

Lesson 7: Faith Moves

Ruth 3:1-7

This Week's Prayer
Requests:

Memory Verse: "Not that I have already attained, or am already perfected; but I press on, that I may lay hold of that for which Christ Jesus has also laid hold of me." - Philippians 3:12

Text: Then Naomi her mother-in-law said to her, "My daughter, shall I not seek security for you, that it may be well with you?" ² Now Boaz, whose young women you were with, *is he* not our relative? In fact, he is winnowing barley tonight at the threshing floor. ³ Therefore wash yourself and anoint yourself, put on your *best* garment and go down to the threshing floor; *but* do not make yourself known to the man until he has finished eating and drinking. ⁴ Then it shall be, when he lies down, that you shall notice the place where he lies; and you shall go in, uncover his feet, and lie down; and he will tell you what you should do." ⁵ And she said to her, "All that you say to me I will do." ⁶ So she went down to the threshing floor and did according to all that her mother-in-law instructed her. ⁷ And after Boaz had eaten and drunk, and his heart was cheerful, he went to lie down at the end of the heap of grain; and she came softly, uncovered his feet, and lay down.

Monday

Chapter one hit us with the bitter providence of God in the life of Naomi as she left her land, and lost her husband, her sons, and one of her daughters-in-law. But there was sweet providence as well. The famine broke in Judah and Naomi could go home. Ruth committed herself to care for Naomi. And all the while a kinsman named Boaz was preserved as a husband for Ruth to raise up an heir for the family name and property. But the chapter ends with Naomi overwhelmed with her losses: "The Almighty has dealt very bitterly with me."

Chapter two overflows with hope. Boaz is a God-saturated man in his business and personal relations (vv. 4, 10-13). Ruth is a God-dependent woman living under the wings of God. Naomi is now a God-exalting woman under the sovereignty of God. All the darkness of chapter one is beginning to dissipate. God is in the process of turning Naomi's mourning into dancing. "The Almighty has dealt bitterly with me" (1:20) has given way to "His kindness has not forsaken the living or the dead" (2:20). If we step back from the trees to get a broader look at the forest for a moment the lesson of chapters one and two as they are viewed together is surely at least this, putting it in the worlds of the

What can we learn from the change that takes place in Naomi between chapters one and two?

great hymn writer:
You fearful saints fresh courage take:
The clouds you so much dread
Are big with mercy and will break
In blessings on your head.

Seek refuge under the wings of God even when they seem to be all shadows, and at just the right time God will let you look out from His Eagle's nest onto some spectacular sight you never could have planned or envisioned for yourself.

Now as we come to chapter two we see that Faith Moves. You see, the question which chapter three answers is, "What do a God-saturated man, a God-dependent young woman and a God-exalting older woman do when they are filled with hope in the sovereign goodness of God?"

What is the difference between positive and passive righteousness?

The answer is that they manifest a "positive righteousness." By righteousness I mean a zeal for doing what is good and right -- a zeal for doing what is appropriate when God is taken into account as sovereign and merciful. By positive I mean that there is intention, purposefulness, and planning.

There is such a thing as passive righteousness which simply avoids evil when it presents itself. We have passive righteousness when we are flipping through the channels on the television, see something nasty and immediately move on rather than exposing our minds and hearts to filth. But positive righteousness takes the initiative and dreams of how to make things right and better. One of the lessons we learn from Ruth chapter three is that **hope in God helps us dream. Hope in God helps us think up ways to do good. Hope in God helps us pursue our ventures with virtue and integrity.**

It's hopelessness that makes people think they have to lie and steal and seize illicit pleasures and look lustfully at others and go out and get drunk and all of the other things people do for some sort of transitory satisfaction. The spring of such things is hopelessness and dependence on self or other weak man-centered resources. But hope Beloved, - true God honoring hope based on the confidence that a sovereign God is for us and not against us - this hope gives us a mighty and exciting impulse which results in call positive, strategic righteousness.

In other words faith moves, and it moves in the direction of positive righteousness. We see it in David as a boy, when he shakes his fist at

What is true hope and what does it accomplish in the heart of a God exalting person?

his older brother and shouts “Is there not a cause” before he marches in to Saul to get permission to face Goliath. We see it in Naomi when she says, “Shall I not seek security for you?” We see it in Ruth when she says, “Take your maidservant under your wing, for you are a goel - a kinsman redeemer.” We see it in Boaz when he says, “I will do for you all that you request, for all the people of my town know that you are a virtuous woman.” True faith in the true and living God is not simply a passive thing, it is not satisfied with bumping along in the status quo, it is not happy with simply trying not to rock the boat, no it is a mighty and vital force in the heart of a person who has it.

Now in our text this week as we look at Naomi and Ruth moving out in faith, the Scripture gives us four exhortations to embrace and take in and apply to our own lives. Four exhortations about venturing out in faith. We will begin with the first one tomorrow.

Tuesday

The first exhortation from our text this week about a vital moving faith is foundational to the others. It is this:

1. Faith and hope rescue us from bitterness (v. 1).

Look at verse 1. It says, “Then Naomi her mother-in-law said to her, ‘My daughter, shall I not seek security for you, that it may be well with you?’”

How does depression impact planning?
What does hope do?

Two things stand out about Naomi here. One is **that** she has a plan; and the other is **what** that plan is. The plan is risky and yet amazing in its simplicity. It is one which in a very subtle and beautiful way picks up on Boaz’s own words in chapter 2, verse 12, which Ruth had shared with her mother-in-law a few months before this event. We’ll talk about this more next week as we look at Ruth’s statement in verse 9.

But before we think about these things, let’s notice that the sheer fact that Naomi **has a plan** teaches us something. People who feel like victims don’t make plans. As long as Naomi was oppressed; as long as she could only say, “The Almighty has dealt very bitterly with me,” she conceived no plan of positive righteousness for the future. Her faith was weak and inactive, and one of the terrible effects of depression is the inability to move purposefully and hopefully into the future.

Positive strategies of righteousness and the forward movement of faith,

What is the difference between a hopeful church and a church without hope?

are the overflow of hope. When people have hope, that start visiting others and sharing the Gospel with them.

When people have faith, they begin making new resolutions in their prayer lives. When people have faith and hope, they start trusting in God's provision and God's future grace and they start giving of their income to the church and the kingdom as God commands them. When Naomi awakens in 2:20 to the kindness of God working in her life, her hope comes alive and the overflow is positive righteousness, moving forward in faith. She is concerned about finding Ruth a place of care and security, and she makes a plan. One of the reasons we must help each other "hope in God" as Ps. 42:5 shows us is that only hopeful churches plan and scheme schemes for making a difference in their communities and world. Churches that feel no hope develop a maintenance mentality and just go through the motions year in and year out. But when a church feels the sovereign kindness of God hovering overhead and moving, hope starts to thrive and righteousness ceases to be simply the avoidance of evil and becomes active and positive.

What is your church like in this matter of hope? How can you make your fellowship more hopeful?

Now, something must be said about the beauty of Naomi's spirit at this point. At the end of chapter 1, she was in danger of becoming a bitter, self-focused, inwardly gnawing, ugly, discontent and angry old woman. She could have gone that direction. She could have lived out the rest of her days as an absolute bear and a heavy burden for Ruth and others, filling their days with grief, despising their efforts to bless her and doing everything possible to draw them into her own unhappiness. We've all known people like that, I think. But one thing saved her from all of that. One powerful and mighty force in her life saved her from the terrible danger of bitterness, the evil root that springs up and defiles many. It was FAITH. Naomi looked at the events of chapter 2 and she didn't respond with any doubt or worldly unbelief or complaining or any other kind of rot. She responded with FAITH. She believed in God, in His

goodness, and she worshiped in verse 20. May we all avoid the sin of bitterness and take this lesson from the life of Naomi. So that we too might grow old with grace and be more concerned with seeking the joy of others than sitting around in self-pity, gnawing old bones.

Naomi's wonderful example leaves us this with this valuable and important exhortation from verse one that we can pick up and apply to our own lives as we fight the good fight to put it in the word's of Paul, namely: faith and hope rescue us from bitterness.

Wednesday

This brings us to a second exhortation from this text about a moving active faith:

2. Don't confuse laziness with trust in God (vv. 2-4).

What do you think about Naomi's plan for Ruth to propose to Boaz?

Look at verses 2-4 as they continue, "Now Boaz, whose young women you were with, is he not our relative? In fact, he is winnowing barley tonight at the threshing floor. Therefore wash yourself and anoint yourself, put on your best garment and go down to the threshing floor; but do not make yourself known to the man until he has finished eating and drinking. Then it shall be, when he lies down, that you shall notice the place where he lies; and you shall go in, uncover his feet, and lie down; and he will tell you what you shall do."

Now you can just imagine this conversation between Ruth and her Jewish mother-in-law: "Boaz is such a nice man. After all, listen to what I'm telling you Ruth, Boaz is a nice man. You have no husband. Boaz is a nice man, do you know? Boaz is a relative. Boaz has been very kind to you. Ruth it's time for us to turn up the temperature a little in relationship to Boaz. Tonight he will be winnowing barley on the threshing floor."

Now look at verse three and consider what she says here. - This is a practical lady. - "Wash. Anoint or perfume yourself. You know that Moab #9 you've been saving for a special occasion. Well this is **the** special occasion. Break it out and put it on. Put on your best garment. Boaz is such a nice man."

The word for garment in the Hebrew is a word that refers to a heavy mantle that would be worn in such a way as to actually shield the persona of the individual wearing it. So there was a sense in which she

Naomi has a very strong sense of God's sovereign working, as is obvious from her statements in this book. But does this lead her to be inactive? What not?

was dressing herself in the way a woman would for marriage in that culture. This is why Jacob could marry Leah and think it was Rachel the whole time. So, you need to get out of your mind all the 21st century nonsense about unrestrained indulgence in dress, immodesty and sexuality. It's not present here. This is a completely different cultural context. Then she says, "Go down to the threshing floor. Don't let yourself be seen. Don't interrupt his meal. Don't go barging in and interfering." Now this is a smart woman, this Naomi. "Make sure you note the place where he sleeps when he falls asleep. Because I want you to go back there and I don't want you getting mixed up and going to the wrong guy's feet. This would not be good Ruth." And so, with all these preparations Ruth is geared up to propose to Boaz.

Now there are a number of things that we could talk about in these verses, Beloved; such as, for girls who are looking to get a husband: washing, perfume and nice clothes play an important part. If you don't wash, haven't seen perfume in a while and dress in a burlap sack, don't bemoan the fact that nobody seems to be interested. However, please note that it is one thing for a lady to make herself attractive, but it is another thing entirely for her to make herself seductive. Ladies know the difference and so do men. The eastern custom was not to flout and flash, but to still be attractive just the same and that's what Naomi and Ruth were about. There is a decorum to their actions. There was a restraint to it. There was a simple majesty. This is not bare flesh in your face contemporary junk; and yet, it is still attractive. There's a difference.

But the important thing that I want you to see in these verses is the overarching principle: namely, **don't confuse laziness with trust in God**. Or reverse it, **don't confuse faith with inaction**.

In other words, we don't have Naomi just sitting in her home saying, "Well, you know. Whatever will be will be. Whatever God's will is, will just sort of work itself out somehow." And others saying, "Oh what a woman of faith!" No, that is not a faithful person, that is a lazy person, sitting around singing, "Kay surrah, surrah, whatever will be will be."

Where is that in Scripture? Nowhere! Scripture says, "Go to the ant, you sluggard! Consider her ways and be wise, which having no captain, overseer or ruler, provides her supplies in the summer, and gathers her food in the harvest. How long will you slumber, O sluggard? When will you rise from your sleep?" (Prov. 6:6-9).

If God is going to bless and pour out grace, who is He most likely going to pour it out on: the sluggard or the person who is out there trying to make things happen? What would you do?

Naomi, a woman of faith says, “Hey Ruth, come here. Get really cleaned up. Get out the perfume, the really good stuff. Get those clothes that we’ve stored away. Get kitted out and get down to the threshing floor. Go and uncover his feet and lie down.”

My thought when I see this plan is simply this: “Phew! Goodness gracious! Positive righteousness. Faith moves.”

I knew a pastor in seminary, an outreach and evangelism pastor at the church where I interned. He had a very strong commitment to the sovereignty of God in salvation, the doctrines of grace. But he did not sit back on his duff, twiddle his thumbs, contemplate his navel and say, “You know, if they’re going to be saved they will be saved. Nothing I can do about it.”

No, this man, who was completely convince of God’s electing grace said, “I want to be in on it,” and he made a commitment to knock on a hundred doors a day in an effort to share the Gospel and invite people to church. A hundred doors a day, five days a week, five hundred doors a week, 26,000 families contacted and invited to church in the community that year, this was his goal and that church averaged 19 baptisms and professions of faith a month. Most of whom proved their sincerity by ongoing repentance and perseverance in the faith; and the rapid growth necessitated a commitment to planting one new church in the community every two years. “Go to the ant,” God says.

Thursday

The next exhortation comes also from verses 1-4:

3. Do not begrudge blessings to others, but strive for them (vv. 1-4).

This is another strong implication of our text for this week. Naomi, as we said earlier, could have become at this juncture of her life a kind of miserable character. She does say that there is a tremendous bitterness attached to her life, which she confesses at the end of chapter one, even asking that people would call her by a different name, Mara rather than Naomi, bitterness rather than pleasant. Nevertheless, Naomi because of her faith and hope does not exude a spirit of bitterness, and she doesn’t convey to us the kind of preoccupation that is part and parcel of someone who has been bereaved of her husband and children. Apparently, her preoccupation is not with her loss but is with her interest in seeing others, who have been similarly bereaved settled and

What is one of the most effective ways to show true love for a person who has passed away?

secure in their life.

This is a reminder to us that the best proof, which you and I can give of our affection for someone whom we loved and has been taken from us, is to show proper attention to the happiness and the comfort of the persons who were dearest in life to the one that has been taken from us. That is what truly honors the lost one's memory.

Also, we recognize that Naomi wasn't one of these older women, who grudge younger women the comforts and advantages which they themselves are now too old to enjoy themselves. You find that in people. They grow old and instead of being able to rejoice in what is happening to those who are coming up behind them, they are constantly bemoaning the fact that it isn't happening to them, or that they are no longer able to enjoy the same things, ... or that they're not going on vacation, ... or that they no longer have the companionship others enjoy. Now dear friends, this is a sin. This is covetousness, plain and simple. This is one of the really bad ones that made God's big ten list. We are not to begrudge the blessings that God gives to others to enjoy.

This is a lesson to all of us. What we will be in this area, when we come to the twilight years of our lives, is simply an extension of what we are now. If we are self-possessed and self-focused now, then we will be even worse if we make it to seventy. So let us learn from Naomi not to grudge to the generation coming up behind us the comforts and the benefits that they may enjoy because of their age and because of the opportunities of their individual circumstances granted to them by God. Naomi is not just sitting in the house bemoaning her widowhood. She is saying to her daughter-in-law, "Come now, you need to be settled in your life, and I have some plans and advice. Now get going on your journey and know that I'm going to do everything in my power to help you and bless you on your way."

So here is Ruth, because of the intervention and kind encouragement of Naomi, walking down the street, washed, dressed up, smelling wonderful, and humming to herself, "Going to the threshing floor, and I'm gonna get married. Going to the threshing floor and I'm going to get married." Isn't it great that God gave us these wonderful true stories, that the Bible isn't some big weird book where you take the first number and multiply it by six and then subtract four. No, this is real life in a real Palestinian village with real people meeting a real God, who gives us real lessons in these encounters for our own personal lives. These are real lessons to live by on our own journey of faith as we make

our way home into His very real arms.

One of those very real lessons from God is this: **Do not begrudge blessings for others, but strive for them.** That is what love does! This is how true faith moves out in positive righteousness.

Friday

One final exhortation from this passage. 1. Faith and hope rescue us from bitterness (v. 1). 2. Don't confuse laziness with trust in God (vv. 1-4). 3. Do not begrudge blessings to others, but strive for them (vv. 1-4). Finally:

4. Venture out in faith. You don't need to know all the details (vv. 5-7).

In verses 5-7, Ruth responds, “All that you say to me I will do. So she went down to the threshing floor and did according to all that her mother-in-law instructed her. And after Boaz had eaten and drunk, and his heart was cheerful, he went to lie down at the end of the heap of grain; and she came softly, uncovered his feet, and lay down.”

Now we'll talk about the ins and outs of this proposal strategy next week, but for the moment, just see that Ruth ventured out in faith, not knowing all the details of what this would mean.

You cannot know, and God does not require you to know or foresee or plan for all the possible eventualities and outcomes of a particular course of action before you embark on that course of action. Were there elements of this plan that were unknown to Ruth? Yes, many of them. In fact, the plan didn't really go very far at all before it ended with, “He will tell you what you should do.”

But on the strength of Naomi's advice and trusting in the providence of God by faith, Ruth proceeded with the plan.

Note: If she had waited until she had worked out all the details in her head, she would never have acted at all and the opportunity would have passed. No, in this there is a reminder to each of us that there are occasions in each of our Christian lives, when we cannot see beyond the next step. At that point, we have to trust God and venture out on the basis of His word and faith. This circumstance is actually, I think, quite common in God's dealing with each of us. We see it commonly in

Scripture. Abraham, the father of our faith, is held up by God as great example to us in this regard, “By faith, Abraham obeyed when he was called to go out to the place which he would receive as an inheritance. And **he went out, not knowing where he was going.**” (Emphasis added).

If the father of our faith was required by God to venture out in faith without knowing the details, might we not reasonably expect God to require the same of us?

And this was not an isolated event for Abraham either. Can you think of other times in his life when God dealt with him in this way?

Now Beloved, it is not uncommon to find well meaning believers, who frankly have made very little progress in their Christian lives. Why? Because they are all about being safe. They are secure in their own minds. There is not very much about them that really smacks of faith. There’s not really very much about them that says, “I trusted in God and I went out on a limb.” Why? Because they’re spending their lives in the waiting room, waiting to make sure that all of the implications of their actions and potential eventualities are detailed and laid out for them like some kind of road map in triplicate.

These people are absolutely neutralized because they want to know details before they are prepared to trust God. And God, who values faith so very highly, is not personally inclined to give them details! So they live their lives in spiritual mediocrity, doing the absolute minimum, acting as a cold water committee and greatly frustrating the rest of us who actually want to go places and do things.

Such people are so afraid of making mistakes, that they never make anything. They’re so afraid of going in the wrong direction, that they go in no direction. Ruth, a great woman of God, did not know beyond “Wash, put on some perfume and good clothes, uncover his feet and let him take it from there.” That’s not exactly what you would call a rock solid plan. There’s come uncertainty there, and yet she goes forward

anyway.

I want to say to some of you, “You need to start thinking about possibilities. You need to start dreaming dreams. You need to look up and beyond the horizon. Give up small ideas and paltry dabbling in what is ‘safe.’” Provided your life is in a right relationship with God and provided you honestly want to go His way and not your own way, provided these things are true, then the Bible gives us all kinds of permission to launch out in faith and take risks for His sake. Even to get it wrong, fail and have to come back is better in God’s eyes than to do nothing. So Ruth says, “All that you say to me I will do.” “I’m going for it.”

Now let’s ask the question, “What was she going for?” She was going for the future. She was going for obedience. She was going on the basis of trust. May I ask you, what are you going for? What is there about your Christian life right now that speaks of faith? Something that you are contemplating doing, a place you are thinking about going, a venture that you are thinking about taking, someone to whom you are planning on speaking the truth, whatever it may be, it is all about faith. You don’t know the eventualities and you don’t know the implications. What in your life speaks of faith?

If your answer above is, “I haven’t got a clue,” then let the word of God in Ruth come to you and resonate in your soul this day, lest we spend our lives very safe, very cold, very refrigerated, stuck in the waiting room and useless to God. And remember that what is true of individuals is also very true of specific churches.

What is your church doing that speaks of faith?

I will close with this story. John Wesley, when he was asked about the dangers of venturesome faith versus presumption on God, had this to say, “Listen, if you are talking about companions for me, I would rather have one man who was so on fire that I have to constantly cool him down, than to have [dozens] of unenthusiastic men, who I have to constantly warm up.” In other words, I’d rather than one guy that I have to say, “Woah, woah, wait a minute,” than dozens who say, “Did you think of this problem, did you think of that issue, I don’t think that will work here, what about this issue, we’ve tried that before and it flopped, we’ve never done that before so we cannot possibly try it?”

Oh Beloved, have some venturesome faith. Do something for God. Some of you need to start tithing. Start doing God’s word and trusting in Him. All of you need to start witnessing. Some of you perhaps need to get active in ministry. Some of you perhaps need to quit your jobs, sell all and go to China, or India, or even harder, Baltimore. All of you need venturesome faith.

Faith and hope rescue us from bitterness (v. 1). Don’t confuse laziness with trust in God (vv. 1-4). Do not begrudge blessings to others, but strive for them (vv. 1-4). You don’t need to know all the details, venture out in faith. Those are the exhortations the word of God gives us today.

Hymn: This Is A Day Of New Beginnings

This is a day of new beginnings,
Time to remember and move on,
Time to believe what love is bringing,
Laying to rest the pain that’s gone.

For by the life and death of Jesus,
God’s mighty Spirit, now as then,
Can make for us a world of difference,
As faith and hope are born again.

Then let us, with the Spirit’s daring,
Step from the past and leave behind

Our disappointment, guilt, and grieving,
Seeking new paths and sure to find.

Christ is alive, and goes before us
To show and share what love can do.
This is a day of new beginnings;
Our God is making all things new.

In faith we'll gather round the table
To taste and share what love can do.
This is a day of new beginnings;
Our God is making all things new.

Words: Brian Wren, 1936. Music: Carlton R. Young, 1926.