

Ruth at the Threshing Floor

Naomi devises a plan for Ruth to appeal to Boaz as her kinsman-redeemer. In an act of faith and courage, Ruth asks Boaz to spread his covering over her.

Ruth 3:1-18

CHARACTERS: Ruth, Naomi, Boaz

THEMES: Redemption, Boldness, Purity, Trust, Marriage

ONE DAY RUTH'S mother-in-law Naomi said to her, 'My daughter, I must find a home for you, where you will be well provided for. Now Boaz, with whose women you have worked, is a relative of ours. Tonight he will be winnowing barley on the threshing floor.'

The harvest was complete. At the threshing floor, grain would be separated from chaff by throwing it into the air so the wind could blow away the lighter chaff. It was celebratory work, often done in the cool of evening. Boaz would sleep there to guard the grain.

Naomi gave Ruth careful instructions: 'Wash, put on perfume, and get dressed in your best clothes. Then go down to the threshing floor, but don't let him know you are there until he has finished eating and drinking. When he lies down, note the place where he is lying. Then go and uncover his feet and lie down. He will tell you what to do.'

This was not a seduction but a symbolic request for marriage. To lie at someone's feet was a position of humility and submission. To uncover his feet was to make him vulnerable—he would feel the cold and wake. Ruth would be asking Boaz to cover her as her kinsman-redeemer, using the same Hebrew word for 'covering' that described taking a wife.

'I will do whatever you say,' Ruth answered. She trusted both Naomi and God's providence.

So she went down to the threshing floor and did everything her mother-in-law told her to do. When Boaz had finished eating and drinking and was in good spirits, he went over to lie down at the far end of the grain pile. Ruth approached quietly, uncovered his feet, and lay down.

In the middle of the night something startled the man; he turned—and there was a woman lying at his feet! 'Who are you?' he asked.

'I am your servant Ruth,' she said. 'Spread the corner of your garment over me, since you are a guardian-redeemer of our family.'

She was asking him to marry her, to be her kinsman-redeemer, to fulfill the law and preserve the family line. It was bold, unconventional, and completely proper. Ruth had proven her character through months of faithful work. Boaz had shown his godly character through months of faithful protection and provision.

'The Lord bless you, my daughter,' he replied. 'This kindness is greater than that which you showed earlier: You have not run after the younger men, whether rich or poor. And now, my daughter, don't be afraid. I will do for you all you ask. All the people of my town know that you are a woman of noble character.'

Boaz recognized the hesed, the covenant loyalty, Ruth was showing. She could have pursued younger men. She was choosing to preserve her deceased husband's family line. She was acting in accordance with God's law and for the blessing of Naomi.

'Although it is true that I am a guardian-redeemer of our family, there is another who is more closely related than I. Stay here for the night, and in the morning if he wants to do his duty as your guardian-redeemer, good; let him redeem you. But if he is not willing, as surely as the Lord lives I will do it. Lie here until morning.'

Boaz would follow the law properly. There was a nearer kinsman with first right of redemption. Boaz would give him the opportunity. But if that man declined, Boaz was ready and willing to redeem Ruth.

So she lay at his feet until morning, but got up before anyone could be recognized; and he said, 'No one must know that a woman came to the threshing floor.' The meeting was proper, but Boaz wanted to protect Ruth's reputation.

He also said, 'Bring me the shawl you are wearing and hold it out.' When she did so, he poured into it six measures of barley and placed the bundle on her. Then he went back to town. Ruth returned to Naomi carrying the generous gift—a sign of Boaz's commitment and provision.

When Ruth came to her mother-in-law, Naomi asked, 'How did it go, my daughter?' Ruth told her everything Boaz had done for her and added, 'He gave me these six measures of barley, saying, "Don't go back to your mother-in-law empty-handed."'

Naomi had called herself 'empty' when she first returned. Now Boaz was ensuring she would not be empty.

Then Naomi said, 'Wait, my daughter, until you find out what happens. For the man will not rest until the matter is settled today.'

Boaz was a man of action and integrity. He would settle this matter quickly and properly. The kinsman-redeemer was ready to redeem.