

NO SHORTAGE OF INTEGRITY

PART I

Ruth 3:1-11

*STEPPING OUT IN FAITH ALWAYS INVOLVES RISK.
BUT WITH GREAT RISK COMES GREAT REWARDS*

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NO SHORTAGE OF INTEGRITY (PART I)

RUTH 3:1-11

The last chapter left off with Ruth working in Boaz' field by day and caring for her mother-in-law at night. Boaz has demonstrated that he is a noble man by the way he has shown kindness to Ruth. Ruth has demonstrated that she is a noble woman by the way she has shown kindness to her mother-in-law Naomi. And Naomi, even though she has done everything possible to miss God's blessings and kindness, is finally getting the idea that there is hope for her future.

I want to emphasize that the Book of Ruth demonstrates that nobility crosses all lines. It doesn't matter what ethnic group we come from. It doesn't matter what economic status we find ourselves in. In other words, nobility has nothing to do with if we are rich or poor. It has nothing to do with social status and it has nothing to do with race. Nobility has everything to do with integrity.

When Ruth and Boaz talk to one another and look into one another's eyes, they recognize nobility. As the story unfolds, Naomi starts to realize that her daughter-in-law is nobility and that her husband's relative is nobility as well.

If we are Christians, then we belong to God's royal family and we are nobility. We demonstrate that nobility by living lives of integrity. We must receive with integrity and we must give with integrity. I must preach with integrity and you must receive with

integrity.

That's the way things should go. But it wasn't always like that for me. You remember that church that I used to pastor ... the one that was so tough.

It was so tough that people just seemed to hear what they wanted to hear and conveniently left out or reinterpreted what they didn't want to hear.

I had a friend that worked at a research institute and he showed me some experiments he was involved in at the university. I was preaching on living a holy lifestyle so he brought them in so I could use them as an illustration one Sunday morning.

In the first jar a worm had been put in dirt saturated with alcohol. The worm had died relatively quickly. In the second jar, the dirt was saturated with tobacco and nicotine. Again, the worm died relatively quickly. In the third jar, the dirt had been saturated with semen and again the worm died. In the final jar, a worm had been placed in good clean soil and was still very much alive.

I ended the sermon with a powerful conclusion. I said, "Alcohol – death, tobacco – death, sex – death, good clean soil, life. Now what can we learn from this demonstration?"

One of my old deacons said, "Pastor, as long as we drink enough alcohol, smoke enough cigarettes, and have plenty of sex, we won't get worms."

Now you know why I'm here. They were obviously not looking to pursue holiness so it became easy to interpret things according to their natural sinful bent. However, it takes integrity to live life as God designed it.

I think that this morning's text reminds us authentically trying to follow God involves great risk. Here is the main idea. **STEPPING OUT IN FAITH ALWAYS INVOLVES RISK. BUT WITH GREAT RISK COMES GREAT REWARDS.** Jesus asked His disciples to leave everything behind to follow Him. They had to leave family, friends, homes, and careers behind. I'm sure this was a frightening thing for them to do. However, their risk resulted in the Christian church.

You and I were able to hear the Gospel and be saved because of their great faithfulness.

I. A RISKY PLAN

Risk Is Reduced When Dealing With People Of Proven Character

It's time for us to step out of our boring, lifeless Christianity and risk great things for Jesus Christ. Please feel the suspense in this wonderful story. In verses 1-4, a risky plan is hatched. However, **RISK IS REDUCED WHEN DEALING WITH PEOPLE OF PROVEN CHARACTER**. As we have seen, Ruth, Boaz, and even Naomi to a certain extent, have proven themselves to be people of integrity.

A. A FRESH PERSPECTIVE (1-2a)

In verse 1 and the first half of verse 2 we see the women start to get a fresh perspective on things. Verse 1 starts out with the phrase, "One day." Actually the Hebrew merely says, "And Naomi, her mother-in-law said." Even though the Hebrew doesn't literally say, "One day," the NIV and the NLT capture the essence of the passage of time. There are probably 7 weeks that pass between the last verse of chapter 2 and the first verse here in chapter 3. It seems as if the harvest has passed. Ruth and Naomi are no longer in any danger of starving or being homeless. They are sitting at home, feeling a little bit more positive about life. Naomi is now able to look beyond her pain. Her self-pity and self-absorption are gone now. She is now engaging life and she is now engaging her daughter-in-law, Ruth. Notice, Naomi never refers to Ruth as her daughter-in-law. She refers to her as daughter. Naomi has loved and respected Ruth from the beginning. It was just that she got so caught up in her own pain that she was unable to demonstrate her full love for Ruth. But now, she is once again ready to be a mother to Ruth.

The harvest is done, their bills are paid, and they have enough stored up for the rest of the year. One day, as they're having tea, Naomi realizes that Ruth is still young and deserves a bright future. She says to Ruth, "Should I not be trying to find a home for you?" That word for home in Hebrew is *manoah*. It means rest, security, and status.

As a widow and a foreigner, Ruth really has no social standing. Naomi wants to find her a husband. Here is what is interesting to me. At the very beginning of the story, when Naomi, Orpah, and Ruth's husbands died, and when Naomi was heading back to Israel, she encouraged Ruth and Orpah to go back to their Moabite culture and look for this rest and security there. At that time I said that even though this was offered by Naomi in love, it would have been totally disastrous for Ruth had she taken her advice. This time, Ruth will have a chance to find a real home that will offer her security, status, and true Sabbath rest.

Naomi suggests Boaz as a prospective husband. Naomi knows three things about Boaz. First, he is well to do. He has been prosperous. Secondly, he is a man of noble character. He has taken special care of Ruth during the harvest season. And most importantly of all, he is a relative of her late husband. He can be a potential kinsman-redeemer.

From Ruth's perspective, she has also come to respect Boaz' character. She has treated Boaz as if he were totally out of her league and out of her reach. But as Naomi talks, Ruth becomes very interested. Perhaps she could have a chance with Boaz. After all, he did seem to take a liking towards her. Ruth is on board.

B. A FRESH PLAN (2b-4)

In the second half of verse 2 through verse 4 Ruth and Naomi come up with a fresh plan. All the harvest is in. Boaz and the workers will probably start in the afternoon gathering up all the grain and preparing it for sale. The workers used to stay out in the field and barns during this process. Whoever gets to market first gets the most for their product.

Here is the plan Naomi comes up with. She says to Ruth, "Go to the beauty salon, get your hair and nails done. Then come home and take a nice long bubble bath. Put on your make-up, and your good clothes. Go out to the barn, and wait until Boaz has finished eating and drinking."

Now look at this warning in verse 3. Naomi warns Ruth to hide out. Keep in mind this takes place during the times of the judges. The Israelite people often got all caught up in the Canaanite practices. The Canaanites used to worship sex gods. So during

the planting or harvest seasons, the Canaanites would get drunk and have sex orgies in order to guarantee good crops. The threshing floor was a highly charged sexual environment. Maybe prostitutes would make themselves available or loose women who just wanted to party may hang out there. If she was noticed, she could be raped or be given the reputation of a loose woman. After all, she was a Moabite.

The plan is risky from the beginning, but it gets riskier. Naomi instructs Ruth to search out the place where Boaz goes to sleep, uncover his feet and lie down next to his feet. When he notices her, she is to listen to what he says. How risky is this? What if Boaz thinks she is a gold-digger or just looking for a free ride? There is a lot of potential for things to go wrong here. Ruth could be raped or killed. She could be rejected by Boaz as a gold-digger or prostitute. Ruth's life and reputation are on the line.

Here is what reduces the risk. All the people involved have proven themselves as men and women of integrity. First of all, no one is under any obligation. Naomi is under no obligation to find a husband for Ruth. Ruth is under no obligation to care for Naomi. Boaz is under no obligation to care for Ruth or Naomi. All will be acting freely out of love and good will. And further, all stand to lose. Naomi could lose Ruth if she marries Boaz and moves away. Boaz stands to lose a lot of money. Ruth could lose her life and her dignity. But the fact that all involved have proven character reduces the risk.

Think about this from our perspective. Marriage is risky. Helping people in church is risky. Getting involved with one another and telling one another the truth is risky. Yet we are called to love one another, care for one another, give to one another and receive from one another. But the risk of being used or humiliated is greatly reduced when dealing with people of good character. I often get together with my daughter and ask her about her future plans. One of the questions I ask her is about her marriage plans. Her answer is always the same, "Dad, having no man is far better than having the wrong man." I think she understands that relationships involve a lot of risk. It doesn't matter what type of relationships we are talking about. One of the things we must remember as we take risks in the Name of Jesus is this. **RISK IS REDUCED WHEN DEALING WITH PEOPLE OF PROVEN CHARACTER.**

II. A RISK TAKER

Pleasing God Involves Not Only Knowing The Truth, But Also Living According To The Truth. That Can Be Frightening.

The plan is in place. It sounds like a good plan, but it's a risky plan. In verses 5 and 6 we will see a real risk taker in action. I know a lot of us think about a lot of things we could do for God and for one another, but here is where faith becomes real.

PLEASING GOD INVOLVES NOT ONLY KNOWING THE TRUTH, BUT ALSO LIVING ACCORDING TO THE TRUTH. THAT CAN BE

FRIGHTENING. Think about it. Saying something like, "I was wrong. I'm sorry. Will you forgive me?" is frightening. It takes a lot of courage to do that. Serving our wives or serving our husbands is scary. It takes an extraordinary amount of courage to be loving, humble, and honest at work, at home, at school, or in church. Living the Christian life is not for the weak. It cost Jesus His life. It cost the disciples their lives. It could cost us humiliation, suffering, or loss.

A. DETERMINED THINKING (5)

Verse 5 introduces us to some determined thinking. Ruth listened to Naomi's plan. I want you to really understand what kind of woman Ruth is. Naomi gave her some bad advice in chapter 1. The advice involved no risk. Naomi provided the easy way out for Ruth to return to her home in Moab to find rest and peace. Ruth put Naomi in her place and told her to shut-up and walk.

This time the plan is extremely risky and dangerous. The point though, is that it is the right plan. It is exactly what God would want. It is a plan of righteousness. Ruth assesses the plan and this time she says to Naomi, "I'll do it! Whatever you say, I'll do it!"

Ruth doesn't make decisions on what is easier or what appeals to her worldly desires. She doesn't make plans based on how much risk is involved. Ruth makes decisions on what is right and wrong.

When our kids were in junior high school, we went to look at some of the private and

public schools in the area. What made up my mind was when I talked with some of the kids in one particular school. I saw them rushing around and busy. I said, "Where are you going?" They didn't all have the same exact answers but they had the same attitude. One boy said, "I going to try out for the basketball team, but if I don't make it, then I'm going to run down the hall and try out for the drama club. If I don't get a part in the play, then I'm going to join the math club."

The point was that these kids were not afraid to risk. If they didn't make a particular team, they didn't consider it a failure. They just moved on to try something else. And they had the right attitude. If someone didn't make the basketball team, it doesn't mean they failed, it simply meant there was something else out there for him or her.

In church, I'm not sure if people don't do things because they're lazy or they're afraid to take risks and try different ministries. Without risk, there is no excitement to the Christian life. The more things we try, the more insight we will get concerning our talents, gifts, and abilities. Those who choose to risk nothing, get nothing.

B. DETERMINED ACTION (6)

Well Ruth has done her thinking and made her decisions. But talk and thinking mean nothing unless we put God's plan into action. In verse 6 we see some determined action. I can imagine Naomi helping Ruth bathe, comb her hair, and get dressed and ready. Ruth looks in the mirror, then looks and Naomi, and says, "Here goes nothing. Please pray for me. I hope I come back in one piece," and off she goes into the night. Naomi closes the door behind her and sighs, "I hope nothing goes wrong."

Let me tell you, it takes courage to admit we are wrong. It takes courage to apologize. It takes courage to ask for forgiveness. It takes courage to speak the truth in love. It takes courage to live a pure life. In fact, being an authentic Christian is downright frightening. If we are not making difficult choices, and if we are not risking in service for Christ, then perhaps we are just thinking Christians and not acting Christians. James says, "Faith without works is dead." **PLEASING GOD INVOLVES NOT ONLY KNOWING THE TRUTH, BUT ALSO LIVING ACCORDING TO THE TRUTH. THAT CAN BE FRIGHTENING.**

III. A RISK REWARDED

Whatever We Give Up In Order To Serve God, He Gives Back A Hundred Times More.

While I was in the military, the commander always used to say, "Soldiers, no guts, no glory." In business we used to say, "No risk, no reward."

A. THE PLAN EXECUTED (7)

Verses 7-11 give us a nice description of a risk rewarded. Here is the lesson for us. **WHATEVER WE GIVE UP IN ORDER TO SERVE GOD, HE GIVES BACK A HUNDRED TIMES MORE.** It's show time! The plan is executed in verse 7. Ruth has been hiding out. The men have been eating and drinking and the party is winding down. Boaz finds a nice quiet place for himself to go to sleep. He takes his coat, spreads it out, and uses it as a blanket to cover himself. He is so tired, perhaps from the day's work, perhaps because he ate a little too much, drank a little too much, or a combination of all three. At any rate, he falls asleep immediately. Ruth stealthily approaches him, uncovers his feet and lies down. Most commentators want to make this a sexual overture. Again, I want to disagree with this. I think what is going on here is that Boaz is lying one way, and Ruth the other. She is lying at his feet, not besides him. I agree the threshing floor is a sexually charged atmosphere but Ruth and Boaz have proven themselves to be totally above board. As the plan unfolds, I think we can see how this is clearly a marriage proposal and a request to be redeemed.

B. THE PLAN REVEALED (8-9)

In verses 8-9, the plan is revealed. It's the middle of the night, and since Ruth uncovered Boaz' feet, his tootsies start to get cold. He rustles around ... you know when you try to kick the blankets around to get your feet covered. All of a sudden, while he's turning and kicking, he notices something. It's almost comical. Can you imagine how you would feel in the middle of the night discovering someone at your feet? After he composes himself and notices that he has kicked a woman, he says, "Who are you?"

It took a lot of humility for Ruth to make herself vulnerable. She is going to ask Boaz to marry her. What if he says no? How do you think she'd feel? We look at our lives and think we have faced rejection and don't want to take any more risks. Ruth would be humiliated if Boaz just told her to get out, or had sex with her and sent her home.

But with courage and wisdom she answers, "I am your servant Ruth." This time she doesn't use the lowly word for servant. *Servant* here doesn't mean someone who is expected to simply be subservient. This word for *servant* carries the meaning of someone who is submissive and needing help. This is a more relational term.

Ruth goes on, "Spread the corner of your garment over me since you are a kinsman-redeemer." Now this word for servant makes sense. Ruth is approaching Boaz as a relative. In fact, Naomi's husband died. Ruth's husband was the next legitimate heir. He died and Orpah's husband died as well. She is saying, "I need someone to give me a child so our family will once again be connected to the land."

The language Ruth uses is very interesting. Back when Boaz met Ruth, he prayed for her by asking that God spread His wing over her and give her refuge under His wing. The word for corner is the same word used for wing. Ruth is asking Boaz to be the answer to his own prayer. Boaz is being asked to be the agent of God. Ruth is asking Boaz to cover her with his wing and give her refuge and safety. She is asking for that home that is characterized by peace, rest, status, and safety.

This should be a lesson for all of us to be careful what we pray for. Often times we pray that God meet people's needs. Perhaps we are the answer to our own prayers. The symbolism is this. Ruth is lying unprotected at Boaz' feet. She is asking him to cover her with his coat. If he does, that means that he has accepted her marriage proposal.

People often say we'll pray for one another. But we don't often want to be the answer to prayer. How many times have we prayed that God would send us His word, and then don't want to hear it? Can you feel the tension? What will happen to Ruth? Will Boaz go nuts and go into a rage?

C. THE PLAN ACKNOWLEDGED (10-11)

Look at verses 10-11. The plan is acknowledged and accepted. From his answer, it seems as if Boaz thought he would never have had a chance with Ruth. It seems as if he loved her from the first time he met her, but he thought she was out of his league. Now he answers, "Jehovah bless you, my daughter!"

Did any of you ever get that answer when you proposed to your spouse? Think about this. You get down on one knee. You look up into your lover's eyes, put a ring on their finger and say, "I love you. Will you marry me?" To which your lover respond, "God bless you." I don't know. Is that a yes? We kind of know it is yes by what follows.

Keep in mind. God is the source of loving-kindness. He gives it to Boaz and Boaz gives it to Ruth. But he says to Ruth, "This loving-kindness is greater than that which you showed earlier." Let's talk about the loving-kindness that Ruth showed earlier. She chose to freely stay with her mother-in-law and care for her even though legally she was not required, morally she was not required, and in fact Naomi released her from any felt obligation. Yet out of loving-kindness, Ruth chose to stay with her mother-in-law.

Next, even though Ruth was free to date and look for a husband, she chose to diligently work for the harvest season and provide for Naomi.

And now, even though she could find some guy she was attracted to or some rich guy, she chose to ask Boaz for marriage. Here is what is going on. Ruth is showing love and respect for Naomi's dead husband. Land and inheritance usually went through the male offspring. Naomi had no male offspring. So when Ruth agrees to ask Boaz for marriage, she is hoping to have a baby boy so once again Naomi will have a real stake in Hebrew society.

Ruth thinks she's out of Boaz' league. Boaz thinks he's out of Ruth's league. Naomi knows they belong together. Look at Boaz' final answer, "Don't be afraid. I will do for you all you ask." Finally, that's a yes. First of all, I'm sure there was plenty for Ruth to be afraid of in the natural world. But whenever angels or God appear to humans the angels or God has to say, "Do not be afraid," because when we encounter supernatural events at work in our lives, the natural response is to become afraid.

God's hands are all over this. Maybe Boaz is trying to calm himself down as well. It is clear. He will redeem Ruth, Naomi, and the land. He will marry Ruth.

Here they finally meet their soul mates. Think about how different these two people are. Boaz is rich. Ruth is destitute. Boaz is an Israelite. Ruth is a Moabite. Boaz is a male, Ruth a female. Boaz is old, while Ruth is young. But in the last sentence of verse 11 Boaz says, "All my fellow townspeople know that you are a woman of noble character." The word for woman of noble character in Hebrew is *eset hayil*. Boaz has been described as a *gibbur hayil*. Ruth is a noble woman. Boaz is a noble warrior. They have nobility in common.

That says it all doesn't it? That's what we are to have in common as children of God. We are to be men and women of integrity. That's why we are instructed to date and marry other Christians. That's why we are encouraged to tell the truth to one another in love. That's why we can be vulnerable with one another, share with one another and ask one another for help. It is because we are to be men and women of integrity. It takes guts to be an authentic Christian because we risk much. But what we risk for Christ is nothing compared to what He gives back to us. **WHATEVER WE GIVE UP IN ORDER TO SERVE GOD, HE GIVES BACK A HUNDRED TIMES MORE.**

IV. EPILOGUE

Let me just summarize all of this. We are called to risk much in order to follow Christ. It looks frightening because life in Christ looks totally opposite of what the world tells us to chase after. It takes a lot of faith to reject this world in order to follow Jesus. Thinking about it and agreeing with Jesus means nothing until we actually step out and risk everything for Him. But we must remember, when dealing with Jesus and when dealing with others who truly love Jesus, the risk is reduced greatly. Here's what it feels like to live with integrity. **STEPPING OUT IN FAITH ALWAYS INVOLVES RISK. BUT WITH GREAT RISK COMES GREAT REWARDS.**

The author of this is unknown, but she says what I think living with integrity is all

about. She says,

"If I can throw a single ray of light across the darkened pathway of another; if I can aid some soul to clearer sight of life and duty, and thus bless my brother; if I can wipe from any human cheek a tear, I shall not have lived my life in vain while here.

If I can guide some erring one to truth, inspire within his heart a sense of duty; if I can plant within my soul of rosy youth a sense of right, a love of truth and beauty; if I can teach one man that God and heaven are near, I shall not then have lived in vain while here.

If from my mind I banish doubt and fear, and keep my life attuned to love and kindness; if I can scatter light and hope and cheer, and help remove the curse of mental blindness; if I can make more joy, more hope, less pain, I shall not have lived and loved in vain.

If by life's roadside I can plant a tree, beneath whose shade some wearied head may rest, though I may never share its beauty, I shall yet be truly blest – though no one knows my name, nor drops a flower upon my grave, I shall not have lived in vain while here."

I'm thinking that we have seen incredible power unleashed as the lives of 3 people of great integrity crossed. My prayer is that each of us here this morning dedicates ourselves to living lives of integrity. And as our lives of integrity cross paths with others living lives of integrity, God's incredible loving-kindness will be unleashed.