

THE CRISIS!

Ruth 3:1-18

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The version for this sermon is the New American Standard Bible*

As long as the harvest was going on, Ruth and Naomi had a certain amount of security. But when the harvest concluded all forms of income were gone. Weeks of harvesting were over and now threshing was in progress. They faced what Jeremiah described as “*Harvest is past, summer is ended, And we are not saved,*” (Jeremiah 8:20). How were they to handle their predicament?

OBEYING, (Ruth 3:1-5)

What Naomi had in mind for Ruth is marriage. That is what the phrase, “*shall I not seek security for you,*” implies. Evidently, Boaz had not made any move toward a marriage proposal. Yet, because Ruth was not familiar with the customs of Israel, Naomi told Ruth what to do. In Israel, during Old Testament times, marriages were arranged by parents. So, the steps that Naomi told Ruth to follow were the way to make the “marriage arrangements.”

Ruth’s actions recall how one must come to Christ—that beyond the gifts and provisions He gives, you long for Him alone. Here are the steps of her preparation:

Washing—Ruth was to prepare herself so she could present herself in the best way for this most eventful evening. “Washing” as a spiritual meaning—that of being born again. John Wesley was once asked why he always preached, “Ye must be born again,” (which was his favorite text.) “I’ll tell, you,” he replied. “The reason that I preach on ‘ye must be born again’ is because ye must be born again.

Anointing—Ruth needed not only to look good, but smell good. The term “anointing” is from the Hebrew word *suk*—meaning “to pour out.” Anointing refers to the presence and work of the Holy Spirit that is poured into a person’s life.

Changing clothes—this reminds us that you cannot live the Christian life in your own power that you cannot rely upon your own righteousness which is nothing but filthy rags, (Isaiah 64:6). II Corinthians 5:21 says, “*He made Him who knew no sin to be sin on our behalf, so that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.*”

Going to the Threshing Floor—this is the place of separation and judgment. Until the Christian judges himself and deals with his life, he will not be living a victorious Christian life.

Lying at the feet of Boaz—for Ruth, this was a declaration of faith claiming Boaz as her Kinsman-Redeemer.

You can get the impression that Ruth’s action of lying at Boaz’s feet is a bit provocative, if not an immoral act. However, if you recall that the area was a public place crowded with the harvesters and their families, you will conclude that such action was not inappropriate. What Ruth was doing was simply following a custom prescribed by Naomi who was taking the initiative in proposing marriage.

SUBMITTING, (Ruth 3:6-9)

The threshing floor was a significant part of Ruth's story. After harvest, the grain would have to be separated from the chaff. Usually, on top of a mountain is a raised circular platform surrounded by rock where clay soil was packed into a firm, level surface where the grain could be threshed. Normally, in the late afternoon, the breezes would come and after either the oxen had already trampled the grain or the grain beaten with stalks (Deuteronomy 25:4), the grain needed to be tossed in the air so the chaff to be blown away.

As long as the breezes blew, work continues. Sometimes it would continue until sundown and other times as late as midnight. Afterward, the work crew and family members would hold a great religious feast. Then, after eating, the crew would take up positions for the night to guard the grain from thieves. Since the threshing floor was circular, workmen would put their heads toward the grain with their feet sticking out like spokes of a wheel.

The threshing floor already had a spiritual significance to it. It was the place of spiritual judgment.

When David decided to number Israel, he acted contrary to the laws of God. Even his general Joab was reluctant to carry out the census. But David insisted, (II Samuel 24). Soon, a plague hit the nations with 70,000 dying. The plague finally ended at the threshing floor of Araunah the Jebusite when David offered a sacrifice there. This was the same location where God tested Abraham—where he offered his son upon the altar, (Genesis 22). It was the same location where Jesus died on the cross—the place where the temple was built, (II Chronicles 3:1). Why did David insist upon paying for the land when Araunah was willing to give it to him without charge? It appears he was willing to pay for the land because of his previous failure. God has told the leaders of Israel that when they held a census, they were to pay a temple tax known as redemption money, (Exodus 30:11-16, Numbers 3:40-51). That is what David neglected to collect—to collect the atonement money. That is why the plague stopped at the threshing-floor, a place of judgment for sin, when David offered the right sacrifices.

LISTENING, (Ruth 3:10-14)

When Ruth said to Boaz, "*So spread your covering over your maid, for you are a close relative,*" she was putting claim upon him as a kinsman redeemer—a practice known among Arabs as a token of marriage. Taking up the position at the feet of Boaz was a sign of submission. The term "covering or skirt" (*kanaph* in Hebrew) has an even greater significance. This is the same term used in Ruth 2:12 for "wing." This was an expression for providing protection, warmth and fellowship—the elements of a good marriage. It was the spreading of one's mantle by which a person claimed that person for marriage.

Boaz commends Ruth for not seeking one of the young men in town. Evidently, she was not out looking for a husband. A tradition claims that Boaz was 80 years old at the time.

The switch from calling Ruth a maiden to "my daughter" reveals how he was willing to have her as his wife. There was an obstacle in the way. There was another man

who was a near kinsman who could claim that right. Boaz was only a nephew to Elimelech, while a brother was still living.

As a side note, the word “know” in verse 14 is not the term for sexual intercourse as in other portions of Scripture, but means to discern.

RECEIVING, (Ruth 3:15-17)

Before Ruth departs, Boaz gives her two bushels of grain—which previously he had given her a half a bushel. Here was a supply for more than two weeks. This was a gift to show that Boaz was satisfied with Ruth’s proposal. It also gave Naomi a place. She had returned from Moab to Bethlehem “empty.” Now Boaz tells Ruth, “Go not go to your mother-in-law empty-handed.”

The question in verse 16 that Naomi asked Ruth has been confusing to Bible translators. The question is, “How did it go, my daughter?” The Authorized Version says, “*Who are you, my daughter?*” Or, to put it in other words, “Are you still Ruth the Moabite, or are you the potential wife of Boaz?”

RESTING, (Ruth 3:18)

There is a final word at this point in the story. Ruth would have to “wait” for the outcome.

“Waiting” is always hard but so necessary in a good spiritual advance with God. Moses told the people to “stand still,” (Exodus 14:13). With the Egyptian army coming after them, it was easy to panic. Reliance upon God as the moment was the need of their lives.

Obedying the command, “*Be still, and know that I am God,*” (Psalm 46:10) will calm your restless spirit. So the words to Ruth, “*to sit still,*” are how she needed to possess her nervous nature.

The interesting feature in this story is that the time of threshing occurred during the Feast of Pentecost. The amount of grain Boaz gave to Ruth was an earnest or down payment of what was to come, just as the outpouring of the Holy Spirit is a foretaste of God’s provision for those filled with the Holy Spirit.

The word “tarry” (*kathizo*) means to “sit or set down.” That was the posture of the believers on the day of Pentecost. It mean that the work was accomplished and God would carry it out!

Why is Ruth spoken as a handmaiden? Is it possible that the reference to handmaidens in Acts 2:18 tells how the Holy Spirit works with a person?