

Title: The Surprise of Grace
Text: Ruth 3
Theme: The beauty and power of God's Grace
Series: Ruth 3
Prop Stmtnt: God's grace is so much more beautiful and attractive than karma.

Read Text:

Most of us are in this country because someone in our family decided to come here. You may not feel like an immigrant, but chances are, someone in your family did. My grandmother's family came here from Switzerland and my grandfather's family came from Norway. They both settled in Iowa, where they lived, farmed and died. The family cemetery sits in the middle of hundreds of acres of farmland, where corn and soybeans are grown. They are Americans now, but not long ago they were Swiss and Norwegian. They came here for a better life. Isn't that why most people go to another country?

That is not always the case. Ruth did not leave Moab for a better life, she went with Naomi because Ruth chose to love her. I've thought a great deal about her decision. "Where you go, I will go. Your people will be my people, your God, my God. And where you die, there will I be buried." But that decision came with a cost. I was at a local gym that had a limited number of treadmills. A young man was on one and he was on it longer than what another man thought he should be. So, the old dude, pulled the plug on the machine, and when the young man asked him what he was doing, the old guy told him, to back to the country he came from, because he apparently looked like a "foreigner." I thought, hold the phone old man, we all came here from somewhere. We're all foreigners. But, we forget that. And by the way, don't read into that politically, because that is not my point. I am making a personal point. It is a fact of humanity that we tend to look for ways to exclude people whom we perceive to be different than us, even if they really aren't different than us. Remember, Israel was given the land of Canaan as a gift from God. They came there, from Egypt. In that sense, Israel was the foreigner who came and lived in the land, and yet, when Ruth came to Israel from Moab, she and Naomi knew that she would most likely face people who would think or say, "why don't you go back to the country you came from."

Knowing that Ruth would be subjected to that, even the crustiest and most cynical person here who assumes that everyone does things based on "what's in it for me" has to scratch his head and say, Ruth doesn't fit into any of your file folders, does she? So, when someone is that nice and that nice loving, we want something good to happen to her. Well, it does, in chapter 2. She gets to work in a friendly field all day, every day without getting molested and shamed. Now, considering what was going on in Israel in those days to women, this was a good thing. But, the good that she experienced does not seem to really match the level of good that she did and is still doing. But, while we want that, Ruth does not live as one who is looking for something good to happen to herself. She has made it her goal to help take care of Naomi.

Tommy was a special needs boy who was mainstreamed at school. This setting, at his elementary school while beneficial in many ways, brought its own set of challenges, one of which was Valentine's Day. Tommy told his mom that he wanted to get a Valentine for every kid in his

class. His mom, just knew that this would only be a heartache. He would give a Valentine to every kid, but in response, he would maybe get 2 or 3. She knew that he was just setting himself up for failure. Maybe she was trying to protect her heart, even more than his. But, he insisted, so they did. On Valentine's Day, he went off to school with his box of Valentines. She dreaded what he would be like when he came home that. When he walked in the door, she heard him saying, "not one, not one, not one." Her heart broke. He hadn't gotten one. But, when she saw him, he wasn't sad, he was happy. And he said, "Mom, I didn't miss one." He did not give to get. He gave to give. And his happiness was tied to his goal of giving. That sounds like Ruth. And Ruth looks a lot like Jesus. The story of Ruth is a story of the hesed of God.

I. Grace motivates faith. (1-5)

Several weeks have passed between chapters 2 and 3. The bitterness that gripped Naomi at the end of chapter 1 is gone. The Naomi that we see in chapter 3 is decisive, hopeful and daring. A beautiful change has taken place. In chapter 1, Ruth commits herself to her mother-in-law until death. Naomi has nothing to offer Ruth but a life of struggle and toil. But, Ruth is committed anyway and won't turn back. Now, Naomi who has been the recipient of God's grace through Ruth, responds as one who has been brought back from the dead. Ruth, you have taken care of me, and I am going to take care of you. "My daughter." (v.1) I have a plan to provide for your future. What has happened to Naomi? The woman who in chapter 1 said, "Don't stay with me, I cannot do anything for you, besides I'm cursed." is now saying, "Hey girl, I've got a plan to take care of you." The woman who assumed the worst is now banking on something good happening.

Now, when I say that Naomi is banking on something good happening, I mean, that Naomi proposes a crazy, wildly daring plan. You've heard the expression: high risk – high reward? This is very high risk. This is a setting that most of us are unfamiliar with. Men tend to associate primarily with men and women with women. There is limited public interaction. The men rule. Men take the initiative. The women are at the mercy of the men. Women waited on the men to act. Servants did not fraternize with the boss. Foreigners were not on the same level as the nationals. But, Naomi was done waiting. She now draws Ruth into her plan.

Look at verse 2. Naomi starts with a question. "Is not Boaz our relative?" I love it. "Our relative." We're in this together. Naomi has really embraced Ruth as her own. Ruth's work day after day has won Naomi's heart. She loves this girl and she loves this girl so much she is willing to do something exceedingly daring. Ruth, you've been working with his girls all this time. Now, comes the command. Take a bath, anoint yourself, which would be a reference to perfumed oil that would be useful in a hot climate and at a time when soap had not yet been invented. And put on your cloak. Is Naomi telling Ruth to dress in a way to be attractive to Boaz? Actually, here is my take on this, and it is a guess.

I think that up until this point Ruth probably dressed as a widow. It would help people identify her and it would be a way for her to honor her husband and her husband's family. But, as long as she dressed as a widow, she would be seen as being in a season of mourning. I think that what Naomi is saying to Ruth is, it is time for you to move on and it is time for you to let others know that you are ready to move on. The time of grieving is over. Naomi was done grieving. Instead of

existing while looking in the past, Naomi was looking into the future. God's grace to her through Ruth was the means by which her heart was captured again and hope was restored.

When you realize how gracious God has been and is to you through Christ, you will live with hope. The greatest expression of grace that you could ever receive is what God has done for you through Christ. Even in the midst of adversity you can rest when your soul is safe. What do you need for happiness? What you need is what you have. Your happiness is safely protected when you realize that it is in the throne of Jesus. Do you live with a sense of anticipating good? Or do you live with an attitude that says, "I wonder what is going to go wrong today?" The truth is, something will probably go wrong. We live in a sin cursed world. But, whatever goes wrong will never be bigger than what is and will go right. But remember the end of Romans 8. People of the gospel are people who live life characterized by hope.

Ok, so when you are convinced that God is for you, and there is nothing that can be against you and win, you realize that you are safe. You can dare to be bold for God. And this is bold, daring and risky. She tells Ruth to go down to the threshing floor. The harvesters will be spending the night next to their grain in order to protect it from animals and from thieves. The piles of grain is one's work for an entire year. There is no crop insurance. Again, this is all hard work. After Boaz eats and drinks, he will be tired and will fall asleep. Go, lay down next to his feet. When he takes notice of you, he will tell you what to do.

Whoa Jackson! What kind of a plan is that? He will tell you what to do? The potential for misunderstanding and disaster is enormous. Ruth's reputation is totally on the line. Naomi knows this and is not throwing Ruth under the bus, but has come up with a plan that she thinks will work in order to let Boaz know that Ruth is available to him for marriage. But, this is more than being available. Ruth is actually proposing to Boaz. Naomi is banking that Boaz will overlook the fact that this is a woman proposing to a man, a foreigner proposing to an Israelite, a younger woman proposing to an older man, a field worker proposing to the land owner. And she is banking that Boaz will wake up and not be too groggy or dazed if he drank a bit too much. But, if he does not see it this way, this could be ruinous. But, look at Naomi! When you recognize God's grace in your life, it gives you a humble confidence. And when you live like that, you become a means of grace for others. Ruth's response is very short. "All that you say, I will do."

II. Faith is a means of grace. (6-10)

With everything it seems riding on this risky scheme, Ruth notes where Boaz lays down to sleep (at the end of the heap of grain). His heart was merry. The crop was good. He fell asleep. Ruth made her move. In a way she let him know what to expect in marriage. She stole the covers. She takes the cover off of his legs and wraps herself in it as she lays down by his feet. Eventually, the guy either gets chilled, or something wakes him up and he discovers a woman laying at his feet! "Who are you?" Ruth, who is of course not sleeping, but is probably having her heart just about pound out of her chest says, "I am your servant Ruth. Spread your wings over your servant, for you are a redeemer."

By saying that, Ruth was asking Boaz to marry her. Her short response has 3 parts. 1) I am your servant Ruth. 2) Spread your wings over your servant, meaning take me as your wife, take me

under your wing like a bird protects her young and 3) for you are a redeemer. You can and should do this because you have the legal standing to get the land in my family in order to keep it in my family. In OT Israel, each tribe had its own region and each family in the tribe had its own land in the region. Explicit laws were in place in order to keep the land in the family forever. That was the design. If a man died, then his brother, or another kin, was to take the widow as his own wife, raise up children in the former husband's name so that the land would stay in that line. If you took in the widow as your wife, you got her land. If the land in the family had been taken over by someone else, a next of kin to the deceased could redeem that land and restore it to the family. But, if there was widow involved then when you redeemed the land, you also got the widow, whom you had to take in as your wife.

Ruth and the land went together. Boaz was a perfect match for both. Ruth was picking him. Would you redeem the land of my husband's family and take me as your wife? Now, here is why this request should never have worked. This servant was asking her boss to marry her. The field hand was asking the land owner to marry her. The Moabite was asking the Israelite. The woman was asking the man. This poor girl was asking this wealthy man. And yet, Boaz interprets her boldness exactly as it was intended. He is overwhelmed by her kindness and consideration of him and tells her so. Her faith is a grace to him. She could have gone after younger men. Her favor toward him, is taken by him as an incredible blessing. In fact, he says that this kindness (hesed) is even greater than her kindness to Naomi. Her faith (and Naomi's faith) is a means of great grace to Boaz. He is deeply blessed and tells her so. And his response makes it clear that Ruth's behavior that night, while bold, was not sketchy. He recognizes the risk that she has taken. Her faith blesses him.

As we have seen, the times of the Judges were grievous times. There was very little faith, and therefore, very little faithfulness. There were plenty of examples of people sleeping around, and living for themselves. God was almost weightless. He seemed to have very little influence upon the nation. We've all noted that we live in similar days. There are scores of people who claim to love Jesus, but when see how they live, it is disheartening. Jesus is good luck charm. His Word has no weight. His glory has no bearing on them. "Following Jesus" makes no discernible difference in their lives. So, when you meet someone who is the real deal, you are so blessed. That is how Boaz sees Ruth. She is such a breath of fresh air. She loves God. She is humble. She is kind. She is hard working. She is bold. And we so desperately want something good for her, which means, we want someone good for her and we could not think of a better guy than Boaz. He sees her as an extraordinary woman, though she doesn't act like she is a big deal. She sees him as an extraordinary man, though he doesn't act like he is a big deal. Together, they would make an incredible gift to the other.

We get the sense that Boaz was attracted to Ruth all along and I've thought that the old guy just needed some help in pulling trigger. Perhaps he was so kind and so humble that he really could not imagine that someone would actually marry him, especially a younger gal like Ruth. The more I examine this, I'm not sure that is the whole story. Boaz didn't need too much encouragement did he? Her faith driven boldness motivates him into action.

III. Faith motivates compassionate commitment. (11-17)

When Ruth proposes that he propose to her, Boaz initially responds exactly as we had hoped and Naomi had hoped. He is all in. But then he tells her that he can't, at least not yet. And we want to die! No! Are you kidding me? There is someone else? What if they exercise their right of redemption and Ruth gets stuck with him instead of Boaz? This stinks! Can't we just skip the law? How did Ruth respond when she heard this? Did Ruth's heart just about stop!? Naomi never mentioned this possibility that we know of. Did she not know? In case we needed any more reasons to love Boaz, we see his compassionate commitment. Here is a man who will do the right thing on behalf of a woman that he loves. There is no devious scheme to circumvent the law. He will do the right thing and he will do it first thing in the morning.

Boaz can't promise her what the outcome will be, but he can promise her that he will act on it immediately. Then come these reassuring words: If he doesn't do it then, "as the LORD lives, I will redeem you." Lie down until the morning. And she lay at his feet the rest of the night. I can't imagine that either one of them slept at all. Did they talk? Did they pray? Did they dare dream? Ruth's life was hanging in the balance. The next few hours would determine the rest of her life. And all she could do, was wait. All she could do, was hope. But her faith captured his heart and his will. The harvest would wait. He had an urgent issue to attend to.

This story hangs upon promises. Ruth makes a promise in chapter 1 and keeps it in chapter 2. Now Boaz makes a promise in chapter 3 and we smile, we cheer, we long to see it happen. It's a promise. Her faith-driven promise in chapter 1 captures Naomi's heart whose faith is renewed so much that she hatches a bold plan that captures Boaz's heart. Do you realize the impact that you have when you make promises and keep them?

IV. Compassionate commitment motivates faith. (18)

The chapter ends with Boaz preparing for a meeting at the city gate and with Ruth going back to Naomi's home with a fresh load of barley. Ruth is going to be married very soon. The question is, to whom? When Naomi sees the gift of Barley to Ruth and hears what Boaz said to her, Naomi sees again his compassion and his resolve. His compassionate commitment only underscores and encourages her own faith and now her counsel to Ruth here at the end of the chapter is the opposite of what it was at the beginning. Sit down. Rest. Wait. Her faith in God motivated her to call for action and now it motivates her to rest and to ultimately wait on God.

This really is an amazing little story and the author is a masterful writer. But, in this story about Naomi and Ruth and God's care for them, something else is going on. Here is a story of faithfulness in the midst of rebellion and chaos. But, even more. What did Judges say over and over? In those days, there was no king in Israel and everyone did what was right in his own eyes. Israel not only needed a king, she needed a king who would do right. She needed a king who would stand up for what is right even when everyone else in the world was doing what was wrong. Well, here is the story of where that king came from. His great-grandfather and mother were two people who did what was right, even when they were the exception and not the rule. That is, what I believe was the author's main purpose in writing this book. But, God had even bigger plans.

God wanted us to understand redemption, because redemption is part of the very heart of the gospel and God's plan for his people.

The compassionate commitment of the Redeemer – Boaz, Hosea
The vulnerability and desperate need to be redeemed – Ruth, Gomer
The price of redemption – Boaz, Hosea – Christ

Boaz' promise in v.13 is the heart of chapter 3. And this is what I want you to go home with. This is what I want to grip your heart. Boaz makes an oath and seals his commitment based on the most certain and sacred thing he could ever imagine – God himself. "As the LORD lives, I will redeem you." Now, that oath comes with two conditions: The one is stated and the other is understood. The one that is stated is, "But if he is unwilling." Boaz cannot make that oath unless the first redeemer steps aside. And secondly, while Boaz is rightfully certain that the LORD lives, Boaz cannot guarantee that he will live. He could suffer a terrible accident that is beyond his control. And yet, Ruth certainly knows that one way or the other, she is going to be provided for.

Now, consider what we have. Our redemption is based on what God himself has said about himself and it is based upon what God has already done. Already Christ has died. Already Christ has risen from the dead. Already our sins have been paid for. Already we have been adopted. Already we have eternal life. Already we have an inheritance. And since God cannot lie and he cannot die, then what he has promised you is certain.

Romans 3