

Abide with me

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Preacher: Alex Bedford

[0 : 00] Well it's time to get those Bibles open and we're on page 223. And today we're looking at chapter 3 of Ruth.

And we'll be doing the reading as we go along. I'll be bringing the reading to us as we go along, but it would be a great help to us all if you have the text in front of you. So you'll remember Naomi's family.

Do you remember Naomi's family in chapter 1? On their pragmatism, it took them away, didn't it, from Bethlehem. And that is away from God and God's purposes and his provision.

And they went to Moab. Do you remember? They went to Moab. And Naomi in chapter 3, well she's not completely dealt with this tendency. You know, for the quick fix.

The DIY solutions to things. It's sort of left over from our old ways. And sort of, well, in a general sense, I think we can all relate with Naomi.

[1 : 04] You know, humankind, we always like to fix things, don't we? Am I right? You see, on Sunday I was outside on the pavement talking to a gentleman. And I was noticing that his eyes were wandering.

And I was looking what he was looking at. And there was this cycle which was chained to the railings. And he'd spotted that a lock ring on the crank of this cycle had come loose.

And it had drawn his attention like a magnetic force. He wanted to fix it. You see, Mike worked at a cycle shop down in Morecambe in England. And he was attracted to this damaged cycle.

He sort of, he could see the potential for a problem there. And he wanted to repair it. Humankind, we like to fix things, don't we? I've got to fix Agnes Brough's alternator belt.

Tension it up because it's slipping. Now, think what's behind all of this. It has its origin in a sense that, well, there's something wrong. On the scale of a lock ring on a cycle, a little lock ring.

[2 : 06] Or on a bigger scale, you know, global warming or something like that. The world's not how it ought to be. And we get involved, don't we? Bringing order to chaos.

For example, we rightly sense, don't we, that death's an awful intrusion into our lives. And so we spend billions through the NHS, you know, trying to extend our time on this planet.

But will the NHS, will the NHS give us ultimate satisfaction? Or will it always lose the battle in the end? Or it's holidays, you know, they help us to cope with life, don't they?

I enjoy my holidays. Get away from it all. A little exodus. And Glasgow Airport is almost overwhelmed with the demand just now, isn't it? You see every evening almost in the papers.

Year on year, the volume's up, up and up. And holidays are great, unless that is, they become your religion. The Elimelech family stop to have a look at the departure screen.

[3 : 12] They're comparing their tickets with the screen. Moab, it says, departure gate five. And they look at the tickets again and then they trundle off with their cases. Sunny Moab, the end of all their problems, they think.

Or we fight the ageing process, don't we? Botox, is it called? But all these things, you know, will they satisfy our longings? Or listen to this, do we load them down with a freight that they can't bear? If you're relating with these feelings, you're probably closer to God than you ever imagined. It's his signature, reaching out to your heart. Listen to what C.S. Lewis wrote.

So a duckling wants to swim in such a thing as water. A baby wants to suck such a thing as milk. And if I find myself with a longing for which this world cannot meet, then it probably means that I was made for something more than this world.

So as humans, we do these things, don't we? We try to bring order out of chaos, which, well, it's all very well and good friends, isn't it? Unless that is, it's against God's revealed will.

[4 : 22] And this has been the problem with the Elimelech family. They've taken things into their own hands. Chapter 1 and Naomi, well, here in a family, they're off to Moab, aren't they?

The immediate, listen, eclipsed their faith in God and his provision for them. Now, you, my friends, and this is good news, you'll have all the longings of your heart satisfied.

Yes, all these things that we've thought about and more, they'll all be satisfied if, listen, if you're reunited with God and his family through Jesus Christ.

Think about this. Christians are reconciled with God. We're reconciled with God and we're united, listen, with his solution, aren't we? If you think about it, to the chaos of the world.

And so we begin to trust in him for ultimate satisfaction. After all, he runs the show, doesn't he? It's perfectly logical. And our lives then, they begin to take their place, you see, in his timetable.

[5 : 31] But Naomi, well, she's not properly got it worked out yet, has she? As we shall see, she's still got that Moab tendency in her. You know, it's left over and it's like us, friends, isn't it?

We're not yet quite perfect. Her decision process is biased towards what? Well, it's biased towards the temporal and the immediate. Friend, think about this.

How about that decision that you've been thinking through just recently? Think about that. What's your criteria? Are you sifting it through God's word?

Good. Well, that was our introduction. And our first point is Naomi's plan launched. And it's verses 1 to 5 of chapter 3.

And you'll remember last time we left Naomi the matchmaker a limelight. Can you remember? We left her, didn't we, in bed. She was tossing and turning in bed and working out what to do.

[6 : 34] Her binoculars were on top of the bedside cabinet, weren't they? And do you know what I found? Look what I found in the bottom drawer. Can you see what it is? Those who are listening in, it's a pink packet with a silver horseshoe printed on it.

And it's full of confetti. This was in a bottom drawer. And poor old Ruth, well, she knows nothing about it. Yes, chapter 3. And Naomi's impatient again.

She's taking things into her own hands, engineering things, jumping the gun. It's like her fingers on the fast forward button. Do you know what I mean? Trying to bring things through quicker.

In her bedroom. Well, a bedroom's a little bit like mission control. She's got a calendar on the wall.

And you can see the calendar. There's a big black line across it. She's written with a felt pen.

And then we see some words written. End of barley harvest. End of barley harvest. So Naomi, she's sure, isn't she, that her window of opportunity, it's closing up before her eyes.

[7 : 37] And it's all hands on deck in that mind of hers. All night she's been thinking about Ruth and Boaz. She thinks that there's only one more rendezvous they've got this season.

So in the morning, as she butters the toast, she's working out how to get Ruth involved with her plan. And it's you and me at times. We can put the cart before the horse, can't we?

Am I right? Our horizontal priorities, sort of calling the shots. Verse 1 in Naomi. Well, she wants rest for Ruth, doesn't she?

But she's going to try smash and grab tactics. Have a look with me at verses 1 to 5. Chapter 3, verses 1 to 5. Then Naomi, her mother-in-law, said to her, My daughter, should I not seek rest for you?

I wonder if that means, should I not seek a husband for you? That it may be well with you? Is not Boaz our relative, with whose young women you were? See, and here's her plan.

[8 : 39] He is winning 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. What a plan this is, isn't it? Then go and uncover his feet and lie down. And he will tell you what to do.

And Ruth obediently replied. She said, All that you say, I will do. And Ruth sighs when she heard that plan. There must have been an opening in amazement, bewilderment.

What an audacious plan that is, isn't it? Poor Ruth, she's so vulnerable. The only thing that's going to protect Ruth, think about this, is the integrity of Boaz.

Sinclair says, Hunches about what God is doing should not be turned into schemes by which we engineer circumstances in order to bring those purposes to pass in an accelerated way.

[9 : 41] Naomi recognises what God might be doing. But she does not submit herself to the principle that God's purposes are to be fulfilled in God's ways and at God's time.

So, you'll remember as well, the writer to the Hebrews. Can you remember in chapter 11, he looks at the heroes of faith. They're waiting, aren't they?

Waiting for a better place. They've got patience. But here, Naomi, she just doesn't seem to fit the bill, does she? The one thing she won't do is wait. She wants rest for Ruth and she wants it today. And she's concocted this scheme, hasn't she? The only thing she's omitted is a four-poster. Am I right? Friends, I wonder, you know, if you're pressing through a plan in your life just now.

You know, it might not be in line with God's revealed will. Perhaps it's to do with relationships. We pray, don't we? Lead us not into temptation.

[10:47] But Naomi's obviously not prayed that prayer on this particular morning. She's deliberately tempting Boaz in the area of sexuality.

Sinclair says that there's deeper connotations with regard to the uncovering of the feet. Do you remember that? Sinclair says there's more to it than meets the eye. Is there a hint of more?

An invitation to physical, sexual intimacy? The tension of the story lies in the fact that the words are open to more than one interpretation. The word translated feet is translated legs in Daniel.

We are uncertain exactly what is happening here. What are you up to, Ruth? We ask. And our second point is Boaz's integrity tested.

Verses 6 to 13. And temptation, well, it doesn't get much greater than this, does it? Boaz has his spiritual integrity tested, doesn't he?

[11:53] In the furnace of sexual temptation. Just picture the scene. Put it together in your mind's eye. A good meal in his stomach. A couple of glasses of fine wine.

Darkness. Secrecy. It's all here, isn't it? Make a good film. An attractive younger woman. Ruth's already taken the initiative, hasn't she, by uncovering his feet.

Warm physical intimacy. Skin contact. The aroma of perfume lingering around in the darkness. And Boaz, he has to dutifully inhale Naomi's sensuous message, doesn't he?

He can't see. But all his other senses are registering. What a sexual approach. Have a look with me at verses 7 and 8. 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. The man was startled.

[12:58] Behold, a woman. I guess it was just like that when Adam first saw Eve. Can you just picture the scene there? In Genesis, when Adam first saw Eve. What a situation.

So pulses are raised, aren't they? And passions are ours here. We ask, where is it leading? Verse 9. He said, who are you? And she answered, I am Ruth, your servant.

Spread your wings over your servant. For you are a redeemer. Spread your wings, says Ruth. The New Bible Commentary says that the phrase, spread your wings, is a vivid expression for providing protection, warmth and fellowship.

The phrase spoke eloquently of marriage. Will you marry me? That's what Ruth's saying. Have a look with me from verse 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. And now, my daughter, do not fear. I will do for you all that you ask.

[14:02] 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 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 either way, Ruth's redeemed, isn't she? However it works out, she's redeemed. And I thought about this particular sentence the other day.

And I had to sit down on the carpet of my study and laugh. Just listen to this. Naomi, Ruth and Boaz, they're all in their beds, but they can't sleep.

They're trying to work out what's afoot. Now, verse 14. So she lay at his feet until morning, but arose before one could recognize another.

[15:04] And he said, Let it not be known that the woman came to the threshing floor. So Boaz recognizes, doesn't he, a compromising situation. And he probably sees that the whole thing is really a message from Naomi.

The whole process. Naomi and Boaz, two mature citizens of Bethlehem. They can both read between the lines, can't they?

They can both communicate without words, subtle innuendos, euphemisms and symbols. Now, here's a question for us to consider.

How can I, how can you resist seemingly overwhelming temptation in the context of making a decision?

Sinclair says this. Listen to this. We do not carry around a Bible concordance. Rather, we hide the word of God in our hearts. Its implications and applications flow naturally into our lives as we find ourselves in a variety of circumstances.

[16:11] God has not left us to interpret providence on our own. They were nice words, weren't they? We hide the word of God in our hearts, says Sinclair.

And I wonder, friend, if you read the Bible each day, do you do that? You know, we need to be reading his word, don't we? So that we allow it to sink into our hearts.

And it's as simple as that. We do have some reading notes on the bookstore, incidentally, and some of these are out of date so you can have them free.

These are Explore reading notes. They're here on the bookstore and they help to have a regular pattern of Bible reading in your life. Now, unlike Boaz here, we often fail, don't we?

But we know one who didn't fail. Yes, Jesus resisted temptation, didn't he? From every quarter. You remember him being tested in the desert.

[17:12] And when we come to Jesus, listen to this, this is good news. Our failures are owned by him on the cross. We look at the cross and what do we see?

We see all of our failures. And then Jesus, through the same death, Jesus' victory, in the face of temptation, it's credited to our account.

How amazing, don't you think? To be considered as obedient as God himself. Well, that's you, friends. If you're trusting in Jesus this Wednesday, it's a clean sheet on judgment day.

I can't think of any better news than that. Can you? Our third point is Ruth returns engaged. And they're from verses 14 to 18.

We looked at verse 14, didn't we? Verse 15. And he said, Bring the garment you are wearing and hold it out. It's like a shawl, I suppose. So she held it and he measured out six measures of barley and put it on her.

[18:19] Then she went into the city. And when she came to her mother-in-law, she said, How did you fare, my daughter? And 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, you must not go back Mara, you remember that word, 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. Naomi's probably still in her dressing gown, isn't she?

And since dawn, she's been looking up that road with those binoculars, waiting to see how her plan is worked out, waiting to see what's happening. She knows Ruth's been away overnight.

And finally, she spots Ruth in the distance. She puts the kettle on. She has another look. Ruth's getting closer and closer. Her muscles are aching, but, well, her face is beaming with the good news, with delight.

Finally, there's a knock on the door, and as the kettle whistles blowing in the kitchen, we see Ruth and Naomi hugging each other. Wasn't it a lovely scene that we saw there in that passage?

[19:37] And when she came to the mother-in-law, she said, how did you fare, my daughter? As if she really needed to ask that question when she's got a big pile of grain. And Ruth's out of breath with it, isn't she?

She's carrying the answer home with her. Ruth had left the previous morning, hadn't she? If you think about this, with an audacious plan. And now she and Naomi can see that the plans borne fruit. Can you see? They sit in the kitchen, chatting, clasping cups of tea. Verse 16, And Ruth told Naomi all that had happened to her.

The bag of grain. Think about that. It's an amen, isn't it? From Boaz. It says, Naomi, Ruth's proposal is accepted. It says, Naomi, I couldn't find a jeweller's, but I've got this for you.

It's a symbol of our engagement. Isn't that nice? Friends, you may remember that the book of Ruth is a bridge from the chaos of judges into the regal splendour of the Davidic kingdom.

[20:48] And here, within the book, within the book of Ruth, there's this bridge, and his name is Boaz. He's filtering through Naomi's hasty plans and he's sending them back more God-shaped.

Perhaps there's something that you need to discuss, friends, with somebody in the church, you know, a Boaz type of a person, a more mature Christian who's been hewn by God's word.

Chapter 3, verse 1, and Naomi was impatient, wasn't she? She was doing what was right in our own eyes. And now, the end of the chapter, and she's learnt patience.

She's waiting on the Lord. Verse 18, wait. And it all hinged on Boaz, the Redeemer. And so, Ruth, now, she's engaged and more.

She's had the door opened, hasn't she, to the kingdom of God. And so, friends, it's not about Ruth, it's about the mercy and the grace of Boaz. It's about the God he serves.

[21 : 55] A God who pays the price to buy you and me back. Look at the cross, friends. Listen to this. Mark, chapter 10, verse 45.

For even the Son of Man came not to be served, but to serve and to give his life as a ransom for many. So, here it is. Wait, my daughter, said Naomi, verse 18.

And it's like the phone's on hold, isn't it? Waiting for some formality to be sorted. Naomi nips into the bedroom. She slides that bottom drawer open. She gets the confetti out, puts it into her handbag.

Who will the next visitor be to the house? Will it be the chauffeur outside, standing at the door of his vehicle, waiting for Ruth? Ribbons on the car. And like Ruth, we have to wait.

Shall we pray? Dear Heavenly Father, we marvel at the steadfast integrity of Boaz.

[22 : 57] We see in his love a glimpse of your Son. And Father, we want our lives to be moulded to such an example as this. And so we pray that through your Son, you'd take from us all those failures, things that we're probably ashamed of, things that fill us with sorrow.

And we pray that you'd fill us afresh, Father, with your Spirit, so that in this world of turmoil and distress, that we'd radiate what it is to be members of your family.

and may the redeeming grace of our Lord Jesus Christ and the pursuing love of God and the intimate fellowship of his Holy Spirit be with us now and forever more.

Amen. So the bookstore's open if you'd like to browse. Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

[24 : 10] Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. ■