the one whose humility and selflessness are at the heart of the gospel.

They're at the heart of the good news because he came down low to serve you even to death on the cross so that he would be exalted. And so that as we find ourselves in him, as we go down and

serve, as we find ourselves united to him, we will be exalted.
to him. He doesn't wait for you to do something to love you. He doesn't love you because you've done something for him. But Romans 5 says, while we were sinners, Christ died for you. While you were his enemy, he loved you. He didn't wait until you turned to him to start loving you. He loved you while you were still in the dirt, in the mess. Not once you've got yourself sorted. You see, the real love story here is not Boaz and Ruth. The real love story is God's love for his people, God's love for lost sheep, God's love for Naomi, his love for Ruth and Boaz and his love for each one of us.

[28 : 09] That's the real love story. He finds Naomi in her darkest moment and uses that to shine a blessing on her.

To shine a blessing on Ruth and Boaz and the people of God. And he will find you in your darkest moment and shine a blessing on you because he loves to serve you and wants to bless you. That is the real love story.