

A different way of proposing marriage

Ruth 3

The third chapter of Ruth can easily be misunderstood and seem quaint and, perhaps, even demeaning to women. In our days, equality is pursued relentlessly and Naomi's behaviour could be seen as subservient and supporting patriarchy.

But that is to look at the chapter with glasses whose lenses are coloured by feminism, some of whose exponents are hostile to faith in God. Remember, by leaving the Promised Land Naomi has, in effect, abandoned God. She has returned a widow, at least bitter, maybe angry. God owes her nothing. But the God who is a "gracious God, slow to anger and abounding in love and faithfulness" (Gen 34:6) has provided a way for being restored and experiencing blessing (Ruth 2:20).

What's going on in this section

- Naomi's idea of finding a "home" (3:1, NIV) for Ruth is much richer than the word suggests. She is trying to find security for Ruth through marriage. But what sort of security is there if Boaz redeems her?
- What are Naomi's exact instructions to Ruth concerning her
 - ❖ Preparation
 - ❖ Timing
 - ❖ Location
 - ❖ Method of approach
- How does Ruth describe
 - ❖ Herself in relation to Boaz (3:9, cf. 2:10)
 - ❖ Boaz in relation to her (3:9, cf. 2:12)Do you sense any change in her attitude?
- In the darkness, it's just possible that Ruth uncovers more than just Boaz' feet. But even if she does, there's no hint of an immoral intention. How does Boaz interpret what has been done to him? (3:10, 11)
- The story seems destined for a happy conclusion, except that Boaz knows there is a problem. Why does the existence of a closer relative potentially thwart Ruth and Naomi's plan? (3:12, 13)
- Ruth returns to Naomi with a promise from Boaz and more barley than she could have gleaned in a day. If the giving of presents indicates what it does today, then what might we think of Boaz' attitude to Ruth?

What about us here and now

- Boaz is obviously affluent and powerful and a young, poor, alien woman offers herself to him. If you think about it, this is a classic situation which is open to abuse. What holds Boaz back from exploiting or abusing her? If you are a male, would you have done the same? Is there anything more important than self-fulfilment?

- The law reads as if the initiative lay with the kinsman-redeemer to act on behalf of immediate relatives. But Naomi utilizes the idea as a precedent, and initiates an appeal to someone who, she presumably knows, is NOT the closest living relative. What does this suggest about how to apply the word of God?
- In one sense Naomi, Ruth and Boaz work within parameters devised by God. Why doesn't God just work it all out with prayer? Why does God make them all "walk a fine line", near to temptation, when the results would be guaranteed if he miraculously worked everything out?

So what can I do?

- What situation are you facing which tempts you to take matters into your own hands? Does this chapter in Ruth give you any orientation to your situation?
- If Jesus is really your Lord, what can you be confident about in the complexities of our failures and decisions? What does it take to trust him by doing what he says, even when your prospects look bleak?
- What gives Naomi, and Ruth to a lesser degree, the right to set Boaz up, by reminding him of a legal obligation? Do you agree there is a fine line between what they do and manipulation of the situation? How do you tell when you are exploiting a convenient situation or taking advantage of providential events?
- In what area might God be expecting you to use your head rather than abdicate responsibility?
- In what way are you ignoring the clear principles of compassion for the widow, the alien and the poor?