

Ruth: Experiencing God's Hand In Your Life

"Part 4: God's Hand in our Risks"

Ruth 3:1-18

~ Delivered at Central Baptist Church on June 19, 2016

INTRODUCTION

- **(SHOW SLIDE)** Please open your Bibles to Ruth 3.
- Viktor Frankl was an Austrian born neurologist and psychiatrist. He was also a holocaust survivor. He wrote a very famous book entitled *Man's Search For Meaning*. In this book Frankl spoke of the connection between hope in the mind and the body's immunity to disease. He said, "***the sudden loss of hope and courage can have a deadly effect [on the body].***"¹
 - Living in the concentration camp he noticed that when a prisoner lost hope, their body would shut down, and they would quickly die. Frankl wrote, "***Any attempt to restore a man's inner strength in the camp had first to succeed in showing him some future goal.***"
- Naomi knew something of this. You remember in chapter 1 Naomi's husband and two sons died. She returned to Bethlehem with her daughter-in-law Ruth. But hope had died in her heart.
 - Her bitterness paralyzes her from moving into the future. When Ruth suggests that she go out to glean in the fields Naomi's reply is terse: 'go daughter.' While Ruth works she stays home.
 - Naomi loses hope because she believes that God no longer cares for her. She sees no reason to go on and sinks into despairing inactivity.
- But then in chapter 2 we learned about God's hesed. Hesed is a word that speaks of loyal love expressed in acts of kindness. In chapter 2 the invisible hand of God leads Ruth to glean in the field of Boaz. Since Boaz is a relative there is hope that he might marry Ruth and save the family from annihilation. Boaz gives Ruth a job, protects her, sends her home with the equivalent of a few thousand dollars for one day's work, and promises to do that everyday until the end of the harvest. This is God's hesed to Naomi and Ruth through Boaz.
 - When Naomi sees how much Ruth has made and hears who did it, her dead heart is resurrected. Naomi's hope is restored because she now knows that God is not just powerful; he is also good. He is not just sovereign; he is also gracious.
- Now what I want you to see this morning is that when these two things come together in your life, when you understand that God's Almighty hand guides every event *and* that this God is with you and for you, it empowers you to take what I am going to call 'calculated risks' in the cause of Christ.
 - People who have lost hope are paralyzed into inactivity. But when, like Naomi, you understand providence *and* hesed, you are filled with confidence about the future. This inspires hope. Hope inspires dreams. Dreams always take a certain level of risk to accomplish but you step out in faith with confidence knowing the gracious hand of God is with you.
 - So let me show you how Naomi's new found hope in God's gracious providence caused her to take calculated risks in doing good. Let's divide today's message in two parts. In the part 1 let me just develop the story by walking you through the chapter. In part 2 let me draw out the lessons.

DEVELOPING THE STORY

- **(SHOW SLIDE)** Let's begin then by developing the story. Although chapter 2 filled Ruth and Naomi with blessing it ended with a serious problem. **READ 23** - ***So she kept close to the young women of Boaz, gleaning until the end of the barley and wheat harvests. And she lived with her mother-in-law.***
 - Harvest was seven weeks. But after seven weeks Ruth is still living with her mother in law. There has been no development in Ruth's relationship with Boaz. You can imagine Ruth talking to Naomi, "***I thought we hit it off so well. But he hasn't sent me a text in days.***"

¹ Viktor Frankl, *Man's Search for Meaning*, 84.

- In a few days the harvest will be done and Ruth will not have the opportunity to see Boaz anymore. Although they are well provided for, the food will run out. In many ways they are only a little ahead of where they were at the beginning of chapter 2.
- But Naomi is a different woman now. There is no despairing inactivity now. Having experienced God's providential hand and God's hesed, Naomi moves into the future with confidence. She has a plan and it is risky.
 - Look at verse 1. **READ 1** - *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?"* What a reversal from chapter 1-2. For ten years Ruth has shown loyal love, hesed, to Naomi. But since hope has risen in Naomi's heart she now becomes the one to show hesed to Ruth.
 - She does not want Ruth, a single widowed Moabite to be left by herself when she dies. Naomi has a plan to find her a husband.
- The plan begins in verse 2. **READ 2-3** - *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.*
 - The plan will take place on the threshing floor. In order to get the kernel out of the wheat the harvesters had to separate it from the husk. So they would thresh it on the hard packed ground of the threshing floor using heavy objects. In order to separate out the kernels from the leftover chaff, the harvesters would take shovels and throw it all up in the air. The evening wind would then blow away the lighter chaff and the heavier kernel would fall to the ground.
 - The owner of the field would not usually do this job. He would hire people to do it for him. But somehow Naomi knows that Boaz will be there tonight. How does she know? We are not sure but like a good mother in law she makes it her business to know. She then lays out the plan to Ruth.
- Step one: take a bath. Ladies that is important in getting a man. Up to this point Boaz had only seen her out in the fields with her hair pulled back and covered in dirt. Step two: put on some of that Moabite perfume that drives all the guys crazy. Step three: get dolled up in your finest clothes. Step four: go to where Boaz is. Ladies, sometimes guys are not the most brilliant. You don't need to throw yourself at guy and look desperate but sometimes you need to put yourself in front of him and get his attention. *"Oh Johnny, I didn't know you were going to be at this party too...oh this old thing, I just threw it on but thank you."*
 - Doing all this would accomplish two things. They were a signal to Boaz that her period of mourning over her dead husband was over and would therefore reveal to Boaz her availability and desire for him.
- Step five: make sure the timing is right. As a previously married woman, Naomi is wise. She knows men. *"Ruth, don't just go run up to him and say, 'Boaz, I thought we were more than friends but now I don't know. I need you to define our relationship.'" That freaks a guy out and Naomi knows better.*
 - Timing is everything. Wait until he has eaten and had some wine. Don't ask me to explain it but God has tied a man's emotions to his stomach.
- But now the plan just gets weird. It is both risky and risqué. **READ 4** - *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."*
 - She needs to note the place where he is lying because it would be pitch black. If there were other men around it would be rather embarrassing to approach the wrong guy. If there is no one around you don't want your first impression to be giving him a bloody nose because you kicked him in the face while he was asleep.
- And then we have this strange comment about uncovering his feet. What in the world is going on here? You might not get this but this whole scenario has huge sexual overtones. There is a Hebrew word for the foot but that is not the word used here. This word is used in Daniel 10 and refers to all of the lower legs.

- She was to uncover his lower legs, not his private areas, and to lie beside him. This pictures the intimacy of a husband and wife as they lie beside each other. Ruth would be saying, ***“take me to be your wife.”***

A RISKY AND RISQUE PLAN

- Now, let me give you four reasons why this plan is risky and why it is risqué.
 - First, going out at dusk looking beautiful like this was dangerous. Remember this is the days of the judges when bad things happened to women. This is dangerous.
 - Second, Boaz could mock her and say, ***“You want to marry me? I am a man of standing and wealth. You are poor. I am a Jew. You are a foreigner. You’re nothing but a gold digger trying to get my money. You are trying to use me to climb the social ladder.”***
 - Third, Boaz could take advantage of her. It is pitch black. He could rape her and then turn around and accuse her of trying to seduce him.
 - Fourth, Boaz may mistake her intentions and accuse her of being immoral. In ancient times the threshing room floor was a place of ritual prostitution to call upon the fertility gods. We see this in Hosea 9 where God rebukes his people saying, ***“you have been unfaithful to your God; you love the wages of a prostitute at every threshing floor.”*** Not only that, Moabite women had a reputation for immorality. In Numbers 25 Moabite women led Israelite men into sexual immorality.
 - So Boaz could easily mistake Ruth’s intentions and accuse her of sexuality immorality. The plan is risky and risqué.
- But notice what she says to Naomi in verse 5. **READ 5-6** - ***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.***
 - Now let’s find out what happens. **READ 7-9a** - ***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?”***
 - Boaz wakes up. He smells that Moabite perfume. He knows all about prostitutes, Moabite women and the threshing floor. You can hear the terse whisper, ***“Who are you?”***

UNDER THE WINGS OF GOD

- Verse 9. **READ 9** - ***And she answered, “I am Ruth, your servant. Spread your wings over your servant, for you are a redeemer.”*** These words are preplanned. Some of your translations of have ‘spread the corners of your garment over me.’ It can be either. It is a play on the words ‘wings’ and ‘corners’ of the garment, both of which signify protection. Putting his blanket over her was equivalent to putting a ring on her finger.
 - A man would come to a woman and say, ***“I love you and want to protect you. Come sleep under my covers.”*** So Ruth is proposing that Boaz propose to her. She wants to sleep in his bed and be his wife.
- Now do you remember what Boaz prayed for Ruth in 2:12? ***The LORD repay you for what you have done, and a full reward be given you by the LORD, the God of Israel, under whose wings you have come to take refuge!*** It is the same word. It would trigger his mind.
 - She is saying, ***“Boaz, you asked God to richly reward me, I who have left the gods of Moab and found shelter under Yahweh’s wings. I will have this reward when you spread your wings over me in marriage.”***
- The reason she asks this is because he is a kinsman redeemer. We learned last week that a kinsman redeemer was a person who had an obligation to buy his relatives property back if they had to sell it to pay debts. And we learned that under certain circumstances, the kinsman redeemer would also be required to marry his brother’s widow in order to raise up a family for the dead man in order to carry on his name and land.

- But Boaz is under no obligation to do this. He is not a brother to Ruth's dead husband. Moreover, the law did not say anything about what to do with foreign women who illegally married into the family. If Boaz was obligated by law, Ruth could have just walked up to him and demanded it.
 - This plan is meant to appeal to Boaz to act in accordance with the spirit of the law. She is asking for him, as an extended relative, to rescue her and Naomi at cost to himself, not because he has to but because he wants to.
- Now how does Boaz respond? He must have paused for a moment. He could hardly believe that this beautiful young woman would want a middle-aged man like him. What will he say and do? A beautiful young woman whom he loves has just declared her love for him. It is dark. They are under the stars. This is meant to be sensuous but the narrator consistently depicts Ruth and Boaz as individuals of unmatched integrity. They don't throw themselves into their passion.
 - **READ 10** - *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."*
 - Ruth's first act of hesed was to her mother in law Naomi. But now she has gone further. She has not married the younger men who are poor for love or the younger rich men for money. No, in order that her mother in law's line would be preserved she has sought after Boaz. This shows how selfless Ruth is.
- **READ 11** - *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.* This is the same word used of Boaz in 2:1. What seems like a terrible match is a great match. They are both people of noble character.
 - Proverbs 31 says, "*A wife of noble character who can find? She is worth far more than rubies.*" Ruth is that woman.

ONE LAST OBSTACLE TO LOVE

- The plan has worked. We want to cheer. Ruth and Boaz are finally together. The music of the closing credits is starting. But the record screeches to a halt with Boaz's words in verse 12.
 - **READ 12** - *And now it is true that I am a redeemer. Yet there is a redeemer nearer than I.* Ruth's heart must have sunk.
- **READ 13-14** - *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."*
 - Again we see the character of this man Boaz. He knows how dangerous it would be for her to walk home in the middle of the night like this and so tells her to stay. Also, he knows what it would look like to others for a Moabite woman to leave his threshing floor. He has protected her chastity in not sleeping with her and now he protects her reputation.
 - **READ 15** - *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.*
 - Boaz does not want her to go and wonders if she has misunderstood him. He makes his intentions clear in giving her what is probably about 80 pounds of grain. It is a pledge to do all he said. And then we read that he immediately went back to town to start dealing with this. What a man!
- Now imagine what Naomi has been thinking all night. She must have been pacing up and down the house. Was I clear enough in my instructions? Is Ruth alright? Then Ruth arrives home. **READ 16-17** - *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.'* "

- Now who was the grain for? Naomi. It was a message to her. Remember she came to Bethlehem lamenting the fact that God had left her empty and without an heir to continue the family line.
 - Boaz is saying with this gift, *“Naomi, your days of emptiness are over. This seed will fill your stomach and this seed points to what I will do to make sure your family land and family line is not annihilated.”* Naomi understands this. **READ 18** - *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.”*

LESSON #1 – CALCULATED RISKS IN THE CAUSE OF CHRIST

- Isn't this a great story? We have developed the story. **(SHOW SLIDE)** Let's shift gears now and draw out three lessons. Three lessons that arise because hope in the gracious providence of God has been renewed.
- **(SHOW SLIDE)** First, renewed hope in the gracious providence of God should inspire calculated risks in the cause of Christ.
 - This is one of the great lessons of the book of Ruth. When, like Naomi, you get a firm grasp of the providence of God and learn that his invisible hand guides all things and when like Naomi you also understand God's personal and particular love for you it inspires action.
 - Naomi did not just sit back and say, *“If God wants you to be married, he will bring someone. She acted.”* The goal of the Christian life is not just to avoid evil. It is to step out and serve Jesus letting our good works shine before men.
- At times this means taking calculated risks. I am not talking about foolish decisions. They knew some key things about Boaz and his character. But sometimes after considering all possibilities you just have to step out and act.
 - Friends when we as a church sense the wings of God hovering over us we can step into the future with confidence. We can follow the advice of that great missionary William Carey when he said, *“Expect great things from God, attempt great things for God.”*
 - Has God been asking you to do something for years but you have held back out of fear? How can you show love to others? Who can you share Christ with? Your fear will be conquered and you will move into action, even calculated risks, only when you understand providence and hesed.

LESSON #2 – FAITHFULNESS IN THE PURSUIT OF ROMANTIC LOVE

- **(SHOW SLIDE)** Lesson #2 - Renewed hope in the gracious providence of God should inspire faithfulness in the pursuit of romantic love.
 - Many of you are single. Here you have such a great example of two single people pursuing romantic love in a God-honouring way. Of course Ruth 3 is not a manual for dating. As someone has said, ladies, don't lie down beside a man under the stars and do whatever he tells you to do.
 - This is not a passage that *prescribes* how to date but it does *describe* some good principles. Let me draw out three.
- **(SHOW SLIDE)** First, be, and seek, a person of noble character.
 - In 2:1 Boaz is described as a man of noble character and in 3:11 Ruth is described the same way. In fact Boaz says that the whole town knows what a noble woman she is.
 - Despite what our culture preaches, love is not a feeling. It is based on character and commitment. Be that person and seek that person and you will be well on your way to a happy marriage.
- **(SHOW SLIDE)** Second, be, and seek, a person who loves Jesus.
 - Both Ruth and Boaz were people who loved and served God. They were spiritually compatible. Oh single people, please hear my plea now. You need to decide right now that you will only

marry someone who loves Jesus. It gets too hard once feelings get involved. Ladies, don't just look for a nice guy – look for a man who loves Jesus.

- **(SHOW SLIDE)** Third, be, and seek, a person of sexual purity.
 - When the stars were shining and their hearts were thumping with desire Ruth and Boaz put the brakes on. As Ephesians 5 says, ***“But among you there must not be even a hint of sexual immorality.”***
 - Men, do you want a marriage with great sex? It begins now. It begins now by being sexually pure when you are in front of your computer, watching movies, and staying in hotels rooms.
- So single people rest in God. When you see that his providential hand is leading you and that he is for you even in your marital situation, it should inspire faithfulness as you pursue romantic love.

LESSON #3 – WORSHIP FOR OUR REDEEMER

- **(SHOW SLIDE)** Finally, renewed hope in the gracious providence of God should inspire worship for *the Redeemer*.
 - Perhaps some of you have blown it in your character, in choosing a Christian spouse, or in sexual purity. What good news there is for all who see their sin before God.
- In the gospel we are just like Ruth. We are in need of a Redeemer. We cannot change our condition. We are guilty of sin. We are helpless and hopeless. When you see your sin you come like Ruth did to Boaz, asking if there is any way God can redeem you. God says to you, ***“I will do it.”***
 - God sent Jesus as our Redeemer. He became our kinsman in taking on human flesh. Like Boaz he worked on our behalf. It cost Boaz wealth to redeem Ruth but it cost Jesus his blood to redeem us. The man Christ Jesus did not rest until our redemption was settled.
 - Do you know what it means to be in right relationship with God? All it takes is admitting your helplessness. It takes coming to the feet of Jesus and saying, ***“There is nothing in me that deserves forgiveness but I ask you to do it for me.”*** Jesus says, ***“I will do it.”*** Have you asked Jesus to redeem you?
- Once you are redeemed he spreads his wings over you. He takes you as his own. Then hope rises in your soul for the Almighty God is with you and for you. This inspires calculated risk in the cause of Christ.