

The Book of Ruth

Over the last week, the world has been watching the US election. People have wondered whether the future would hold more of the same or whether a change would come with new presidential leadership. Over the last couple of weeks, our church has recommenced worship services, but we do so, knowing that what we took for granted for so many years, is no longer the 'norm'. Our lives – and the ways we have always operated – have irreversibly changed. As much as we may long for the security of the familiar, sometimes, there is no going back and the only way forward, is to look for the possibilities in the future.

GETTING STARTED: What has been the biggest change that you have been through in the last 12 months? How has that impacted you – Emotionally? Relationally? Financially? Practically? What you do hope for, even dream for, in coming months? How much of that is tied to things in the past? What plans have you made and how much is that tied to your hope for the future?

READ: RUTH 3:1-18

🗨️ What did you notice/ what things stood out, as you just read the passage?

🗨️ What things did you take away from the sermon this week?

❗ “ACT 3 CONSISTS of three scenes. Scene 1 (3:1–5) is a short introductory scene that takes place at the home of Naomi during the day, with Naomi disclosing her plan for Ruth and Boaz. Scene 2 (3:6–15) is a lengthy scene that takes place at the threshing floor that evening, midnight, and dawn, with Ruth executing Naomi’s plan and Boaz offering to be the kinsman-redeemer. Scene 3 (3:16–18) is a short concluding scene that takes place at the home of Naomi at dawn, in which Naomi evaluates the encounter (i.e., Boaz will act).”¹

🗨️ In Jer 29:11, we read “For surely I know the plans I have for you, says the LORD, plans for your welfare and not for harm, to give you a future with hope.” If we are going to believe these words, what things do we need to also believe about the nature and character and God?

❗ Phil noted that, in Ruth 1, the words of Naomi indicate that she was in a state of ‘hopelessness’, even depression. She saw that she was ‘empty’ and had no future, but also, that even if she remarried and had another child, she could not provide a future for her daughters-in-law. With the news that Ruth had met and been blessed by Boaz, Naomi’s hope was rekindled. No longer was she facing a brick wall. There was hope that Boaz might provide Ruth with “security” and a future. Some commentators suggest that Naomi’s instruction to Ruth to put on clean clothes, was symbolic of ceasing from mourning for her husband. Others think this was in preparation for marriage.

🗨️ In Scripture, there are many verses which extol the wisdom of making plans, including getting good advice as part of this process.² In Ruth 3:1-5, Naomi counselled Ruth to ask Boaz to exercise his duty as ‘kinsman-redeemer’/ next of kin and to marry her. Ruth had to take the initiative in approaching Boaz. By doing that, Ruth risked being abused, assaulted, rejected or ridiculed. What is one time where you have taken a risk (eg applied for a job, made an offer to purchase a house) and you came off ‘second best’? What was a time where that risk, led to your desired outcome?

🗨️ How do you feel about the events recorded in Ruth 3:6-9? And, especially, how do you feel about these verses being included in Scripture?

❗ “Ruth invokes Boaz to “spread the corner of your garment [*kānāp*] over me, since you are a kinsman-redeemer [*gō’ēl*].” The choice of the term *kānāp* is purposeful as it carries a number of nuances. (1) It can be construed as a general plea for protection. Thus, Ruth is invoking Boaz’s usage of the term *kānāp* (“wings”) in 2:12. Like the “wings” in 2:12, this gesture probably also symbolizes protection of the woman (and perhaps sexual readiness as well). By repeating the key word from his own lips, Ruth essentially asks Boaz to answer his own prayer! (2) The term *kānāp* may also refer to the “corner of his garment” and hence be a more specific reference to the symbolic investment connected with marriage. The term marriage is not spoken, but the intentions of Boaz are clear. The next morning, he officially redeems the land and acquires Ruth as his wife (4:9–10).

¹ Younger, K. L., Jr. (2002). *Judges and Ruth*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan. p457.

² https://www.openbible.info/topics/planning_ahead_in_the_bible

The “spreading of the hem” of one’s garment over a woman appears to be a variant of the ceremonial covering of the head of the bride by the husband.”³

- Phil referred to Ezek 16:8, which occurs in a passage where the LORD condemned his people for being like an unfaithful bride, yet later, the LORD promises to remember his covenant. Read the verses below. What do they tell us about the strength of commitment that God shows to his people?

“I passed by you again and looked on you; you were at the age for love. I spread the edge of my cloak over you, and covered your nakedness: I pledged myself to you and entered into a covenant with you, says the Lord GOD, and you became mine.” (Ezek 16:8)

“yet I will remember my covenant with you in the days of your youth, and I will establish with you an everlasting covenant. ... 62 I will establish my covenant with you, and you shall know that I am the Lord, 63 in order that you may remember and be confounded, and never open your mouth again because of your shame, when I forgive you all that you have done, says the Lord God.” (Ezek 16:60,62-63)

- ❗ Back in Ruth 2:1, we read that Boaz was “**a man of standing**” (*’iš gibbôr hayil*) ... The phrase *’iš gibbôr hayil* is difficult to translate into English. The word *gibbôr* comes from a root meaning “mighty” and is frequently translated “warrior.” The word *hayil* can mean “strength, power, ability, capability, wealth,” and its meaning depends on the context in which it is used. ... it can refer to wealth (2 Kings 15:20) or ability (1 Kings 11:28). It designates one who possesses social standing and a good reputation. In this context it connotes not only wealth and status but also ability, honor, and capability. **Thus it is clearly used as a description of character.**⁴ In Ruth 3:11, Boaz comments: “All my fellow townsmen know that you are **a woman of noble character** [*’ēšet hayil*].” This phrase clearly **emphasizes “the quality of Ruth’s person.”** Boaz’s attribution of this quality to Ruth matches the narrator’s attribution of this quality to him in Ruth 2:1.⁵ The phrase Boaz used is also used in Proverbs 31. In Ruth 3:10, Boaz also commended Ruth for her loyalty (*chesed*).

- Phil commented that would have been easy for Boaz to take advantage of the situation. However, he was determined to act in a way that was honouring to God and to Ruth. That meant being self-controlled and believing that God would bless them in their righteousness, rather than taking ‘easy wins’. What has been one situation you have been in, where you have been tempted to take advantage of a situation, whether that be in a personal relationship, business dealing or other situation? What things do you do, to remind yourself, to keep honouring God in your decisions?

- When Naomi heard that Boaz had promised to settle the matter, she was sure that he would promptly act on his word. (Ruth 3:18) Additionally, Boaz knew what would occur if people realised a woman had been with him overnight. He took care to wake Ruth before daylight to ensure she could leave without being seen, so that the workers would not know she had been there and her reputation was not affected by gossip and innuendo. How do you ensure that you maintain a good reputation, particularly with your work colleagues? How do you protect the reputation of your colleagues? How do you deal with gossip and comments about other people?

- ❗ The parting gesture of Boaz was to give Ruth a gift of six measures of barley. We can’t quantify this. If it was 6 ephahs of barley – she wouldn’t have been able to physically carry it. But it must have been heavy – because he put it on her back for her to take it home. When Ruth got home, the narrator focusses on one comment: ““He gave me these six measures of barley, saying, ‘Don’t go back to your mother-in-law empty-handed’” (3:17). There can be little doubt that the writer’s use of the word “empty” is meant to reflect the reversal of Naomi’s “emptiness” expressed in 1:21: “I went away full, but the LORD has brought me back empty.”⁶

- Think about the following words of Jesus from John 10:10. What does it mean, for you, to have a ‘full’ or ‘abundant’ life?

I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly. (John 10:10 NRSV)

I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full. (John 10:10 NIV)

FOR REFLECTION: In 1 Cor 13, Paul wrote that there are three things that endure: faith, hope and love. Ruth chapter 3 is a passage about these three characteristics – which inspire lives that are lived purposefully, intentionally and righteously.⁷ Think back to the words of Jer 29:11. Hope should be something that sustains, encourages and energises us, catalysing us to action. Think of all the things that you hope and dream for, for your future and that of your family. Commit these hopes and dreams to him.

³ Younger, K. L., Jr. (2002). *Judges and Ruth*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan. p462.

⁴ Younger, K. L., Jr. (2002). *Judges and Ruth*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan. p439-440.

⁵ Younger, K. L., Jr. (2002). *Judges and Ruth*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan. p464.

⁶ Younger, K. L., Jr. (2002). *Judges and Ruth*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan. p465-466.

⁷ <https://www.desiringgod.org/messages/ruth-strategic-righteousness>