

“Righteous Scheming”
Ruth 3
(Preached at Trinity, March 13, 2016)

I’m supplying these notes for the benefit of busy pastors who may be engaged in bi-vocational work, feeling the pressure of preparing to preach twice on the Lord’s Day while trying to balance full-time secular work as well as caring for their families. While the notes of another man are no substitute for personal study, I pray that these may aid in the process of preparing to preach.

Disclaimer: These are the actual notes I bring with me to the pulpit, which I follow loosely. They are not designed for publication. While I try to make every effort to give proper credit to my sources from the pulpit, adequate citations will sometimes be absent from my notes. If anyone feels their intellectual material has been used without adequate citation, please contact me and I’ll make immediate correction giving credit.

1. In Chapter 1 we are introduced to a Hebrew family that has made a huge compromise in choosing to move to the pagan land of Moab. Things did not go well for them. Elimelech, the head of the family, soon dies leaving behind his grieving widow, Naomi. His two sons choose Moabite women for their wives and then they too died, leaving behind their widows, both being childless. One of the wives, Orpah, returns to her Moabite relatives and her pagan gods. The other wife, Ruth, pledges loyalty to Naomi, her people, and her God.
Ruth 1:16-17 NAU - ". . . where you go, I will go, and where you lodge, I will lodge. Your people *shall be* my people, and your God, my God. ¹⁷ "Where you die, I will die, and there I will be buried. Thus may the LORD do to me, and worse, if *anything but* death parts you and me."
2. Finally, after ten years Naomi and Ruth return to Bethlehem. Naomi is filled with bitterness and sorrow over the course of events in her life. In **Chapter 2** Ruth captivates our attention. The excellence of her character shines. But we are also introduced to Boaz, also a man of high character. Boaz and Ruth will occupy the place of prominence for the remainder of the book.
3. One of the great operating themes throughout the entire Book of Ruth is the overshadowing Providence of God. He has an eternal plan and is working it out perfectly. We’ve seen God’s hand throughout this story: The famine, the death of Naomi’s husband and sons, arriving back at Bethlehem at the barley harvest, Ruth being at the right field when Boaz arrives, Boaz being a single bachelor, and a suitable kinsman to redeem Ruth. God is reigning.
4. And in His purpose He is working for the good of His people. Naomi is beginning to understand the overshadowing goodness of God.
Ruth 2:20 NAU - "Naomi said to her daughter-in-law, "May he be blessed of the LORD who has not withdrawn his kindness to the living and to the dead."
 - a. The “who has not withdrawn his kindness” grammatically could refer to Boaz or to God.
It fits best for it to refer to God who has not withdrawn His kindness - רַחֲמֵי.
“the dead” of course is referring to Elimelech, Mahlon, and Chilion.
Matthew Henry says that Naomi now remembers the former kindness Boaz had shown to her husband and sons. But there is no record that Boaz had ever met her sons. It is better to stick with the text and see this as referring to God’s kindness—His covenant love.
As Leon Morris states: “The whole drift of the passage shows that Naomi is thinking of God”
“the living” is in the plural referring to both Ruth and Naomi.

- b. Naomi is beginning to see that her “bitterness” is actually a demonstration of God’s kindness.
- 5. In God’s redemptive purpose He uses a long host of individuals. Among these are the most unlikely – a harlot from Jericho who becomes the mother of Boaz. And now a Moabite woman who becomes the great-grandmother of King David.
- 6. God’s overshadowing direction is evident throughout the entire book. He works through the lives of men in such a way as to maintain their freedom of volition while at the same time perfectly working out His divine purpose.
 - A. Elimelech and Naomi chose to leave Judah, but it was God who sent the famine and set Moab before their eyes.
 - B. God stirred the heart of Ruth to cling to Naomi and turned her to Himself in love.
 - C. In **Chapter 2** Ruth goes to glean in the fields without any particular direction
Verse 3 - "she happened to come to the portion of the field belonging to Boaz"
 - a. As I pointed out the Hebrew word for “happened” points to a chance occurrence. We might use the expression, “as luck would have it.”
 - b. From Ruth’s perspective she just happened upon the field. But we know there are no accidents and luck does not rule this world. God was working carefully at every turn bringing about His purpose
- 7. The interesting point we see throughout the Book of Ruth is the way God works through human agents. God works all things after the council of His own will. But this in no way means we have no part. Nor does it relieve us of responsibility for our actions.
- 8. This means we must make wise decisions and at times set into play complex schemes that demand much planning. This in no way implies a lack of faith in God.
- 9. We will see this clearly through the strange events of **Chapter 3**. We find some ingenious scheming going on between Naomi and Ruth. We don’t understand everything about these customs but one thing we can see clearly. Naomi and Ruth were working as if it all depended upon them.
- I. Life involves necessary scheming
 - A. Although God is sovereign we are responsible for careful planning. A scheme is a carefully laid out plan.
 - 1. There are times we put forth schemes designed to produce a particular outcome.
 - 2. Young people carefully evaluate potential mates
During the courtship process both are putting forth their best side—scheming to produce the desired outcome.
 - 3. We carefully seek potential employers
We put together the best possible résumé. We study the company before going to the interview and then we put forth our very best before the interviewer. You might say we “package” ourselves.
 - B. Naomi carefully examined the circumstances and put a plan in play
 - 1. She knew that Boaz was a kinsman. This meant he was qualified to exercise the law of Levirate. We’ll look at this more carefully next week. Basically, it was a marriage in which the brother of a deceased man was obliged to marry his brother's widow, and the widow was obliged to marry her deceased husband's brother. With no brother a near kinsman could step up.

2. Naomi could see that Ruth had found favor with Boaz so she sets forth her plan in **Verses 1-4**.
Ruth replies: **Ruth 3:5 NAU** - "All that you say I will do."
 3. This is where we become uncomfortable with the scheme.
- C. It seems like a morally questionable scheme
1. Thus far we've been impressed by Ruth's righteous character
We've seen her selfless loyalty to her mother-in-law-
This is seen once again in **Verse 5** - "All that you say I will do."
We've seen her initiative and hard work in laboring as a gleaner
We've seen her great humility and respect as she worked in Boaz's field
 2. Now she's being asked to boldly thrust herself upon a man – a seeming act of indecency. It appears that Ruth is being told to climb into his bed in the middle of the night.
 4. Thankfully, we've seen nothing but the display of the righteous character of both Ruth and Boaz. Still, you have to question the scheme.
- II. The importance of righteous scheming – we must never dismiss the importance of human responsibility as we consider God's sovereignty.
- A. We are permitted to put forth our carefully planned schemes, In fact it is essential for us to put forth carefully planned schemes. You must have some strategy for the future.
1. Our scheming must be righteous scheming
 2. Our plans must always be governed by God's rule of righteousness. We must be honest, truthful and just in our dealings
This doesn't mean we have to divulge everything we know.
You don't have to share every detail of your life in an interview.
 3. We are never permitted to be dishonest or immoral. We aren't permitted to selfishly disregard the wellbeing of others.
- B. The purity of our motives is important
1. This is where our righteous reputation is important
 2. From all external observation Naomi and Ruth are engaged in a wicked scheme. But we already know Ruth to be a woman of excellence and virtue. Seldom does a person of virtue suddenly abandon all piety and principle.
 3. People are often quick to judge your motives. Your righteous character will often vindicate you.
Ruth 3:11 NAU - "Now, my daughter, do not fear. I will do for you whatever you ask, for all my people in the city know that you are a woman of excellence."
There isn't a person in all of Bethlehem who would have questioned the motive of Ruth in coming to Boaz.
- C. So let's look at the scheme of Naomi and Ruth
1. We've already seen that the context of this passage is the barley harvest.
Ruth 1:22 NAU - "And they came to Bethlehem at the beginning of barley harvest."

2. This would have been about a six week process. Each day Ruth would go and glean from the field of Boaz. This continued until the end of the harvest.
Ruth 2:23 NAU - "So she stayed close by the maids of Boaz in order to glean until the end of the barley harvest and the wheat harvest. And she lived with her mother-in-law."
3. As the harvest continued they went through the process of threshing the grain. The threshing floor was located at the top of a hill to catch the wind in order to blow away the chaff. The clay soil was packed to a hard smooth surface. The grain was spread upon the floor and trampled by oxen pulling a sled. They would then toss it into the air and the wind would blow away the chaff and the grain would fall to the floor. Families would come and camp around the threshing floor which meant there were many people present. The men usually slept in a circle around the grain to protect it from thieves.
4. The threshing floor was a place of gathering. It was also the place of one of the annual feasts of Israel – the Feast of Harvest.
Exodus 23:16 NAU - "Also you shall observe the Feast of the Harvest of the first fruits of your labors from what you sow in the field; also the Feast of the Ingathering at the end of the year when you gather in the fruit of your labors from the field."
5. This passage is most likely in the context of the feast
Ruth 3:7 NAU - "When Boaz had eaten and drunk and his heart was merry"
 - a. Boaz was surely not alone as he retired to sleep
 - b. There would have been many laying there in the dark. This explains **Verse 14**
Ruth 3:14 NAU - "So she lay at his feet until morning and rose before one could recognize another; and he said, "Let it not be known that the woman came to the threshing floor."
6. Now it was nearing the end of the harvest. Naomi could see that the opportunity for Ruth was quickly passing. She knew she had to step up and put together a plan.
Ruth 3:1 NAU - "Then Naomi her mother-in-law said to her, "My daughter, shall I not seek security for you, that it may be well with you?"
By security, Naomi is referring to marriage. She is putting together a scheme that will lead to Ruth and Boaz being married.
7. Naomi knows that Boaz is the near-kinsman. But she needed to devise a way for Ruth to let him know she was interested. She needed to lay claim to him as her near-kinsman.
8. So here's the plan
 - a. First, wash yourself, put on perfume and your best outfit – **V. 3** (this was a great contrast to Ruth's regular work clothes)
 - b. Second, she was to go and lay down at his feet.
 - c. The third thing we see is Ruth's request for Boaz to spread his cloak over her.
Ruth 3:9 NAU - "So spread your covering over your maid, for you are a close relative."

(1) This is a custom we don't have a lot of Biblical instruction on except in the Book of Ezekiel

Ezekiel 16:8 NAU - "Then I passed by you and saw you, and behold, you were at the time for love; so I spread My skirt over you and covered your nakedness. I also swore to you and entered into a covenant with you so that you became Mine," declares the Lord GOD."

(2) Spreading one's cloak seems to be a symbol of the taking of a wife. Ruth is requesting him to exercise his right as redeemer. She is seeking to enter into marriage with him.

9. There is nothing improper about this scheme.
 - a. Boaz was her kinsman redeemer but according to the law the widow had to lay claim on him.
 - b. This may seem inappropriate to us but, as we can see, it was not a situation where she came alone into his bed. There is nothing immoral here. Naomi is telling Ruth to lift the cloak covering the feet of Boaz and put her feet under it.
 - c. When he awoke and saw her she declared her intentions.
Ruth 3:9 NAU - " He said, "Who are you?" And she answered, "I am Ruth your maid. So spread your covering over your maid, for you are a close relative."
10. And Boaz accepted!

III. Faith and Scheming

- A. Scheming is in no way inconsistent with faith
 1. By righteous scheming we should not think of it as manipulation void of trust in God. Rather it is trusting God while taking seriously God's demand for us to take responsibility for our life.
 2. It wasn't enough for Ruth to stand idly by and trust that Boaz would step forth as her redeemer. It was necessary for her to make her desire known
 3. We can't expect to get that job position if we don't apply. And we want our résumé to be top-notch. And we want to shine when we go to the interview.
 4. And what couple while in courtship doesn't give attention to personal appearance and charm?
(Courtship must not end!! – we must still desire to woo our mates)
- B. Even our salvation demands energy from us
 1. It is entirely a work of God. In a sense we have no part in it
 2. But it is also true that God stirs the heart of the sinner to come. And we come energetically—with passion
 - a. Coming to Christ demands a great expenditure of energy
Thomas Watson – “The right way to take heaven is by storm; or thus, none get into heaven but violent ones. Though heaven be given to us freely, yet we must contend for it. . . The Christian is resolved, come what will, he will have heaven.”
 - b. When a man has a desire to enter the kingdom it becomes his chief work

- c. It will never be entered by those who desire to keep one foot in the world
 - d. It will never be entered by those who toy with God.
It is not for weaklings and compromisers
Thomas Watson – “Where there is half a resolution—a will to be saved and a will to follow sin—it is impossible to be violent for heaven.”
 - e. Those coming to Christ always make it their primary concern
Jonathan Edwards – “Besides desires after salvation, there should be an earnest resolution in persons to pursue this good as much as lies in their power. Those who are pressing into the kingdom of God, have a disposition of heart to do everything that is required, and that lies in their power to do, and to continue in it. They have not only earnestness, but steadiness of resolution: they do not seek with a wavering, unsteady heart, by turns or fits, being off and on; but it is the constant bent of their soul, if possible to obtain the kingdom of God.”
- C. The Book of Ruth is a story of redemption and Ruth gave herself wholly to it.
1. There are many things in life that we see as having great importance. It is important that we contend for these things. Expend great energy; make careful plans; give ourselves to righteous scheming.
 2. Following Christ is that way. We give ourselves diligently to the matter of following Christ. This is the nature of saving faith. We have found the Pearl of Great Price and are willing to part with all else to have it.