

The Pursuit

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[0:00] Let's read. Starting in Ruth 3, verse 3. Then Naomi, her mother-in-law, said to her, My daughter, should I not seek rest for you, that it may dwell, that it may be well with you?

Is not Boaz our relative, with whose young women you were? See, he is winnowing barley tonight at the threshing floor. Wash, therefore, and anoint yourself, and put on your cloak and go down to the threshing floor.

But do not make yourself known to the man until he has finished eating and drinking. But when he lies down, observe the place where he lies. Then go and uncover his feet and lie down, and he will tell you what to do.

And she replied, All that you say I will do. So she went down to the threshing floor and did just as her mother-in-law had commanded her. And when Boaz had eaten and drunk, and his heart was merry, he went to lie down at the end of the heap of grain.

Then she came softly and uncovered his feet and lay down. At midnight the man was startled and turned over, and behold, a woman lay at his feet.

[1:10] He said, Who are you? And she answered, I am Ruth, your servant. Spread your wings over your servant, for you are a redeemer. And he said, May you be blessed by the Lord, my daughter.

You have made this last kindness greater than the first, in that you have not gone after young men, whether poor or rich. And now, my daughter, do not fear. I will do for you all that you ask.

For all my fellow townsmen know that you are a worthy woman. And now it is true that I am a redeemer. Yet there is a redeemer nearer than I.

Remain tonight and in the morning, if he will redeem you, good. Let him do it. But if he is not willing to redeem you, then, as the Lord lives, I will redeem you.

Lie down until the morning. So she lay at his feet until the morning, but arose before one could recognize another. And he said, Let it not be known that the woman came to the threshing floor.

[2:14] And he said, Bring the garment you are wearing and hold it out. So she held it, and he measured out six measures of barley and put it on her. Then she went into the city. And when she came to her mother-in-law, she said, How did you fare, my daughter?

Then she told her all that the man had done for her, saying, These six measures of barley he gave to me. For he said to me, You must not go back empty-handed to your mother-in-law.

She replied, Wait, my daughter, until you learn how the matter turns out. For the man will not rest, but will settle the matter today. Thanks, Zoe.

Well, good morning. It's me again. Sorry about that. My name is Oscar. If you don't know me, I serve as one of the elders here at Watermark Church.

Welcome to everyone. Special welcome to our guests this morning. Great to see so many friendly faces and some new faces as well. Let me pray for us as we look into God's word today.

[3:24] Father. Father. Father. Father. Father, I pray that our hearts will be humble and contrite as we consider your word this morning.

Thank you so much. Thank you, God, that we have the Bible, your word, which is so powerful, which speaks truth, which heals our hearts, which challenges us, which shows us the incredible gift that is Jesus.

As I speak. As I speak. As I speak and as we listen, I pray all of our hearts would be soft and tender and and to receive your message today. Lord, help me to speak clearly.

Help your message to come through. I pray, God, that we would see the incredible beauty of our Savior, Jesus Christ. In his name we pray.

Amen. For 20 years, I worked in the financial industry with some of you here, actually. Each year was like a marathon.

[4 : 30] I work really, really hard each year to prove myself, and at my year-end review, hopefully I would get a reward for my efforts. Maybe a bonus.

Maybe a promotion. Maybe a nice pat on the back. Great job, Oscar. In university, I played for my tennis team. And at the beginning of each season, my teammates and I, we would be jostling for position.

We played challenge matches against each other to see who would start on the team that season. In this world we live in, if we pursue something, when we want something, we are asked, we're forced to prove ourself.

To get into school, our children must present their portfolios. To get a job, we must polish that CV. And this morning, as we look into Ruth chapter 3, I'd like us to sit on this question.

How are we to approach Jesus? What are we to bring to Jesus when we come to him? Over the past few weeks, if you have not been with us, we've been looking at this beautiful book, this beautiful short story called Ruth.

[5 : 49] Over the last few weeks, we looked at chapter 1. And in that chapter, we saw that Naomi, she loses everything. She loses her husband, her sons, her protection, security, everything that she cared about was gone.

But God intervenes and provides her a glimmer of hope. He provides food back in Bethlehem. And he provides her Ruth, who would cling to her and care for her.

In chapter 2, we saw that Ruth, with great, incredible faith, she ventures out into the fields in spite of the risks and the danger to find food.

And there, she meets Boaz, who showers her with unmerited grace and kindness. And so that's where we are now. And we pick the story up in chapter 3.

So this morning, we'll look at chapter 3 in four parts. The plan, the approach, the response, and the pledge. Let's dive in.

[6 : 52] The plan. Chapter 3, verse 1, begins with Naomi urging Ruth to approach Boaz. We learn in chapter 2 that Boaz is a relative of Naomi's dead husband, Elimelech, and therefore could be a potential kinsman redeemer.

Meaning, Boaz, because he was a near relative, could potentially redeem or restore the honor, the position, and future of both Ruth and Naomi in a number of possible ways, but at great cost to himself.

And here, Naomi's idea is that Boaz could provide rest for Ruth. In chapter 1, when Naomi was returning to Bethlehem, she told Ruth to stay in Moab.

And there you'll find rest by potentially remarrying and reestablishing permanent security, provision, and honor in a husband and family.

And that evening, Boaz would be spending the night on the threshing floor outside the city, where farmers would take harvested grain to winnow.

[8 : 08] Should be a picture up there. A process whereby you use a pitchfork to throw a bunch of grain and straw and chaff in the air. The heavier grain that you want would fall to the ground, and the unwanted chaff would blow away.

This usually happened at night, as a night breeze was helpful in this separation process. But the threshing floor was a dangerous and immoral place.

The farmers, typically men, would stay there all night, guarding their coveted grain. And after an evening of winnowing, and perhaps a bit too much wine, the men would often engage with prostitutes.

Hosea chapter 9, verse 1, mentions that prostitution and immorality were rife on the threshing floor. And yet, Naomi comes up with this elaborate and risky plan for Ruth to approach Boaz.

She instructs Ruth to take a bath, put on perfume, wear her cloak. Other translations say, put on fresh clothes.

[9 : 19] Don't let Boaz see you until he's had enough to eat and drink, she tells Ruth. And then when he lies down to sleep, uncover his feet, lie down, and Boaz will tell you what to do.

What is going on here? Well, first, it's important to note that just because Naomi's plan is in the Bible, it's not meant to be prescriptive.

The book of Ruth, sorry, singles, is not about dating. Chapter 3 is not a dating manual about who should approach who and how.

What we do see, however, is A, it's likely that Ruth was still grieving over the death of her husband, Malon.

And now that time is over, it's time to change clothes. It's time to throw away the clothes that were meant for grieving. In 2 Samuel, chapter 12, King David does the exact same thing.

[10:26] After the death of his son, when David had finished grieving, he washed, anointed himself, and then he put on fresh clothes. But B, more importantly, we see here the heart behind the plan, which shows Naomi and Ruth's desire to honor Boaz.

Of course, Boaz is not Jesus, but he is a worthy man and has acted as God's agent of kindness to both Ruth and Naomi.

And therefore, he shows characteristics of Jesus in many ways. And most importantly, he is a kinsman redeemer, holding a special familial position and therefore could possibly redeem Ruth and Naomi.

He's special.

When you meet the king or queen, you wear your best suit and tie. How about us when we approach God? How do we prepare ourselves?

[11:56] When we come to God, when we open his word and when we pray, do we approach him with a contrite and humble heart? With focus, attention and without distraction.

Or when we open the Bible, we read, but then there's a hundred iPhone notifications coming on and we're distracted. Or we open his word at 1130 p.m. at night and then we fall asleep midway.

Or do we rush to Sunday service and we get here at 1134 a.m. Heart and mind distracted. Come early, guys.

That's what I'm saying. Okay. To settle our hearts. We do that to settle our hearts, to prepare our hearts. We've come to worship the great King Jesus.

Now, also, look how easily Ruth agreed to Naomi's dangerous and risky plan. Last week, we saw that going into the fields to glean was very dangerous for Ruth.

[13:01] And it was only because Boaz showed incredible favor towards Ruth, offering her safety and protection that she was able to glean for that entire season. So how much more would Ruth be putting her very life at risk, venturing down to the threshing floor at the dead of night with no one to protect her?

But Ruth shows unwavering faith in God, which drove her to continue to make good on her promise to cling to, to protect, to love Naomi, even if it meant putting herself in danger.

Ruth responds to Naomi's plan in verse five. Simple response. All you say, I will do. The plan. Will it work?

Well, Ruth indeed does everything Naomi instructs her to do. She discreetly heads down to the threshing floor. And after Boaz has had enough to eat and drink, he lies down at the end of a pile of barley.

Ruth then quietly goes and uncovers Boaz's feet and lays down there. Around midnight, Boaz, he wakes up. He's half asleep.

[14:17] He's startled and he senses someone near him. And he says to the dark, who are you? Ruth replies. Verse nine. I am Ruth, your servant.

Spread your wings over your servant. For you are a redeemer. Let's put ourselves in Ruth's shoes for a moment. Imagine being Ruth on the threshing floor, heart pounding, perhaps worried about being mistaken for a prostitute, wondering how Boaz would respond.

Hoping for the best, but expecting the worst. Stepping out in faith to ask the boss for his hand in marriage. Doing this in spite of knowing her place in the social ecosystem of Bethlehem.

Many strikes against her. A Moabite foreigner. A woman. A poor widow with no husband or protector. The lowest on the low. The lowest of the low.

On the social ecosystem of her town. Notice Ruth says, I am your servant. A small upgrade from chapter two where she said, where she saw herself solely as a foreigner and not even one of your servants.

[15:34] Life has gotten a little bit better for Ruth at the end of the harvest season. Boaz provided food from his field. He provided protection.

But on that threshing floor, Ruth is asking for more because Ruth knows she needs more. Her proposal to Boaz is a desperate cry for permanent rest. She's asking to be saved. Because Ruth and Naomi didn't just need food for one season. The two destitute widows needed provision for the rest of their lives. They didn't just need protection from the dangerous men in the fields. They faced an existential crisis. The line of Elimelech. Naomi's ex-husband. Dead husband. And the line of Malon. Ruth's dead husband. Was about to be wiped off the family tree. Now maybe in our culture and in today, in this modern age, that doesn't really resonate for us. [16:39] But back then in ancient times, having a son and extending your family line, that was everything. And so, having your family wiped off from the family tree was like us having our bank accounts, stocks, bonds, real estate portfolio go to zero overnights. Plus, we lose all our family and friends. Plus, we lose our dignity and reputation all at the same time. That night, Ruth wasn't just looking for a husband or for companionship because she was lonely. Ruth needed a savior, a redeemer. And she held nothing back. And in faith, despite the risks, in her proposal to Boaz, she puts her life in God's hands. And so today, whether you're a Christian or maybe you're seeking, the question is, do you think you need saving? Or how much do you think you need saving? The reality is, is that in our natural state, without God, all of us are like Ruth. Broken. [17:58] Weak. And destitute. Sinners. Without hope. But I think most of us, if we're honest, probably think that we're pretty decent. We're educated. We have good jobs. We have nice families. Most of the time, yeah, we do good. But as Isaiah writes, all of us, like sheep, have gone astray, each to his own way. The reality is this. We aren't just drowning and need rescuing. We've actually drowned. In our sin, we are dead. We need someone worthy and perfect. Someone who is our family to bring us back to life, to a new life, with a new identity, with a new purpose. All of us, like Ruth, are in desperate need of a savior. And there's only one God-man that can save. And today, he beckons all of us with open arms to approach him. His name is Jesus Christ. [19:07] Do you know him? And like Ruth, who approaches Boaz with nothing but complete desperation and faith, we don't need to approach Jesus with anything. Just our empty hands and our faith. He doesn't demand perfection from us. He doesn't demand anything from us but desperate faith and humble dependence. For Jesus opposes the proud, but gives grace to the humble. Our prayer is, Lord, I need you today. I can do nothing without you. I cannot do my job without you. It's too difficult. I can't love my parents or family without you. It's too difficult. God, give me the strength. I can't witness to my colleagues because I'm too timid. God, give me the strength. Lord, I need you. And Ruth approaches her redeemer, Boaz, and says, spread your wings over your servant, for you are a redeemer. [20:14] This phrase, spread your wings or spread your garment, it's a saying that symbolizes marriage. In Ezekiel 16, 8, the passage describes this as God spreads his wings over his people Israel in a show of loving commitment. Ruth asks Boaz to marry her and to be her permanent protector. In chapter 1, Boaz said Ruth had come to the people of Israel to find protection under the wings of God. And now, Ruth reminds Boaz, be part of God's plan. Protect me. Provide for me and my family. Spread your wings over me. But isn't it risky for Ruth to approach Boaz, especially with nothing in her position of weakness? See, the only reason why Ruth could approach Boaz that night on the threshing floor is because she knew the type of man Boaz was. A worthy man. A God-fearing man. [21:23] She didn't know how Boaz would respond, but she knew enough and had enough faith to put herself in Boaz's hands, to completely surrender to his response. And how does Boaz respond to Ruth's proposal? Well, we see that in verse 10. It's beautiful. With immediate joy and with a firm commitment.

Boaz is genuinely full of excitement and joy when Ruth asks him to spread his wings over her. Ruth admits he's an older guy and thinks Ruth could have gone after the younger men.

But she didn't. And so, it's at this point in the story that we realize that Boaz loves Ruth.

He longed to be with her and to take her as his wife. In spite of her past and her current destitution, he loved this Moabite foreigner, this poor widowed woman, because of her character.

[22 : 30] Back in chapter 2, Boaz showed incredible kindness to Ruth in providing grain and protection for a harvest season. But back then, his true feelings were ambiguous.

Was he showing favor out of empathy and compassion? But now here, it's clear that the admiration he had for Ruth, for her humility, for her loyalty to Naomi, for her robust work ethic, for her faith, has now turned into love.

Boaz loved Ruth. And he commits then and there to redeem and marry Ruth. Verse 11. Now, my daughter, do not fear.

I will do for you all that you ask. For all my fellow townsmen know that you are a worthy woman.

Yes. Boaz had compassion on Ruth, and yet he loved Ruth.

Now, isn't this such a beautiful picture of Christ's redemptive love for us? Despite the great cost and sacrifice, Jesus committed to redeeming us from our sinful state by going to the cross for us.

[23 : 46] He had compassion on us. He saved us. But Jesus didn't unemotionally go to the cross, devoid of any love or intimacy or emotion towards us.

No, just the opposite. For the joy set before him, he endured the cross. What drove Boaz to redeem Ruth was love.

What drove Jesus to the cross to redeem us was a far greater and eternal love. A love so powerful and longstanding. A crazy, illogical, irrational love that is so high and deep, far and wide.

A love that lasts today, tomorrow, unto death, and even past that. And so today, know this.

Jesus doesn't just love the church. He doesn't just love Watermark. He loves you individually. He died for you.

[24 : 49] Now, as a quick aside, I know I said before that Ruth chapter 3 is not a prescriptive manual on dating. I stand by that.

But it is instructive to highlight the sexual purity of Ruth and Boaz on that threshing floor. It's clear there's mutual attraction.

Either of them could have made a move physically toward the other. But at a time, when everyone did what was right in their own eyes, and following God's law and holy commandments was largely ignored, as it is often today.

In Ruth and Boaz, we have two faithful, God-fearing people. Boaz had had some wine. It was midnight. Sketchy things happened with that one-two combination.

Boaz could have taken advantage of Ruth. Ruth could have seduced Boaz into marrying her. Both of them could have given in to their carnal desires and done what they felt was right.

[25 : 56] But instead, both Ruth and Boaz displayed the outward purity that stemmed from their inner selves as God-fearing individuals, which led to honoring each other, despite an attraction and temptation.

Both displayed patience and fear of God and honored God above personal desires. In chapter 4, we see the beautiful fruit of their God-honoring relationship.

So, in particular, young folks, single folks, please take note. Don't compromise your purity for your boyfriend or girlfriend or for anyone.

Honor God. Fear God. So, then and there, Boaz commits to redeeming Ruth. But, of course, as with every good story, there's a slight complication.

In verse 12, Boaz tells Ruth, Yet there is a Redeemer nearer than I. Remain tonight and in the morning. If he will redeem you, good.

[27 : 05] Let him do it. But if he is not willing to redeem you, as the Lord lives, I will redeem you. Lie down until the morning. There was a relative of Naomi's dead husband, a Lemelech, that was closer than Boaz.

And therefore, according to God's law, had the right to marry Ruth before Boaz. And so, Boaz, even though he wanted to marry Ruth immediately, he, again, he honored God's law and said, Wait, I need to ask this closer Redeemer first.

Boaz puts his faith in God before his own desires. And in the final display of kindness that evening, Boaz instructs Ruth to stay by his feet throughout the night.

It's clear nothing salacious or sketchy happens. This was to protect Ruth's reputation from being seen and mistaken for a prostitute. Boaz mentions this in verse 14.

But also to protect her, to protect Ruth from the dangers of the night. And so Ruth lay there at his feet until morning. Finally, the pledge.

[28 : 25] Early the next morning, Boaz measures out six measures of barley, which is about 30 to 40 kilograms of grain. And he puts it on her.

Either Ruth carries it on her back or she carries it somehow in the front of her cloak. And then Ruth heads back into the city. This is yet again another unmerited act of kindness from Boaz that would serve as a gift or a pledge to both Ruth and Naomi.

In some ways, the way the night encounter ended with Boaz must have been disappointing for Ruth. She goes to great lengths to plan and takes huge risks to approach him on the threshing floor.

But then, just as Ruth was ready to buy her wedding dress, Boaz says, Wait! Gotta do something first. First, my heart intention is to redeem you.

In either way, you will be redeemed. But, I must do the right thing. We have to wait. Because someone else might redeem me, redeem you before me.

[29 : 40] And to show the seriousness of his intention, Boaz gives Ruth one last huge bounty of grain as a symbol, as a pledge, as a guarantee.

To say, this provision of food, this symbolizes that my word is good. And I will honor my word. Trust me, I will do for you all that you ask.

It's a pledge to Ruth, and it's also a pledge to Naomi. In verse 16, when Ruth returns, Naomi asks her, How did you fare, my daughter?

Actually, the translation of this question more closely resembles, Who are you, my daughter? In other words, what is your relationship status now?

Are you a Moabite widow? Or are you to be Boaz's wife? Ruth recounts the story of this, of the morning, that Boaz gave a pledge, saying, saying, you must not go back empty-handed to your mother-in-law.

[30 : 50] God, again, showing kindness to Naomi through Ruth from Boaz. And like Ruth, we too have been given a promise and a pledge.

Two thousand years ago, Jesus sealed his promise on the cross with his blood. And that if we were simply to come to him in faith, in desperation and humble dependence, and ask him to spread his wings over us and to be our redeemer, he will do all that we ask.

And one day, we will see Jesus face to face in heaven as he promised in many places. In John 16, Jesus says, I will see you again and your heart will rejoice and no one will take your joy from you.

But no one knows when that time will be. But in the meantime, Jesus gave us his own spirit, the Holy Spirit, as a pledge, as a deposit.

Paul writes this in Ephesians chapter 1. When you heard the word of truth, the gospel, you were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit who is the guarantee of your inheritance.

[32 : 16] And as the Holy Spirit, this pledge lives in us. We are transformed. The Spirit helps us to know Jesus more and better.

It's through the Holy Spirit that we experience God today before we see him face to face. The Spirit's our helper, our counselor to give us what we need today, wisdom, discernment, strength, joy in the midst of tragedy to open our hearts to experience Jesus.

Not fully, but it will be full one day in heaven. And until that time, we wait and we work.

We wait patiently and we work on the mission that Jesus gave us before he left and went back to heaven, soul-saving, so that all can know and find rest in Jesus.

Let me close. Chapter 3 ends with a bit of a cliffhanger with everything resting on whether Boaz will figure things out that day.

[33 : 32] But it's very clear that Naomi's sentiment continues to brighten. In chapter 1, after such tragedy, she experiences a glimmer of hope.

In chapter 2, her sentiment increases again and she experiences the kindness of God through Ruth and through Boaz. In chapter 3, she's in good form.

She's recovering her good form. She's energetic. She's engaged. She's actively trying to help Ruth and herself. And she ends the chapter with great faith because she knows the man that Boaz is, a worthy man, a God-fearing man.

Our faith also lies on one man, one God-man. Everything about being a Christian is about Jesus Christ, who he is, son of God, and what he's done, the cross.

Nothing we could do could make Jesus love us more. And as I was preparing this sermon many months ago, I felt for Watermark, my heart for Watermark, is that we would come to Jesus with humble desperation.

[34 : 53] We'd be desperate for him. Too many of us are desperate for the things of the world. These things will never satisfy. There's only one thing in this universe that can satisfy the longing of the human heart, and that is knowing our creator, Jesus Christ.

So this week, let's remember who we are. We are broken people, but we are eternally loved by Jesus. Let's approach him with humble dependence and desperate faith.

Let's pray. Father God, Lord Jesus, Holy Spirit, the Trinitarian God, the one true God, we thank you again that we can come before you and sit under your word today.

I pray, God, that as these words of this chapter 3 in Ruth continue to sink deeper into our heart throughout this week, that you would help us to see that, yes, we are broken people.

We are highly imperfect. Our hearts are dark. We make a lot of mistakes. But if we can just come to you, nothing in our hands, like Ruth approaches Boaz, you so desire to hold us in your arms, to embrace us, to comfort us.

[36 : 21] You are a great protector. You are a great provider. You are our great redeemer. Help us, God, to humble ourselves and to put away the things of the world, to be desperate for you, not desperate for the things of this world that are temporal and one day will fade away, but to be desperate for you, Christ, because you are eternal and you are God and you love us.

We give the rest of this service to you. Help us to honor you in Jesus' name. Amen.