

INTRODUCE MYSELF

READ RUTH 3:1-18

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? 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. 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." 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. 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?" And she answered, "I am Ruth, your servant. Spread your wings over your servant, for you are a redeemer." 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, 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, 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." 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. 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.'" 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."

PRAY

INTRODUCTION

- I. There comes a time in every relationship when two people need to sit down and DEFINE THE RELATIONSHIP
 - A. The fateful DTR—The conversation when you learn just what kind of relationship this is going to be.
 1. Are we boyfriend and girlfriend? Are we just getting to know each other? Or are we just friends?
- II. What we have here in Ruth chapter 3 is an ancient DTR of sorts. It is time to learn what kind of relationship Boaz and Ruth will have.
 - A. Now that being said, we can get into trouble if we read this passage through the lens of 21st century dating culture in America.
 1. The world we are reading about is very different than the one we live in.

Uncommon Love

- a) And if we're not careful, Ruth and Boaz can end up looking more like characters from Hollywood film than their ancient near eastern culture.
- (1) Now let me be clear, I do believe that there are significant lessons we can learn from Ruth and Boaz about biblical romance—Namely, the priority of ones character in choosing a suitable spouse.
- (a) And if we were to spend multiple weeks together in this text, we should certainly address that.
- i) However, I am in agreement with the majority of scholarship when I say that romantic love is not the author's main point in this chapter.
- (1) So in our time today, we WILL be talking a lot about love...
 - (a) Make no mistake, Ruth is a love story. But it is a very different kind of love story.
 - (b) And it is a love story that all begins with a mother-in-law's plan.

EXPLAIN THE TEXT

III. It is a very interesting plan...

- A. There is a ton of speculation among scholars concerning what Naomi's intentions were.
- B. Did she anticipate that Boaz would agree to be Ruth's redeemer?
 - 1. As a refresher, a redeemer was a close relative that would take responsibility to rescue a member of the family out of some sort of trouble.
 - a) Sometimes, that would be paying off a debt or buying back land that had been sold.
 - b) Sometimes it meant executing justice when a family member had been harmed in some way.
 - c) In this case, the hope would be that someone from The family of Elimallech (Naomi's late husband and Ruth's Father-in-law) would not only redeem their family's land, but also marry the surviving widow and eventually provide a child who could carry on the family name.
 - (1) More on this next week
- C. Now, the question is, did Naomi expect Boaz to understand Ruth's actions to be a request for redemption in this way?
 - 1. Or did she hope he would simply bring them into his household as maidservants (like those Ruth was in the fields with earlier).
 - a) Or did they expect something else?
 - (1) In short, we don't know.

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- (a) We don't have any other examples of behavior like this in the rest of scripture.
 - i) There really isn't anything like this in the rest of ancient literature either.
 - (1) This is a very unique scene in antiquity
 - 2. We just aren't going to know exactly why this is all happening in this way.
 - a) But we do know how their actions were interpreted by Boaz.
 - (1) He saw it as a marriage proposal.
 - (a) The most confusing marriage proposal EVER!
 - i) It is confusing to us, but the author is doing something very intentional.
 - (1) And to understand the author's intentions, I'm afraid things are going to have to get even more confusing for a moment.
 - (a) So put on your seat belts. Those of you who have been binging Stranger Things all weekend aint seen nothin yet.
 - (b) Just a heads up, the Bible is not rated G. And neither are the next 5 minutes of this sermon.
 - IV. There are scholars who would have you believe that this scene describes Ruth getting Boaz drunk and seducing him in order to coerce him to marrying her.
 - A. And that might sound ridiculous...But given the Hebrew language used in this text, it's actually not unimaginable.
 - 1. There are many word choices used by the author that have double meanings in the culture. And at points the authors descriptions are intentionally vague.
 - a) And so what is described here CAN be interpreted in a pretty scandalous way.
 - b) Now, before we even get into this I want to put your minds at ease...NOTHING SHADY HAPPENED.
 - (1) While a little suspense isn't bad, you don't know me that well yet. And I feel like I need to earn a little trust with you all before I get into something that make us all a little uncomfortable.
 - (a) Absolutely nothing sexual took place that night at the threshing floor.
 - i) But it would seem that the author wants to allow for the possibility in the reader's mind.
 - (1) Let's look at what I'm talking about.
 - V. We need to understand something the author is doing with the Hebrew language.
 - A. There are words and expressions in this passage that have more than one meaning.

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B. When it comes to words with two possible meanings, we need to understand that just because certain words CAN be interpreted certain ways, does not mean they MUST be interpreted that way.

1. Let's keep that in mind as we talk about some of these words.

a) First, the phrase "to uncover someone", specifically, to uncover their nakedness, is a Hebrew expression that refers to a sexual relationship.

(1) Just read Leviticus 18. It is a list of unlawful sexual relationships and each one begins with "You shall not uncover the nakedness of..."

b) But Ruth is not uncovering Boaz's nakedness right? Just his feet. Well hold on?

(1) Even this word is vague. There are a couple synonyms for feet and they can refer to the feet, legs or the whole lower half of a person from the waist down.

(a) It would appear, the author wants the reader asking is "How much of Boaz did she uncover?

i) Was it only his feet? Or something more?

c) Then after she uncovers his feet, she "lays down"

(1) And to lay with or to lay down with someone is just like our English expression "to sleep with someone".

(a) It CAN mean simply sleeping or laying down next to someone. But it can also imply, again, a sexual relationship.

i) You can see why some scholars understand this the way they do.

C. The strangest part is that the author appears to do all this INTENTIONALLY. The author would have certainly known about the double entendre they were using.

1. But again, just because certain words CAN mean something, it doesn't mean that they MUST.

a) So how do we know that this passage doesn't describe a sexual relationship?

(1) In short, Boaz says that she is a worthy woman. This is the same phrase used to describe the woman from Proverbs 31 — An excellent wife, who can find?

(a) Scripture would never affirm Ruth's character if there had been any indecent act.

2. So then why use this kind of language to describe what happened here?

a) First, it is fantastic story telling.

(1) The suspense is through the roof!

b) But more significantly, by using certain language the author is alluding to a couple incidents from earlier biblical history.

Uncommon Love

(1) Can you think of another story that involved the moabites, a drunken man, and an immoral sexual union to preserve the family line?

(a) That's literally how the Moabites came into existence!

i) In Genesis, Lot's oldest daughter got him drunk, lay with him, got pregnant by him and named her son Moab and then convinced her sister to do the same.

(1) Without a doubt, in a culture who was encouraged to memorize the Torah, this story was playing in the minds of the earliest readers.

(b) Then again in the book of Numbers, after the king of the Moabites tried to curse Israel through the sorcerer, Baalam, he decides to just send the moabite women to seduce the Israelite men and cause them to abandon their God. And it worked!!!

i) A student of the Torah in ancient Israel would see these stories all over this scene and be tempted to write Ruth off as just another Moabite.

(1) An Inbred, Idolatrous, Moabite.

ii) The ambiguous language recalls all this anti Moabite sentiment in order to make the reader assume a pessimistic outcome—especially in the context of the constant moral failure in the time of the Judges.

c) Chapter 3 presents an opportunity for both Ruth and Boaz to crash and burn like the rest of their generation. And yet their righteousness is confirmed.

(1) They are a picture of the way all of God's people are called to live. To love God and one another according to the Law that they had graciously received from God.

VI. This kind of love was uncommon in Israel during the time of the Judges.

A. The Book of Judges is a record of one failure after another. Not only were the people unfaithful to God and to the covenant but even the judges themselves get progressively less and less heroic and sometimes they're downright tragic.

1. And so for two people to be pursuing righteousness in this context is very uncommon.

a) Now consider that Ruth isn't even an Israelite.

(1) She has no claim to the covenant blessing and promises. She is not entitled to fellowship with God and his people.

Uncommon Love

- (a) She was not born under the Law and yet she lives more righteously than the people who were just a couple generations away from those who walked through the red sea and out of slavery in Egypt.
- i) And so when placed over the backdrop of the book of Judges, Boaz, and Ruth, are examples of an incredibly Uncommon Love.
- (1) An Uncommon Love for God and all who trust in him.
- (a) I think this is the point that the author is making.
- B. This is a point made throughout the scriptures.
 - 1. Think of Naaman, the Assyrian General who was cleansed of leprosy in the days of Elisha the prophet.
 - a) All of Israel had fallen into idolatry and this enemy of Israel leaves declaring the superiority of the God of Israel over all other gods.
 - 2. Jonah, God's own prophet, who ran from God before reluctantly preaching judgement on Israel's enemies in Nineveh
 - a) And Nineveh repented while Jonah sulked in self pity.
 - 3. Think of the Roman official who's son is healed by Jesus because he believes that Jesus can just say the word.
 - a) Christ says that this man, who was a representative of Israel's enemies, had greater faith than any he had seen in all of Israel.
 - 4. The Samaritan woman at the well in John 4. Another woman like Ruth who was an ethnic and spiritual outcast.
 - a) She believes when the rest of Israel was blind.
- C. This is the point the author of Ruth is making
 - 1. When god's own people are going astray, God will still have mercy on those who appear to be the furthest from him.
 - a) The love of our Father is an uncommon love. That even when we stray and are far from God, He pursues us. He loves us.
- D. I started reading the Bible so that I could use scripture against the Christians in my life and convince myself that faith was pointless.
 - 1. Through his word, God pursued me. He softened my heart. So that one day, when a friend invited me to this crazy college ministry in Santa Barbara, I actually went.
 - a) And I heard the gospel. And I believed it.
 - (1) Running from God, I found grace.
 - (a) What would happen if we ran to him?
- E. The love with which God loves his people is nothing like we've ever experienced before.
 - 1. And the love with which he calls us to love others is uncommon in this world.

Uncommon Love

- a) That is the 2 point the author is making here.
 - (1) That our love for God must translate to love for other people.
 - (a) His love not only comes to us but is to pass through us.

i) My Conversation with Kurt

- (1) I believe but I don't see God's presence
 - (a) Hungry people
 - (b) Military background
- (2) Why doesn't God help them?
 - (a) Some of you have these same questions

F. Scripture causes us to ask these same questions.

- 1. Think of Gideon
 - a) When the Lord came to him, he said The Lord is with you!
 - (1) Gideons response was "If the Lord was with us, then why are we being oppressed by the midianites?"
- 2. The book of Ruth asks the same questions
 - a) There is a famine...Where is the Lord?
 - b) All of the male descendants died...where is the Lord?
- 3. These are legitimate questions!
 - a) But I think Ruth addresses these questions in an incredible way.
 - (1) Ruth shows how God is at work through the faithful actions of his people
 - (a) Where do we see this?

VII. Rest

- A. In Ruth 1:9 Naomi prays that Ruth and her sister would find rest.
 - 1. But the very beginning of our passage describes Naomi's desire to seek rest for Ruth herself.
 - a) She is seeking to answer her own prayer!

VIII. Wings of Refuge

- A. Again, in Ruth 2:12, Boaz prays that she would be blessed by the Lord, under whose wings she has taken refuge.
 - 1. But in our passage, Ruth asks Boaz to spread his wings over her.
 - a) And just as Naomi sought to answer her own prayer, Ruth is giving Boaz and opportunity to answer his.
 - (1) She's saying, put your money where you're mouth is.

IX. You see. Many times, when we ask God to intervene in the lives of others, I think it's a cop out. I think God wants us to help people.

- A. Now there are some things only God can do.

Uncommon Love

1. But often, when we ask God to help someone, his answer to us, is “yes, I want to. So go and help them.”
- B. When our hearts are changed by the Lord, he gives us a heart for others.
 1. In that conversation I had with my friend, I asked him if he had ever
 - a) Fed someone in need, Comforted, encouraged, instructed someone in the truth of the gospel, glorified Jesus?
 - (1) He said “Yes but that all feels like just me”
 - (a) I asked if he would have done that before being a christian
 - i) He said “no”
 - (1) I said that sounds like the Holy Spirit to me.
- C. Often times, the reason the world doesn’t see evidence of God in the world is because our love for people is far too common.
 1. It is a love that continues as long as it is convenient for me.
 - a) That’s why we don’t help those in need. Or why we dip out of church as fast as we can so we don’t get cornered by that guy or gal who just needs someone to talk to.
 2. But God has called us to an uncommon love, a love that is unique. A love that only he can provide. It is a love that is absolutely committed to him over and above all things But because we are committed to him we are committed to the things he loves...people.
 - a) Will we love People with an uncommon love?
 - (1) A love that stands in contrast to our culture?
 - (a) When the high of virtue in our culture today is people loving themselves and being true to themselves.
 - i) I wonder if our lives offer any contrast when compared with this generation?
 - (1) Carpentaria, will you love your neighbors in a way they are convinced is not possible?
 - (a) What would that look like?
 - (b) Ruth gives us a pretty great picture of what uncommon love looks like.
- X. It begins with **LOYALTY**
 - A. We see the beginnings of Ruth’s loyalty to God and Naomi through her verbal declaration in Chapter 1:16-17

Uncommon Love

1. She said to Naomi “Do not urge me to leave you or to return from following you. For where you go I will go, and where you lodge I will lodge. Your people shall be my people, and your God my God. Where you die I will die, and there will I be buried. May the LORD do so to me and more also if anything but death parts me from you.”
 - a) When her sister turned back and went home, Ruth doubled down and committed her loyalty to God and all of his people, including and especially Naomi.
- B. But loyalty is more than just a verbal confession.
 1. What happens when the heat gets turned up?
 - a) When they have no food?
 - b) When she has to work all day to provide scraps for herself and Naomi?
 2. It’s in times of difficulty when our loyalty is challenged.
 - a) But Ruth was faithful
 - (1) And her love and loyalty would go beyond simply providing food.
 - (a) She went to seek a redeemer.
- C. How is this loyalty to Naomi?
 1. When Boaz tells her that this Kindness was greater than the first, he is not flattered that she would be attracted to him.
 - a) Her first kindness was her loyalty to Naomi in leaving her home country and following her to Bethlehem.
 - b) The kindness she is doing here again, is not a kindness to Boaz.
 - (1) This is a kindness to Naomi. Why?
 2. Naomi had lost everything—husband, children, her ability to survive on her own.
 - a) Widows were seen as the most vulnerable in society. They had no protection and no ability to provide for themselves.
 - (1) The only way to survive was to beg or to get married.
 - (a) But Ruth steps in and works to provide for her mother in law.
 - i) This is a great act of loving kindness (what the Bible calls *hesed*)
 - (1) It is a kindness based in covenant loyalty to God and his people.
 - b) But there was a greater way to provide for a widow in Naomi’s case. A greater possible kindness.
 - (1) She had a daughter in law who was willing to seek out a redeemer.
 - (a) If Ruth were able to marry a member of Naomi’s family and have a child, then not only would Ruth have legal protection, but Naomi as well.
 - i) If she married anyone else, Naomi would have no legal claim to any provision.

Uncommon Love

3. Boaz said she could have gone after younger men, wealthier men
 - a) Someone who could provide better and longer for her.
 - (1) But she went after the man who could do the most good for her and those she was committed to.
 - (a) This is incredible loyalty.
 - i) She sacrifices her own potential good for the sake of another.
 - ii) And it's because of her commitment to Naomi's good the she is willing to risk her life to pursue it.
 - (1) It starts with Loyalty. But loyalty produces courage

COURAGE

XI. Courage doesn't mean that you're not afraid.

- A. If you weren't afraid to do something, it wouldn't require courage.
 1. Courage means that you do the right thing even when you are afraid.
 - a) No matter what it costs, or what people might think about us, we must do what is right.

XII. **Ruth's courage** is seen in the way she risks everything and goes to Boaz at the threshing floor.

- A. Imagine if her proposal was rejected
 1. She risked damaging the relationship with the man who was providing her protection in the fields as well as providing food for her and Naomi.
 - a) She was risking her safety and her livelihood
 2. She risked damaging her reputation.
 - a) She would forever be known as a desperate moabite who humiliated herself by thinking a noble Israelite would ever consider her worthy of redemption.
 3. She even risked her own life!
 - a) I mean, how many legitimate reasons are there to sneak into a man's room when he's sleeping and lay next to him?
 - (1) Had Boaz or anyone else assumed this to be some sort of sexual solicitation, he would have had legal right to kill her.
- B. Ruth demonstrated remarkable courage and willingness to sacrifice in the face of real consequences.
 1. How was she able to do this?
 - a) The Lord was her God.
 - (1) She said it earlier..."Your God will be my God"
 - (a) And she owned it.

Uncommon Love

- i) She knew the Redeemer. The one who judged Egypt and brought his people out of slavery
- (1) She believed he could redeem her from her reproach.

TRANSITION

C. Do we have a faith that produces a love and fierce loyalty to God and his people? Or is our faith only a commitment to seeking good for ourselves?

- 1. Do we have a love for the Lord that produces Courageous acts of faith?
- 2. Do we have the courage to sacrifice our lives for whatever God calls us to?

D. First Half of the Conversation with Asher about giving our lives to God.

- 1. This is what faith in God requires
 - a) It takes immense courage to sacrifice our lives out of love for Jesus.
 - (1) It is a high calling.

SACRIFICE

XIII.Church. This is a difficult calling. It means dying to ourselves and our desires not only to follow God, but to love and serve others.

A. It is laying our lives upon the alter.

B. Jesus said that there was a cost to following him. He said anyone trying to save their life would lose it. And anyone willing to lose their life for his sake and for the gospel would find it.

- 1. The good life only comes when we lay life down.
 - a) This isn't just a calling to some potential martyrdom should persecution come against the church in America.
 - (1) It is a daily dying to self for the good of others.
 - (2) If we are waiting for an opportunity to present itself before we lay our lives down, then that opportunity will never come.
 - (3) Rather, if we lay our lives down today, we will see that all of life is an opportunity to die to self and live for Christ and others.
 - (a) Don't be the person who say's they'll sacrifice
 - i) Do it! Today! In the opportunities that surround you.
 - (1) Each and every person in this room is a literal opportunity to die to yourself today and pursue God's glory and the good of other people.

Uncommon Love

2. If we are not willing to sacrifice the little things now, our time, our money, our reputations, our luxuries, our pride, our entitlement, our expectations, our everything!!!
 - a) If we are not willing to speak up for truth, speak up for the weak and vulnerable in society, speak up and share the gospel with friends family, coworkers, and neighbors,
 - (1) if we are not willing to sacrifice our lifestyle in order to support the church and the mission of God financially and practically,
 - (a) if we are not willing to sit with a person suffering from homelessness or addiction to show them the dignity of the image of God within them.
 - i) If we are not willing to apologize to our spouse, our friends, our community when we have wronged them.
 - (1) If we are not willing to risk our reputations by confessing sin and allowing others to hold us accountable.
 - (a) If we are not willing to wake up a little early or sacrifice keeping up with that show, in order to read God's word and spend time in prayer with him.
 - (b) If we are not willing to do these little things...
 - (c) Then it is not Christ we are loyal to, but ourselves. And we're letting Jesus be a part of it as long as he continues to meet our expectations.

Pause

XIV.Sadly, this is the faith that the world sees in the church.

- A. A bunch of common people who are just like everybody else.
 1. But we are called to an uncommon love.
 - a) A love for God that produces love for people
 - (1) If God's grace has only come to us and is not passing through us into the lives of others
 - (a) Then we need to ask whether or not what we have received is actually the grace of God or some other counterfeit gospel.

PAUSE

Uncommon Love

- B. Because here's the difficult truth...we will never be able to *work up the will* to live this way.
1. We will never be able to manifest a life like Ruth or Boaz by sheer effort.
 - a) We will never be able to live the life that Jesus calls us to until we understand what Jesus has done to give us the life we have.
 - (1) We have a greater provision and inheritance, a greater glory than we could ever provide or keep for ourselves.
- C. It was Christ, who from eternal love with the Father, committed himself to his people and to their good and their salvation.
1. Out of his loyalty to God, he fulfilled the Law
 2. and out of his loyalty to us, fulfilled it on our behalf.
- D. As Ruth left Moab and her people to unite herself to God's covenant people, Jesus left everything behind.
1. He left his throne,
 2. he left the heavens to come to earth.
 3. Though he was in the form of God, he united himself to humanity in the incarnation.
 - a) He did not use equality with God to his own advantage.
 - b) He gave up his right to life and all things.
 - (1) He traded power for weakness,
 - (2) exchanged a throne for a cross,
 - (3) gave up life and embraced death.
 - (4) He gave up the good things he deserved to take upon himself the punishment for sin that we deserve.
- E. It was Christ, who courageously and faithfully declared the truths of God and his kingdom, who pronounced judgement on the religious elite,
1. even though it would cost him his life.
- F. What need do you have that isn't met more fully and completely in Christ?
1. Do you want reputation or status?
 - a) You have been given the right to become children of God. You are royalty!!!
 2. Do you want wealth?
 - a) Jesus is the heir of all things and you have been made a coheir with him. This means that we own ALL THE THINGS in CHRIST.
 3. Do you want comfort and security?
 - a) He rose from the dead, proving that he had the power over even death and hell.
 - (1) And the same power that raised him from the dead lives in you.
 4. Do you want someone to love you?

Uncommon Love

- a) No man or woman can ever love you like Jesus loves you.

PAUSE

- (1) Some of you might be saying in your hearts “but it’s not the same!”

- (a) You’re darn right it’s not the same!

- i) A spouse will never give you what you truly need.

- (1) Only Jesus can do that.

- (a) Don’t cast off Jesus, the one you truly need, just because something else feels good now.

- (b) Be loyal to him.

- (2) He is the only one who will never let you down.

- (a) There is no love like Jesus

G. When you finally understand that, then you can live the life that God calls his people to live.

- 1. To try to live that way without complete and total submission to Jesus is only a loyalty to yourself.

- a) It’s trying to wrench the blessings from God’s hands without placing your life into his hands.

H. And when you lay yourself on the alter and commit yourself to Jesus,

- 1. he gives you his Holy Spirit to empower this kind of loving, courageous, sacrificial life that glorifies God, advances his Kingdom and, like Boaz, brings the good news of redemption into the lives of those who are far from God.

- 2. Will you trust him with your life today?

- a) He delights in redeeming us.

- (1) Will you go to him in faith?

- 3. As my son recognized, We do not know what he will ask us.

- a) But we do know what he will give us.

- (1) He gives us himself.

- (a) Through caution to the wind, Church.

- i) Do you know what it means that Jesus loves you!?!?