

## Ruth 3:1-9

### Strange Obedience

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In Ruth 3, Ruth was given instructions by Naomi that seemed odd to us and most likely seemed strange to Ruth. But those instructions were based on the truth of God's word, and by following those instructions, Ruth would receive a tremendous blessing. Her story should encourage us to obey God's word, whether our flesh is comfortable with it or not.

#### I. Naomi's \_\_\_\_\_ (Ruth 3:1-4)

- God had brought Ruth into the path of the man who could rescue them from poverty by fulfilling the law of the kinsman \_\_\_\_\_.
- The law of the kinsman redeemer applied in three ways. The first was in the case of a relative's property \_\_\_\_\_ due to poverty. (*Leviticus 25:25-31*)
- The second was in the case of a relative that had sold himself into \_\_\_\_\_ due to poverty. (*Leviticus 25:47-55*)
- The third case was that of a \_\_\_\_\_ sister-in-law who had no sons. (*Deuteronomy 25:5-10*)
- Naomi's instructions to Ruth were founded on \_\_\_\_\_ instructions to His people.
- These instructions probably seemed strange to Ruth. It was a good plan given by a loving authority figure and based on the truth of God's Word, but it was \_\_\_\_\_.

#### II. Ruth's \_\_\_\_\_ (Ruth 3:5-8)

- What Ruth did might seem strange and even \_\_\_\_\_ to some, but redemption requires radical obedience.
- If we are not walking in obedience, then we are not in right \_\_\_\_\_ with God. (*1 John 1:6-7*)
- The peace of God is not the absence of nerves. It is the assurance that God is in control and His plan is the best plan. That gives you the \_\_\_\_\_ to have radical obedience.

#### III. Ruth's \_\_\_\_\_ (Ruth 3:9)

- The phrase, "spread therefore thy skirt over thine handmaid," refers to a custom done during an ancient Jewish \_\_\_\_\_ ceremony. (*Ruth 2:12*)
- Boaz understood Ruth's character enough to know that she was not there for any \_\_\_\_\_ or sensual reason.
- Ruth had faith in God, and her strange \_\_\_\_\_ proved it.

### Conclusion

If you have faith in God's providential plan, then you will show that faith through obedience to God's word, even if the thing that God is asking you seems strange to the point of being absurd. It might even make you nervous thinking about what you have to do, but you must not let your flesh decide for you. God's greatest \_\_\_\_\_ come when we obey God no matter what.

## Ruth 3:1-9

### Strange Obedience

God's plan for redemption requires us to have faith in truths that may seem hard to believe and to obey instructions that we may find strange. This is true of redemption for salvation. One must have faith in the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus for our sins to be saved, though it may seem hard to believe. It is definitely strange to the human mind that salvation is by faith apart from works. We like to think that we can do something, even if it is small, to help save ourselves.

It is also true that redemption and recovery from tragedy require us to believe in truths and obey instructions that may seem strange. But if we are to enjoy the blessings of God in our life, then we must obey God's instructions no matter how odd they may appear to our minds. In Ruth 3, Ruth was given instructions by Naomi that seemed odd to us and most likely seemed strange to Ruth. But those instructions were based on the truth of God's word, and by following those instructions, Ruth would receive a tremendous blessing. Her story should encourage us to obey God's word, whether our flesh is comfortable with it or not. It is when our flesh is most uncomfortable with obedience that it is most important that we obey anyway.

#### I. Naomi's Instructions

*Ruth 3:1-4 Then Naomi, her mother in law said unto her, My daughter, shall I not seek rest for thee, that it may be well with thee? [2] And now is not Boaz of our kindred, with whose maidens thou wast? Behold, he winnoweth barley to night in the threshing-floor. [3] Wash thyself therefore, and anoint thee, and put thy raiment upon thee, and get thee down to the floor: but make not thyself known unto the man until he shall have done eating and drinking. [4] And it shall be, when he lieth down, that thou shalt mark the place where he shall lie, and thou shalt go in, and uncover his feet, and lay thee down, and he will tell thee what thou shalt do.*

Ruth returned from a long day of gleaning in the field and had told Naomi all that Boaz had done for her. Naomi immediately realized that God had given them more than a wealthy benefactor. God had brought Ruth into the path of the man who could rescue them from poverty by fulfilling the law of the kinsman redeemer.

God has made provision in the Old Testament for the people and the property of the Israelites to be rescued from destitution through the nearest male relative of the person affected. There were three specific cases that this applied to. The first was in the case of a relative's property mortgaged due to poverty. (Leviticus 25:25-31) God divided the land amongst the children of Israel so that no one would be left without land. In addition to the law of the Kinsman redeemer, God set up the Year of the Jubilee. Every fifty years would be declared the year of the jubilee, and in that year, the land would rest, and any land that had been sold during the previous fifty years would be given back to the family that it was originally assigned to.

The second was in the case of a relative that had sold himself into slavery due to poverty (Leviticus 25:47-55). The children of Israel were to be His servants, not anyone else's. So if a man sold himself to a stranger (non-Israelite), then his next nearest kinsman could go and buy him out of slavery, and the stranger could not forbid him from doing that.

*Leviticus 25:55 For unto me the children of Israel are servants; they are my servants whom I brought forth out of the land of Egypt: I am the LORD your God.*

The third case was that of a widowed sister-in-law who had no sons. (Deuteronomy 25:5-10)

God's purpose, in this case, was to make sure that the families of Israel continued. Without this provision, it would be possible that a family line could cease should a man die without having any sons. This also ensured that the widows would be cared for. If a man died without any sons, then the relatives were responsible for caring for the widow.

It was the duty of the kinsman redeemer to rescue the poor and the widow from destitution and ensure that the people of God and the land which God had given them were perpetually preserved. Naomi knew of this, though it is unclear how much Ruth might have known. Naomi's instructions to Ruth were founded on God's instructions to His people.

Naomi's motivation for giving Ruth these strange instructions was good. She wanted "to seek rest" for Ruth. By "rest," she meant deliverance from her widowhood so that she would not have to spend the rest of her life gleaning as she had been doing.

Naomi's genuine concern for Ruth is seen in how she addressed her as "my daughter." She thought of her as her own. It is a parent's responsibility to seek rest for their children, that is, help them get to the place in life where they are experiencing God's blessing. Naomi took this responsibility seriously. Yes, she would benefit from fulfilling God's plan too, but it was not for her sake only that she led Ruth to take these extraordinary steps.

Naomi was acting in complete reliance God's law and the provisions of the Kinsman redeemer. She stayed within God's commands and taught Ruth to do the same. Again we see Naomi adopting the parental responsibility to teach one's children to follow God's word.

*Deuteronomy 4:9 Only take heed to thyself, and keep thy soul diligently, lest thou forget the things which thine eyes have seen, and lest they depart from thy heart all the days of thy life: but teach them thy sons, and thy sons' sons; (see also Deuteronomy 6:4-7; Psalms 78:4-7)*

Note the details of the plan that Naomi laid out for Ruth. First, she told Ruth to get cleaned up "Wash thyself therefore, and anoint thee, and put thy raiment upon thee." She had been working all day in the hot sun, so it was no wonder she told her to bathe.

She told her to then go to the threshing floor. At the end of the harvest, it was their custom to have a large feast celebrating the harvest. In this case, there was a particular reason to celebrate because they were coming out of a time of great famine. Many people would have gathered for this feast, so her presence there would not have been inappropriate.

Then she told her to hide from Boaz. She said, "Make not thyself known unto the man until he shall have done eating and drinking." This was not a deception. It was wisely waiting for the right time. The right time would be when she could talk with him in private.

That's why Naomi told her to go to Him in the middle of the night. "And it shall be, when he lieth down, that thou shalt mark the place where he shall lie, and thou shalt go in, and uncover his feet, and lay thee down; and he will tell thee what thou shalt do." There was nothing improper or immoral about this instruction. Naomi was not encouraging Ruth to do something inappropriate. While it is not a pattern that young people today should follow when seeking a spouse, there was nothing wrong with what Ruth was told to do in this context.

These instructions probably seemed strange to Ruth. Add to that that she had been working all day and was probably very tired, and you realize how much faith Ruth must have had to go through with this plan. It was a good plan given by a loving authority figure and based on the truth of God's Word, but it was strange.

## II. Ruth's Obedience

*Ruth 3:5-8 And she said unto her, All that thou sayest unto me I will do. [6] And she went down unto the floor, and did according to all that her mother-in-law bade her. [7] And when Boaz had eaten and drunk, and his heart was merry, he went to lie down at the end of the heap of corn: and she came softly, and uncovered his feet, and laid her down. [8] And it came to pass at midnight, that the man was afraid, and turned himself: and, behold, a woman lay at his feet.*

Ruth immediately consented to Naomi's instructions. There was no argument or even any discussion. She said, "All that thou sayest unto me, I will do." And then she went and "did according to all that her mother-in-law bade her." Everything played out precisely as Naomi had envisioned. Boaz enjoyed the celebration with his employees, family, and friends, and when he was good and happy, he went to sleep by the pile of grain they had harvested. Ruth came quietly so as not to attract attention and cause a scandal, and she laid down at his feet. It was customary for the servants to lay at the foot of their master's to sleep, and since they slept in the same clothes they wore all day, there was nothing immodest or inappropriate about it for them.

What Ruth did might seem strange and even radical to some, but redemption requires radical obedience. The world may think that a person is radical for turning to Christ, but that radical obedience is what brings us to salvation. The world may think that it is radical to live a life of total surrender to God, but only that radical obedience brings lasting joy and satisfaction.

Obedience is not optional for the Christian. We must obey. When God tells us to do something, we are obligated to do it. Jesus said, "If ye love me, keep my commandments." (John 14:15) There are those who teach that any emphasis on obedience to God's commands leads to legalism and detracts from the relationship we have with God, but if we are not walking in obedience, then we are not in right fellowship with God.

*1 John 1:6-7 If we say that we have fellowship with him, and walk in darkness, we lie, and do not the truth: [7] But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin.*

I cannot help but think that Ruth must have been very nervous when she came to the feast that night. She probably had butterflies in her stomach as she kept an eye on Boaz throughout the evening. When he withdrew from the crowd and went to find a place to lie down, she was probably a little jittery, knowing that the time had come for her to approach him. Some might have mistaken that nervousness for a lack of peace, but it wasn't. The peace of God is not the absence of nerves. It is the assurance that God is in control and His plan is the best plan. That gives you the courage to have radical obedience.

### III. Ruth's Proposal

*Ruth 3:9 And he said, Who art thou? And she answered, I am Ruth thine handmaid: spread therefore thy skirt over thine handmaid; for thou art a near kinsman.*

Boaz woke up and asked a perfectly logical question: "Who are you?" He knew she wasn't there when he went to sleep, and now he wakes up to find this woman lying at his feet.

Ruth's answer was honest and direct. She said, "I am Ruth. Will you marry me?" The phrase, "spread therefore thy skirt over thine handmaid," refers to a custom done during an ancient Jewish wedding ceremony. At one point, the groom would take his cloak, hold it out, and wrap it around the shoulders of the bride. This signified the groom taking the bride into his protection like a mother hen spreads her wings over her chicks to protect them. A similar picture was used to describe how Ruth had placed her faith in God.

*Ruth 2:12 The LORD recompense thy work, and a full reward be given thee of the LORD God of Israel, under whose wings thou art come to trust.*

Ruth stated her reason for such a bold request. She said, "Thou *art* a near kinsman." In other words, he was one of the ones that had the duty to rescue her from her poverty, according to God's law. Boaz understood exactly what Ruth was asking, as we see in the verses that follow. And he understood Ruth's character enough to know that she was not there for any selfish or sensual reason.

This was probably the biggest of all the steps of obedience that Ruth had taken. It was bigger than going out to glean in the fields. It was at least as big as leaving her home to stay with Naomi. She risked her personal safety and her reputation by doing it. She could have been rejected. She could have been falsely accused and punished. We could invent many possible bad endings for this story.

But because Ruth had put herself unto the Lord God's wings and followed His plan, she was safer there that night than anywhere else. She had faith in God, and her strange obedience proved it.

### **Conclusion**

James 2:18 says, "Yea, a man may say, 'Thou hast faith, and I have works: shew me thy faith without thy works, and I will shew thee my faith by my works.'" If you have faith in God's providential plan, then you will show that faith through obedience to God's word, even if the thing that God is asking you seems strange to the point of being absurd. It might even make you nervous thinking about what you have to do, but you must not let your flesh decide for you. God's greatest blessings come when we obey God no matter what.