

RUTH - Wk 3

“Trusting God in The Middle”

11/14/21

Ruth 3

Introduction + Recap

Tim. Pastor. **Ruth 3**. Pray.

Ends + Means. As we get started this evening, let me ask you a question that philosophers have argued for thousands of years → **Does the end justify the means?** If my intentions are good, if the ultimate outcome or goal that I desire is good, does it matter what I have to do to make it happen?

Have you ever noticed how much our society wrestles with this question? It's all over our culture and our media.

Anti-Heroes:

- Walter White - Good goal of providing for his family and his cancer treatment. Starts a meth lab.
- Robin Hood - Good goal of providing for the poor, steals from the rich.

Villains:

- Thanos - Good goal of bringing balance to the universe. Kills half of all living things.
- Darth Vader - Good goal of saving his family, kills the younglings.
- New England Patriots - Good goal of a Super Bowl, cheats in a number of different ways.

Our culture is full of examples of people seeking something good the wrong way.

What about our lives? What about our stories and our journeys? Now, hopefully none of us are starting meth labs or trying to collect all of the infinity stones to kill half of all living things....not our current temptation....but we're pressed with this question in other ways, aren't we?

- Good goal: I want to live a fulfilled life of meaning and purpose. *What am I willing to compromise or sacrifice to get there?*
- Good goal: I want my kids to grow up as functioning, responsible members of society. *What am I willing to say or do or give up to make that happen?*
- Good goal: I want to get married to a loving spouse. *What values or Biblical teachings am I willing to compromise?*

Seeking something good the wrong way.

We are working our way through the book of Ruth over the course of this month asking different versions of this same question → **Will we trust God?** Week 1 - “When we suffer.” Week 2 - “When we prosper.”

Tonight → **Will we trust God in the middle?**

Will we trust God:

- In this spot in our lives where things are not yet resolved?
- In those moments we feel stuck?
- When we feel like He's not moving fast enough for our liking?
- When we're waiting for redemption, for resolution, for God to fix it or solve it, or bring it to a conclusion?

Will we trust God in the waiting? In the “not yet”? Or will we take matters into our own hands, using whatever means necessary?

Will we trust God in the middle?

RUTH 3.

Recap of Ruth 1-2

To catch you back up to where we are in the story....

Ruth 1: Introduced to Naomi who's living in the nation of Moab - much suffering. Naomi's husband and two sons have died. Left with nothing but this daughter in law Ruth.

Ruth 2: Glimmer of hope - go back to Bethlehem. Ruth and Boaz meet. Boaz starts providing for Ruth, invites her to take as much as grain as she needs from his fields.

Everything is going well, we're moving somewhere, Naomi is starting to show glimpses of trusting God again.

But now, as we get to the beginning of Ruth 3, we find that **7 weeks** have passed, and it's been nothing but the same old, same old. No further progress in Boaz and Ruth's relationship. No redemption. Just 7 weeks of gleaning in the fields.

And Naomi has had enough. She's stuck in the middle and she's ready to get out and take matters into her own hands.

Ruth 3 Walkthrough

So as we have been, let's walk through Ruth 3 together, and I want you to keep your eyes on the stark contrast between Naomi and Boaz. I'll help us the best I can make sense of the story then we'll apply it into our lives as we consider trusting God in the middle.

1 Then Naomi her mother-in-law said to her, “My daughter, should I not seek rest for you, that it may be well with you?”

This is a call back to Ruth 1:9 where Naomi's original hope and prayer for Ruth was that she would find rest in the house of a husband. That she would be provided for. The kindness of Boaz to provide food for them isn't enough. Naomi wants more for Ruth. She wants her to get married, have children, have a more steady source of provision than gleaning from a nice man's field.

There's also most likely some selfish motives in here too, because a husband for Ruth could mean grandchildren and security for Naomi.

2 Is not Boaz our relative, with whose young women you were? See, he is winnowing barley tonight at the threshing floor.

There's this moment near the end of Chapter 2 where Ruth comes back to Naomi from Boaz's field with 30lbs of grain, tells her about Boaz and Naomi says → **2:20 - “The man is a close relative of ours, one of our redeemers.”**

Remember 7 weeks ago when I brought this up? That this guy could play a bigger role in our family than just benefactor? Remember I said that he is related to us and a part of our clan?

What Naomi has in mind here is that Boaz would play the role of a Kinsman Redeemer for Ruth.

KINSMAN REDEEMER:

Let's talk about this idea from the Bible of Kinsman Redeemer. We have to understand what this role is to understand chapters 3 and 4.

The role of a Kinsman Redeemer is one that was established by God in His system of living He gave to His people in the Old Testament laws. God describes Himself (Ex 6:6) as the true redeemer of His people, but then he created a system in which humanity, created in His image, would reflect God's redemption through how they redeemed and took care of each other.

And the role is exactly what it's called. It's a kinsman (someone related to someone else) stepping in to redeem them or what they own.

Male relative who had the privilege or responsibility to act for a family member who was in trouble, danger, or need.

So in the role of Kinsman Redeemer, if someone fell into need, a family member was expected to volunteer to help - to become that person's redeemer or deliver.

And there are a number of specific ways this would play out:

- Someone was murdered, KR would seek redemptive justice
- Sold into slavery, KR would pay to redeem
- Sell property or land, KR would buy it back and regain it for the family
- Man died childless, KR (typically brother) would father a son for the dead man as a means of preserving that man's family line and heritage

In all of the various ways, the role of a Kinsman Redeemer was to step in and provide for their family member in need, even at great cost to themselves.

That is what Naomi is hoping Boaz will do for her and Ruth. That though he isn't a close family member, that he would still fulfill the spirit of the Mosaic law by stepping in to play the role of redeemer.

Now, things get a little bit crazy. This guy can be our redeemer Ruth, so here's what you need to do....

3 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. 4 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."

Hey Ruth - This guy could be our redeemer, so go take a shower, get dressed up, wait until he's had a little too much to drink, then in the middle of the night go uncover his feet and lay down next to them. When he wakes up, he'll tell you what to do.

Just so we're clear:

First, this is not good dating advice. Someone tells you the way to a man's heart is by waiting until the middle of the night, getting dressed up, sneaking into their room, and laying down at their feet - you ignore them. Ok? Sounds good?

Second, I don't want you to hear anything I'm about to say as an indictment against women expressing their interest in a man. Nothing that the Bible teaches about the roles of men and women means you have to wait until he asks you out. That's an unbiblical stretch. So don't mishear me on that either.

Let's talk about what's really happening here with what Naomi tells Ruth to do.

A couple of things we have to understand:

- 1) Some folks will wrongly argue that this is a good thing. The argument is that Naomi is encouraging Ruth to do an ancient Jewish practice of how women would express interest in a man in those days. If you wanted a man to know you were interested, go lay at his feet in the middle of the night. Which is a ridiculous thing to argue from the text. There is not a single example of this being taught or acted out anywhere else in the Scriptures or in ancient Jewish literature to imply that this is some sort of tradition or custom. It is pure speculation at best to assume that this is some sort of Jewish way of a woman expressing interest in marrying a man.
- 2) The language that Naomi uses here is explicitly sexual in nature. To wash, to anoint, to put on her cloak - it's the same language used in Song of Solomon to describe how a wife makes herself attractive for her husband. Also, the word for feet here, could easily be translated "his entire legs" that she is supposed to uncover. This is sexual attractiveness and enticement and temptation type language.
- 3) Remember what she said to Ruth just a few weeks ago, she told Ruth (2:22) - **"It is good, my daughter, that you go out with his young women, lest in another field you be assaulted."** So 7 weeks ago she was worried about Ruth out in the fields during broad daylight, now she's sending her alone in the secrecy and danger of night to go lay at the feet of a man.

So what is happening here? Well we don't know exactly what Naomi is hoping will happen that night. We don't if she wants them to sleep together so Ruth will get pregnant and Boaz has to marry her. We don't know if her intentions are more pure and she is just hoping this gets Boaz's attention enough to show how desperate they are for him to redeem them.

We aren't told the heart level motivation, but **what we do know is that Naomi is seeking a good goal the wrong way.** Her hope is a good one - redemption and rest and provision for Ruth and herself. But she's done waiting on the Lord. She's ready to once again take matters into her own hands. She's willing to risk Ruth's integrity, reputation, and even her life to get what she wants.

In fact, she's acting just like her husband Elimelech did 10 years earlier when they first set off for Moab.

"I'm not going to trust the Lord in this, I'm taking matters into my own hands. It doesn't matter if it's righteous or not, wise or not."

Here's how pastor Sinclair Ferguson describes the scene - **"Behind her risky strategy lies Naomi's old spiritual rashness. It is the residue of the spirit that earlier led to emigration from the Promised Land. If God does not do things speedily enough for us in our way, then we will take matters into our own hands. We devise our own ways of bringing to pass what God has promised to give to us. We refuse to wait for him to bring his own purposes to fruition."**

Naomi has started at the end of chapter 2 to trust the Lord again. She's starting to recognize His kindness, His providence, His provision - but now it's been 7 weeks. Now things are moving too slowly.

God - when are you going to bring the full redemption? When are you going to provide a husband for Ruth? When is Boaz going to step up and be our redeemer?

She doesn't know how to wait for God in the middle. When it's unresolved. When she's still unredeemed. **Naomi has not learned to trust God, not only with the ends, but also with the means.**

Go make it happen Ruth.

5 And she replied, "All that you say I will do."

6 So she went down to the threshing floor and did just as her mother-in-law had commanded her. 7 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. 8 At midnight the man was startled and turned over, and behold, a woman lay at his feet! 9 He said, "Who are you?" And she answered, "I am Ruth, your servant. Spread your wings over your servant, for you are a redeemer."

Ruth's actions take a turn from Naomi's instructions. Naomi told her - do all of these things and then wait, he'll tell you what to do. But as soon as Boaz wakes up, Ruth speaks up. She's a worthy woman. She's trying to honor God and her mother in law, but she wants to make her intentions clear - I'm here for redemption and marriage, not for a one night stand.

She says to Boaz - "Spread your wings over your servant, for you are a redeemer."

Remember Ruth 2:12 where Boaz acknowledges that Ruth has hidden herself under the wings of the Lord. Ruth is using that language and metaphor to say to Boaz - **"I need you to be an extension of God's protection and provision to me through more than just a wheat field. Boaz - will you become the answer to your own prayer for my blessing and protection?"**

I know that I'm safe under the wings of God, I just want you to be a physical part of those wings.

So now Boaz is pressed with a choice. He wakes up in the middle of the night. This beautiful woman at his feet. What is he going to do? We're meant to feel a bit of tension and apprehension at this scene.

Is Boaz going to be like Naomi? Is he also going to take matters into his own hands? Or will he trust the Lord?

10 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. 11 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."

Remember Boaz was described as a worthy man in 2:1? God-honoring. Now he uses the same word to describe Ruth. Even though she's this Moabite foreigner, she is now known around Bethlehem as someone who honors and fears the one true God.

12 And now it is true that I am a redeemer. Yet there is a redeemer nearer than I. 13 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." 14 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." 15 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.

Boaz is set up as a direct contrast to Naomi in the text. Naomi, in the middle, doesn't wait on the timing of God. She wants to move ahead, make it happen, rush the providence and provision of God.

But notice - Boaz waits and follows the Lord's guidance. He wants to redeem Ruth, he sees it as a good thing, something he desires, and yet he knows there's a God-honoring way to go about it.

He doesn't run ahead of God. He's willing to wait in the tension and uncertainty of the middle.

If there is a redeemer closer than me, then God's Word says he must get the first opportunity to redeem. I'm not going to take matters into my own hands, I'm not going to let the ends justify the means. I'm going to trust both the provision and the plan to God. We're going to do this as the law of God commands. No shadiness, no under the cover of night, no secrecy and seduction.

Because He is absolutely committed to God's ways, he will do nothing to compromise either his or Ruth's integrity. He tells her to leave and go back before someone recognizes her.

And then in case Boaz isn't being awesome enough, he sends her back with six measures of Barley - 80lbs of grain as a gift to her and to Naomi. As a statement of promise - you will have a redeemer. Either me or this other guy - either way I promise someone will redeem you.

You will be redeemed, I promise, but we're going to do this the right way.

16 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, 17 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.'" 18 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."

Boaz has urgency. His waiting on the Lord doesn't mean he doesn't take action, he's just going to do it the right way. He's going to trust God with the end and the means. He's going to take decisive action, but in a way that honors God and honors Ruth.

Application → Two Different Responses in the Middle

Alright, let me help get this into our lives. **Will we trust God in the middle?**

Do you see the stark contrast between Naomi and Boaz here in the text?

Naomi takes matters into her own hands.

It's been 7 weeks since we got back to Bethlehem and you met Boaz in the field Ruth! 7 weeks! Still no redemption! I want you to have rest! Good goal right? Vs 1 - **"My daughter, should I not seek rest for you, that it may be well with you?"**

I want you to have a redeemer. But God isn't making it happen, so we will, regardless of what it is we have to do.

But listen, if you would put yourself in Naomi's shoes for just a second, can you really blame her? Think about all that she's lived through - all of the suffering, death, loss, pain, and uncertainty.

Sure, God has brought a harvest back to Bethlehem, and yes He's given me Ruth, and sure Boaz is providing for us from his fields.

But wouldn't you doubt God's provision just a little bit? Wouldn't it make just a little bit of sense that Naomi starts doubting God again?

How easy it would be in the midst of a life of so much suffering for Naomi to default back, 7 weeks after saying that God's kindness has not forgotten her, to question again → Is God really going to show up? Is God really going to be good? Is He really going to provide? Does he actually care?

It is hard for Naomi to trust the Lord in the middle with the means, because she doesn't trust him with the end.

And so if I don't trust God and His outcomes and His plans, then the next logical step is to take matters into my own hands, right?

Movie Endings. I've shared about this before, but I hate uncertainty. My default root idol, what drives the majority of my sin and distrust of God is **control**. I want to be in control of everything in my life - the ends and the means. I want to run things, I want to know the plan and then help execute the plan.

I remember as a kid growing up we used to play the game where we would ask - "if you could have one superpower what would it be?" I used to say, **being able to see the future**. That's how bad it is.

This trickles down into all areas of my life. I've shared this before, but I look up the endings of movies as I'm watching them. Like there comes a point where about halfway through I just can't handle the uncertainty and tension anymore, so I google it. Wikipedia has the entire plot. It's very simple and easy. Lindsay and I watched *Dune* a few weeks ago, halfway through she looked over and saw me on my phone and was like - "Are you looking up the ending???" - "No?"

And what makes me so frustrated about real life is that I don't know the ending of my story. "The most controlling people I've ever met are the most fearful." I don't know how things are going to turn out, I don't know what's going to happen. In small situations and in large ones. I don't know the end.

And so all of the time, instead of trusting God in the middle. Instead of trusting God in the midst of the uncertainty. Instead of trusting God when it has yet to be resolved. I want to take control and go my own way and force the resolution that I want.

Church - what do you do in your middle?

- While you're applying for jobs
- While you're wading through relational conflict
- While you're waiting and praying and hoping for marriage
- While you're waiting and praying and hoping for children
- While you're waiting for a medical diagnosis
- While you're waiting for healing
- While you're waiting for sanctification and redemption

How do you handle your middle?

- In your impatience, do you sin against those around you by lashing out and taking out your frustration on them?
- Are you a bundle of anxiety because you just don't see how God is possibly going to provide for you?
- Do you resort to grumbling and gossip like the Israelites in the wilderness?
- Do you anxiously Google every possible solution in the middle of the night, desperately trying to seize control?
- Do you turn to old patterns of numbing the pain to deal with your frustration (alcohol, porn, bingeing food)?

Naomi fails to trust the Lord. She takes matters into her own hands. She sins against God and against Ruth and Boaz. She puts them in a compromising situation because of her own desire to take control.

And yet in Ruth 3, Boaz is also in the middle. He expressed in verses 10 and 11 about his desire to redeem Ruth, to step in and be the Kinsman Redeemer. He sees it as a good thing, a gift, a joy, but there's another man who has first rights. Another man who is first in line to redeem. He must be consulted and given a chance. This is the way God has designed, and Boaz wants to honor the process given by the Lord. He takes decisive action, but he does it the Lord's way.

Boaz waits on God's providence and timing

Boaz once again proves himself to be a "worthy" man. A man following the Lord. He doesn't take matters into his own hands. He doesn't let the ends justify the means. He's going to walk out God's design and trust the Lord in the middle.

Boaz is a tangible example of **Psalm 62**. Psalm 62 where the Psalmist David repeats in the midst of heartache and uncertainty, doubt and desire:

Psalm 62:1-2 - 1 For God alone my soul waits in silence; from Him comes my salvation. 2 He alone is my rock and my salvation, my fortress; I shall not be greatly shaken.

The Lord brings salvation. It's not on me. It's not up to my timetable or my whims or what I want when I want, the Lord brings salvation. So Boaz is willing to wait.

To take action, he doesn't just sit by and do nothing, but he's willing to do it in the Lord's timing and the Lord's way.

Naomi says, "This is what I want Lord, so I'm going to make it happen."

Boaz says, "This is what I want Lord, so I'm going to trust you and do it Your way."

Psalm 62 is an invitation for all of us. **That we would wait on God. That we would trust Him in the middle.** That we would believe and remember that it is from Him that our salvation comes. That He alone is the rock and the fortress. That He alone is what is a sure and steady foundation. That He alone is worth trusting.

Not our best laid plans. Not our best efforts. Not our own wills for our lives. Not our ability to control.

That's what Psalm 62 tells us at the end. It commands our souls to wait on the Lord. And then in case we think we should trust in other things or ourselves, verse 10:

Put no trust in extortion; set no vain hopes on robbery; if riches increase, set not your heart on them.

Everything we try to do or grasp at or look to in the middle that are not God are offering a false hope. They might create the illusion that we have control, but ultimately it's a lie. Your anxiety, your impatience, your frustrations are lying to you telling you that by taking matters into your own hands you'll have more control. But Psalm 62:10 reminds us - we can't set our hearts on these things.

- God is our rock, not money.
- God is our rock, not a relationship status.
- God is our rock, not a drama-free life.
- God is our rock, not a good diagnosis.
- God is our rock, not a resolution.

God is our rock. So He is the one we trust in. That's what Boaz gets and Naomi doesn't → **God is trustworthy.**

With the ends, and the means.

With the provision, and the process.

With results, and the ride.
With the turnout, and the timing.

Will we trust God in the middle?

Gospel Conclusion

Let me close with this → This story of Naomi waiting for redemption, takes place in the middle of a larger waiting for redemption of the people of God. This story takes place roughly 1200 years after God's promises to Abraham about a future Messiah and 1200 years before that Messiah comes down to earth. This is the middle for the people of Israel as they wait for God's Son to take on flesh and enter humanity.

Put yourself for a moment in the shoes of an ancient Jew hearing this story of Ruth.

Think about what's going on in your heart. Think about the 1200 years of unfulfilled prophecy about a Savior. Think about the waiting. Think about the desperate longing in your heart for the yet-to-come promised Messiah. Think about the doubts you would have about God's goodness - will He provide? Has He dealt bitterly with us? Can we trust Him? Will He ever bring resolution? Will we ever be redeemed as we were promised and as we hope?

And yet you hear this story of God's provision. About how He continues to provide time and time again for Ruth and Naomi. That He hasn't deserted them or left them.

- And then you think about **Abraham**. How God didn't desert Him even when Abraham messed up and tried to go His own way and take matters into his own hands - God still provided.
- And then you think about **Moses**. How God never gave up on Moses - even when he was rebellious, when he was afraid, when he was a coward - God still provided.
- And you think about **Joshua**. How He trusted God's plans even as they stared down giants in the land of Canaan. And how God didn't desert His people even when they were afraid and didn't trust Him - God still provided.

And so you look back in the middle of your middle. And you remember all the middles you've walked before. And all the times God brought you through - might not have looked how you wanted, or the timing you wanted, or the provision you wanted - but God was always faithful to His people.

And you remember → God does see. He has been kind. He will provide. God is still working in the middle, right now as we wait for our Messiah. **He will be faithful. The Messiah will come.**

Now, do the same right now in 2021, Charlotte, NC.

In the middle of your middle. Your doubts. Your uncertainty. Your fear. Your temptation to take matters into your own hands - Will God provide? Has He dealt bitterly with us?

And yet you hear the story of Ruth and how God provided.

And you think about Abraham and how God provided.

And you think about Moses and how God provided.

And you think about Joshua and how God provided.

But then you keep going...

And you think about David, and Solomon, and Jeremiah, and Isaiah, and you walk the thread of God's provision for His people all the way through history.

And then you think about your own story. You think about all the middles you've walked through before. You think about all the times in your life where you've said - "I just want it to be resolved. I just want it to be fixed. Lord, just take this way. Lord, just show up in this. Lord, just do this."

And all the times in the midst of that God has been faithful - maybe not how you wanted, or when you wanted....but He was always faithful. This is what God calls His people to all of the time in the Scriptures - when they're discouraged, afraid, full of doubt → **Look back and remember my faithfulness.**

But you don't stop there. You look at one more thing. You look at God's greatest act of faithfulness in history. The Messiah who was promised who actually came → **Jesus Christ, taking on flesh, entering into humanity, living a perfect life and yet dying on the cross for sin and sinners. God has shown Himself to be trustworthy through the sending of His Son Jesus - His ultimate promise and ultimate answer of redemption.**

And your heart is meant to leap as you remember - God is still working in the middle. God has been faithful to His people. He does see. He has been kind.

He will be faithful. The Messiah has come.

If He did not leave His people in the middle, but fulfilled what He promised by sending Jesus to live, die, and rise again - He will not leave us in the middle now.

How do we trust God in the middle? By remembering and reminding ourselves and each other that God does not and will not fail His people, and we know that because he took care of our greatest need through the life, death, and resurrection of His Son.

Will you trust the Lord's kindness in the middle?

Pray. Communion.