

## Spiritual Depression Part 4: Out of the Blues cont

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*Book of Ruth*

By Ty Blackburn

**Bible Text:** Ruth 3:1-18

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The book of Ruth, Ruth 3. We've been looking at the subject in the main character in the book of Ruth, we said the main character actually is Naomi. Ruth is certainly a very important character but that Naomi is really the main character that the narrative is following because we basically watch her go from emptiness to fullness. The problem that is behind the book of Ruth is her emptiness and the resolution is in her fullness and that's what we see from chapter 1 to chapter 4. We noted that before, how Naomi is the one who speaks most, her name occurs by far more than any other name in the book.

But anyway, so we're looking at, by looking at her we've been looking at the subject of spiritual depression and today the message would be, the title, I've been wrestling with this because once you preach it expositionally, you don't realize how long you're going to be on something and you start into a title and then you end up later thinking, "I wish I had done this differently." But anyway, I titled the message about six weeks ago "Spiritual Depression," and we looked at Naomi's spiritual depression and then the last three weeks we've been looking at spiritual depression continued so we've been continuing to look at that and they are a depressing series of messages, too. But basically the last three, the last three Sundays we've looked at "Spiritual Depression: Out of the Blues," counting today; the last two and today will make three, "Out of the Blues," borrowing Wayne Mack's title from his book. And so we're looking at how she comes out of her spiritual depression and each week we've looked at a different aspect of it these last three weeks, so we might call this "Spiritual Depression Part 4: Out of the Blues Part 3," or maybe "Out of the Blues" should be "Part C." That sounds better, doesn't it? Anyway, "Out of the Blues Part 3 or Part C," whichever you prefer and that's what we're looking at today.

What we've seen is that she was exhibiting the characteristics of depression which assail so many people. It's a profound problem that afflicts many. We noted that 1 in 4 people in America it's estimated will have a time of severe depression in their lives. 1 in 12 right now are experiencing it. But 1 in 4 some time in their life will experience severe depression and that also occurs within the church. We noted how Martin Luther and Charles Spurgeon, William Cowper, the list could go on and many of you, may I add your name to that, and I certainly had one bout of depression myself which went more than two weeks so I guess counted as this.

So how do we get out of the blues? How do we get in and how do we get out? That's what we're looking at and what we've seen is learning from her circumstances, we've said that basically the last two messages, two weeks ago we said that to really get out of the blues we need to embrace God's providence or embrace his right to lead, is how we said it. That is, when we come to faith, I mean, he is our Shepherd and he leads us where he wants to take us. We don't have any say in where we go ultimately. The Shepherd leads. The call of Christian life is, "Come follow me."

So embrace God's providence, that is, his right to lead. That was what we saw two weeks ago. And when we do that, we stop kicking against the goads; we stop complaining about how we'd like to be on a different path and we start dealing with the path we're on. The second thing we saw last week was we should enjoy God's kind provision along the way. So enjoy God's provision. Embrace God's providence, then enjoy God's provision. Where he leads, he provides. He will provide blessings and sustenance and strength along the way he leads. So we said embrace God's providence, enjoy God's provision and today the message is: enact God's promises. Enact God's promises. That's kind of a provocative term and I use it advisedly. When you enact something you make it happen, and I think what we see in this circumstance, the one thing we can glean out of what Naomi does, what we're going to see is her action here is questionable at best. Certainly she is doing, some aspects of what she's doing don't really add up to the best course of action looking at it from where we stand but the essential heart of her action is grounded in she is looking at the promises of God and she is trying to boldly act in faith. She's trusting in God's promises and so she's acting on that. It's one thing to say, "I trust in God's promises," and to sit passively back and wait. What we're going to see is that Naomi actively pursues God's promises and that one of the things that's going on in the book of Ruth, we're going to see that also Ruth is going to add her weight to this too, doing the same thing, that we see the mystery of God's providential governance of our lives is that he works through means. He works through means. So he works through actions that we take. It's not that we pray and do nothing. We're to pray and act.

Now, we should act on his promises and act on his word and I think we'll see as we go forward that Naomi could have been better instructed in the word and done a little better job but the message of this passage isn't to caution you that way. One of the beauties of expository preaching and preaching the text as it appears is if you try to hear what the text is saying at a given point and you just let that go and with minimal...I mean, sometimes you have to give some...obviously Scripture interprets Scripture so there's some balance into it because you could take this passage and run with it and it would be dangerous. But, and I don't want us to do that, but I don't want us to water it down so much with all of the balancing Scripture that we fail to miss what's being said here and that's the beauty of the word of God is that certain passages will come at the side of a truth from a certain angle and another passage comes at that same truth from a different angle. So there is a sense in which some passage says, "Get moving!" and another passage says, "Wait on the Lord," so what do you do? You wait on the Lord and you get moving and you have a right heart. As you get moving, you're waiting on the Lord, you're trusting in the Lord as you move and it's like we can only process part of the message. We can't hear the whole thing all at once and so the Lord gives us different passages of

Scripture which speak to these different sides and we could go issue after issue in the Christian life and show how truth out of balance leads to heresy.

There is really a sense in which cutting it straight in the word of God is walking along a knife edge. Well, how do you stay on a knife edge? How do you walk along a ridge that has a very tiny top area because there's a tendency to want to fall off to either side? Well, what God does with his word is he keeps pushing us back. As we start to go one way, a passage pushes us back to the straight and narrow and then we start to go this way and another passage pushes us back and we're going to see this is a passage which I think is challenging, especially for us in the Reformed camp because we focus so much on the sovereignty of God that we sometimes tend to be inactive. This is a passage which calls for action.

Now, with that said, so the theme of the message is enact the promises of God; that God's promises come into fulfillment as we act on them by faith. Now what we're going to do, we're going to consider this, we have three points but let's read the text. We'll read the entire passage of chapter 3 of Ruth.

1 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 is not Boaz our kinsman, with whose maids you were? Behold, he winnows barley at the threshing floor tonight. 3 Wash yourself therefore, and anoint yourself and put on your best clothes, and go down to the threshing floor; but do not make yourself known to the man until he has finished eating and drinking. 4 It shall be when he lies down, that you shall notice the place where he lies, and you shall go and uncover his feet and lie down; then he will tell you what you shall do." 5 She said to her, "All that you say I will do." 6 So she went down to the threshing floor and did according to all that her mother-in-law had commanded her. 7 When Boaz had eaten and drunk and his heart was merry, he went to lie down at the end of the heap of grain; and she came secretly, and uncovered his feet and lay down. 8 It happened in the middle of the night that the man was startled and bent forward; and behold, a woman was lying at his feet. 9 He said, "Who are you?" And she answered, "I am Ruth your maid. So spread your covering over your maid, for you are a close relative." 10 Then he said, "May you be blessed of the LORD, my daughter. You have shown your last kindness to be better than the first by not going after young men, whether poor or rich. 11 Now, my daughter, do not fear. I will do for you whatever you ask, for all my people in the city know that you are a woman of excellence. 12 Now it is true I am a close relative; however, there is a relative closer than I. 13 Remain this night, and when morning comes, if he will redeem you, good; let him redeem you. But if he does not wish to redeem you, then I will redeem you, as the LORD lives. Lie down until morning." 14 So she lay at his feet until morning and rose before one could recognize another; and he said, "Let it not be known that the woman came to the threshing floor." 15 Again he said, "Give me the cloak that is

on you and hold it." So she held it, and he measured six measures of barley and laid it on her. Then she went into the city. 16 When she came to her mother-in-law, she said, "How did it go, my daughter?" And she told her all that the man had done for her. 17 She said, "These six measures of barley he gave to me, for he said, 'Do not go to your mother-in-law empty-handed.'" 18 Then she said, "Wait, my daughter, until you know how the matter turns out; for the man will not rest until he has settled it today."

Let's pray to the Lord.

*Father, we ask that by your Spirit you might open the eyes of our hearts, open our minds. Help us to understand, to believe, and to obey. For the glory of your Son, we pray in his name. Amen.*

Enact the promises of God. Enacting God's promises. I use that verb because when you enact something you, in a sense, make it happen. You know, you enact a policy, the government enacts a policy or a law, that means to make it happen. When you do a reenactment of something, you act out some event and so the idea is on acting based on God's promises.

So I want us to consider three main points. We're going to, first of all, look at the action, then we're going to look at the implication and the application. So those are our three points: action, implication and application. Now we're going to spend some time on the action because that's what the text does, it focuses our attention on this amazing story. The action. Observe the action, our first point, and there will be four sub points under this first point of observing the action.

To observe the action, first of all, let's note a pressing need. There is a pressing need. When Naomi says to her in verse 1, "My daughter-in-law, shall I not seek security for you, that it may be well with you? Shall I not seek rest for you?" she's addressing the problem that she first brought up way back in chapter 1 in verse 9 where she prayed that her two daughters-in-law would find rest in the house of their husband. This is a picture of domestic bliss, well-being, wholeness, and so she says, "Should I not seek security for you? Should I not seek rest for you, that it may go well with you, that you may have a blessed life?" She wants her to have security. She wants her to have hope. And Naomi is probably thinking about the fact that even if they are able to eke out an existence as they are right now with the Lord providing through the gleaning process, what happens to Ruth, the Moabitess, when Naomi dies? What will a Moabite woman, how will she fare in this society?

So she wants to find rest for her, she wants to seek a husband for her and I think that she's also clearly acting on what she said in chapter 2, verse 20: she is looking for redemption as redemption is understood in this culture. She knows that Boaz is a redeemer. In chapter 2, verse 20, after she came back, Ruth had come back from that gleaning process when she went and gleaned in the field and happened upon Boaz's field and then he showed such kindness to her that she came home basically with a 5 gallon bucket of

grain, an extraordinary amount of grain for one day's gleaning. Her mother-in-law is just astonished, sees the kindness that this man showed. Finally she says, "Where did you work? Where did you glean?" And it would build up in that chapter when finally she says the name Boaz and Naomi exclaims, "May he be blessed of the LORD who has not withdrawn his kindness," chapter 2, verse 20, "who has not withdrawn his chesed, his lovingkindness to the living and to the dead." And Naomi said to her, "The man is our relative, he is one of our closest relatives," the NASB says. Actually, it would be better translated "kinsman redeemer." The NIV gets this one right more often than the other translations the way it translates it. That would be a better to me, better translation to us. "He's one of our kinsman redeemers." He is a relative but the relative has an obligation to redeem, to buy back, to purchase, so that those two aspects are there together: relationship and responsibility both in this word, the goel in Hebrew. The goel is translated throughout the NASB as "close relative." The King James translates it "kinsman." The ESV translates it "redeemer," so they get at the responsibility. But the NIV translates it with both of these terms, "kinsman redeemer."

So that's really what...when she says in chapter 2, verse 20, "The man is our relative, he is one of our kinsman redeemers," the original audience hearing that, things started going off in their minds. He's one of the kinsman redeemers. He can fix the problem that Ruth and Naomi have. They have a pressing need but Boaz is a potential solution to the problem. The readers understood that better than we do because we're not familiar with these customs. We're far removed but the original audience understood these things and so they see in Boaz a potential solution to the problem. In fact, the word "redeem" and "kinsman redeemer" or, as I said, it says "closest relative" in the NASB or "kinsman" in the King James, the root word though for "redeem" and "closest relative" here in the NASB is the same. It's goel and gaal, the verb gaal and the noun goel occurs 22 times in the book, the greatest concentration of this word group in the entire Bible.

So when the original audience heard that, they were thinking even back in chapter 2, verse 20, "This could be the answer." So then in chapter 3 up to verse 2a, verse 1, "My daughter, shall I not seek security for you, that it may be well with you?" they're thinking, "Yes, Naomi, you're finally off of yourself and you're thinking about your daughter. Yes, your daughter-in-law. You need to work on that." And then the first part of verse 2, "Now is not Boaz our kinsman, with whose maids you were?" "Yes, you're thinking right, Naomi. He is a potential redeemer." Now then from 2b all the way down, they're starting to worry about Naomi because what she suggests is not exactly what they would have expected but the problem they had, they need security, they need provision. Remember, to not have a man in that agrarian society in that time was to have no future and you had two women and they had no man so they're doubly hopeless but here they see in this man Boaz a potential solution to the problem.

Now, to just give you some background on what the kinsman redeemer is, let me give you some passages because I think she really is, she's banking on the truth of God's word and God's faithfulness to his word. That's the essential beauty of what Naomi is doing here.

In Leviticus 25, let's turn back over to Leviticus 25 and I'll mention there's basically four things that the kinsman redeemer does in Scripture; that that word "goel" and "gaal" refer to four different duties. It's for a brother or a near relative, a male relative, when a man dies having no son, the goel is the closest male relative to the man that died on his side of the family. So it would be a brother, an uncle, a cousin, someone in his family that can take up his role. And they basically did four different things. In Numbers 35, which we're not going to look at, you see that the kinsman redeemer was the avenger of blood. If someone was murdered, that the nearest of kin, male nearest of kin had a responsibility to see that justice was done and this is what is unfolded in Numbers 35 and also in Deuteronomy as well. You see this laid out. I think it's chapter 19. But that's one aspect. That's not at play in Ruth at all.

The other three aspects though, two of them are found in Leviticus 25, number 2 and number 3. Number 2 we see which relates directly to our passage in chapter 2, verse 23-25. I'm sorry, it's chapter 25, verses 23-25 of Leviticus. So Leviticus 25:23, "The land, moreover, shall not be sold permanently, for the land is Mine; for you are but aliens and sojourners with Me." He's parceling out the land to the various tribes and to each family and families will own the land and he's saying the land shall not be sold permanently. "It shall be a permanent inheritance for the families that I give it to because you are aliens and sojourners with me. It's my land," he's saying. "You're sojourning in my land," God says, "so you follow my rules and my rule is that the family that I give the land to, it will belong to them as a perpetual inheritance because that's the way I want it."

Now, verse 24, "Thus for every piece of your property, you are to provide for the redemption of the land. If a fellow countryman," if a brother, "of yours becomes so poor he has to sell part of his property, then his nearest kinsman," his kinsman redeemer, his goel, "is to come and buy back what his relative has sold." So if you lose your land, you become so poor you have to sell your land and now the family is dispossessed from that piece of land, it's the responsibility of the nearest male kinsman to come back and buy back that family's land so that the inheritance will stay in the family. This is what's at play in this passage. Naomi's husband Elimelech's land has been sold. They have no land and she's looking for redemption. She realizes that her dilemma, her problem, God has spoken to. And let me say this: faith, bold faith biblically is always rooted in the word of God. Faith comes by hearing and hearing by the word of God. Presumption makes up what you want to believe. "I want this therefore I just trust in it and believe in it and I'm going to get it." No, that's not biblical. Name it, claim it, is not biblical. You must know that what you're believing in is what God has truly promised you.

Now in this situation, she is right, God has promised her as a widow and her daughter-in-law as a widow, of an Israelite who had an inheritance, God has made provision for her in his word through the practice of redemption through the goel. And you see this also in that same passage, there's also another aspect of it is the redemption of a slave. If you become so poor you have to sell yourself into slavery, it's the responsibility of the goel, the near kinsman, to buy you out of slavery because no Israelite should be enslaved, period, because I delivered you from slavery.

So you have the avenger of blood, you have the redemption of land and then you have the redemption of slaves and you have a fourth aspect that came to be understood to be part of that from Deuteronomy 25 so turn over to Deuteronomy 25. This is the passage on Levirate marriage. Though the word "goel" is not used here, it's clearly in the same spirit of that whole word group and so the Israelites came to understand this was a part of it; they saw that this applied the same way. In Deuteronomy 25:5, "When brothers live together and one of them dies and has no son, the wife of the deceased shall not be married outside the family to a strange man. Her husband's brother shall go in to her and take her to himself as his wife and perform the duty of a husband's brother to her. It shall be that the firstborn whom she bears shall assume the name of his dead brother, so that his name will not be blotted out from Israel." That is the rule of Levirate marriage. It goes on to say if the man doesn't want to do it, basically he is to be despised and take off the sandal, the woman spits in his face and gives him his sandal and says, "This is the man," verse 10, "The house of him whose sandal is removed." This is what your house was to be called.

The Lord is serious about you should love your brother enough to raise up an offspring for him. This is how it went in that period of time. It's not intended to be applied today, clearly, but in Israel at that point in redemptive history, this was what God was doing. The land was a type of heaven so we've moved beyond that now in the fullness of Christ but this was picturing for us the realities that would help us understand the coming of Christ and the glory of what he's done for us.

So you put those four aspects together, the avenging of blood, the redemption of land that has been sold, the redemption of a slave that's been sold, and the concept of Levirate marriage, those all became associated with the goel, the responsibilities of the goel, and Naomi has in mind those aspects and so does the audience as they read the book of Ruth. So the pressing problem, the pressing need, they need security, they need help, they need well-being, and God has made a way for that.

Now, what's interesting is there is no male initiative here. Some of the commentators write about that. Why is Boaz not bringing this up himself or the guy that turns out to be a near relative than him? Well, often that's the case. An interesting we're going to see, this passage relates to another passage where you see astonishing feminine initiative being part of the unfolding of God's plan. This doesn't mean that you should always be initiating as a woman, remember Sarah and Hagar, but it does mean that when you're acting in faith, that often, sometimes the wife will see something and need to be bold in it. You've got to let the word govern you and like we're going to see, Naomi could have done a better job of that because the real star of this is God who covers over our mistakes when he sees a heart of faith going after him.

Now, so we're still observing the action. All we've looked at so far of the four sub points is a pressing need. The second sub point is: a questionable plan. This is at 2b, the reader begins to wonder, "Wait a minute, what's going on?" because she says, "is not Boaz our kinsman, with whose maids you were? Why don't we go down to the city gate and talk to Boaz about redeeming and if he won't, let's go to the elders of the city." That would have

been the more natural biblical way to do it but she doesn't do that. She says, "he winnows barley at the threshing floor tonight." Now this is where it hurts us that we're removed from the text and that's why it's good to have a good study Bible there when you're studying the Scriptures because the threshing floor for us, we don't really know what a threshing floor is; we don't have any experience with that. I don't think probably very many of us have ever done anything like that, but the threshing floor is where they took the grain and they beat out the stalks of grain so that the grain kernels were separated and then after that was done, the threshing would actually be they would take the grain, throw it up in the air, the wind blowing would separate the grain from the stalks and from the chaff. So they would do it at night because the prevailing winds came at night.

So Boaz is down there doing this. Naomi knows that but for people in that culture, they also knew that the threshing floor already had overtones of sensuality. You see this in Hosea 9:1 where God is speaking to Israel's unfaithfulness and says basically, "You've been playing the harlot at the threshing floor," because in a culture that believes, was an animistic or a polytheistic culture in which they were agrarian, they needed the harvest, they very easily fell into the temptation of fertility cults. So many of the gods of the Ancient Near East were fertility gods and so they would worship related to the harvest and one of the ways they tended to worship was they would tie together fertility all the way around, sexual fertility along with a fertility of the land and so sexual sin became associated with the threshing process. So the threshing floor itself would automatically raise, "Wow, the threshing floor at night. Wow, what's going on?"

So this plan, "Go to the threshing floor at night and not only that, put on your best clothes, wash yourself, anoint yourself." Anoint yourself, this means put on your perfume. "Put on your best clothes, go down and then don't let anybody know you're there." Secretive. "Until he's finished eating and drinking. When he is favorably disposed, go uncover his feet, lay down beside him. Lie down. Lie down. When he lies down, you lie down." These words are loaded words. I think the author intends us to feel the anxiety of this, to feel a sense of, "Wow, why?" In fact, Sinclair Ferguson comments in his book on Ruth, he says, "Over the years both Jewish and Christian scholars have wondered whether these words should be translated with more obvious sexual overtones," because of even the word for like uncovering the feet can mean more than to us the feet; maybe it means the legs and this kind of thing. So the reader is hearing it and so Jewish and Christian scholars have debated should these be translated with more obvious sexual undertones. But even as you read in our standard English translations, this is hardly counsel we would expect an older woman to give to an attractive young woman in her 20s. Can this be the same woman who has been restored by God's grace? Is she really telling her daughter-in-law to perfume herself, put on her most attractive clothes, go down to the threshing floor in the middle of the night, lie beside a man to whom she is not married and wait to see what happens? Can this possibly be God's way of doing things? Is it conceivable that a sensible Christian would ever give counsel like this? Can it be divinely blessed? That's the question and the reader sees that, you know, again, when we read the Scriptures, we're used to this story. We forget the impact of it. This plan is questionable and as the reader gets through verse 4 and hears the complete plan laid out, it's a questionable plan at best.



That's the second sub point under "observe the action." Now we move to the next point. It definitely is gripping, though. It keeps you reading on and the third sub point is: a clandestine meeting because from verse 6 to verse 9 we have the meeting happen as Naomi had planned. Verse 6, "So she went down to the threshing floor and did according to all that her mother-in-law had commanded her. When Boaz had eaten and drunk and his heart was merry, he went to lie down at the end of the heap of grain; and she came secretly, and uncovered his feet and lay down. It happened in the middle of the night that the man was startled and bent forward; and behold, a woman was lying at his feet. He said, 'Who are you?'"

Now, I mentioned the threshing floor, where this happened. When? It's at night. And isn't it interesting that when he raises up, he doesn't know who she is? He can't see her and, in fact, I think the author's been very careful to give you that sense as you read because the names of Ruth and Boaz and Naomi are almost absent from chapter 3. What you have instead is the man and the woman. Verse 8, "It happened in the middle of the night," not that Boaz was startled, look at that, "It happened in the middle of the night that the man was startled and bent forward; and behold," Ruth was, no, "a woman was lying at his feet and he said, 'Who are you?'" In chapter 1, when you add up the names of Ruth and Boaz, well, Boaz doesn't occur in chapter 1 but when you add up Ruth, Boaz and Naomi, chapter 1, their names occur 12 times, that's just Ruth and Naomi. Chapter 2, it's 20 times. In chapter 4, it is 12 times. So, did I say 12? 15. 15, 12 and 20, the names, those three names. In chapter 3, instead of 12, 20 and 15, it's 4. Boaz and Ruth and Naomi's names occur only 4 times in the chapter because even the way he tells the story, you're in the dark and you can't see. You feel the darkness and so it creates even more of that tension. He doesn't know who is at his feet. "Behold a woman is lying there. He says, 'Who are you?' And she answers, 'I am Ruth your maid. So spread your covering over your maid, for you are a close relative.'"

And you see this even like in the fact that she came secretly, verse 7. And then, interesting thing, verse 14, "she lay at his feet until morning and rose before one could recognize another; and he said, 'Let it not be known that the woman came to the threshing floor.'" Who is he talking to? Probably what happened was there were other people at the threshing floor who were also sleeping there. Ruth's in hiding until they all lay down. It's dark because it's darker there than it is here because we always have nightlights, we've got lights outside. When you've gone camping or something, if you've had the misfortune of having to do that, when you've gone camping and you're out somewhere where you don't have any lights, you can tell the difference between how bright it is around our houses, isn't it? We get in the night and we can still see something because either the microwave has got the light going on if you walk through the kitchen, your clock radio.

But when it's complete blackness, it is dark, and so she waits and she's watching to see where he lies down because why? You don't want to end up with the wrong man. "Watch where he lies down and then secretly go over, uncover his feet and lie at his feet." I think part of what's happening is she uncovers his feet and she lies there until he wakes up.

Naomi even thinking this plan out, thinking this way everybody will sleep and you'll have a conversation with no one listening.

So they have the conversation and he says, "Continue to lie here." They wake up before it's even light and he sends her away. Before he even sends her away, he says, "Listen, no one is to let it be known that she was here." Why? Because the appearance. Here's a woman of dignity and honor and her name is not going... Boaz is the one who comes off in this chapter as the hero. I mean, he is standing with God in the way he has handled this.

So you feel all of that tension and the names, it's almost as if the author is blushing as he tells the story. So we considered a pressing need, a questionable plan, a clandestine meeting and finally: a wonderful outcome. Still "observing the action," our first major point, "observing the action: a wonderful outcome." You have Ruth propose marriage which we see what she's really been doing is proposing marriage. Naomi just had it done in a way that wasn't the best custom to follow here because she basically voices in verse 9 what she was saying by lying at his feet. She said, "I am Ruth your maid. So spread your covering over your maid, for you are a close relative."

Spread your covering over me. There is a wordplay, a wonderful wordplay going on here. What Boaz had said to Ruth in chapter 2, verse 12, "May the LORD reward your work, and your wages be full," when he first met her and he talked about the wonderful things that he had heard about her. He said, "May the LORD reward your work, and your wages be full from the LORD, the God of Israel, under whose wings you have come to seek refuge." The word for "seeking refuge under" is the same word she uses here: spread your covering. It's the same root word. She's saying, "Boaz, you pronounced a blessing upon me that I would find refuge. Now fulfill that. Be the instrument of God doing that." And she says it in an imperatival way. She doesn't say please or would you consider, she says spread your covering over your maid.

Now, the wonderful outcome is we don't know what's going to happen. We see this happening. We know Boaz to be a righteous man but he's been, he's waking up in the middle of the night, he's not sharpest now. He may give in. The woman smells wonderful. She's a beautiful woman. She's lying at his feet. Is something going to happen? That's the tension that's building at this point. Now, Ruth's statement begins to be a movement toward holiness but Boaz when he finally speaks, we know a sense of sigh of relief, a collective sigh of relief from the audience and the author. "May you be blessed of the LORD." For the first time the Lord's name comes into it. Again here only the Lord's name occurs twice. Every other chapter, many more times than that. It's as if the personal names and God almost are looking in the other direction. Now we know that's not the case, but it feels that way and sometimes doesn't it feel that way in your life? But the reality is he's always there and he's always working just as he is here.

So he says, "May you be blessed of the LORD, my daughter. You have shown your last kindness to be better than the first," and he basically says, "Lay at my feet." But in his adherence to the word of God he realizes, "There is one person who is closer to you than

me and it's not appropriate for me to take you as my wife until he's had an opportunity." Complete honor. Not only that, he says, "Lie down, sleep." And then he makes sure they're up before dawn and he gets her out of there but he doesn't even make her leave empty-handed. Look at the kindness of God.

Now, that's the action: a pressing need, we looked at a questionable plan, a clandestine meeting, a wonderful outcome. That's "observing the action." Now, let's look at a theological implication. Our second point is implication, second major point. The point is that God works through means and he works through less than perfect means. He honors the heart that seeks him in faith because his plan is being carried out through these nefarious means even. I mean, these aren't overtly sinful, it's really kind of she's just skirting the line but the Lord honors it and blesses it anyway. This doesn't justify not seeking out the word of God more carefully and doing what you know to do. Like I said, it can also end up in disaster like Sarai's counsel to Abram concerning Hagar. But what we see is the amazing grace of God that he in the carrying out of his plan in a fallen world, in reality he's always using less than perfect means because he's always using less than perfect people, less than perfect actions, less than perfect understanding, less than perfect obedience, less than perfect faith. It's not the greatness of our faith, it's the greatness of our God that rewards a little faith.

So it's so encouraging to see that, that she didn't have to have it all figured out and wait and just keep, you know, go into a three year study on how to handle the goel situation and work it out and I kind of go to seminary on what a goel is to be and then finally, okay, we're going to act on it. Now, I think in general we're supposed to study the word to show ourselves approved, we're supposed to study diligently to seek the word of God, yes, but there are times, there are moments when action must be taken and what do you do in the moments when actions must be taken? You do the best you can to follow the word of God but you act on the word of God. That's what he's saying. And you trust God with the results. And you trust God to correct you where you need to be corrected. But you also trust him to work and honor his word. She's not made up this idea. She's acting on it. Like I said, Leviticus 25 and Deuteronomy 25, she has taken the promises of God as she understands them and she basically understands them essentially correctly. God has made a provision for widows in Israel and that is through the kinsman redeemer and she's seeking to lay claim of God's word and his promise and so her essential interpretation is accurate and she acts on it and God blesses. He blesses so wonderfully.

I think that one of the things that's happening here is I think there is an allusion to another passage that I think that thoughtful readers of Scripture, particularly the original audience but even us, should have an association with another passage of Scripture where there was female, there was a situation where the line was about to end where there was the responsibility of Levirate marriage and it wasn't being fulfilled and through extraordinary female action it was fulfilled.

I remember when I was teaching a series of sermons on the providence of God from Genesis 37 to 50, way back in, I think 2002, and how I hadn't taught through the whole book of Genesis, I just took those 14 chapters, 37 to 50, to do a great series, the

providence of God. So I taught through chapter 37 and I skipped chapter 38 because chapter 37, what happens is Joseph has a coat of many colors. He has the dreams. He tells his brothers about the first dream, tells his brothers and his dad about the second dream. They sell him into slavery. He's on the way on the slave train at the end of chapter 37 and chapter 39, verse 1, picks up with him now in Egypt but there's this big parenthesis: it's the story of Judah and Tamar. It's an odd parenthesis.

You remember the story, or if not let me give you the essential details and you can read it later. Judah is one of the sons of Jacob and he's going to be one of the tribes of Jacob. We don't know at the time how significant his tribe is going to be but we know that each one of the 12 sons needs to carry on their family name for the nation to be, God gave him 12 sons for a reason. Judah has three boys: Er, Onan and Shelah. Er marries a woman, Tamar, and Er is a wicked man and God kills him. He dies before they have a son. Now, this is 400+ years before the giving of the law but it was understood, the principle of Levirate marriage was understood because Judah said to his second son Onan, "You have the responsibility to raise up the name of your dead brother so you are to take Tamar as your wife and your firstborn will be as if Er had had a son." Onan despises that responsibility, subverts the process and will not follow through on it and God kills him.

So now Judah has lost two of his three sons he feels like at the hands of Tamar. He tells Tamar, "Listen, you go home and you wait at your dad's house and you stay there," because remember what we saw in Deuteronomy 25? She's not free to remarry outside the family. Her responsibility is to be there to preserve the line of that deceased man. "So you go and you wait and when Shelah grows up, I'll send for you." Time elapses. That's what the passage basically says. Time elapses. Judah's wife dies. Tamar has heard nothing. Obviously Shelah has grown up and Judah is not going to do it. He's not going to risk his third son on this cursed woman.

So Judah happens to be after his wife has died, he's going somewhere to pick up something, I forgot what he was going to get, some flocks or something. Anyways, he's walking through a town. Tamar has heard he's coming. She dresses as a prostitute, waits on him, entices him into a sexual liaison, asks him for proof that he's going to pay her. He gives her his signet ring. He leaves, doesn't know it's Tamar. He goes back home, hears from someone, "Hey, Er's wife Tamar is pregnant." He gets ready to go and have her killed for adultery because she has violated the rule that you wait on the Levirate marriage. He goes over to her and is going to have her killed and she says, "The man who made me pregnant gave me this," and hands it to him discreetly. He opens up his hand and looks at his own signet ring.

Wow. That boy that was born to Tamar by Judah is the man Perez. Matthew 1 in the lineage of Jesus Christ, we're told that Judah had a son Perez and it says this, "by Tamar." Boaz had a son by Ruth in Matthew 1. Female initiative fulfilling the promise of God. I mean, listen, we didn't know at the time when you first read Genesis 38 but Genesis 49 we find out in verse 10 that it's through the line of Judah that the Messiah will come and the line of Judah was in danger of not being fulfilled. And now God does not sanction that kind of action. We know that. Yet he providentially governed over and around for his

purposes even this sinful act. Judah's sin was greater because Judah failed in his responsibility. Tamar was left in a vulnerable position. All she could do, she thought though it wasn't the right thing, she was pressed into that. He was the stumbling block, Judah was and he acknowledge his sin was greater. God worked through that. Now, that's the Lord. He works through these even almost audacious acts of faith.

So let's talk about application, the third point. Application. In the implication, God uses less than perfect means. He honors the heart that seeks him in faith. The application. We need to act in bold faith. Now, faith comes by hearing and hearing by the word of Christ. Make sure you're acting on the word of God, not your own desires. But when you act in bold faith upon the promises and you act as if they are true, you step out as if they're true, God will fulfill his promises. There are certain things, you know, when they were going to walk into the land of Canaan, when they were going to go through the Dead Sea, he said, "Put your foot into the water before the sea goes back." When they're walking into the land of Canaan, he said, "When the priests put their feet into the Jordan," and it was swelling it's banks at that time, "when they put their feet into the Jordan, then the water will stand back." Not until. They weren't to go and sit there and pray, "Lord, please pull back the Jordan River." He said, "Act on it. Step in it as if it's going to go," and God takes it away.

So these lessons, they're moments in our lives where we're required to do something and we need to act in bold faith. The Lord, I mentioned, I read that passage earlier, the Syro-Phoenician woman. It shows how the Lord puts us in circumstances to strengthen our faith. I mean, it's amazing. I was reading Richard Sibbes' "The Bruised Reed," actually the passage that he talks about that. I'm going to read it for you. He says, because he shows how God will sometimes, well, let me just let him say it in his own words. "Christ may act the part of an enemy a little while, as Joseph did to his brothers," remember Joseph acting like he was an enemy to them? "Christ may act the part of an enemy a little while, as Joseph did, but it is to make way for acting his own part of mercy in a more seasonable time. He cannot restrain his bowels of mercy long. He seems to wrestle with us as with Jacob, but he supplies us, even at the moment, with hidden strength to prevail. Faith pulls off the mask from his face and sees a loving heart under contrary appearances. At first, he answered the woman of Canaan who was crying after him not a word, then he gave her a denial. After that, he gave an answer tending to her reproach, calling her a dog as being outside the covenant yet she would not be so beaten off." I love this line, "for she considered the end of his coming."

That was the beauty of her faith. He said, remember when they're asking him, she's saying it over and over, "Lord, please have mercy on me. My daughter is demon possessed. Lord, please." He's ignoring her. The disciples come and say, "Listen, she's making a scene. We've got to do something about this lady. Nobody can hear. It's just embarrassing. Will you just tell her to go away or will you heal her?" He says, "I'm not come, I've come to the people of Israel." She comes up after that and says directly to him, she presses through the crowd and says, "Lord, please have mercy on me." And then he says to her, he ignored her at first, then he spoke third person about her basically, "I'm not here for people like that. I'm here for the people of Israel. I'm here for the people of

Israel." She hears that, she presses through the crowd. He then says, "Shall I take the food for the children and give it to the dogs?" And she says, "Lord, even the dogs eat from the crumbs that fall." And Sibbes says, "The reason she pressed on is she considered the end of his coming." Where is Jesus then? He's in the region of Tyre and Sidon. He's come to her hometown. She knows, "He didn't come to my hometown to not bless us. The God I hear him talking about, the God that he is, would not come this close and not bless me." And he is drawing out that faith. By holding her back he's actually strengthening her resolve and then you see the end of it when he says, "Oh, woman, great is your faith." Great is your faith. He didn't commend many people, there are just a few times he commends someone for faith but a Syro-Phoenician woman with a possessed child is one of those.

So you press on after him because, "I know your character. I know that you're a God of lovingkindness. I know that when you reveal your glory, when you show who you are." Moses said, "Show me your glory." When he saw your glory, he didn't see first your wrath being poured out. Now he had seen that earlier but when he asked to see your glory, what did you show him? The Lord, it wasn't what he saw, it was what he heard remember, "The Lord, the Lord, compassionate and gracious, slow to anger and abounding in lovingkindness who keeps lovingkindness." That's that word "chesed" that's in Ruth. "Who keeps lovingkindness for thousands. Who forgives iniquity, transgression and sin. Yes, and who will by no means leave the guilty unpunished."

That's the God of the Bible so press on to him. He is a God who if you will seek him with all your heart, he says, "I will be found by you." You look at your life and that's chapter Jeremiah 29:14, when they are looking at the desolation of Jerusalem, he says, "You're going to look at the desperation of Jerusalem and you're going to wonder what in the world do we have hope for?" He's going to say in verse 11, "I know the plans that I have for you, to give you hope and a future. Look at your life, it's a mess, but I know my plans are for hope and a future." Verse 13, "seek me with all your heart and you'll find me." Verse 14, "I will be found by you, declares the Lord." Don't stop. Be bold in your faith. Seek him. Seek him while he may be found and seek with everything that you are.

You take the promises of God and you act on them. In salvation, you take the promises of God and you act on them. He is willing to save the most filthy sinner and I am the most filthy sinner but he's willing to save the most filthy sinner therefore he's willing to save me. Cling to him. Surrender to him. Give yourself to him. He will receive you. And you're a Christian and you sin grievously, you sin in a way that you can't believe you sinned that way. What do you do? Well, you may need to make some restitution. You may need to make some confession publicly. But you can know that you can go to Christ first because Hebrews 4:14 says that we can draw near with boldness to the throne of grace because we have a high priest who has passed through the heavens. We have a high priest who sympathizes with us, who comes alongside us and strengthens us even as we press on toward the Father to get to the throne of grace. Jesus is strengthening us, helping us all along the way.

So what is the answer? Don't sit there and rest. Go after him. This means that we apply this in every area of our lives. One area I want to mention just real briefly, a practical application that hit me in just thinking about this. You know, Ruth and Naomi are looking for the provision that God has made for them in their predicament and they see the promise in Leviticus 25 and Deuteronomy 25. Naomi sees those things. She understands those things and she acts on them. So often we get sidetracked by we don't understand what we're supposed to do. We don't take faith.

I was thinking about it as it relates to, you know, when we start getting old, one of the things I've heard people say a lot is, "I don't want to be a burden to my children. I don't want to be a burden to my children." And so, you know, draw up the living will. Sometimes it almost sounds like, "If I just start to look a little bad, just go ahead and let me go." And I know there's a place for that. I'm not saying, there are complicated issues around that and there are places where we're not to artificially prolong life. Artificially, right? I understand that. But caring for our parents or having our children care for us, you know biblically 1 Timothy 5:4 says that we're to care for our parents. We're to make a repayment to them. This is acceptable in the sight of God. So I think it's important for us to understand, now this doesn't mean, you know, take out and camp out on that and say, "You're not providing for me." No, we don't want to be a burden. That's appropriate that we don't want to be a burden but their pride gets in with that and pride says, "I can't humble myself to become needy and I want somebody else to care for me," and sometimes I'm not saying there's never a place for a nursing home. I'm not saying that. I'm not trying to get into complicated details. What I am saying is this: Christians should care for their aging parents for the glory of God and the fact that it's going to impact your family, that your children are going to be impacted by it, yes, but we know that God has called us to this and this must be a part of his plan and so we're going to act on it joyfully, gratefully, excitedly for what he's going to do in our lives and the person receiving the care needs to stop grumbling and complaining because you just make it tougher for people to care for you when you're doing that. Rejoicing that God has put you in a place of humility that you have to receive. You have an opportunity to demonstrate what Christ-like humble faith, dependence on Christ looks like. I could do nothing for myself, when it gets to that point, in the same way spiritually I could do nothing for myself.

So when we see the promises of God, acting on them. That's just an example of that kind of thing and what it looks like in each circumstance is going to be different because I'm not trying to prescribe exactly what it looks like but I'm saying we have an obligation to pray and to fervently seek to obey God's word for his glory in every area of life and be bold. Be bold in it for him and watch what he will do. And your steps and actions aren't going to be perfect. You know, this is when you're witnessing to someone. There are times where I've been hesitant in speaking out because I'm thinking, "I don't really know how to answer the thing they're going to say back to me." So that slows me down and then I miss the opportunity. That's just stupid. I can never be perfectly prepared to witness to any person. I can never be fully ready to understand all the arguments they're going to bring up. What are you supposed to do? Act in faith. The Lord has given you an opportunity to speak, speak.

Trust the Lord to come around your weaknesses and do whatever it needs and sometimes it may just be humbling me to say, "Boy, I do need to study more. I should have been ready for that. Thank you, God, for making me aware of how much I need you." You see, even that is for the glory of God. Ministering, are you ready to minister to someone? You don't have to have it all figured out, just go and do what you can. This is what the Lord is calling us to and when his people take the initiative not based on their own predispositions or their own desires but understanding of his word, we act on it and watch the Lord work for his glory. May God help us be people who are bold in faith.

Let's pray together.

*Our Father, we thank you that you are a God of grace and mercy who call us to dependent faith. We acknowledge our own unbelief. I confess my own timidity. God, grant that we might hate that and that we might see that trusting you means being more vulnerable and more earnest and more urgent. Show us how, Lord. Even as we try to apply these things, give us energy for that, give us earnestness, give us the willingness to fail but, Father, keep us in your word always depending upon it for your glory. We pray for those that are here today that need to repent and believe the Gospel. Let nothing hold them back from such a glorious and wonderful Savior. We pray in his name. Amen.*