

You may be familiar with the 1990 film, *Dances with Wolves*. Kevin Costner played an American Civil War Union Lieutenant, John Dunbar. And he was in a state where he wanted something far out, and so he took an assignment on a remote outpost in the Dakota Territory, the western frontier of the United States. And he got enamored with the friendly Sioux Indian tribe that befriended him. He befriended them through a series of things to the point where you see his character immersed in this culture that was not his by birth. But he became so enamored with it that he eventually earns a place with the tribe, and in a very dramatic scene where he confronts soldiers who have come—you know, the bad guys—he pronounces in his perfect Sioux dialect that his name is ‘Dances with Wolves’ and these are his people and he will be with them. We see that this commitment, this deep and lasting commitment that this Civil War lieutenant goes through affects everything about his worldview, his ideology, and the way in which he interacts with those around him, those he loves, and those he has conflict with. We pick up the story of Ruth, a Moabitess. She was not an Israeli by birth. We pick up Ruth, chapter three in this month-long series, looking at a picture of a beautiful and deep love story. It may not have the Hollywood trappings of violin music and the things that we’ve come to know as love stories, but this is true love—make no mistake about it. Perhaps some background is in order. You remember that Ruth who began her life in the area known as Moab was radically affected because of a decision by a man named Elimelech. Elimelech, we know, was married to a woman named Naomi and they had two sons. And a famine hit Elimelech’s home town of Bethlehem—he was of the tribe of Judah. He was an Israeli by birth. But Elimelech in this time of famine decided he was going to go and find food for his family, so he took his wife, Naomi, their two sons, and they moved to Moab—aware that there [were] food resources there. Eventually Elimelech died, and Naomi wanted their two sons to be married, so she encouraged them to marry Moabite women. They did. One was named Orpah, and the other is our main character, Ruth. And about ten years [pass] of Ruth living with Naomi, living in the Israeli culture. And then they discover that there are food resources back in Bethlehem, Naomi’s hometown. And so Naomi, knowing that these two young widows need covering, she encourages them to find a husband in Moab, to leave her and to stay in their native land and to be a part of that culture that they were raised in. Orpah is convinced and she does depart from Naomi, but Ruth has committed herself to the new way of life. We see that commitment in those words that ring so wonderfully in our hearts in chapter one of Ruth. Dana and I used these words in our marriage vows close to 25 years ago. Where you go, I will go and where you stay, I will stay. Your people will be my people, your God my God. Where you die, I will die and there I will be buried. And that was significant, because they would die in a place, but they’d have their bones taken back to their native land. Ruth’s commitment is so full-orbed that she’s saying wherever I die, there I will be buried. I’m with you, Naomi. Your people are my people. Ruth makes that commitment, and at the end of that little statement, she says, “May the Lord deal with me, be it ever so severely, if anything but death separates you from me.” Now that is a whole heart embracing that new culture. You may recall that that’s the thing that was significant about Ruth when she came back to Bethlehem. They knew that this woman was unique. She had abandoned her Moabite roots, and with all her heart she was embracing the God of Israel. She was trusting Yahweh. That may not be so significant to us, but you have to get into the history of the Moabites.

Maybe you recall the less than auspicious beginnings of the father of the Moabites. You remember the story of Abraham and Lot, possibly, and Lot and his two daughters were hiding out in the cave, and after there’d been a lot of wine drunk both those daughters became pregnant. I’ll let you read the details in Genesis 19. The oldest daughter conceived a son and they gave him the name Moab. He was the father of the Moabites. And the younger daughter conceived and had a son and they gave him the name Ben-ammi, and he was the father of the Ammonites. Deuteronomy 23 has some pretty firm words about associating with Ammonites and the Moabites. They were forbidden from entering the assembly of the Lord. You see the difference? You see the distinction? There are clear lines of demarcation drawn. There is a prohibition that God’s people were given, to not associate with these other tribes. The reason for the prohibition is not because Israel had some kind of moral superiority, that they had the corner market on doing things right. In fact, quite the opposite. God knew of their weakness and that they would be drawn into the pagan cultures around them. So the prohibition was a hedge for them, to protect them from disobedience. You remember the purpose for which God called Israel to himself, was so that they could be a light to the nations. They were to represent God to the watching world. And he does not want his name sullied, tainted, dirty. So this is where the beauty of God’s grace shines through—just like Abraham, who was just wandering around until God chose him, and Rahab, who was not a part of Israel by birth—these are brought into the covenant family, because they’re not Israel by birth, but they’re Israel by the new birth within. Not by the physical birth, but by the spiritual birth. And that’s what had occurred in Ruth’s life—a mystery that takes place within a person. We are privileged to see the outcome, the results, the demonstration of that

mystery within as we see the activity without. And that's what happens in Ruth. She was exposed to God's people, exposed to the way and the will of Yahweh, and something clicked over inside Ruth and she embraced Yahweh with all her heart. And that's what Boaz recognized. That's what he recognized about Ruth in chapter two that we saw last week. She's referred to as a Moabitess, but she's referred to as a daughter of Naomi and a daughter of Boaz. She's recognized as now a part of Israel. Naomi reminds Ruth that Boaz is 'our' relative—plural. So that's the stage that's set for us as we approach chapter three, because there is something that God has for us in this. These are literal, historical figures. Ruth was a real woman. Naomi, a real woman. Boaz, a real man. They have a real saga, a real story going on here, but God has something just as real for us to learn about the reality of who he is.

So that's where we pick up the story. I want to read from Ruth chapter three, all 18 verses. God's word for us. "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. 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." 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." 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. 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." 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." 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. 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."

May God add his blessing to this word. This chapter is so rich, so full of the glory of God. Yes, these are literal, historical figures, but I also believe that God wants to show us who he is through this passage, who we are in this passage, and what he's done in our redemption. I want to look at--we could take different tacks on this. I'm sure you've heard sermons preached on this where they take the perspective of Boaz, or the perspective of Ruth, or the perspective of Naomi, or the perspective of Sovereign God, or some other perspective. I'm sure seminary classes right now are handing out assignments to that effect. But I want to look at Ruth, specifically. I want to look at five actions of Ruth and what they say about her, what they say about Boaz, what they say about us. That Ruth discerned the need for a Redeemer. She risked reputation to pursue that Redeemer. She boldly requested of the Redeemer. She rested secure in the promises of the Redeemer. And she was abundantly provided for by the Redeemer.

So she discerned the need for a Redeemer. Just a brief word here about Ruth's mother-in-law, Naomi. This woman also is undergoing a heart transformation. This is no longer the Naomi of chapter one, verse 20, who said, don't call me Naomi, call me Mara, because the Lord Almighty has dealt with me bitterly. This is a woman of chapter two, verse 20, who's praying prayers of blessing for Boaz and recognizing that the sovereign God is at work. We're blessed by the Lord, may Boaz be blessed, whose kindness has not forsaken the living and the dead. You see the heart transformation taking place in Naomi. And Naomi is aware of their plight as widows--they have no covering, they have no protection except what they can beg from others, what they can be provided by the good graces of others. Naomi is very aware, and Naomi's heart reaches out to Ruth, as well. I need to find you rest, I need to find you security. And Naomi knows that Boaz is a close relative. He's in line with their family line, close enough to be able to fulfill the law of 'goel'--or the kinsman redeemer codes--because Israel is set up in the familial way. Family was everything, and the name Israel was everything. It had to do with protecting the family and the family line, the seed. And according to Leviticus 25 someone in the family close enough could reclaim or redeem a property. A field that was sold during a financial crisis could be

redeemed by a kinsman close enough who was willing to do it. In Leviticus 25:47-48 a kinsman could redeem a person by buying a family member back from slavery. A kinsman could redeem or avenge the murder of a relative with a redemption of blood, Numbers 35:16-21. And according to Deuteronomy 25, in verse five, a kinsman could redeem a widow, a relative of someone who was widowed, and he could marry her if he was willing to have children with her and protect the line. Naomi knows God's law. And she knows that Boaz is a really solid hope for both Ruth and for Naomi. He could fill that redemptive role. But look at Naomi. Back in high school I was in our senior play, we did *Fiddler on the Roof*. I was the role of Motel the Tailor...yeah. But in that play there's a milk guy, Tevye, who has five daughters, and there is a matchmaker in the town, Yente, who is not very good at matchmaking, because everybody she sets up these daughters with--at least the oldest three, or she tries to--she just throws up her hands. "Matchmaker, matchmaker, make me a match." She's not very good. And Naomi--I think of matchmaker when I read this passage. Look at the plan that she sets before Ruth. It's quite perilous, if you think about it. Ruth is to clean herself up, make herself presentable. She's been with the harvest, with the grain harvest for close to six to eight weeks now, been working hard out in the sun. And perhaps also she's been known as a widow, and Naomi's giving her instruction--you need to get cleaned up and presentable so that no one thinks you're still in mourning--you're available. Ruth then is to go to the threshing floor and approach Boaz, but only after Boaz had eaten his fill and has drunk his fill, and the Scriptures record 'his heart was merry.' But there's more! Naomi's plan is to have Ruth wait until he's finished eating and drinking, his heart is merry, but then only after he's laid down to go to sleep. On the threshing floor, looking presentable, going alone, going at night, approaching him while he sleeps, after imbibing wine---yeah, what could go wrong with that plan. Right, it's a no-brainer. There's a lot that could go wrong, and we know it, and we'll spare our children the details of what could go wrong with that plan. But look at the humble submission of our sister Ruth in this. She doesn't retort to Naomi and say, what are you doing? Woman, you're putting me at risk. She doesn't respond with a fifteen-point rebuttal. Ruth displays a humble submission of those in authority over her, and she says all that you say, I will do.

So we see Ruth risk her reputation in order to pursue the Redeemer. Ruth not only saw the benefit of obeying Naomi's instructions for her own situation, but she also was thinking of Naomi. This would be good for her mother-in-law. If they were to be married, they would have an income. They would have the line continued, and Ruth was still eligible, as we'll see from Boaz's words later on. But the plan was fraught with all kinds of possibilities of being misconstrued. Hosea chapter nine, verse one reflects that it was probably a pretty common practice for prostitutes to also appear at the threshing floor after the harvest of grain, to ply their trade and make money off of the men who'd been working in the fields for weeks and were ready for some rest and relaxation. There's a possibility here of destruction of reputation. Also, there's no guarantee of Boaz's reaction to Ruth's presence, there, either. The vague instructions that Naomi gives leaves a whole lot to be desired. I was talking to our Hebrew scholar, Peter Lee, after the first service, and he was telling me, hey, you did good on those three words. The three words that Naomi gives to her are 'Go and Uncover' (Leviticus 18, Ezekiel 16, Ezekiel 23--I'll leave some of that for your further research) but the word 'uncover' is there. The word 'Feet' is there also. Also just pack-jammed with meaning where the Old Testament uses the word 'feet' in references. And then to top it off, those two words coupled with the word 'Lie.' They're suggestive enough on their own, separate, but coupled together? These instructions leave a whole lot to be desired, and it could be very complicated for Ruth and for Boaz. But I'm here to tell you today we have sufficient evidence from this letter alone that nothing torrid took place on that threshing floor between Boaz and Ruth. What took place was a pure exchange of two people who had established their moral character where it needed to be established--in the regular and mundane-- so that when they were in an awkward situation their character shone through. Ruth 2:1 records that Boaz was a man of worth--a man of virtue, we heard from this pulpit a week or two ago. He was a worthy man with regard to righteousness. And in Ruth 3:11, we'll see in just a little bit, that Ruth also held the reputation of being a woman of worth, a worthy woman. So we have two godly people in an awkward situation as a result of the matchmaker's plan, but God sees them through, he protects them in this.

And we see Ruth, then, making a bold request of the Redeemer, probably because she realizes the integrity of the one of whom she requests. She knows the character of Boaz. She's seen him interact with his field workers. She's been now close to two months in his presence. And Naomi knows of Boaz as well. So that here we have the scene. It's midnight. Boaz realizes that his feet have been uncovered. Probably the cold air has hit his bare feet, and he awakens. And the Scripture says that he asked the question that we all probably would--'Who are you?' They didn't have night lights. There was no street lamp burning on the corner. And so he startled at the presence of this other. Now this is where Ruth veers from the vague but well-intentioned plan of Naomi. Up to this point she's done all that Naomi has requested of her to do. She has been in humble submission to her mother-in-law. But I believe that as a product of Ruth's faith in

Yahweh, and I believe as a result of Ruth closely observing the character of Boaz, she goes a little bit further--in fact, a lot further, and she makes this bold request of her kinsman redeemer. 'I am Ruth, your servant.' She identifies the relationship, and then she makes this request--it might seem odd to us--'Spread your wings over your servant for you are a redeemer.' 'Spread the corner of your garment over your servant.' It's translated both ways. You see, Ruth in no way wanted her intentions on that threshing floor to be misconstrued. She immediately responds to Boaz's question, 'Who are you?' with 'I'm Ruth, I'm your servant, we're related. I want to be your wife.' Very clearly put. 'I want to be in covenant relationship with you as you fulfill God's covenant agreement. As you obey God's law, as you walk in God's way, Boaz, I want to be joined together with you in that. Nothing short of that will satisfy.' That's what she's saying. And we know, in that setting--at night, wine imbibed, and all that stuff--a lot of things tempt to satisfy, but Ruth says, no, nothing short of the honorable thing--for you to take your garment and spread it over me like a covering, for us to enter into a covenant relationship according to the laws of Yahweh-- that will really satisfy me. See, she and Naomi had every reason to believe that Boaz would do the honorable thing. But please don't miss the boldness of Ruth in this request. She believed Boaz to be a man of integrity, but for a woman to make that kind of request of a man? 'Unheard of!' (*Fiddler on the Roof*) 'Unspeakable!' For a fieldworker to imply that the field owner should take their advice? Never. For a young person to instruct an older person as to what he should do? Nope. But the boldness of her request is based on the character of Boaz, but her strong desire to see God's will lived out. And Ruth did that. She made the bold request. A reference to 'spreading his wings over her' has full meaning. When God describes himself as a man who found the nation of Israel as a young maiden in Ezekiel 16 we read the same kind of language. God says, 'When I passed by you again and I saw you, and behold, you were at the age for love. I spread the corner of my garment over you and I covered your nakedness. I made my vow to you and I entered into a covenant with you, declares the Lord God, and you became mine, beloved.' That's what Ruth is making the request. She says I know the law of Israel. I love the God of Israel, and you have an opportunity to fulfill that in us. I want to be your wife. Ruth's bold request is, I recognize you're the one who can redeem. I want to be a recipient of the covenant faithfulness if you'll have me.

And so we see also that Ruth, fourthly, rested secure in the promises of the Redeemer. Boaz was not responsible for Ruth's situation, but Boaz was in a position to remedy her situation, and he took that responsibility very, very seriously. You see, the Scriptures don't record emotion in Boaz, they don't record tears may have come to his eyes, and I'm not going to speculate, but the language that Boaz uses when he responds to her request is telling. Boaz is moved by Ruth's desire to be his wife. And he notes how remarkable it is that Ruth could've run after younger men, whether they are rich or poor. Somebody that wasn't Boaz probably would have taken care of her, and he knows that. And he's moved by that. Literally he says that the townsmen, the elders of the city gate have spoken about her character such that he's also desirous of having her to be his wife, because she's been found to be a virtuous woman. It's the same language--we refer to Proverbs 31 as the text that reveals the godly woman. And in Proverbs 31 it says that she will be praised in the city gates. It's the exact language that Boaz uses here. You have been praised in the city gates by those who have the ability to recognize these things. Ruth, you've been recognized as that. I want to be that Redeemer for you. I want to provide the covering that my garment symbolizes for you and provide the familial redemption that you seek. But Boaz points out that patience is required with all those promises. He indicates that there is a relative even closer. And we have to check with him, because he has the right of first refusal. Patience is often developed as we wait on the fulfillment of promises. Make no mistake that that is exactly what we're seeing here. And Ruth is being called to patiently wait, but the promise is as sure as the name Boaz, and even greater, as the Lord lives, Boaz says. If the other relative is not willing to redeem Ruth, Boaz makes a pledge, a solemn oath--as the Lord lives, I will redeem you. One way or another I will make sure that you are covered. I'll check with this other relative. If he's willing, fine. If he's unwilling, I will do it.

And so you see in the bold request we see the abundant provision by the Redeemer. The conversation subsides, and Boaz encourages Ruth to remain there. Boaz is interested in her safety. It's not safe to travel at night, and so Boaz encourages her. With my promise intact, remain here until the morning. Boaz wants to make sure that she knows that he's good to his word. And they don't part until Boaz blesses Ruth and Naomi as a demonstration of his intention to fulfill the promise. We might not know how barley is measured out, but if you look at your study Bible, if you go research, that six measures of barley is a great deal. I used to do roofing in Georgia when I was working on my master's degree, and depending on the type of shingles that the house owner would order they could be from eighty pounds to ninety or plus. And lugging an eighty pound bundle of shingles up a ladder. When Ruth holds out her cloak, Boaz fills it with about eighty pounds of barley. Ruth was quite the woman. Quite the woman, because she wraps that eighty pounds up in her cloak, and it says that Boaz assists her to get that secure. And she takes that back to Naomi. She takes

it back to Naomi but only after Boaz demonstrates that he wants to protect her reputation. He says, before people are able to recognize faces we'll part company--before the sun comes up when people can see what was going on here. Not that they were hiding anything—he wanted to protect her reputation and maintain her woman of worth status. So he loads Ruth down and she goes back and Naomi meets her. Naomi's question is actually translated here in the ESV, “How did you fare, my daughter?” but some translations of the Hebrew say, “Who are you?”—the same question that Boaz asks of Ruth. Naomi asks of Ruth, ‘Who are you now? Are we connected? Is there a commitment? Do we have something going with Boaz?’ And then she told her all that he had done for her, saying, ‘These six measures of barley he gave to me, and he said to me, you must not go back empty-handed.’ We've seen that phrase before. Naomi spoke it of herself in chapter one. Naomi, when she is describing the way the Lord has dealt with her, she says, ‘I am empty of hand’ or ‘I am with nothing.’ And Boaz wants Naomi to know, as well, that the redemption that he is willing to provide is going to be for Ruth, but for Ruth's people. It will be a complete redemption. The provision is both promised which is sure and plentiful, which is many.

So we come to the point where we encounter our Redeemer. And I would submit respectfully to you the question, ‘So, what about us?’ With this picture of these historical figures, their saga in view, their journey before us and the actions of Ruth as she pursues the Redeemer, How about you? Have you, like Naomi and Ruth, discerned that you need a Redeemer? Have you discerned that your sinful state, left to yourself, you have nothing--you're utterly empty-handed? And if redemption is to come it must come through another? Have you been able to see that the work of Jesus Christ is worth risking everything? It's why when Paul wrote to the Philippian Christians he said, everything that I could hold up, everything that I could tout, all of the accolades that I have--I consider them rubbish compared to the surpassing knowledge of knowing Christ as Lord. To risk everything, to risk reputation, to pursue Jesus, to be thought a fool for believing in the invisible God, for trusting in the ancient documents: He is worthy. And then to make the bold request of the Redeemer---have you based on your knowledge of God your awareness of who he is through the word? Have you cried out for mercy? There is only one redemption found and one alone—Christ. And God says, Whoever calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved. The reputation, the integrity of the Redeemer is such that you can boldly request of him: I give my life to you, I give my heart to you, you have my all. No one will be put to shame who comes to him in faith. And have you rested secure in the promises of the Redeemer, are you growing in your knowledge of God's promises found in his word, growing in your ability to rest in those promises as if, as if--because they are—already fulfilled in Christ. And then fifthly, are you aware of the abundant providing by the Redeemer? We have symbols here today--the bread and the cup--symbols of the abundant provision of Christ for us. He gave himself. There's no measure of barley that could ever compare. Are you aware of the abundance that in him we've been redeemed from the curse of the law because he became a curse for us, sinner? That in him we have been set free from the power of sin because he lived a life of perfect righteousness that we could never live, and he defeated our penalty of sin on his cross? Are you aware of the abundant provision that in him we've been given a new position as sons and daughters adopted into the family of God, a new identity, solid and firm footing before God, that in him we now have life, and that life in abundance can be lived out? In him we're seated together with him in the heavenlies, where we eagerly await that day when our bridegroom comes to claim his bride and to take us to be with him. This table is a foretaste of that. It's a picture of the Wedding Feast of the Lamb. This table is for believers. This table is for those who have been baptized in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. It's for those who have professed their faith to the world: I belong to Christ, I'm a sinner. I can do nothing about my sin except cry out for mercy to the one who saves sinners. This table is for you, beloved. Please, come and sup with Jesus, enjoy that fellowship, be fed by him, be nourished by him. This table is where you and I, believer, proclaim the Lord's death on our behalf until he comes. This table is not, however, for those, who do not profess their faith in Christ alone. I would encourage you, and it is my duty to warn you, to let these elements pass you by if that is not your profession. But if that is not your profession and you have seen the beauty of the Redeemer today please talk to someone after the service and please get questions answered or think up new questions about who Jesus is and what he has done for people like you and me. Let's pray together and then let's come to this table. Father, I pray that you would help us, please, Lord, to discern your body, given--the Son of God given for us. To see your blood shed to cover every one of our sins-- past, present, future--thought, word, deed. Lord, that covering that you provide is precious to us. I pray, Lord, that we could see it clearly now in the elements of the Lord's Supper. In Christ we ask, Amen.