



Sermon Transcription • Ruth 3:1-18 (NIV)

Love at the Threshing Floor

Pastor Jeff Bucknam

[Please Note: This transcript has been lightly edited for ease of reading. Also, some headings have been added in square brackets to aid the reader in locating portions of the sermon.]

I don't usually go and watch films twice in the movie theaters. Once is usually enough. Most of the movies aren't worth that, even. But often, in the past, my wife will have had her eye or heart caught by a film that we saw the first time and she will want to go a second time. It was usually before we had children when we had time to do this sort of thing. There was one film, in fact, that she --we watched it the first week and it was three and a half hours long. It was called *Titanic* [laughter] and the boat sinks at the end. I'm sorry if I gave that away there. It sinks at the end. It's a love story. So we watched it. Three and a half hours and it was over and we were driving home and her eyes are puffy because she was crying about how hard that was and I was like, "Yeah, it was a good movie" [laughter]. The the next week she said to me on Friday night: "Hunny, I just...all week long that movie is just...I just want to see it again." And I was like, "Ugh." It was of course early in our marriage, so it was before I had the courage to say, "No" to these things [laughter] and I said, "Yeah, okay. Okay." So we went to the film the second time and you know, I didn't realize how long it was. It was a very, very long film. So about an hour into it I was like, "Man, this is going to go for a lot longer than this," and the boat wasn't even in trouble yet and so...[laughter]. So I told her, "I've got to use the bathroom." So I got up and I actually went to another theater and watched another movie for a little while [laughter]. I went to the bathroom, came back and sat down, and she didn't even know I was gone (I don't think) she was so wrapped into the film. But of course, still, it was another good hour before the thing was going to end and, you know, it just draws on and on and on and I'm counting the ceiling tiles and trying to figure out whether Leonardo DiCaprio - if I saw him I'd really want to punch him or not. Finally, finally, it builds to the scene where the boat starts to go down and it gets to the very dramatic scene - it gets swallowed up by the ocean and there's a guy two rows in front of me who, when the boat finally goes down, yells out, in the theater, "It's about time" [laughter]. And every guy around me was like nodding, and his wife was like, "Such a jerk."

Ever wonder why we love love stories so much, though? I mean, the reason my wife wanted to see it twice was because it is a love story. Because, you know, for her it was delightful. I mean, we know the arc for all the love stories. There's a romantic comedy that comes out and you know what's going to happen. There's probably going to be an airport involved at some point and one of the two of them is going to run up to the gate: "No, I love you. I'm sorry we fought." Let's get married or not or whatever the final scene is, but they are together. We know what's going to happen. Their not going to like each other at the beginning but eventually they are going to be together. We know the story but we can't



help ourselves. We can't. Every time I'm on a plane and *Notting Hill* is on there I secretly (nobody's looking), "Okay, I'll watch this." You know? [laughter]. It's warm hearted.

I tell you that because Ruth is a love story. If you've been reading it at all, if you've spent any time in the book of Ruth (it's only four little chapters long), you realize that that's really what it is. It's about a man who becomes a great rescuer for this dear, faithful woman Ruth and her mother-in-law Naomi. If you are new to this (maybe this is your first week), we have been going through this book for two weeks previous, so maybe you need a little refresher course. Naomi is an Israelite woman who was married, but there was no food in Israel at the time because of a famine, so they move to Moab and that's not a good thing. Moab is not a nice place. It's usually Israel's enemies. So they move to Moab and disaster strikes them there. Naomi loses her husband and then ten years later she loses her two sons, who were married to Ruth and Orpah (not Oprah...Orpah). So you've got these three women who are together and they don't know what to do. Back in those days, you needed to have a man to take care of you financially. You couldn't get a job, you couldn't own land if you were a woman, so you needed a man (either a son or a husband or a father) and they don't have any of that. Ruth tells these two girls, "Look, go back to where you guys came from. The chances of you finding a husband in those places is far better than if you stick with me." Orpah says, "Yes, you're right," and she goes - understandably. But Ruth sticks around and says, "No, I'm not going. I'm not leaving you." So they head back to Israel, not knowing what's going to happen, and in order to get food, Ruth has to go out into the fields and she has to do what is called *gleaning* - you go behind the harvesters and you pick up what they drop. It was understood that the harvesters, in order to care for the people in their community who didn't have very much, would deliberately leave that stuff behind. They wouldn't go back and clean it up. They would let these gleaners (these poor people) come and pick it up. And there's Ruth, in the fields, and she just so happens to go into the field of a guy named Boaz, who sees her and says, "Huh, do you know who that girl is?" He takes note of her. "Well, she's this Moabite woman who came with Naomi..." and they tell him this story. So he decides that, "I'm going to make sure that she has everything that she needs." He pulls her aside and says, "Listen, I need you to stay as close as you can to the back of the harvesters. In fact, I'll tell some of my men to deliberately throw some of the bushels of barley over the side so that you can pick them up." And at the end of chapter two, which is where we were when we last saw our heroes, Ruth 2:23 reads:

"So Ruth stayed close to the women of Boaz to glean until the barley and wheat harvests were finished. And she lived with her mother-in-law."

So every night she is going home to live with her mother-in-law Naomi, and every day she is going to the fields where she is working side-by-side (we presume) by Boaz. Imagine the conversations that the two of them had as time went on. The relationship starts to build and we start wondering, at the end of chapter two, "Huh, I wonder what is going to happen between these two."

So I want to tell you up front that it's weird, okay? It's weird. So here we go. I'm going to tell you the story and then I just want to give you four applications at the end for this story.



[Tell the Story]

So let's really engage ourselves a little bit in this story of Ruth 3. Here it is - Ruth 3:1:

“One day Ruth’s mother-in-law Naomi said to her, “My daughter, I [have to] find a home for you, where you will be well provided for.”

Now listen, she’s not looking to find a new house. “You know, you’re bedroom is not big enough, hunny.” She’s looking to find a man. Naomi is lovely here. She has basically recognized, at the end of chapter two, that every day Ruth goes off and she spends time with Boaz and then she comes back and tells her (presumably) what’s going on. In the evening, what else are you going to talk about? There’s no radio, there’s no T.V. so what are you going to talk about? What’s going on during the day. And Boaz is what’s gone on during the day. So, Naomi starts to do what every good parent starts to do when you start to see your children (who you want out of your house) [laughter] show interest in another person. You start to see them connect a little bit.

When I was a Young Adults Pastor here, I remember after our young adult services, when hundreds of kids would be here and young adults would be here, I’d go out in the foyer and I could stand there with a guy I worked with (Matt) and we’d stand there and we’d look around the room and we’d notice that guy talking to that girl. Or sometimes they wouldn’t be talking, they would just sort of be hovering around each other the first week and then the next week they would sort of talk and the next week she’s touching his elbow and whatever. So we would go up - because I tease everybody - so I’d go up to the guy afterwards and say, “Huh, what’s going on with that, eh?”

And he would be like, “What? What’s going on with what?”

“Come on man, what’s going on with that? With her?”

And he’s like, “No, I don’t...” and then quietly he’d say - repeatedly, seriously, this happened more than once - he’d say, “How did you know?” [laughter]

“Come on man. I know because I’ve got the winners ring here. You see that?” [laughter]. “I’ve been through this rodeo before.”

And you’re parents, you know this, right? You can see it when you get older. You realize that they’re not being as coy as they think they are. That’s what Naomi has done. She notices what is going on between Ruth and Boaz, and listen, she’s not surprised because she prayed for this.

If you go back to chapter one, what you find, in Ruth 1:8,

“Then Naomi said to her two daughters-in-law, [this is in a moment when everything has gone wrong and their husbands have died and her husband has died and she’s trying to tell them, ‘Man, you guys need to go back to your family because it’s the only way you’re going to find a husband.’ Then Naomi said to her two daughters-in-law,] ‘Go back, each of you, to your mother’s home. May the Lord [now here’s her prayer: may the lord] show you kindness, as you have shown kindness to your dead husbands and to me. May the Lord [‘Oh, I pray that the Lord would’] grant that each of you will find rest in the home of another husband.’”



And Naomi, at the moment, is thinking to herself, “The only way that that is going to happen is if you go back to your homeland and you find a guy, because I am some dead weight when it comes to the relationships here. So get rid of me, go back to your homes, and find a guy.” Of course Ruth doesn’t do it. So here’s this moment, finally, after months, Naomi starts to realize, “Oh, the Lord is actually answering the prayer. Not like I thought...” and so she springs into action, like a dear Jewish mother <squeaky, singsong voice> Matchmaker</squeaky, singsong voice>, and she hatches a plan [laughter]. She hatches a plan. And listen, this plan is weird. Here you go: Ruth 3:2-5:

<Narrativization of Ruth 3:2-5>

“Now Boaz - this is Naomi saying to Ruth, “This is my plan: Now Boaz, hunny, with whose women you have worked, he’s a relative of ours. So tonight he’s going to be winnowing barley on the threshing floor. So I need you to wash, put on some perfume, and get dressed in your best clothes. And then go down to the threshing floor, but don’t let him know you are there until he has finished eating and drinking. When he lies down, note the place where he is lying. Then go and uncover his feet and lie down. He will tell you what to do.”

“Okay, I will do whatever you say,’ Ruth answered.

So let’s take this plan step by step. You’ve got to picture they are on the couch, Naomi’s seen these two in the distance and realized, “Oh, there might be something here for you. Hunny, sit down on the couch.” She puts her hands in her hands and says, “Okay, here’s what we’re going to do: what I need you to do is, first, you need to know that Boaz is going to be down at the threshing floor winnowing barley.”

What that means is that they used to take all the barley stalks and they’d put them on the floor (usually on a hill or in a valley - a place where the wind was blowing) and they would step on it themselves or get an animal to step on them or roll over them with rocks or whatever to break the heads of the barley and then they would take a pitch fork (basically) or some tool like that and they’d throw it in the air. Now, they’re doing it at night because that’s usually when the breezes were a little less gusty. A consistent breeze was coming across. So they are down there and they are throwing these broken stalks of barley up in the air and the chaff would blow away and the grain would drop. You do this enough and you’d just have a pile of grain. So this is the end of the harvest - this is the greatest moment.

“And he’s going to be down there, hunny. Tonight, here’s what I need you to do: I need you to wash yourself, because *pee-yew* [laughter]. I need you to put on some perfume and I need you to dress in good clothes.”

Now, we presume that the reason for this is what you and I think it is - I mean, you probably stink. This is a not a day of deodorant or antiperspirant or soap, so you need to clean yourself up a little bit because what I want you to do for Boaz here, you need to be a little bit more appealing than you currently are. Now, that might be the big reason, but probably what she is telling her is saying, “Listen, you need to drop all your mourning clothes here” (mourning, *m-o-u-r-n*). I mean, she lost her husband, and the way that you showed everyone that you were in mourning was you wore black and sometimes



sackcloth and all sorts of horrible outfits and you would go out and that's why no men would ever be interested. So presumably, that's what Ruth has been doing all these days out in the fields. "So hunny, you need to change your clothes and wash yourself."

When David's (King David's) child dies, he goes into mourning. And when he comes out of mourning, the scriptures say that he washed himself and he put on better clothes and he went to worship the Lord. That's a signal to the man (Boaz) that you're going to be ready and on the market again, is if you smell better than you do and you look better than you do.

"So he's winnowing barley. Wash, put on perfume, dress in good clothes, and then I want you to go to the threshing floor (where he is) and I want you to wait until he's done eating and drinking."

Okay, end of the barley harvest, end of the wheat harvest - this is like the culmination of all of their hard work. Have you ever been around a community that does farming? The harvest is a great, great time. At the end of the harvest, it's not uncommon for the men to have a few drinks.

So she's saying to her, "Listen, I need you to just wait for him to be a little lubed up, right? Because we want him to be in good spirits when he sees you. So wait for him to finish eating and drinking (we want him to be in a good mood) and then watch where he lies down, because other men are going to be around there doing the same work. You don't want to pick the wrong guy (that could go very, very wrong, hunny) and then uncover his feet, lie down, and, hunny, he'll tell you what to do."

Now, I have a question. Ladies - how would you respond to this plan from your mom [laughter]? "Have you been taking your pills, mom? [laughter]. Like, are you crazy?" And the reason that you respond that way and the reason that we laugh is because, instinctively, we read that and we think, "Am I missing something? Because this sounds like a *me-too* moment waiting to happen here. Like, you're putting yourself into this horrible situation. Are you kidding? What kind of mother is this?" It sounds like it's got massive sexual overtones. Now, some commentators on this passage say, "No, no, no, no, no, no. That's just 21st century people placing our 21st century opinions about sex on an ancient passage. There's nothing like that there." Okay, I'm going to tell you that their wrong, and here's why. I'll prove it to you, okay? Here you go: This phrase - *to lie down* - in Hebrew is often used in the Old Testament, the very words are often used in the Old Testament to connote sexual activity, right? So, "He *lied down* with his wife," - that's the phrase. "So I want you to go lie down at his feet." To *uncover* - that word is usually used in connection with nakedness. It's used all over the place in the Old Testament. To *uncover someone's nakedness* is the way you say, "Oh, you're going to go have sexual relations with them." Now here it doesn't say, *uncover their nakedness*, it says, "I want you to go and uncover his feet," but you need to know that, also in the Old Testament, there are several places where the word *feet* is a euphemism for the genitalia. Now, what I mean by *euphemism* is that you and I sometimes say, "My wife went *to powder her nose*," you know? Okay, she's not *powdering her nose* in that room over there. I can tell you right now that that is not what's happening, but we use that because it's a nice way of saying something that's a little bit... So to *uncover his feet* can be understood as, "Take the clothes off of him." She also is supposed to wait for Boaz to finish drinking. There are other scenes in the Old Testament, namely with Lot and his daughters, where they get Lot to



drink as much as he can so that they could have sex with him. So this would not be the first time (the same language is used here, in fact). And the threshing floor in the ancient world was a place that was commonly visited by prostitutes during the harvest season. So, if you were the first people listening to that being read to them, you're hearing all of those words and you're hearing all of that and you're supposed to be thinking, "What in the world is this Naomi doing? What?" Now, don't get me wrong. I'm not suggesting in any way that Naomi is saying to Ruth, "Listen, I want you to go have sex with him." But, the language here is kind of --you're on the fence. You're like, "This could go horribly, horribly wrong. This is a very sexually charged environment that you're putting your daughter-in-law in." And you're supposed to, at the end of these verses, go, "What's going to happen? What's going to happen?"

So Here's what happens [laughter]. It's crazy that Ruth agrees to this. No question. She doesn't say, "By *lie down* did you mean..." Ruth 3:6-9,

"So she went down to the threshing floor and did everything her mother-in-law told her to do. When Boaz had finished eating and drinking and [he] was in good spirits [I bet he was], he went over to lie down at the far end of the grain pile [alright, so it's a signal that he's not near anybody else now. He's way over there on the edge. Easy access. All alone.] Ruth approached quietly, [she] uncovered his feet and [she] lay down [time passes]. In the middle of the night something startled the man [have you ever had the covers come off your feet in the middle of the night? You wake up and your feet are freezing, right? He's out in the middle of the open air and something startled the man. Maybe it's that, maybe it's the smell of this woman that he's like, "That's different. That's different than the stink I usually smell. That's actually nice." I don't know. Something wakes him up.]; he turned - and there ["Behold" - it says in Hebrew. "Lo! Whoa!"] and there was a woman lying at his feet! [You can imagine the guy sitting up, "What?"] 'Who are you?' he asked. 'I am your servant Ruth,' she said. [Now] 'Spread the corner of your garment over me, since you are a guardian-redeemer of our family.'

What is she asking of him? Well, a couple things. First, you need to understand this little phrase *guardian-redeemer*. It's used in the older versions - *kinsman-redeemer*. What it means is that there was basically a rule in Israel (that's rooted off of several old testament passages in the law) that if anything happened because of your bad decisions - say you lost some of your land because of a bad financial decision, or maybe you had to sell yourself into slavery because you couldn't pay for a bad financial decision - if something really bad happened to you, it was the responsibility of the nearest member of your family to *redeem* either your property or you; to buy you out of slavery, to redeem the property, to save you. So she comes to him and she is saying, "You are our guardian-redeemer. You know what has happened to me and to my mother-in-law. You know where we are. We have nothing. We have no one and the only way out of this for us is to find a man who will look after us. You're part of our family. I need you to be the guardian-redeemer of our family." But she doesn't just want this to be a financial transaction. It's more than that. In fact, she says, "I want you to cover me with the corner of your garment. Spread the corner of your garment over me." What does that mean? Well, that same language is used in Ezekiel 16:8 when God is describing how he came to Israel and wanted to make her his wife and have a covenant with her. Listen to what it says in Ezekiel 16:8,



“Later I passed by [says the Lord], and when I looked at you [Israel] and saw that you were old enough for love, I spread the corner of my garment over you and covered your naked body. I gave you my solemn oath and entered into a covenant with you, declares the Sovereign Lord, and you became mine.”

What is she asking? “Marry me. Covenant with me. Save us through loving marriage.” In the middle of the night she is on one knee. The ring up.

There’s this great scene, in fact, in the movie *Notting Hill*. If you haven’t seen it, don’t. It’s okay. But I can’t help it. There’s this scene --it’s a story about a woman, who is this super star hollywood mogul, and she’s a great actress and known everywhere and a guy who is just a British bloke who just lives in a flat with a weird friend. You know, it’s weird for this British bloke to know this super star mogul, but they form this friendship, and then relationship, and next they have trouble, and the next thing you know he thinks it’s all over. But she shows up in his art shop (this art bookstore) and she’s standing there (Julia Roberts) and she says to this British bloke, “I know that all of this fame and popularity is off-putting to you and it’s weird, but it’s all fake, you know. And at the end of the day (she says this great line): At the end of the day I’m also just a girl standing in front of a boy, asking him to love her.” That’s when my wife is like, <sniffing> “This is so great” [laughter]. That’s this moment, though, that’s what this is. In every love story there’s a *define-the-relationship* talk. There’s a moment when their feelings come out for each other and they have this awkward conversation. “You had me at hello.” This is that moment and she’s on her knees, “Marry me! Save us!” And you can imagine the pause. There’s got to be a pause. In Ruth 3:10,

“The Lord bless you, my daughter,” he replied. “This kindness is greater than that which you showed earlier: You have not run after the younger men, whether rich or poor.”

Now, don’t misunderstand what he’s saying here. He’s not saying, “Your kindness towards me.” He’s saying, “Look, what you’ve done here is you’ve shown this rich kindness to your mother-in-law. You’re here, but you could have run after any man. You could have come back and you could have run after any man. I mean, you’re spending all this time in the fields with all these handsome, strapping young men. You could have married for love. You could have fallen for them and that would have of course put your mother-in-law in a difficult situation because those guys wouldn’t have been able to take care of you, but instead you’ve chosen to honour her and honour me and sought to keep your promise here, to your mother-in-law when you came all the way back. This kindness is greater than the kindness you did before when you made that promise.”

You do know that the movie *Titanic* is about a girl who gets on board the Titanic and she is promised to be married to a wealthy guy who is not the nicest dude around. There’s no question about that. But she’s doing this --she’s getting married to the wealthy guy so that she can preserve the future for her mother and her. But, on the boat, she meets Leonardo Dicaprio and she falls in love with him and they run around on the boat after each other all the time and hide from the mean rich guy who is going to save her and her family, and in the end the boat goes down, he dies and she’s left alone. The whole



story is basically saying, “You should marry for love and for yourself, not for your family.” I am telling you, the Ruth story is like the anti-Titanic story. It’s the opposite. It’s basically saying, “No, you should marry for the covenant. You should marry for the promises you’ve made and for the people you’ve actually loved.” That’s what Ruth is doing and Boaz notices and thinks, “You remarkable woman. You’re amazing. You act, not for yourself, but for the care of Naomi.” Ruth 3:11-18:

“And now, my daughter [verse 11], don’t be afraid. I will do [what] you ask. All the people of my town know that you are a woman of noble character [there’s nothing about you that you’ve ever done among us, even though you’re a Moabitess, that has given us any pause regarding how noble you are in your character]. Although it’s true that I am a guardian-redeemer of our family, there is another who is more closely related than I. Stay here for the night, and in the morning if he wants to do his duty as your guardian-redeemer, [then] good; let him redeem you. But if he’s not willing, as surely as the Lord lives I will do it. Lie here until morning.” [Notice what he says there: “Lie here until morning,” and nothing happens beyond that.] So she lay at his feet until morning, but got up before anyone could be recognized; and he said, “[look] No one must know that a woman came to the threshing floor.” [“See, their going to think that you’re a prostitute and nothing happened and I don’t want your name to be sullied”]. He also said, “Bring me the shawl you are wearing and hold it out.” When she did so, he poured into it six measures of barley and placed the bundle on her. Then she went back to town. [“You’re not going to ever leave me, Ruth, without having more than what you came with.”] When Ruth came to her mother-in-law, Naomi asked, [can you imagine that scene?] “How did it go, my daughter?” Then she told her everything that Boaz had done for her and added, “[You know] He gave me these six measures of barley saying, ‘Don’t go back to your mother-in-law empty handed.’” Then Naomi said, “Wait, my daughter, until you find out what happens. For [he] will not rest until the matter is settled today.”

“Ooo, I wonder what’s going to happen?” You should come back and see what happens at the end of the story.

[Four Applications]

But before we do that, let me give you ten minutes of application, okay? Four of them. Here’s the first: Be strategic like Naomi.

What we learn from this passage is that you and I ought to be strategic like Naomi. I mean by that is here is Naomi whose praying for her daughter-in-law in chapter one. “Oh God, would you give her a husband.” But she doesn’t respond to her prayer by saying, “Well, I prayed for her and that’s done.” Instead, when she starts to see the providence of God move in the direction of her prayer, she immediately jumps in and goes, ‘Alright, let’s fan this baby into flame. Look, I trust you, Lord, to answer the prayer, but I’m not going to be found lazy.’ See, prayer does not lead to passivity. Just because you prayed about it --I know that in your heart you want to say, “Oh, I want to trust the Lord,’ but trusting the Lord does not mean, “I’m going to sit on my hands here and just wait for God to do everything about it.” There are, in the Bible, a couple of errors you can make when it comes to



planning. I mean, she makes this strategic plan here. There are a couple errors you can make in the Bible. On the one hand, one of the errors is to be an arrogant boaster. You say, “What does that mean?” Alright, well in James 4:13-16,

“Now listen, you who say, ‘Today or tomorrow we will go to this or that city, spend a year there, carry on business and make money.’ Why, you do not even know what will happen tomorrow. What is your life? You are a mist that appears for a little while and then vanishes. Instead, you ought to say, ‘If it is the Lord’s will, we will live and do this or that.’ As it is, you boast in your arrogant schemes.”

See, it’s arrogance to think that you control the world in such a way that you can make a plan that comes to fruition exactly like you planned it. Because God is involved in your world and sometimes he turns you in another direction and you get mad at him. Don’t be arrogant in your schemes and boast about your ability to carry them through. Now, some people hear that and they think, “Oh, I’m not going to plan, then. I’m not going to strategize at all because I don’t want to be guilty of arrogance.” And so what they do is they say, “Well, I’m just not going to...I’m going to pray about it and then I’m just going to leave it to the Lord.” Can you imagine that if you had to get a job, for example, and you said, “Lord, I’m just going to pray about that,” and then you sat on the couch, right? This is every 25 year-old boy in the world, right? You need to pound the pavement. Have you looked at *craigslist*? Have you been involved on any of the job boards? “Well listen, man, the Lord can bring me those job boards if he wants.” Yes, he can. God is sovereign and he can do that, but prayer does not mean passivity. Listen, I believe that God is sovereign over salvation and that God has an elect in the world, but that doesn’t mean that you and I sit here and do nothing about it. No, we go to Portugal, we go to Turkey, we go and give our lives for it. Just because God determines and end doesn’t mean he didn’t determine the means. Pray, trust God, get to work. Prayer does not mean passivity.

When I was bodyboarding with my family in Mexico. I was our 25th anniversary and my wife wanted to bring the kids. “Yay” [laughter]. I love them. Listen, I always make fun of my kids, but I love them. It was great. We had a great time. We went to Mexico and we were bodyboarding on the --bodyboarding is an interesting thing, right? Because you see the waves come and you do nothing to get the waves to come your way. You know that. They just come, right? They’re sovereign. God is moving providentially to bring that wave your way, but if you sit there and you just let the wave roll under you, you’ll never bodyboard. What you do, is you see the wave coming and then you say, “Paddle, paddle, paddle, paddle, paddle.” You work your tail off and you catch the wave and you’re not doing anything at that point except maybe avoiding the shark or whatever. This is the way you and I ought to be living our lives. Looking at the horizon and seeing the providence of God moving and being just ready to strategize and plan, knowing all the well that God could change the direction, and we’re happy with that. But God’s not going to move a parked bus. So many of us are parked busses. “Well, I’m praying about it though.” Move! Trust God and get to work.

Second, then. Be strategic like Naomi, second be faithful like Ruth.



So, back in Ruth 1 (I've already referenced this), this is what Ruth says to Naomi when Naomi says, "Go back to your own land," but Ruth won't do it. Ruth replied, Ruth 1:16-17,

"Don't urge me to leave you or turn my back from you. Where you go I will go, and where you stay I will stay. Your people [are going to] be my people and your God [is going to be] my God. [And] Where you die I [am going to] die, and there I will be buried. May the Lord deal with me, be it ever so severely, if even death separates you and me."

"I'm with you, Naomi, from now until forever. I am by your side, looking after you, taking care --we are in this together." She makes this grand promise and then she has a myriad of opportunities to not walk in light of the promise. I mean, there were young men there she could go and give her heart to in the field. She could get tired of living with Naomi and move back. But she looks at this promise and then, when she has an opportunity to act and fulfill it in front of Boaz, she says, "No, that's what I'm doing because I promised." Boaz notices it and thinks, "What a woman! She's remarkable."

You and I don't always treat our promises like that. We tend to make more *Goldilocks* promises, you know? "If it's just right I'll carry it through." We do that in little things, like I say to my wife, "I'm going to clean the garage." "You promise?" "Yeah, I promise." And then later she finds me on the couch. "I thought you were going to clean the garage." "Yeah, something came up." "What came up?" "Like, the T.V. [laughter] You know, it was on." You're not fulfilling your word. You say, "Awe, that's silly." Yeah, but what about your business transactions, though? "Yeah, yeah, I'll sign that contract and we'll make an agreement and I'll follow through on that agreement. I mean, unless...I mean, unless it doesn't go perfectly. Unless it's not just right. Then I'll look for opportunities to get out of it." Or our marriages. Listen, I am happy, before God and these witnesses, to make all these promises to you, hunny, but I kind of need you to know that in 15 years, if I realize you are not quite as great as you are right now, then I'm out. Because I make these promises as long as it all goes right." Guys, does it ever all go right? Does it ever all go right? No. No, but you and I should be faithful like Ruth.

When I see this, I always think of a --I was going to show you a film clip, but I'm not going to. But I always think about Samwise Gamgee. He's about to go into the --in *Lord of the Rings*. It's the end of the movie and Frodo is about to take off and take the ring up to Mordor himself and Sam just says, "No." Frodo says, "No, go back, go back. I've got to do this alone," and Sam just keeps barging into the water and he's drowning and he has to be saved by Frodo. They get in the canoe there and Samwise looks at him and says, "I promised, Frodo. I made a promise and I don't mean to break it." Is that the way you are with promises? We don't mean to break them, no matter what.

Strategic like Naomi, and faithful like Ruth. Honourable like Boaz.

Gentlemen, can I speak to you for a minute? I want you to, just for a second, imagine that you are in the situation of Boaz here, yes? And by that, I mean, there you are, you're doing your hard work, you're at the threshing floor, you've had a little bit to drink, you're satisfied, you're in good spirits, you go to sleep. In the middle of the night there is a beautiful smelling woman, who you've had your eye on for a while, lying at your feet. Essentially throwing herself at you. What do you do? I've got to tell you



that for most of human history, the answer to that question is, “I will do whatever I want.” Because you guys have read the newspapers on the internet sites, yes? Have you gentlemen? Have you seen that? You see movie producers up in there hotel rooms, inviting women up and saying, “Hey, if you just do these particular favours for me you could further your career.” Political leaders doing the same thing and we think, “Yes, but that’s outside the church,” and yet I could give you a litany of Christian pastors who have done the same, who have used their spiritual power to gain sexual favor. And what you find in this passage is a man, who has all the opportunity and all the power and all the freedom to do it and get away with it, and he says, “You, hunny, you just lie over there. I’ll be over here and we’ll do this the right way.” Is that the way you treat woman who are not your wife? 1 Timothy 5:1-2,

“Treat younger men as brothers, older women as mothers, and younger women as sisters, with absolute purity.”

What defines our relationships with our sisters in Christ? Is this the way it is for us? Shameful - let’s be honest - it’s shameful that in the Church today the *me-too* movement is alive and well. Why? It should never be, boys. It should never be. Honourable like Boaz.

And finally, above all you’ve got to see Jesus here, don’t you?

You say, “Where?” Well, Tim Keller does a really good job of trying to explain at one point that every love story --why is it we love love stories so much? We watch it over and over and over again, we know the story arcs, we know what we’re going to get, but then why do we love them so much? His argument - and it’s a good one - is that all of those stories are big shadows of the greatest love story there is. And that ultimately, when you see a Boaz saving a Ruth, what you see is a faint shadow predicting and foreshadowing Jesus, who comes to us and we have nothing and we need everything and there we are in desperate need and he says, “No, I’ll take you. I’ll make this right. I’ll redeem you.” And we never go to him and come away empty handed. He fills us with what? Six, ten bushells full of joy and privilege and blessing. Over and over again he follows through. Yeah, we need a true and better Boaz and we have one. Don’t we? We have one. So you can read this book as many times through as you want, but at the end you need to constantly see the Lord Jesus. Listen, you should come back here next week because it finishes well.

Let me pray for us. Father, I’m so thankful for your grace and for this book in the Bible and I’m thankful that we get to spend time looking at it. There’s more to be said here, but I pray that what I have said here would be faithful to you and what it is that you’ve embedded in your Holy Word. Would you now use your Spirit to press into us the meaning of it. Make it affective and drive it into our hearts, we pray. In Jesus’ name, Amen.