



river west church

Bold Move!

Ruth 3:1-18

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The Book of Ruth is a great story. In just two chapters we have been thoroughly pulled in. We care about Naomi, Ruth, and Boaz. We feel their pain; admire their character; and rejoice when things take a remarkable turn for good. We're dying to know the outcome. How will God work? What will happen to Naomi and Ruth? What does it all mean? How will this end?

Lots of "Sexual Tension"!

Chapters one and two pulled us into the drama, but chapter three takes the suspense to a whole new level. Naomi gives Ruth a bit of outrageous and unexpected "advice". What she tells Ruth to do goes beyond all social convention of the times. The scene that follows is riveting. Ruth, looking her finest, comes to Boaz by night. She waits for him to fall asleep and then "uncovers his feet" and lays down.

Every commentary on the Hebrew of this passage shows that the language has clear sexual overtones. It's a risky move; it's so bold. It certainly gets our attention! But what does it all mean? There's clearly a sense of sexual tension in the scene. It raises lots of pressing questions. Why would Naomi advise Ruth to do this? What was her real intention? Was Ruth trying to seduce Boaz? What should Boaz think of all this? How risky was this for Ruth; for Boaz? Was this a mistake that God somehow used anyway? Did they have sex that night? Wow! What in the world is going on here? The scene is intentionally designed to raise these questions in our minds.

Virtuous Man; Virtuous Woman

What took place that night is far more than a riveting story with sexual overtones. What took place in chapter three is just as crucial as what took place in chapter one, when Ruth decided to stay with Naomi, or in chapter two, when Boaz decided to be gracious to Ruth. This is another key turning point in the story. What Boaz and Ruth did at this crucial moment was all important. What they did was, once again, the expression of their inner character. Boaz shows himself to be a virtuous man. Ruth, likewise, is revealed to be a woman of great virtue.

That may seem like a strange conclusion, after seeing the "outrageous" move that Ruth makes. But clearly, both Boaz and Ruth come through this scene with their character unscathed. All the tension just makes this clearer.

They feel the tension. They know the options. They know what many others in the culture would do. They do the right thing before God and they do it for the right reasons.

A key to the story is in 3:9. Ruth says, "Spread your wings over your servant, for you are a redeemer." The word "wings" has a double meaning. It can also mean "corners of a garment." No, Ruth wasn't asking Boaz to snuggle under the blanket with him. This expression, to spread the corner of your garment over a woman, was the equivalent of a proposal for marriage. Ruth is asking Boaz to propose marriage. The beauty of this phrase is that it takes us back to 2:12, where Boaz prayed that God would reward Ruth, who had "come to take refuge under the wings" of the God of Israel. In this beautiful way, Ruth implied to Boaz that he himself was the answer to his own prayer for Ruth!

God's Grace Calls for Bold Faith

Ruth doesn't just want to snag a husband. She wants redemption. Boaz doesn't just want the cute young bride. He wants to show the kindness and character of God himself by going radically above and beyond what was required of him. Boaz was not required by God's law to do what he did. What he does is a model of extreme grace. Boaz is the model of Christ who freely gives all for his bride, the church. This is a powerful picture of God's free, redeeming love.

But what about Ruth's bold move? Ruth went for it! Why? Because in her heart she knew the character, the heart of Boaz. She knew he was a man of integrity, kindness, grace, and action. That's why she felt the freedom to take the "risk."

In this way, Ruth becomes the model for each of us in our relationship with Christ. Great grace calls for bold faith. This is the teaching of Christ: bold prayer; bold faith; bold risks; bold action. All because we know the bold grace of our God and savior; our great redeemer, the lover of our souls, Jesus Christ our Lord!