

RUTH 3:1-18

(Reading: Ezekiel 16:1-34; Deuteronomy 25:5-10)

Covered By Grace!

Congregation of our Lord Jesus Christ...

The story really grips us, doesn't it?

Haven't we found again how much of a genuine love story this is?

And not only that we have realised that again but we have realised even more how much it is about love, especially about God's love for His people.

This is why the book of Ruth is all about 'grace'.

In chapter 1 there has been grace through suffering, which brought out God's comfort.

Then there was grace shown in chapter 2 through God giving food.

Ruth was able to find a field to glean and a property owner who was especially generous.

And now we see grace in this third chapter before us this afternoon also.

Because here we will see this 'grace' so clearly through the Lord's own redeemer.

This means that not only are we witnessing here His covenant children being provided for in this place and at this time but through that we have a glimpse of how all His children will be redeemed for all time.

It's at this point, however, that we must already qualify what this 'grace' is.

Many preachers have been quick to say that God is gracious here in spite of what the main characters in this story are doing.

And particularly they take Naomi to task for what she does here.

They say that while she had the right motives she uses the worst of methods.

It's a serious charge.

And we must consider it.

Thus it is that our first aspect this afternoon declares **NAOMI IS NO MANIPULATING MOTHER-IN-LAW.**

You see, those commentators unhappy with Naomi say that she is inappropriately interfering.

They look at this chapter and they see some major moral dilemma's here.

And perhaps you noticed them too?

Something definitely didn't seem right to you.

Now, it is healthy that we have our spiritual antennae operating.

We must always be evaluating our world in the light of God's Word.

And where something doesn't seem to agree with Scripture we should be honest about it and deal with it so that we know it's wrong and it's something we shouldn't do or keep on doing!

But our judgment must be a fair one.

How many times haven't we quickly jumped to the wrong conclusion because we didn't know all the facts?

And so it is with this chapter especially.

You think about it, congregation.

We have picked up a fair idea of what Naomi and Ruth and Boaz are like from what we've heard so far.

And as we dug into those verses didn't they come out as sincere believers faithfully following God's will for their lives?

Right throughout times of extreme hardship they kept their focus on the Lord.

So why should that suddenly change now?

Have we missed some underlying deviousness in them, particularly Naomi?

Let's look at these verses again.

And as we do so let's put ourselves in their shoes.

Or should I say, their sandals?

Verse 1 of chapter 3 tells us of the concern of every believing parent.

One day Naomi says to Ruth, "My daughter, should I not try to find a home for you, where you will be well provided for?"

It is a good desire.

When our children grow up we would like them to be married.

And particularly we would love them to be married to a fellow believer.

Even more, we would pray for our son or daughter that he or she would wed a faithfully biblical Christian.

Christian parents have been involved in the process of finding a suitable spouse for their offspring.

We may balk at the thought of this today but throughout the ages there's been an active match-making going on.

In fact, our age is the one out of step with this!

These arranged marriages have been a good thing.

Then there's a wider wisdom and experience involved than just the two head over heels in love with each other!

Parents and wider family and friends being involved means their love is based on similar backgrounds and experiences.

Now, here some may say, "But that's not love!"
Ah, not love as you know it perhaps.
But love in the Bible is something far more than an infatuation or a warm feeling.

It's not something you fall into!

Scriptural love is a life-long commitment.
The way God wants us to love is the way He loves us.

Marriage in the Bible is too serious a thing to be left only up to two individuals to sort out between themselves.

Rather, marriage is very much reflecting and showing the covenant community.
I mean, doesn't the apostle refer to the relationship between the Lord and His Church as a parallel to the one between a husband and his wife?

Just think, if love were something that you so easily fall into, couldn't it be that you fall out of it just as quickly?

Indeed, isn't that the sad state of many marriages or so-called 'partnerships' today?

Congregation, Naomi knows what she's doing.

This is no impulsive stab-in-dark, with the hope they might get away with it!
And this is certainly no dreaming that Boaz will fall in love with Ruth and so together they'll ride off into the sunset into a life of unending bliss.

Indeed, this will have been based on the accepted and understood customs of that time.
These are customs that we are not so familiar with today but which were very much part of the fabric of the covenant community then.

It is certainly clear that this is Naomi's planning and doing.

Not only was she aware of her obligation as a mother but also she'd checked that Boaz would be spending the night at the threshing-floor, protecting his grain.

Naomi tells Ruth what to do and what to wear.

She is to wash and perfume herself.
Isn't that what you do when you're going to somewhere important?
I mean, you don't come to church all smelly and dirty from your daily work, do you?

In Ezekiel there's a wonderful picture of how the Lord prepared His people in a similar way.

Chapter 16 verse 9 there says, "I bathed you with water and washed the blood from you and put ointments on you."
And the verses 10 till 13 after that describes the jewellery and fine clothing as well.

This was exactly so that Israel would be ready to enter into that sacred relationship with the Lord God!

The 'best clothes' mentioned here in verse 3 would also refer to her large outer garment, which would keep her warm in the night and help to keep her incognito.

She would be disguised as she went to the threshing-floor.

Then while Boaz would be soundly asleep after his eating and drinking, he would have to wake up when his feet were made uncovered.

This meant it would be possible for Boaz to speak with Ruth in private.

There would be no overhearing ears that could create misunderstanding or cast aspersions.

You can see Naomi's point in this.

It would be difficult to have any other place and time where this could be raised without others hearing of it.

And knowing Naomi she would already know of the other kinsman-redeemer Boaz alludes to later.

She would have known her own family network well enough to realise that Boaz would be far better for Ruth and the family line.

But not only do we see that NAOMI IS NO MANIPULATING MOTHER-IN-LAW.

The verses 5 till 9 also show that RUTH IS NO PASSIVE PARTICIPANT.

Ruth's response to Naomi's words in the verses 1 till 4 is most positive.

"I will do whatever you say," is very clear.

Because she will do it.

This is a promise.

Verse 6 confirms this with describing Ruth going down to the threshing floor and doing everything her mother-in-law told her.

And it wouldn't have been done without some trepidation.

She had to a bold courage to do this.

So there is a determination here.

Ruth, just as much as Naomi, knew how important the family inheritance was.

She knew their dire economical situation and the need of a kinsman-redeemer to save them.

This is the family line of Elimelech and Mahlon.

And in that family line she is the only one left who could possibly physically continue the line.

We can be sure that Ruth would have wanted for a husband and family, as any other woman her age would desire.

But that desire had been placed within the commitment to their family's place in the covenant nation.

This was about the importance of the physical land itself then in God's plan.

This is why she obeys Naomi's words aiming to be faithful to both marrying within the immediate family and keeping the land as part of their inheritance.

Because the land was not theirs, of course, it was the Lord's.

And as the Lord had divided it up amongst them so it was part of a special trust through which they witnessed to His grace.

This is all going through Ruth's mind and heart in verse 6.

In verse 7 we see Boaz doing what most landowners would have been doing.

For he was sleeping it off after the barley harvest.

A harvest which was a good one.

And, remember, they hadn't had so many good harvests lately.

In fact, there had been famine for ten years or so.

We know about such conditions a little, don't we?

While we never had the severe conditions they had then but, still, isn't it a relief and joy that the rains have fallen the way they have!

We are so thankful the dams are filling and the fields are green.

And how bountiful won't the harvests be?

Boaz had been working hard.

But it was so much worth it!

And after he'd eaten and drunk his fill and was in good spirits because of it all, he went to sleep at the far end of the grain field.

This was a type of security then.

And so, while he may have had a few wines, he was far from drunk.

He couldn't afford to be – protecting what he had harvested was just as important as harvesting it!

In fact, what we see next in verse 8 proves this most definitely.

You see, we are told at the end of verse 7 that Ruth has approached quietly, uncovered his legs and laid down.

Naturally this at some point will startle Boaz, especially if he isn't drunk.

Because a drunk man just about sleeps through anything!

When Boaz stirs he's naturally surprised.

He didn't expect anything like this.

Again, it is another indication as to his faith, but also to Ruth's trust in him to be faithful.

Boaz asks, logically enough given it is dark and he's been sleeping, "Who are you?"

And notice Ruth's answer.

She is clear about why she's doing.

There are no unseemly indications here.
Both are clean and above board.

This is confirmed by the use of the LORD's name here.
Because you can be sure no one would be invoking that name in a blessing if they had immorality on their mind.

In fact, the response from Boaz affirms that this couldn't be a more honourable meeting.

He shows his faith here in the same way he greeting his harvesters in chapter 2.

But first let's understand exactly what it is that Ruth asks.

For in verse 9, after identifying herself, she asks Boaz, "Spread the corner of your garment over me, since you are a kinsman-redeemer."

These are gentle words.

But what they ask is something quite important.

Ruth is seeking of Boaz no less than his hand in marriage!

She is laying before him his status as the next in line to fulfil the levirate law and thus take her as his wife.

The image of the spreading of the corner of the garment we find elsewhere in Scripture.

Ezekiel 16 is speaking of that love the Lord has for His people Israel says in verse 8, "when I looked at you and saw you were old enough for love, I spread the corner of my garment over you and covered your nakedness.

"I gave you my solemn oath and entered into a covenant with you, declares the Sovereign LORD, and you became mine."

Well our text is quite the opposite situation to the context of that verse.

In fact, it couldn't be more different.

For Ezekiel 16 tells us the sad story of Israel's unfaithfulness.

But here were two faithful to the covenant.

Yet Ezekiel 16 does confirm that this is powerful symbolism.

Symbolism that was clear to Boaz from the words Ruth spoke to him.

Words that showed her faith in the Living Word most of all!

Congregation, RUTH IS NO PASSIVE PARTICIPANT.

That's what the verses 6 till 9 testify to us.

And then the verses 10 till 18 very much put Boaz in the frame.

It's here we see that BOAZ IS NO SUCKER FOR A PRETTY SMILE.

The third aspect to our text this afternoon.

The response of Boaz shows his surprise and joy.

He's surprised because this beautiful young women sees her need to be with him, a man who could well be twice her age!

Rather than follow her natural passions and run after a younger and naturally more attractive man, she has chosen to be faithful to the Lord.

And Boaz is joyful because he really does like her.

And it's for the right reason.

After praising her for not chasing after the young men, he tells her he will answer her request.

In fact, hasn't he already been answering her prayer all along?

Her prayer which is the same prayer he prayed for her in verse 12 of chapter 2.

Now Boaz reaffirms his commitment to her.

And he confirms it by describing her in a way that would have to be the most wonderful way any woman could ever be described.

After assuring her that he will do what she asks he says, "All my fellow townsmen know that you are a woman of noble character."

You know what people are like.

They are always talking about other people.

And the local folk had certainly been doing that about Ruth.

As a Moabitess she would especially have come under the microscope.

People would have been wondering whatever it was that Mahlon saw in her.

Well, they saw it alright!

She is the most virtuous woman!

She even rates well against the most faithful Hebrew woman!

Ruth is a bride worth winning.

And so Boaz is going to fight for her.

Thus while he has to be honest in verse 12 that there is a man who is a closer relative and so he has the first option on Ruth, he's going to deal with it straight-away!

In fact, Boaz promises he will deal with it the very next day – in just a few hours time.

And as he assures Ruth of that he's also mindful of her safety.

He tells her to stay the night there.

Some wonder why Boaz has not made a move before this point.

Well, there is the matter of the closer kinsman-redeemer.

And that could still have been used by Boaz as a reason to delay matters.

But not now!

He is determined to marry Ruth.

And this is about marrying Ruth.

While there are those who say it benefits him to have this land the way the practice had developed over time in Israel that joined redeeming the land with levirate marriage.

Boaz can't have one without the other, as we further see in chapter 4.

Notice also the way he's concerned for both Ruth's honour and this marriage going ahead.

Boaz says in verse 14, "Don't let it be known that a woman came to the threshing floor," and so it is done.

He was doing everything he could to make sure this happens.

Congregation, Naomi and Ruth could expect nothing from Boaz as of right.

In fact, this whole situation could have gone quite badly.

But they had come to know Boaz.

He is a merciful and generous man.

This is affirmed with the gift of Barley he gives to Ruth to take home.

It is a large gift – a gift of six measures of barley.

And doesn't that kind of seal it?

But notice what Ruth says when she explains the gift of this barley.

In verse 17 she says after telling Naomi how it has all gone, "He gave me these six measures of barley, saying, 'Don't go back to your mother-in-law empty-handed.'"

One commentator suggests that Ruth used these words to cleverly get Naomi to like Boaz more.

But Naomi already knew who and what this man was.

There was no need to do anything like that.

Yet there is one thing we can note here.

That thing is the most obvious a contrast this is with Naomi's despair in chapter 1 verse 21.

There she had cried out upon her return from Moab, "I went away full, but the LORD has brought me back empty."

So, just think, congregation, her 'empty' days are over!

She who was so lost has been restored by the Lord!

The ultimate Redeemer-Kinsman is working for her good through a physical kinsman-redeemer!

The gift of the barley shows the two widows Boaz is thinking of them.

Naomi is assured that Boaz will deal with it right then and there.

Knowing he has the family's endorsement, through Naomi's sending Ruth to him, he can meet that with his love for Ruth.

There's no reason for waiting anymore.

In fact, to delay now would be the worst thing to do.

He strikes while the iron is hot.

Isn't this a great story?

We can enjoy it as much today as those who saw it or read of it a way back then.

And we can appreciate it just as much as then because this is the spirit of the law – ‘grace’.

Despite what many Christians may believe in seeing the Old Testament as ‘law’ and the New Testament as ‘love’ this shows us that there is both in both!

The problem with the Jewish religious leaders of our Lord’s time was that they had covered over the spirit of the law with the letter of the law.

So how much isn’t this story a lesson for them, as much as for us today?

True love is not limited by the law but it does spring from the law!

For when the law is the basis of how we live, through faith in Christ, then faithfully obeying the law will bring out love.

And that will be a love that often goes beyond the law.

We only need to look to the perfect example of our Lord Jesus in this.

He went way beyond adherence to the law in showing us His love.

And that was all according to the plan of the Father.

As 2nd Corinthians 1 says, He is the Father of compassion and the God of all comfort.

And isn’t because of Christ that that comfort comes to us?

Congregation, it is through Jesus Christ that we have a place amongst His people.

He is **the** Redeemer-Kinsman who paid the costliest price to save us.

He was sacrificed for us.

On Calvary He died for you and me.

And now, by His victory, He lives in you and me.

May He through His Spirit so bring this world so see!

Amen.

PRAYER:

Let’s pray...

O LORD God, we do pray that many, many more may experience this same grace in our day also. We pray that the gospel will convert great multitudes throughout this world.

And we pray Lord that Your Spirit will use all Your people to show the difference that grace makes. In a world with so much hate may we stand out as those who truly love.

For this we all pray in the name of the Son of Your Love, Jesus Christ, Amen.