

“Less Than Wise Counsel”

Living Wisely in an Unwise World

Ruth 3:1-8

Pastor Jeff Stivason

December 29, 2017

Jeff: Our heavenly Father, we are thankful for the day. We are thankful for the Lord Jesus Christ, for the Holy Spirit who opened our eyes to the reality of His work and for the meaning of it. We're thankful today that we can gather together and open Your word. Father, there are many blessings in this world. But all of them are to be found in Christ alone. And Lord, as we come to You, and as we are mindful of our life in Christ, we pray that You would make us even more so as the day progresses.

But this morning, Father, as we've carved out this time to be together and to be with You in the Word, we pray that Your hand would be upon us and that You will be leading and guiding us, directing us through it, teaching us our truth and Lord, making Your goodness abound to us in our thinking and in our lives.

Father, as we come before You this morning, we're mindful that our hearts are light because of the holiday season and because of all that we've experienced with family and friends and because of the Incarnation. And we're thankful, Father, for the birth of Christ and for His life, and for all that His humiliation entailed. But we're also thankful for His death on the cross, the culmination of that and His resurrection from the dead, and for His ascension and the outpouring of His Spirit upon us. Father, for these things we thank You.

But Father, as we come before You, we are also mindful that our hearts are heavy because of the things that have happened in the lives of our brothers and their friends and their families. And so, Father, we think first of all and pray for Dick. We're thankful that his voice is back. And yet we pray for his continued healing. Father, we ask that You will continue to cause his body to mend. And Father, we also pray for Frank who is recovering from one thing and heading toward another, heading toward a surgery for a hip replacement. So Father, we pray that as he recovers from his dependence upon the morphine because of his pain, we pray that You will help him to be clear-minded as he looks toward the surgery. And we pray, Father, that You will do much good in his life both physically and spiritually through this.

Father, we pray for Bruce, and our hearts are heavy for him because he seems to encounter one difficulty after the next. And yet we pray and ask that Your hand of blessings would be upon Him for good, even in the midst of the difficulties. We pray, Father, that You will teach him to follow the Lord Jesus in His humiliation, as we pray the same for all these men. And we ask that Your hand would be upon Him as You from Christ in him throughout these episodes.

Father, we certainly pray for Paul and ask that You would bless and keep him. Father, as John experiences these difficult days, this intense radiation or chemotherapy, we pray that You will sustain him even at the age of 83. And Father, we pray that You would be with Dale as he seemingly waits to die. And we just ask that You'll sustain and keep him throughout it. We ask that You'll bear witness with his spirit that You are Lord, and that You are the giver of all good gifts, and we pray that that would encourage his heart.

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Father, we pray that You will bless us and keep us now as we open Your word and study it together. And we ask it in Jesus’ name. Amen.

Men: Amen.

Jeff: Well let’s turn to the book of Ruth. And let’s look today at chapter 3. We’ll look at chapter 3 in its entirety. I think I’ll read it today just to kind of keep warm. *(Laughter)*

Participant: We’re surrounded by hot air.

Jeff: Yeah, yeah, yeah. We’ll get a little bit of hot air going around up here. Ruth chapter 3. You know, I want you men to remember something important as I read this. What we have in our hands is the word of God, nothing else. And that’s a treasure to us. It’s a comfort to us. And I don’t know about you, but we live in a world that seems to just have words all over the place—words that are spoken, words that are texted, words that are on the Net, words that are written. And yet this is the only sure place to stand.

Participant: Amen.

Jeff: This is God’s word. Ruth chapter 3.

“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. 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

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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.’”

Participant: This is the word of the Lord.

Men: Thanks be to God.

Jeff: I still just don’t expect it. *(Laughter)* I will, I will. All right. Well let me have you think about the outline for today. I want to talk to you about some introductory things in the text.

I want us to think about Naomi a little bit, to think about Naomi both from a good and a bad perspective. I want us to think about her *nobility* and her *inanity*. And we’ll talk about what that means in a minute. I want us to think about *Ruth’s respectful posture*. We’ll think about that as well. And I want us to think about *the wisdom of God* in the midst of it all.

So let’s think about some introductory points for just a minute. This is a perfect morning to think about this story that I’m going to tell you next. I remember I was in fifth grade and I had a friend. His name is Tim. He is now a doctor. He is a doctor of physical therapy. And so what I’m about to tell you is that I want you to be sure and know that he is not brainless. He’s a doctor of physical therapy.

When we were in fifth grade, we were standing behind his electric fence *(laughter)* on a cold, bitter morning. And he said to me, “Put your tongue on it.” *(Laughter)*

And I said, “No!” *(Laughter)*

And he said to me, “Put your tongue on the fence.”

And I said, “Tim, I’m not going to do that.”

And he said, “Watch.” And he put his tongue on the fence. And the panic—you could just see it in his eyes. And he couldn’t get his tongue off the fence. *(Laughter)* And then he pulled, and then he said to me, “You do it!” *(Laughter)*

And I said, “No!” *(Laughter)* “I’m not gonna do it!” Anyway, that’s not a picture of us. *(Laughter)*

But you know, as I thought about that moment, I thought to myself, why he wanted me to do that I had no idea. But he was giving me counsel that was stupid. *(Laughter)* And there are people in this world that will give us counsel. And the counsel ranges from wise to unwise too stupid to sinful. And the counsel that he gave me was stupid. It wasn’t sinful. But it was stupid.

And when we look at the counsel that we’re going to consider in our text today, it’s definitely not wise. It’s definitely not wise. I don’t think it’s sinful. It ranges from unwise to just flat out stupid. So let me pause and let me give this to you. I know everybody’s thinking, “Well, how can I be wise?” Well if you keep this in mind, you’re going to be wise all the time, okay? The secret of wisdom. If you think of something stupid to say, then don’t say it. *(Laughter)*

Participant: Amen.

Jeff: I’m not going to charge you for that one. *(Laughter)* That’s free.

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All right. I want you to think about something before we get into the next thing that I’m going to say. I want you to think about the time period. And I want you to think about Naomi, and I want you to think about what’s going to happen next with Naomi. I’ve already given you the indication that Naomi is going to give some counsel to Ruth that’s less than wise. What I want you to think about, though, is that I want you to think about the time frame for just a second.

Go all the way back to chapter 2. You know, we say all the way back to chapter 2. But do you realize that all the way back to chapter 2 was during the harvest. And chapter 3 is during the time of threshing. Harvest is now over. Some time has elapsed—not a lot of time, but some time has elapsed.

And I want you to think about it from this angle. I want you to think about this woman Naomi. She sees that the Lord has blessed her daughter-in-law, blessed her with *chesed*. The Lord has blessed them both with loving-kindness, with covenant faithfulness. How so? Because Ruth has returned from this field with a whole bunch of grain that she seems to be taking care of in the field of Boaz. The Lord has just shown loving-kindness.

And so Naomi waits. What will the Lord do next? Well now harvest is over and it’s threshing time. And the Lord hasn’t moved, hasn’t done anything else. And so Naomi grows impatient. And it’s now time for her to act. I just want you to have that in the back of your mind as we think about what’s happening next.

I want us to think about a comparison. Think about a comparison now between Naomi and Boaz. Now both of these people seem to have the same, or at least a similar concern. If you look at both of them, they both seem to be concerned for Ruth’s welfare, for her safety.

Do you remember what Boaz said to her? He said, “I want you to stay in my field and I want you to glean here for your safety.” And she goes home and she tells her mother-in-law. And her mother-in-law says, “Yes, that’s a good idea. Why don’t you stay with him?”

Now there were reasons for that. One of the reasons, a general reason that we all know is that this was the time of the Judges. Everyone did what was right in their own eyes. And sometimes what was right in their own eyes was not a very good thing. And so we know that it was a dangerous place to be during those 400 years, during the time of the Judges.

But we also see that worked out more specifically in the counsel that Boaz gives to Ruth. He says, “Glean in my field and you’ll be okay.”

But notice what he has to do. And I think this is just absolutely incredible. He actually goes to his young men and he says to them, “Now don’t touch her. Don’t lay a hand on her.”

Now that word has a range of meanings, like most words that are translated from one language into another. And the range of meaning can be “Don’t touch her. Don’t harass her. Don’t mistreat her. Don’t lay a hand on her in an inappropriate way.” All of those things are brought under this idea of “don’t touch her.”

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And so he actually has to go tell his men, “Do not touch that woman.” It’s interesting. It’s interesting that even this godly man has to rein in his young men so that they don’t behave according to the culture, even in his fields.

So it’s a dangerous time, very dangerous. And I think we have to get that before we can get the counsel here. And so he says to her, “Work in my field. Even in my field it’s dangerous. I’ve got to tell my young men not to touch you. But there may be no one to tell that to those young men. Then you’re really in danger.” You see that, that kind of thing.

Now think about this. I’ve painted Naomi as this kind of despondent, bitter woman, such that on the borders of Moab she says to her daughters-in-law, “Go! Go home. Go back to your people and your gods.”

And then when she does arrive home, what does she say? Ruth says to her, “Shall I go glean in the fields?” What does she say? “Go, my daughter, go.”

And now, when she’s confronted with this advice from Boaz, what does she say? “Yes, go and work in his field.” There just seems to be a passivity that overtakes Naomi in this whole story that I don’t think we can miss. She just seems to be moving along with the current, wherever it seems to take her until chapter 3. And in chapter 3 she seems to take the bull by the horns at least. So let’s think about Naomi’s nobility and her inanity.

First of all, I want us to think about *Naomi’s observation*. Naomi observes something. She sees something. Before I say this, let me just say this as a caveat. I should say this because I am kind of hard on her. And I want to make sure that you know that I think that Naomi is a believer. I think Naomi is a believing person. I think she believes in the covenant promises. I think she articulates them. I don’t think she always articulates them in the best of ways, as we’ve already seen on the borders of Moab. But I think she’s a believer.

But here’s the reason why I want to emphasize that. I want to emphasize that because I think Naomi sometimes is a picture of us. I don’t know about you, men, but sometimes when I look at Naomi I see myself. And I have to say to the Lord, “Thank God that You put an example like this in Scripture so that I can take heart in my weakest moments, so that in my inanity I can remember that there is somebody that God loved who is just as inane as I am at the present time. So thank You, Lord.”

And I think that we see this in Naomi. And I think that if we watch Naomi, whether Naomi is just slow to mature or if she’s been a mature person and this has been something that’s just been a shock to her in a way that we can’t comprehend and she grows out of it, we don’t know. But the point is that I do think that Naomi is a believer. But she’s acting like a very immature, fragile believer at this point. She’s acting quite different than we might expect.

Well one of the things that we need to remember about her is that she makes this observation. And this is one of those things that reminds us that, for lack of a better way to put it, she knows the law of God. She knows the law of God and she understands the idea of the kinsman redeemer, the covenant redeemer. She understands that her relationship to Boaz means that he is a potential redeemer in her situation.

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Now let’s think about what a kinsman redeemer is. The kinsman redeemer, first of all, is a picture of Jesus Christ.

Participant: No question.

Jeff: Now I want you to think about this for just a minute. I want you to think about the Old Testament in all of its pictures. I want you to think about the kinsman redeemer. I want you to think about the priesthood. I want you to think about the sacrifices. I want you to think about the temple. I want you to think about all of those things and more. I want you to think about Leviticus and all the instructions about mold and mildew and all of those things.

What are all of those things telling us? Those things are telling us something about soteriology, something about salvation, something about sin, something about Christ Jesus Himself. And no one thing can pull all of that under itself. In other words, it’s not that the kinsman redeemer can sum up all that there is to say about salvation in Christ. It just can’t do it. Mildew and mold can’t say everything there is to say about sin and about redemption in Christ. Seven sacrifices in all. All of these things have to be brought together so that we can see that the fullness and the richness of salvation in Christ can’t be captured in any one image.

The kinsman redeemer is under that particular umbrella of things that point to Jesus Christ. A kinsman redeemer was someone to whom a family could turn to in need. If there was a murder, the kinsman redeemer, the closest redeemer, could seek justice. If property needed to be redeemed, the kinsman redeemer, the closest relative, could redeem that property. If there was a situation like now, where a brother dies and the wife is left childless, the brother of that man who died could father a child. It was called a *Levirite marriage*. We’re going to see that in just a second. The Levirate law was that if a man died, his brother would father a son for him so that son now born could inherit, or be the namesake, for the man who died. Go ahead.

Participant: So someone becomes a kinsman redeemer because of his position in the family?

Jeff: Yes.

Participant: No other designation, no other—

Jeff: The closest relative.

Participant: The closest relative.

Jeff: Yes, the closest relative.

Participant: But how is Boaz related to Naomi and Ruth?

Jeff: Through Elimelech.

Participant: Thank you.

Jeff: Now I want you to think about this for just a minute. I’m so glad that Sig did not raise some of the questions that I thought he might raise. *(Laughter)* And so please don’t raise any of those now that I’ve given you a hint that I don’t want to hear them. *(Laughter)*

Participant: I have one more question.

Jeff: I don’t want to hear it. *(Laughter)* No, go ahead.

Participant: No, I was just kidding.

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Jeff: Okay, good. All right. So I want you to think about what it is that Naomi says. What does Naomi say? She says, “*He is a redeemer.*”

Participant: Right.

Jeff: Now I think that you have to catch that because that’s going to be crucial throughout the time that we spend thinking about this particular chapter. The idea is that Naomi knows. If you go back to the beginning, she knows the covenant language. She knows the blessings of the covenant. She knows about the Levirate law. She knows about kinsman redeemers. I find it really difficult to imagine that she does not understand that it’s the closest relative who becomes the kinsman redeemer. And I think that’s why she says to Ruth, “*He is a redeemer.*”

He’s not *the* redeemer. He’s not the closest redeemer. In fact, Boaz knows that. He says, “It is true that I am a redeemer. But I’m not the closest redeemer.”

And just in that alone you get the idea that here is a woman who is trying to force the matter. She’s trying to get Boaz to act on their behalf when it’s really not his place to act.

Now I think this is an interesting thing, because when you begin to think about decision making, sometimes you have to remember that the decisions of others affect us. And so sometimes the unwise and even the stupid decisions of others affect us.

And Boaz is a classic example of that. He is not doing anything to remedy the situation with Ruth and Naomi because it’s not his place to do so. He is waiting patiently as it were for the Lord to act, for Naomi to go to the other redeemer and see if he’s willing to act. You know, in all of these things he’s waiting. He’s doing the godly thing. He’s patient.

And so I think that Boaz becomes a great example for us to know how to respond in situations when others are acting. You know how it is when you watch somebody, and they’re flailing about, you know? They’re living life in such a way that it’s erratic and they’re not making good decisions. And we feel pulled into that.

And yet here’s this example from Boaz. Here’s what you ask. You ask, “What’s my role in this situation? What role do I have in this situation? What’s my obligation to this person? What limits my responsibility in this situation? Can I offer any encouragement to the person?”

You know, sometimes that’s all you can do. Sometimes you don’t have a responsibility or an obligation. And sometimes your role is limited in such a way that, for instance in Boaz’s case, he was limited by the fact that he wasn’t the closest redeemer. And so what does he do? He only offers encouragement. He gives grain. He gives help. He gives encouragement. Sometimes that’s the only thing you can do.

But I’ll tell you what. Oftentimes we’re just tempted to jump right in when we really don’t have a responsibility or an obligation, okay? So here we have to keep that in mind.

So let’s think about *Naomi’s inanity*. This is Naomi’s purpose. She says, “*Shall I not seek rest for you?*”

Now I’ve mentioned this before; I’ll mention it again. Here’s the same word that we encounter on the border of Moab. That word *rest* is that word that is a synonym for the Promised Land. And so she was asking on the borders of Moab that God might give these

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girls in the land of Moab what God had already promised to give in the land of Israel, the land of rest. And now she’s saying, “Now should I not seek rest for you?”

Do you see how she’s taking—all of a sudden, this woman who has been very passive—“Go, go, yes, go to his field”—has now become active. But she’s become active in such a way that is wrong! She’s now taking what should be God’s prerogative and she has shouldered it for herself. She is going to get rest for her daughter-in-law.

Now you would think—I mean I think, you would think that probably at this point this woman would have learned her lesson, and she would have sat back and she would have said, “You know, isn’t it marvelous, all that God has done for us? And what a marvel it is that we’ve been in the situation that we’ve been in and now we’re here! And I just think back to what I prayed for you girls on the border of Moab. Wow, it’s crazy! Think about how crazy that was, you know? And here we are.”

You know, you would even think at this point that she would say, “Poor Orpah! Why did I send her back to her people and her gods? Why didn’t we bring her with us? And why didn’t we say, ‘Come with us!’?”

But instead, no. What does she do? She says, “*Shall I not seek rest for you?*” It kind of gives you the impression that the woman still hasn’t quite learned the lesson she needed to learn. She had an opportunity to learn it. She didn’t do it.

But now here’s what I want to say. It’s just a practical point. I mean, look. How often do you guys get caught up in the moment, and then you’re brought up short? And it’s that moment where you can learn a lesson, where you can actually sit back and say, “Wow! God’s providence is really teaching me a lesson that I ought to learn at this point.” And you just push right through it instead. Did you ever do that?

Participant: Could you explain that a little more, more specifically how we would experience that?

Jeff: Well first of all, let me say this. That’s a great question, Ted. First of all, let me say this. I do not believe that we can read the providence of God infallibly.

Let me explain what I mean by that. Let’s say—and Sig, I’m going to pick on you. Let’s say that Sig walks out the door and it’s slippery, and Sig falls and breaks his leg. Now we sit back—

Sig: Are you a prophet? Is that going to happen? (*Laughter*)

Jeff: I’m not a prophet. (*Laughter*) So there are a few of us in here drinking coffee at the table, okay? And you say this. You say, “Sig broke his leg because he took two minutes of Jeff’s time.” (*Laughter*) That’s God telling him not to take Jeff’s time.

Now do you see what you’re doing? You are trying to say that you know the meaning of that event. And you can’t do that. You can’t do that.

Now let’s take the same event. Let’s say that Sig falls and breaks his leg. He’s at home on the couch convalescing. And he says, “You know, I don’t know why God did this to me. But I’m learning a number of things through this.”

In other words, he’s using this providential event to his benefit. He’s not trying to discern the meaning that God has in this providential event, as if he could read it infallibly. He can’t. But he’s making use of this providence. And he can make many uses of it.

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So I’m not saying that we ought to read providence infallibly. That’s not what I’m saying.

But, for instance, let’s say—and let’s just use Naomi. Here Naomi is home in the Promised Land. She’s experiencing the blessing of God. Grain is coming in. She has this wonderful godly daughter-in-law. Right now they’re not in the best of circumstances, but they are in good circumstances, better circumstances than they were in. What could she stop and learn from this providence?

She could stop and learn any number of things. She could stop and learn about her own sinfulness, about how God is good despite the fact that she made some wrong decisions along the way. She could work on her bitterness in light of her bad choices and say, “I really don’t have cause to be bitter toward God at all, because He showed me *chesed*, even when I deserved bitterness.”

She could learn all kinds of things. But one of the things that we have a tendency to do is to be just like Naomi. Rather than sit back and learn to take the opportunity from providences to learn, we say, “I am going to make this happen.” And we don’t sit back and learn from those things. We don’t sit back and use providence as we ought to use it. We force our way ahead on our own strength, as if we could determine what exactly happens next. Does that help, Ted?

Ted: Yes, that’s great.

Jeff: Okay, good. Okay, so she has an opportunity to learn. But old habits die hard, and she’s in control. So she’s got a plan. And her plan is this. “Here’s what I want you to do, honey. I want you to wash up. I want you to get perfume on. I want you to put on your nice cloak. I want you to go down to the threshing floor. It’s dark now. I want you to wait for him to finish eating and drinking and making merry. Then I want you to wait for him to lie down and go to sleep. Then I want you to go over to him, uncover his feet and lay down. And when he wakes up, do what he tells you.”

If my wife gave that kind of advice to my daughter, (*laughter*), we would have big trouble. (*Laughter*) I do not know how you can make that advice sound good in any way, shape or form.

I mean you know, that’s like a mom saying this. “You know, Johnny works down at the Mission. And I know the Mission’s in a bad part of town. Here’s what I want you to do, honey. I know that with you and Johnny there may be a thing there. And he’s not acting on it. So we’ll try to get him to act on it. Here’s what I want you to do. I want you to shower. I want you to perfume up. I want you to wear your nicest clothes. And I want you to go down to this bad section of town in the dark. And I know that this is Christmas. And so, you know, donations are coming in and he’s happy about that. I want you to wait until he’s done counting all the donations. And I want you to wait until he has a glass of wine or two. Then I want you to let him go to bed. Then I want you to uncover his feet before he gets in bed. Then I want you to lay down at the foot of the bed and wait. And then when he wakes up, he’ll tell you what to do.” (*Laughter*)

I just don’t get it. At this point in my life I look at Naomi and I can’t understand how this counsel can be good. And I want to tell you why.

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Do you know the reason why Boaz had to lie down beside the grain? He had to do that because the threshing floor was a dangerous place to be at night. The reason why you had to lie down beside your grain was because there were thieves prowling about the threshing floor, seeking to steal it. So the threshing floor was not a good place to be. And after dark? Hel-lo! If the man had to tell his men in broad daylight, “Do not touch this woman”, what must life be like after dark?

So this is not a good thing that this woman has just been told to do. And the question you have to ask yourself is does Naomi really care? Remember, we started with both Naomi and Boaz caring about the same thing. That’s Ruth’s safety. At this point you have to ask yourself. Does Naomi really care?

I’ll tell you what it looks like to me. It looks to me like she’s saying, “Go stick your tongue on a fence.” (*Laughter*) In the middle of winter. I mean, that’s the kind of thing that it looks like to me.

Now I want you to catch *Ruth’s respectful posture*. Ruth loves her mother-in-law. And she’s obedient to her mother-in-law. She says, “*All that you say I will do.*” And she does exactly that, doesn’t she? She does exactly what her mother-in-law tells her to do.

But I love this picture. “Oh,. There’s a woman here!” He’s startled. Boaz is startled, you know. His feet are uncovered, it’s cold outside. But he eventually wakes up and looks down. “What? What are my feet doing uncovered? Whoa! There’s a woman!”, you know? “There’s a woman at my feet!” And he’s a godly man, a worthy man. No wonder he’s startled that there’s a woman at his feet!

And here’s the deal. Ruth does something that she doesn’t follow blindly. She doesn’t follow her mother-in-law blindly.

Notice what she does. When he says, “*Who are you?*”, she doesn’t say, “I am Ruth,” and then wait for him to tell her what to do. What does she do? She answers, “*I am Ruth, your servant. Spread your wings over your servant, for you are a redeemer.*” She doesn’t wait for him to tell her what to do. She tells him what to do. “You are a redeemer. Spread your wings over me.”

Now what is she saying? She is appealing to what he said to her back in Ruth 2:12. “*The LORD repay you for what you have done, and a full reward be given to you by the LORD, the God of Israel, under whose wings you have come to take refuge.*” She is saying to him, “You said that God will spread His wings over me because I’ve come to take refuge in Him. You treat me as God has treated me. You spread your wings over me in the same way that the God of Israel has spread His wings over me.”

Now I think that is wonderful! Here’s this girl. She courageously follows the stupidity of her mother-in-law’s counsel. But she changes it at the most crucial point. She does not allow Boaz.

Now we have no reason to think that Boaz would have suggested anything except a worthy thing. But she doesn’t take that chance, does she, because she’s a worthy woman. And she’s not going to allow herself to be put in that position. Both of these people, as I told you last time, are called worthy people. He’s a worthy man; she’s a worthy woman. And the thing that we need to notice is that she is not going to take that chance. And so that’s what she says to him. And Boaz recognizes that she is a worthy woman in verse 11.

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Notice what she’s doing. She has no idea what the outcome will be. But what she’s doing is that she’s casting herself upon God. And granted, she’s taking a risk. But she’s casting herself upon the Lord.

Well let’s just look quickly at God’s wisdom in all this. Here’s the thing I want you to see. One of the things that you always come away with when you look at a passage, even an Old Testament passage—and I should say especially an Old Testament passage,—is the gospel and how it sort of works itself out. I look at this and I say that there’s irony here. There’s the irony of Naomi’s daughter and God’s Son.

And what do I mean by that? Well Naomi is trying to bring redemption about for them both. And in order to do that she tells her daughter-in-law to get all fancied up and glorified, and go to the threshing floor and wait.

But God’s Son did not take that route. God the Father and the Son made a covenant of redemption in which the Son would cloak His glory in the form of a Servant. And I just find that a striking irony when you think about man’s wisdom in comparison to God’s wisdom. It’s just a striking difference.

And then I want you to notice that *the foolishness of Naomi is contrasted with the foolishness of God*. There may be people in the world who look at Naomi and say that she was a woman of resilience. She was a go-getter. She got things done. And look what happened. She was able to bring about the rest for her daughter-in-law that she so desired. And so hers wasn’t foolishness at all. It was a woman taking the bull by the horns and getting things accomplished. And yet the world calls the gospel the foolishness of God, when in fact Naomi’s advice and counsel was foolish. And God’s foolishness is wisdom. Go ahead, Sig.

Sig: I just need to ask a simple question because I’m inane at times. I had to look that word up. I realize that it means being vapid, or empty, or—

Jeff: Shallow or immaterial, yes.

Sig: So can I connect a couple dots to make sure I’m okay? Naomi is suggesting to Ruth that she go into the threshing floor after Boaz had a good night’s work, a good meal and some good wine, and uncover his feet so eventually they get cold and he’ll wake up, and he’ll see a woman at his feet, and maybe he’ll have a relationship with her, and then he’ll be obligated to marry her or take care of her? Is Naomi hoping that Ruth will be put into a compromising situation and Boaz would not be an honorable man?

Jeff: Well, I mean all of the above could be true. But she doesn’t really say. She just says, “Go, and when he wakes up, do what he tells you to do.” So what does that mean? Does that mean that Naomi is hoping that he is a worthy man? And when he sees her, he’ll act in an appropriate way and do what he actually does do?

Or is she willing to gamble on the fact that well, he’s a worthy man but he may do an unworthy thing, and that will bring about the same result? I don’t know. What does it mean? What does she mean?

Sig: Well what’s the point of uncovering his feet so that they’ll—

Jeff: I do think that’s so he’ll wake up.

Participant: But we really don’t know why.

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Jeff: We really don’t know why. The other thing is—and I didn’t tell you guys this—the other thing is that sometimes *feet* is used as a euphemism for a man’s privates.

Participant: Oh, really?

Second Participant: So big feet do have a proportionate relationship. *(Laughter)*

Jeff: The only thing I would say is that I don’t think it’s used as a euphemism here because later he tells her to lay down at his feet.

Participant: Yes.

Jeff: And so I don’t think it’s used as a euphemism here. But there are people who have taken that and said, “Ah, see, this is immorality in the text right here.”

Participant: But Naomi was trying to get Ruth connected to Boaz as a husband/wife kind of thing?

Jeff: Well, yes. I think that was her goal. Yes?

Participant: Well this text is a classic problem situation that we find often, where people try to read into a text and mold it, instead of what God actually intends for His beloved.

Jeff: Yes.

Participant: So as we go through these discussions about what’s really going on there, you know there’s some information that leads you to believe one way, and there’s some information that leads you to believe the other way. But since it’s not explicitly stated, we should be careful when we try to draw those conclusions. To your credit, this is not the only place where this occurs in Scripture.

Jeff: Yes. That’s right. We’ve got to do our exegesis, not our isogesis. Right. Anybody else? Don?

Don: And yet God, in spite of all that, does work it out that eventually Ruth and Boaz are married.

Jeff: Yes. And I think that’s the most comforting thing about all of this. Whether it’s Naomi’s foolishness or Ruth’s faithfulness, God is bringing about His plan and his purposes. And that’s just like Romans 8:28. They work for the good of those who love Him. And so I think it’s another one of those things that you treasure as somebody who sometimes feels like Naomi, and sometimes at a better moment you feel like Ruth. And yet God doesn’t change. He doesn’t vacillate between inanity and wisdom. He is always wise. He is the all-wise God and He brings about His good purposes in our lives. But I think that’s the comforting thing to really think about. Yes?

Participant: So is that why the book is called Ruth and not Naomi? *(Laughter)*

Jeff: It seems to me, huh? Yes?

Participant: Hey. I was just reading over where Boaz told her to lay down and cover up and sleep till morning. And I think of the New Testament verses. “How beautiful are the feet that bear the gospel!” He was bearing the gospel.

Jeff: Yes, he was.

Participant: It’s the Old Testament version of that, because he was a godly man.

Jeff: Yes, that’s right. Okay, let me pray and then we’ll close out.

Father in heaven, we are thankful for the day, for the time You’ve given to us. We once again remember those who we mentioned in prayer earlier. And we ask that Your hand

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would be upon them. We pray for the blessing of Your word to go with us today, and we ask it in Jesus’ name. Amen.

Men: Amen. (*Applause*)