

Ruth 3

Intro Risky Faith January 20, 2008

Reading your Bible can be a risky business. As you turn to its pages for guidance and direction, you may get more than you bargained for. There is risk when you seek guidance without understanding its intent. While God's Word is without error and we have full confidence to trust what it tells us about God, our fallen condition and the only remedy in Christ, when we ask questions of the Scriptures they don't address we can find ourselves in trouble. The Bible is our guide, our guide to Christ. Other aspects of life, we need to be quite careful.

Take for instance the complexities of marriage. The Bible gives many fine instructions for marriage, but if you go to the Bible to ascertain how you are to find a potential husband or wife, be careful, for the examples given are a mixed bag.

- Deuteronomy 21 advises to find an attractive prisoner of war, shave her head, trim her nails and give her clothes and she's yours.
- I doubt your folks would be pleased if you followed God's commands to Hosea...for he was commanded to marry a prostitute.
- You could pull a Moses...find a man with seven daughters and water his flock. Yet I doubt that would apply to many people in Waukesha County.
- Judges 21 tells how the remnant of Benjamin, who had no women left to marry, were to hide in the vineyards during the feast of the Lord at Shiloh and when the women came out to dance, they leapt from the vineyards, grabbed the gals and carted them home. (Summerfest?)
- You may want to be like Adam and have God create a wife for you while you sleep, but beware, this procedure will cost you not just a rib, but Paradise.
- You can work seven years for a woman, only to wake up on your honeymoon to find you've married her homely sister, leaving you to work another seven years for the one you want.
- You can impress your father-in-law to be by handing him 200 Philistine foreskins, like David.
- He also gives us the example of watching a lady bathe, kill her husband and marry her.
- Samson spied a beauty, went home and demanded his parents get her for him.
- You could wait for your childless brother to die and take his wife, so says Deuteronomy 25.
- Or don't be too picky. Make up for quality with quantity. Solomon had 700 wives and 300 concubines.
- When it is all said and done, you may well agree with Paul who says it is better not to marry.

Well when it comes to Ruth people often look at this tremendous love story as the beautiful picture of courtship, but if you follow its description as prescriptive, you are bound to get in trouble.

I have heard preachers use this story of how to court, what kind of man a woman should seek, how to handle a bitter old mother-in-law...but when they get to Ruth 3, there is a lot of uncomfortable explaining to do. For courtship, the book is descriptive, not prescriptive, for the intent of the story is not a moralistic lesson on courtship, but a pointer to what faith in Christ looks like.

Just as there are risks in misreading this chapter, if you apply it to how to snag a husband, there are also risks to rightly applying the text. For this chapter illustrates risky faith.

The risks we see in Ruth 3 are risks we take when we come to faith in Christ. These are risks that are well worth it, but as risks we best know what we are getting ourselves into.

Up to this point there have been many risks in the lives of Naomi, Ruth and Boaz.

Elimelech risked his family's faith by foolishly running to Moab to avoid death, only for him and his two sons to die. Naomi risked rejection by returning, but maintained her defenses behind a hardened wall of bitterness. Ruth risked it all by identifying herself with the God of Israel. She risked much by venturing out into the barley fields at harvest, as a Moabite widow. Boaz put his reputation on the line by extending grace to her. The risks continue as we READ Ruth 3

What kind of risky faith do we see here?

FAITH RISKS FOR REST 1-8

It is most likely the end of the barley harvest as the dried stalks are ready to be beaten and the grains winnowed from the chaff. At end of Ruth 2 Naomi is on the mend from her bitterness, at last she can see God's loving-kindness, his covenantal mercy in her life, as Boaz has given the two widows grain.

Yet that last line of Ruth 2 reminds us that while they have food in their tummies, there is not rest in their hearts. Ruth is still living with her mother-in-law; there is no hope for the future

Naomi asks a rhetorical question: “should I not seek rest for you that it may be well with you?”

She knows the time is short. The rest is not just comfort, but the word here *manoah* refers to tranquility and security and often is used of the house of one’s husband. Living with Naomi is not the end of the game. Naomi is thinking about the future. As much as bitterness chews the acrid waste of the past, she is now dreaming about a sweeter future for Ruth. Faith looks forward and that does not mean living there.

So Naomi comes up with a plan. Now she’s forward thinking, taking the initiative and ownership for what to do next. I can picture the conversations over some barley soup with barley bread:

”So did that nice Boaz boy say anything today?” “You know, barley season and wheat season will soon be over, you won’t be working with his young women anymore...now’s the time to make your move, Ruth.”

“Sure he gives me grain and treats me kindly, but I don’t know where this relationship is going. We need to talk, to define this relationship, whether we are just friends...or what?”

So Naomi’s yenta brain is working. The temp job is almost over; the clock is ticking, including the biological one. Tonight is a big day. Winnow barely during the day and party all night.

Hold on as we go through this advice. Girls, stop listening, take no notes; this is not how to get a guy. I am not willing to say that Naomi’s advice is sinful. What she says may not necessarily cross the line, but she sure is dancing vigorously on it.

Wash, put on perfume, put on some new clothes, go down to the threshing floor, but...

Boaz has only seen Ruth out in the fields, grungy and sweaty. Some guys may find that attractive, but I’m not sure you want to marry them. This advice is not bad, make yourself appealing. Get the mud off your face, some make-up, get rid of the field stench.

The reference to the cloak tells us more. It probably refers to getting rid of a mourning garment she had on and now she would don clothes in keeping with her available status.

Show up, but don’t get in his face, but wait until he has finished eating and drinking.

I must say that there is some good advice here, too. Let a guy finish his meal, enjoy his time with his buddies. Have his few beers...

If you are coming from a fundamentalist tradition, you can excuse this as merely descriptive, not proscriptive...but yes, they had enough to make their hearts merry (v7). They were enjoying God’s creation, including the barley in liquid form.

Now the advice gets questionable: “After he’s had his fill and goes to sleep, go, uncover his feet, lie down and he’ll tell you what to do.”

Commentators have a field day with this, for her language is filled with innuendo. The word to uncover is almost always used of exposing nakedness, feet, may have a dual reference, lie down is a specific word often used for illicit sex. And telling a girl to do that with a man who’s had enough to be merry, and expect him to tell here what to do...well!

Given what we know already about Boaz as well as Ruth and Naomi, we should not be surprised at the outcome...and it is not how Hollywood would portray it.

Naomi knew Boaz’s character and what is being insinuated here is not sex...at least not yet. Ruth is to be clear as her needs. She needs more than just another sack of grain nor a romp in the sack. She needs hope for the future and Boaz is the one to provide it. She needs rest...in the arms of a provider.

That is exactly what we need. We need rest from our self-labors; we need rest from trying to establish our own righteousness. We need rest in a home in which we will be cared for. We need to no longer scavenge for scraps the world has for us, the occasional compliment, the boast to our self-esteem. In Christ you will find rest, you will find the rest that allows the world to say what it will about you, the rest that says no other suitor suits me best. Christ has accepted me and I am no longer in circulation.

In a moment we’ll see more what this risky faith looks like, but here we see the need for a future, for rest supercedes any gentile notion of etiquette. When it comes to latching on to Christ, it is not a time for tea parties with scones.

What are you willing to risk so that you can know that Christ is your husband, your rest? Are you willing to risk reputation, acceptance, safety and peace? Look at what Ruth risks.

FAITH RISKS REJECTION 9-13

Ruth obediently does as Naomi says, she goes down, waits until the kegger is over, Boaz is zonked out, and she sneaks over when all are sleep and crawls under his covers. Before we go any further... does any of this sound familiar? Do you see a problem here with Ruth THE MOABITE pulling this trick.

This is how her great-great...grandpappy got his start, when Lot's daughters intoxicated their dad and produced a son, Moab. Can you imagine the fear in her heart, wondering what a virtuous man like Boaz would do when he awakes? What if a friend of his gets up and sees here there? Will they all assume that she is just another Moabite whore, who as in Numbers 25 debauched the sons of Israel, so that a plague came and took the lives of 24 thousand?

Boaz stirs and there is a woman at his feet (yes, it is feet). He asks the obvious question and Ruth's reply tells us more than what Naomi's instructions let us know.

I am Ruth, your servant

Of course he knows her, but how she addresses herself is telling. Before she used a term for servant to imply a piece of property, a foreign slave as in 2:13. But here she calls herself 'ama, a handmaid, a term used of the eligible class of young women who are in need of protection. With growing confidence she now does the most risky thing of all, she says...

Spread your wings over your servant for you are a redeemer

Recall what Boaz said to Ruth just weeks before in 2:12. Boaz knew Ruth sought Yahweh's protection. It was under his wings she sought sanctuary. The word for *wings* is also the word for cloak, the very act she was doing. She was asking Boaz to be the fulfillment of his own prayer weeks before. Ezekiel 16 pictures this when it describes how the Lord pursued Israel as a bride (read 16:8-10).

She is not asking for a fling, but is asking him to marry her. She is looking to him as her redeemer, to rescue her from a fearful life, to be her rest.

Boaz responds beautifully, understanding what is and is **not** happening here.

You have made this last kindness greater than the first

Again, that key word, *hesed* is used, God's covenantal mercy, loving-kindness. The first was her caring for Naomi, taking on the covenant God made with Israel. He is shocked that she would seek him. "There are guys out there with six packs...I've got a cooler. Why me? I'm old"

He puts her mind at ease..."do not fear..."

He will pursue the matter. Although a Moabite, he knows, everyone knows, her character. He elevates her status, using the same word used of him in 2:1, she is a woman of valor, strength, of integrity.

There is a catch; there is a redeemer near than he. Next week we'll expand this term more, but suffice it for now, there is one who had priority in this situation. As a nearer relative to Elimelech, that person has rights of first refusal. If he desires to give you the rest you need, then that is good, if not, Boaz will willingly fulfill this task. But despite all she has done, there is still a chance it may not work out.

Faith risks rejection. Certainly Ruth put her very life on the line. Her actions could have cost her her life, accused of seduction when all she sought was protection. Faith risks rejection.

So also our faith in Christ. Ah, but you know how the story turn out, for Ruth and for us. True. But when we come to Christ, we are not always so sure that life will be as we wish. Will God the Father call us his child? Will God the Son, at the final judgment, point to his scars and claim us as his own, redeemed by his own blood?

As Boaz's garment covered Ruth from the cold night air, so Christ's righteousness is our only dress, our bridal gown, with which we know that we are now cleansed and clean. It does not feel that way when we wrestle with our sinful thoughts, but we have the confidence in Christ, that He, will keep his promise. I will not be rejected.

The rest you need will not be found in the labors of your own hands, but only in Christ's fulfilling the law for you. Even as we read earlier from Mark 12, the fulfillment of the Law is exacting, there is no rest, unless we hear what Paul tells us in Romans 13:8-14

The answer is found in putting on Christ, covering ourselves with his garment, as a groom takes his bride, He takes us and imputes to us his perfect record.

FAITH RISKS WAITING 14-18

Now comes the hard part, waiting. Ruth waits until morning, for to send her out, a single woman after the men of the town have partied all night, would not be wise. Nor is it prudent to spread the word as to what just transpired. So she tells no one.

His intentions are admirable, indicated by his instruction to her to bring her garment over and fills it with six measures of barley. How much this is we don't know, but it may be symbolic of what he will do. It may be that six, considered an incomplete or imperfect number, was a reminder that more is to come later; the fulfillment will arrive the next day.

When she arrives home Naomi greets her, whom I am sure has not slept a wink. Ruth tells her all that the man had done for her and for Naomi, as the barley is intended for her.

This is another great lesson not intended by the text, but guys, court the mom. Win her heart and you'll have no problem getting past the father.

Naomi can see what is happening. Her hope is restored, her faith assured. But now comes the hard part, waiting (18). The man will not rest until you have rest.

This is where many of you are in your faith today.

You've made the commitment of faith, trusting in Christ for your rest. You cannot continue, as you are, an orphan, a widow, alone and unprotected. There is a risk making the commitment to Christ and to His Church. Yet, the risk is worthwhile.

So for now, God's Word calls you to wait, wait until that final day when your redemption is done.

Certainly Christ's death and resurrection have secured your relationship with the Father. You are covered in Christ's robe, His righteousness is now yours, but in the day-to-day life you now live, doubts come, questions arise. How much longer will you have to wait until the struggles of the Christian life cease? The answer is until you go to be with Him.

Boaz was not under any legal obligation to fulfill some sense of duty. His response was one of loving-kindness. How much more is it with Christ? He will not rest until we are safely with the Father. Your standing rests not in your performance, but in his perfect promise. That promise is what we see in God's Word.

This is Paul describes in Ephesians 5, when talking about marriage his point of reference is Christ and His Bride, the Church. Look at what Christ does for us, for Cornerstone, he cleanses us, washes us, presents us to himself in splendor, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that we might be holy and without blemish.

Even on my best days, we don't feel that standing. We are called to wait, for this is the work Christ is doing in and through us now. We have the promised provision of the Holy Spirit, but the final day will reveal his completed plan for us. We must wait.

So, when you turn to His Word, desiring His guidance and direction. Do not settle for the everyday advice of how to snag a man or what job should I take. The pointers in God's Word direct you again and again to the completed work of our Boaz, Jesus Christ. There you will find you a place for a faith willing to take a risk to find rest, a faith willing to risk rejection, a faith willing to wait.