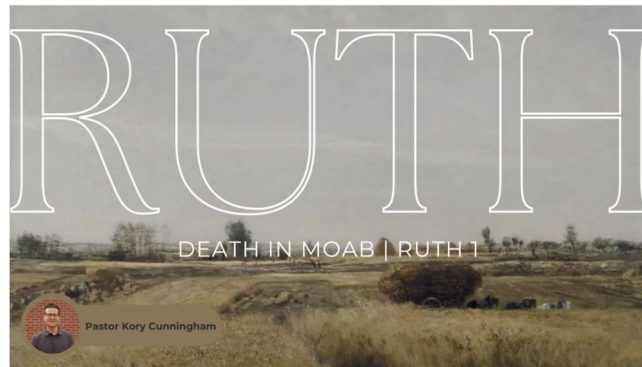


A Match Made in Heaven



Bro. Ricky Cunningham **Ruth 3**

It's amazing sometimes how some of us need just a little help—we need what's called a matchmaker. Many of us forget that Naomi plays an important part in the genealogy of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. As we look at the last few verses of Ruth, I just wonder if maybe Obed, who is going to be in the line of Christ, was so thankful for a lady named Naomi, because she was the one that got his mother and dad together. There are some kids who are in our church, and every time I see them I think they had better be thankful for Memish. Every time I see Aaron Thompson, I think that. Did you know it was Memish who got his mom and dad together? When I see Lauren and Logan Eastwood, I think of that day that Celisa came home from the vet service in Murray and she said, “Wow, I told Dr. Eastwood about a girl in our church. I sure hope it works out.” Sure enough, it did! This morning, we're going to see a match that we will think is a match made in Bethlehem, but in my opinion, it's actually a match made in Heaven, a match that not only brought about the redemption of Ruth and Naomi, but ultimately brought about the redemption of you and me.

As we walk through these 18 verses of chapter 3, there are four things that are going to jump out at me. The first thing that's going to jump out is in

these first five verses, and I'm going to call this Naomi's plan. Let's start in verses 1 and 2, "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? Is not Boaz our relative, with whose young women you were? See, he is winnowing barley tonight at the threshing floor."

Now, this word "then" is reminding us of what we just previously read. It sets the stage for what's fixing to happen next in this amazing short story. What has just happened? Harvest is over—the spring harvest of barley and wheat is over. Now, Naomi had left her homeland with a husband and two sons. They went to Moab, the sons got married, but she has now come home empty-handed without a husband, without her two sons, without one daughter-in-law who stayed in Moab, but she has one who came back with her. The reason they came back home is because it's spring and word had spread of a bountiful harvest in Israel. Now, the harvest is over, and chapter 2 ended with Naomi and Ruth living together—two widows. Where's their barley going to come from now? Where's their wheat going to come from now? That's over. Do you sense that? See, when we're reading this amazing short story under the inspiration of God's Holy Spirit, this word's big. Can you imagine what's going through Naomi and Ruth's minds now? There is no longer grain in the field for Ruth to glean and bring home something each day for them to eat. That's over.

Now, we get a glimpse into the heart of Naomi. Naomi looks at Ruth and says...*Hon, here's what I desire for you. I desire rest for you.* She has seen her daughter-in-law go out every day and glean the fields. She's heard her talk about this man she met named Boaz who she's actually had dinner with, and about how gracious he is to all his servants. And now, Naomi desires rest for her. Now, I think there's a play on concept here. I don't think Naomi is saying I want you to rest from laboring; I think she's using rest here to refer to that ultimate rest that she wants her to have. She wants her to have a husband, a home, not a home where she's coming home to Naomi, but where her husband is coming home to her every day and she has rest—a home where she's being protected and provided for by a house-band.

I think Naomi here is giving the ultimate compliment to marriage when she calls it rest. She says isn't it right that I should want you to have a husband and live with him and not have to live with me? Isn't this a beautiful picture of marriage? Ruth needed a redeemer and Naomi knew there was a relative, a redeemer, who could bring rest to her, and she desired that for her. Can I just pause here just for a moment? Is that what you guys are providing for your wife...rest? Does she find her ultimate protection, her ultimate provision in you as her house-band? I've been married over 43 years and have been pastoring over 42 years, so when I say this I mean no offense to ladies here...but there is not a lady who has been raised by earthly parents who does not enter into marriage without some spots, wrinkles, and blemishes that worry or concern her. When she married you, she thought you were her redeemer. She thought you were a man of God and that as she brought herself under your care she would find that ultimate rest in you under Christ. You have no idea what it's like to be a pastor and counsel a wife whose redeemer never lived up to being the redeemer she needed him to be. Guys, you are a redeemer. I pray that you draw strength from this man named Boaz who's going to come into the life of not only Ruth but Naomi. He's going to change their world. Ultimately, this is a story about the coming of the ultimate Redeemer, and that's Christ.

Naomi just wants rest for Ruth. Now, her mind is already clicking as the mother-in-law. She knows Boaz is a prospect. Ruth has been hanging with his female servants gleaning, and I think Naomi knows what the story's been telling us—that the workers are leaving a little extra in Ruth's path for her to glean so Naomi recognizes him as the redeemer, Ruth's redeemer, possibly. And Naomi knows exactly where he is...do you see Mama's mind? He's at the winnowing floor tonight. Here's what she goes on to tell her, here's her plan, verses 3–5, “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.’” This is so cool. What we're hearing is mama in-law telling her daughter-in-law, who she now views as her

daughter, how to get a man, a particular man. Now, this is going to blow us away because this isn't how we do proposals, and normally, the female waits for the man to propose to her. Did you know if you've got a Scottish background, on Leap Year it's okay for the lady to ask the man to marry them? I want you to remind Celisa that we got married on Leap Year...I'm not saying anything, but just know we got married during Leap Year, we got Scottish history. ☺

So get this picture. Mama's getting her ready for a man and she tells her to take a bath (good idea, ladies!), spray the perfume on, put your cloak on, go where he's at but don't let him see you until after he's eaten supper. Now it's my opinion that they're not the same age—he's older, she's younger. Any of you guys who are older like me, tell me what happens when you eat a fine supper...what's the next thing you want to do? You want to go to sleep, right? You get tired; you get sleepy. So what she's saying is he's older, don't approach him until after he's eaten and has his belly full, and goes to lie down. When he goes to lie down, he's going to fall fast asleep, and I want you to pay attention to where he lies down. Now, the reason she has to be careful is because there are other workers at the threshing floor too, so she needs to observe where he lies down. Naomi said you approach him and then you lie down at his feet, then you uncover his feet, and you wait and he'll tell you what to do. Ruth says I'll do it.

Now, I want to make sure we understand this—there's no immorality, nothing illicit here, there's nothing sexual going on here. Don't read this through the prism of our culture. Do you know what I think mama is telling daughter? Anoint yourself, put your perfume on, and change your clothes, your time of mourning for my son is over. You remember King David—his sin brought death to his son. When he heard the news that his son has died, the writer of 2nd Samuel tells us that he bathed, he anointed himself, and he changed clothes. And they freaked out...*what are you doing?* Because see, what he was saying by those three behaviors was I'm not going to mourn the death of my son anymore; I'm now going to return to the land of the living. With my mourning, I can't bring him back here but I can go where he is...and it shook the servants. Do you know what Ruth

had been doing since she came home from Moab? She's been mourning the death of Mahlon. She loved him, loved him deeply! And even though she's been gleaning in the fields, when you got around her there was an odor, there was a wretchedness—she was mourning. She let everyone around her know she loved Mahlon and she was grieving for him. And now Naomi says...*Hon, that's got to stop.* (Can you imagine a mother-in-law telling a daughter-in-law you have to get over my son?) *I want what is best for you, and what's best for you is not living with me; what's best for you is for you to have a husband and your own home again.* Ruth says I'll do what you say, and she bathed, put perfume on, changes clothes, and goes down to the threshing floor. Wow, what a plan Naomi had!

Now listen to verses 6 through 9. "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! He said, 'Who are you?' And she answered, 'I am Ruth, your servant. Spread your wings over your servant, for you are a redeemer.'" I love this. She goes to the threshing floor, waits till he's eaten, waits until he's falling asleep, and then softly she approaches him. This doesn't mean she went secretly, it means she went quietly. She doesn't want to wake anybody or startle anybody. There were other workers, other men at other piles of grain, but she knew exactly where Boaz was. As she came to Boaz, she was clean, she was fragrant, and she had a change of clothes. She laid down beside him at his feet and she pulled the cover off his feet. I love this—Naomi's plan worked to a tee! At midnight, he woke up startled and found a woman lying at his feet.

Let me tell you what I think's going on here. How many of you like a cover from head to shoulders when you go to sleep? Now as I get older, I fall asleep when I'm studying in my recliner; I didn't used to do that. Some mornings I wake up in the recliner. So because I know there's a chance I'm going to fall asleep and be in the recliner a while, before I start studying I put a cover over me and I wrap it around my feet as best I can, and then I start studying. Now, the moment I go to sleep, I start turning and

wrestling, and the next thing I know, the covers have fallen off my feet. And guess what happens? My feet get cold, and when my feet get cold, I wake up and start trying to cover my feet up again (because I can't go back to sleep unless my feet are covered) or I get up and go get in the bed with Memish. Memish tucks the covers under the mattresses *way* down in there so that the cover doesn't come off our feet and we can sleep through night, because when cool air hits your feet at night you wake up.

That was Naomi's plan. Please don't read this that she's pulling up his cover so she can get a peek at him. No, no, no, no, no! Yes, the Old Testament tells us not to uncover someone's nakedness but that's not what she's doing here. She's just uncovering his feet so he'll wake up. And at midnight, he wakes up and he wakes up startled. He woke up startled because woo, that cold air was going up his spine! He starts looking for the cover and he finds a woman, praise be to God, amen! All of a sudden, there's this woman at his feet, and he says, "Who are you?" She says, "I am Ruth." Now remember, she's a Moabite, and now she's going to do something that Naomi didn't tell her to do. Naomi had just told her how to get in his presence, and then told her to wake him and wait to see what he said, and then do what he said to do. Ruth doesn't wait. She says, "I am Ruth, your servant. Spread your wings [cover, or cloak in the Hebrew] over your servant, for you are a redeemer."

You know, this goes back to Moses' law, to the children of Israel from God, Deuteronomy chapter 25. If a brother got married and he died before the wife could give him a child, his brother that was next in line was to marry her. When they got married, the first son belonged to the brother, not him, and carried the brother's name. That sounds weird to us. Can you imagine your older brother brings home a girlfriend and you're the second brother and you're thinking... *Oh, I better make sure I like her because if something's happened to him before they have a child, I gotta marry her!* This was so engrained in Israelite culture that a Sadducee came to Jesus and gave a story about seven brothers who all had to marry the same girl because the girl never had children while any of the brothers were alive. They said the first brother died, so she married the second one, the third one, the fourth one, the fifth one, the sixth one, and the seventh. And then

trying to trick Him, the Sadducees asked Jesus, 'in the resurrection, whose wife will she be?'

While that is foreign to us, it was part of their culture. So when Ruth says to him, cover me with your cover, what she wants him to do is ask her to marry her. You say, "What?" That's also cultural. See, in the biblical world, when you wanted to marry someone, you took your cloak, and you covered it over them. If she said yes, she stayed under the cloak. If she didn't want to marry you, she pushed it away. Now, you are wondering where I come up with this stuff; I know you think I make this up! Look at Ezekiel chapter 16, verse 8. God's talking to the nation of Israel, asking them to be His people. He said I saw you when you were a young maid, I fell in love with you, I waited till you came to marital age, and when you came to marital age I *put my cover over you*. So here's what Ruth is waiting for; she is saying...*Ask me to marry you! I'll marry you if you'll just ask. You're my redeemer*. Guys, I know we don't have the kinsman redeemer law in the church today, but hear me...most girls marry desiring a redeemer, someone who will provide a place of rest, a place of security. This is beautiful!

Now we're going to see Boaz's promise to Ruth. Look at these next verses. Verses 10–12, "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." Are you ready for this? Here's what he's going to acknowledge—may you be blessed of the Lord. Because this act of kindness, you letting me know you want me to marry you, is a greater kindness than that first kindness you did. Do you remember the first kindness? Ruth leaves her home to go be with Naomi. And then when they get back to Naomi's home, she gleans for her. And even though she's Moabite, a descendant of Lot, the whole Israelite town is seeing her life and they're commenting how worthy she is, how virtuous she is, how righteous she is—and Boaz says what you're doing right now, lying at my feet letting me know you want me to cover you with my

garment, is even greater. He feels like he's the luckiest man on the planet! He said... *When you came here you could have married any young eligible bachelor, rich or poor, but you didn't go for any of those. You wore those clothing of mourning, telling every man, you were mourning the death of your husband, that you loved him. And look what you're doing now—you have taken off those clothes of mourning and you're letting me know you think I can be your redeemer. You want me to marry you; I'm blown away!*

I can't tell you how many times in our 43 years of marriage that I will turn to Celisa and say, "Would you just tell me again why you married me?" Like Boaz, I feel so unworthy to have her. Is that your feeling? That's Boaz's feeling! He's got this young virtuous woman wanting him, an older man, to be her redeemer. And he promises... *I'll be your husband. I'll redeem you.* And he didn't take advantage of the situation. He said there's a relative closer than you than me. Verse 13 says, "Remain tonight and in the morning if he will redeem you..." Now, I have read chapter 4 so I think Boaz wanted to add here (but I hope he doesn't). ☺ But here's what he says, he's being cool, he's being manly, "...if he will redeem you, good; but if he is not willing to redeem you, then, as the LORD lives, I will redeem you. Lie down until the morning." Is that beautiful, or is that beautiful? What is he promising? He's promising to redeem Ruth, and the way he redeems her is taking her as his wife.

Now, I want you to watch this next section, verses 14–16. This is going to be Boaz's pledge to Naomi, so please see this. "So she [Ruth] 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.' 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." Get this picture. After he's promised himself to her, he's now getting ready to make a pledge to her mother-in-law. He tells her lay down until morning...so I want you to see him already starting to be the redeemer. He knows there are a whole lot of ladies that came to the threshing floor tonight but they came for the wrong reason, and he doesn't want her to leave now because if she leaves at this hour in the morning, some might think she's one of 'those' kind of girls. So he says

stay right here till morning...don't move...rest, lay down. When she gets up before daybreak, when it's still kind of dark but people are stirring, he tells the men who may have seen her not to say a word about her being there, and he lets them know nothing happened. He's protecting her reputation because he knows he's going to go to that nearest redeemer and ask him if he'll redeem her, and who wants to redeem a woman who has that kind of reputation? Boaz is protecting the reputation of Ruth. Got it? Then, he tells her to hold out her garment and he starts loading her down with grain, to the point that it gets so heavy that she can't just pack it, he has to put it on her.

Boaz goes on to say, verses 17–18, "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.'"

Did you get this? He gave this grain to Ruth, not for Ruth, but for Naomi! How did Naomi come back into the land? Empty-handed. Who did she blame? God. She was bitter. And now, Boaz gives grain to Ruth to give to Naomi so she won't be empty-handed ever again. What he's doing here, in my opinion, is he's pledging his support not only to Ruth his wife, but to Ruth's mother-in-law, Naomi. This is the bride price. He's pledging that he's going to marry her and he's going to settle the matter today. Now watch this...Naomi tells her to just be patient, wait, we'll see how this turns out; for he will not rest until he settles this matter today. Somebody tell me how verse 1 started out. She's wanting rest for who? Ruth. What does Boaz want for Ruth? Rest. To provide rest, he can't rest until the transaction is finished. All that is going to happen in chapter 4, but I want you to see how chapter 3 ends. Naomi says he won't rest, and you will know today if you're going to marry him or you're going to marry the other redeemer.

This sounds like a cool story because there was a matchmaker who put Boaz and Ruth together. And this sounds like a match made in Bethlehem, but it's really a match made in Heaven because God not only wanted to redeem Ruth with a redeemer, He wanted to redeem you and me with a

redeemer. It wasn't just Naomi who put these two together; it was God who put these two together, because ultimately He wants you to rest. He wants you to rest in your husband. He wants you to rest in your redeemer. He wants you to rest in Christ. And when Christ comes and we celebrate His birth, here's what we know throughout all the gospels, He will not rest and He did not rest until He redeemed us. Wow! Have you discovered the rest that comes by being in Christ Jesus, where you rest from your labors and you trust totally in the work of another? That's what the Christmas story is all about. It's about your match made in Heaven between God and you when He put His Son on that cross. But before Jesus could be put on that cross to be a Kinsman Redeemer, He had to be like us. He had to be kin to us so He had to become a man. He's your Kinsman Redeemer. Ultimately, no dad, no mom, no brother, no sister, no husband, no sibling, no cousin can redeem you, and you'll never find rest until you find the ultimate rest in your true Redeemer, and that's Jesus Christ.