

# Communion Preparatory Service

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[ 0 : 0 0 ] I want to thank you first of all for the warm welcome given by your minister. I want to say how glad I am, pleased I am to be with you. I studied in Aberdeen many years ago and I have a fondness for the place and still no folk here. So it's a nice chance to be back in the city and I'm looking forward to meeting some of you over the course of the weekend and I trust that as we spend these times together in God's Word that God would draw near to us and bless us through the Word. This is a wonderful little book, the Book of Ruth. It is in many ways one of the most romantic parts of the Scriptures. It's also a book that is full of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Perhaps the chapter that we're going to be studying this evening is in some ways the most perplexing chapter of the Book of Ruth. Let me just begin with a little anecdote. I knew a young man once who was in love with a young woman and they had been going out for a very short period of time, six months or so together. But he felt within himself that the time had surely come to pop the question. One Saturday evening they were going out for a walk and he decided in his heart this was the time. There was no more waiting. But having a poor sense of direction, they took a wrong turning and ended up walking through a rather run-down part of the town through an old industrial estate.

He could see the opportunity running away from him and so determined not to lose the moment and summoning up all the courage, he proposed there and then. He waited, he looked expectantly, and to his dismay there was this look of surprise and shock written all over her face. Her thoughts had been concentrated on how to get out of this dreadful place and it was not the sound of wedding bells that were ringing in her mind but the sound of police sirens possibly arriving any moment. And so she blurted out, I don't know, it's very, very soon, I need to think. He would set back. A week later the answer came back and the story has a happy ending, it was a yes. Now the moral of that little anecdote is that when it comes to proposing in marriage, picking the right time and the right place is everything.

And in this chapter we have a marriage proposal and we also have some very serious questions as to whether it was the right time and the right place for that proposal. But under the guiding hand of God, the outcome again was a positive outcome. Well, the book of Ruth is of course all about our need for a Redeemer. This is the central image in the book of Ruth, Boaz who emerges as the Goel, the Redeemer, the kinsman Redeemer of Ruth. And in the book our need for a Redeemer is expressed in very down-to-earth, our physical terms. We've got to think ourselves into the context again. Ruth and Naomi are living in a day when there was still a fairly hazy understanding of life after death. And so it was very important to have a son to carry on your name after you and if you had a stake in the land then it also secured your family's membership within the covenant community. And so to be without a son and to be landless was a great problem, it was a great dilemma. It meant that death robbed you of all meaning. And of course with the greater light of the New Testament, the truth that is already there in the Old Testament is brought fully into view. And of course we are also made to more clearly understand that our need is to be brought out of sin's clutches because sin will mean that we face judgment and eternal loss. So death is still the great enemy but Jesus our Redeemer brings us victory over the grave through the price that He has paid for our sin on the cross of Calvary. He redeems our souls. He delivers us from death. But still, still the redemption that we know as Christians, as New Covenant Christians, has very practical and physical repercussions on the way we live out life, doesn't it? It has relevance to some of the very problems that come to the surface in the book of Ruth. Knowing the Redeemer has relevance to the problems such as we face in a fall in our standard of living, such as we face bereavement, such as we face in getting on with our in-laws, moving home, finding a marriage partner. These are all key issues in this book of the Bible, and they are key issues as well

to which our faith in the Lord Jesus

Christ is relevant. So, we are going to be seeing how God's Word in this part of the book of Ruth calls on us to entrust ourselves, first of all, to the protection of our Redeemer, the Lord Jesus Christ, as Ruth sought the protection of Boaz as a Redeemer. We are pointed forward from this Old Testament book to the need to come to Christ for His covering salvation. But also, as believers, to live purposefully in the knowledge that God cares for us and has an overriding providence that guides our lives and overrules even our flaws and our mistakes.

[ 7 : 14 ] So, let's look in turn at Naomi's plan, at Ruth's request and Boaz's response. Naomi's plan, then, first of all. So, the action in chapter 3 takes place approximately seven weeks after the action in chapter 2, when Boaz has been so kind to them and the link has been established, the family connection has been made.

Why do we say there are seven weeks between the two? Well, we are told that they arrive in Bethlehem at the beginning of the barley harvest. In chapter 3, the harvest is over and it is a threshing scene.

And we are told from one of the old documents, old historical documents, the Geyser calendar, which was a 10th century BC agricultural calendar that in this part of the world, there were seven weeks from the onset of harvest to the the finish of harvest, the conclusion of harvest, which also ties in with the Jewish feasts, the time between the Passover and Pentecost, the time that was marked off. So, back in chapter 2, when Naomi learns of Boaz's kindness to Ruth, there is a new optimism, boys up within her. She says, "The Lord bless him. He has not stopped showing kindness to the living and the dead. That man is a close relative." He is one of our kinsman redeemers. So, Ruth sees the hand of God at work. She's, sorry, Naomi is seeing the hand of God at work. She's excited that God has placed them right into the path of the one who is well placed to look after them, and they're expecting great things.

But that was back then, and this is now, and their seven weeks have elapsed since they discovered that Boaz was a near relative, and nothing has happened. Nothing has happened. Now, isn't that true to our experience also? There are times when things seem to move really, really slow. God's purposes move incredibly slowly, at least so much more slowly than we would wish. But that, of course, doesn't mean that God is not at work. As the hymn puts it, God moves in mysterious ways His wonders to perform, and God is at work even during these seven weeks of seeming inactivity. God is ordering affairs for the events which will mark the culmination of this little book.

What was God doing? What was God doing in the heart of Boaz? Well, we're not told, of course, but from what we hear later on in the chapter in verse 11, it seems evident that Boaz has been observing.

[ 10 : 46 ] He's been watching this woman from Moab, and he's been listening to what people have been saying about her, and he's been noting that she's a woman of noble character. God is at work.

He's drawing Boaz's attention to Ruth. He's drawing out his heart towards her. But that doesn't mean, of course, that Ruth and Naomi should do nothing, that they should be completely inactive because God is sovereign and is working out His purposes. Nor does it mean that we are from action because we believe in a sovereign God. We can't hide behind the cloak of God's sovereignty and use it as an excuse for our inactivity. And one of the big lessons that we have here is that God's providence and our confidence in God's sovereign action ought to give us confidence to bold action for him. It should give us hope. It should give us confidence. And so, Naomi hatches a plan, and she shares it with Ruth. And Naomi's motivation is a high motivation. She asks Ruth, rhetorically, should I not try to find a home? Literally, rest for you.

Ruth. This was the ideal for the Jewish woman, that she should find domestic rest, that she should come under the protecting wing of a husband, that she should be valued, that she should be safe and useful in a home. And Naomi, with beautiful forgetfulness of her own situation, wants that for Ruth. She wants Ruth to find rest. She wants her to come under the wing of this kinsman redeemer. And so, here's her plan.

Somehow or other, we're not told, but she knows that Boaz will be the night in the threshing floor. And she wants Ruth to go and meet him. I'm sure most of you know what would have been happening here. The grain would have been taken in from the field, and the grain would still be attached to the straw, and it would be taken in great heaps into the threshing area, and it would be beat with sticks, and the heads would be knocked off. And then the head and the chaff, the grains and the chaff would be thrown up into the air with great spades, and the wind would carry away the

lighter chaff, and the grain would fall to the ground, so that the husks and so on would be separated from the grain. And so, they often built these threshing floors on the top of little hills to catch the wind around. And Boaz had been supervising all the way through the harvest. He, as the landowner, had been seeing how things went, and we remarked on the fact that he is a very gracious master. He's respected by the workers under him. He brings the sunshine with them when he goes into the field. They greet him and bless him, and he blesses them in return. And now he is looking after the grain. There's obviously a great asset here to be protected from thieves and so on, and so he is spending the night. He's camping out in the threshing barn, something that wasn't particularly unusual. So, knowing this,

Naomi tells Ruth to go and have a bath, go and put on some perfume, put on her best clothes, and then to make her way secretly to the threshing floor and hide herself until Boaz has finished his evening meal and has gone to sleep. She's got to go over to him and then pull back his cloak from his feet, so that he awakens, presumably with the cool air, and await on his instructions.

[ 15 : 37 ] Now, it's at this point that we start scratching our head and we ask, what on earth, what on earth is Naomi getting up to? How do we evaluate this plan? What's the lesson to be had from her instructions to Ruth? Is it that the end justifies the means? That there are huge risks involved to Ruth. When Boaz wakes up, as Naomi envisions he will do with the cold air on his feet, there are three distinct possibilities, maybe more, but certainly three things that could happen.

First thing that could happen is that he awakens up and he thinks that she has come to him like some common prostitute and waking up groggily, goes on and takes advantage of her and ruins her reputation, perhaps justifies it in the spur of the moment that she's taken the initiative, it's all her fault. And there's something that is suggestive of the danger of the encounter in the chapter itself. All the commentators point out that some of the words that are used have a double meaning, which suggests that the whole encounter is sexually charged. Ruth could have a reputation ruined, that's the first possibility. Second, Boaz could waken up and be astonished to find Ruth there, and being a righteous man, he could simply dismiss her, dismiss her, dismiss her. And the effect, of course, on Ruth would be that she would be absolutely crushed. She would feel completely worthless as a result. Or thirdly, he could recognize that Ruth's intention is innocent and respond favorably to her invitation to take her under his wing in marriage.

So, it's a huge risk, isn't it? It's fraught with all kinds of wrong outcomes. And I think it would be fair to say that Naomi is seeking the right ends, but in the wrong way.

But notice in passing that what Naomi is doing in undertaking for Ruth is typical of the kind of involvement that biblical parents have for their offspring. Think of how Abraham takes the initiative in arranging a marriage for Isaac. We see in the closeness of the relationship between Naomi and her daughter-in-law, Ruth, the kind of openness that should be present in Christian relationships between father and mother and son and daughter. A freedom to speak about this, the most important of decisions.

An openness to be guided, a desire that God's will that His own children, our children, His children, should marry only in the Lord, that that should come about. So, we're seeing that here. And then, secondly, we're reminded by the way in which things do work out that God is able to overrule the course of events. Our flawed attempts to honor Him. This is a pretty flawed scheme that Naomi hatches, but God is able to overrule it for His own good. Naomi's plan is going to work out well, but that's down to God, God directing the course of events rather than any wisdom that was inherent in her own plan.

[ 19 : 33 ] But she's acted, and that's important. She has been buoyed up by a sense that God is in this. She is seeing God at work in bringing her close to this kinsman redeemer, and she has responded in taking action. Now, there is always in the Christian life a danger of being what we could call completely passive in our righteousness. By that I mean that we're more concerned about avoiding evil than we are concerned about doing good. But following the Lord Jesus is about more than staying clear of evil. It is, of course, that, but it is much more as well. We are to seek good. We're to obey His commands. We're to care for the orphan and the widow in their distress, and we're to be righteous in this sense. We are to trust that God is able to use us if we are willing to make ourselves available, that even although we may be misguided in some ways, God is able to direct our course for His own good ends. Last year, I was in Philadelphia in the church where I worshiped during a year out in Westminster that I had when I was training, and went to visit a man who was in charge of the mercy ministries that the church were doing in central Philadelphia. And it

was a very stimulating discussion. This man was responsible for a very large program of helping people who were aid sufferers, people who were disabled, people who had problems with drugs and alcohol and so on, who were homeless. And he was, his primary role was to stimulate members of the congregation to get involved and to help in the volunteer program that the church had. And what he said was that his philosophy in helping all of these different categories that are generally overlooked by society was that the people simply needed to show up, i.e. to get involved, to be available, and let God do the rest.

And when you condense it down to that, it's very, very simple, isn't it? Show up and let God do the work. We're no big deal, are we? We are simply channels for the Holy Spirit to work. It's God who does the work, God who changes people, but we can show up and let God do the work.

And to our credit, Naomi's plan involved Ruth being available for God to do the work.

Let's look at that approach to Boaz. She does as Naomi instructs, she picks her way through the shadows, she hides herself in a secret place where she can watch Boaz. And Boaz is in pretty good spirits. The harvest has gone well, and who knows, as he's drifting off to sleep, his thoughts may well have wandered to that pretty girl from Moab that he saw working in the harvest field. He's enjoyed his meal and the wine.

He lies down at the end of the pile of grain. Very quickly, he has gone off to sleep. Ruth slips over to him, rolls back the cloak from his feet. She lies down and waits. And in the night, Boaz is wakened. There's perhaps been a draught of air. He wakens up with a start, looks down, and sees through the gloom the form of a woman. Who are you? He demands. And Ruth responds with these vital words, she says, I am your servant, Ruth. Spread the corner of your garment over me, since you are a kinsman redeemer. Beautiful words. And because Jesus is the central message of the book of Ruth, we see in this encounter something of a model as to how we are to approach our redeemer. Ruth comes as someone who acknowledges her need plainly to this one who is able to help her. She is acutely aware of the insecurity of her situation. She's landless. She's without family. She is without a stake in the land. She comes because she has no option but to cast herself at the feet of Boaz. Now, that is such a clear picture of what it is to come to Jesus. We need to be redeemed. We need a Savior. And there is no one else in the world who can save us but Jesus.

[ 25 : 34 ] Buddha cannot save us. Krishna cannot save us. Muhammad cannot save us. Politicians, scientists, all the wise people of the world are helpless to provide us with what we need, which is to be redeemed from the power of sin and to know eternal life. But Jesus, Jesus can save us. And so we come and we cast ourselves at the feet of Jesus. We come with no question of being able to save ourselves.

We must be saved by him or we will not be saved at all. But we come with hope. Ruth is motivated by hope.

She is persuaded in her heart that Boaz is a good man. He has already given evidence by her treatment of her and Naomi that he is a good man. He has dealt kindly towards her. She was in an insecure position, but she now has every confidence that he will not turn her away. And our hope in coming to our Redeemer, in coming to Jesus, is that he is good. The Lord is good. He will not turn us away. He has promised not to turn us away. And then thirdly, her request is for protection. She wants protection. The expression for him to cover her with his garment is a clear proposal. It's a proposal of marriage. She's asking him to marry her. And when we think of it, when we phrase it as starkly as that, we realize just what a bold move this was by Ruth. Who is she to ask Boaz to marry her? This would be bold in our day.

How much more back then? She is the woman proposing to the man. She is the servant addressing the master and proposing marriage to him. She is the foreigner addressing the Israelite. She is the homeless refugee asking the nobleman to take her and shield her and giving her all of the rest and all of the joy and all of the comfort that is involved in marriage. It's a bold request. And when we come to Jesus, we're doing the same. We're asking the Lord Jesus Christ to extend the wing of his salvation over us and to give us all that is summed up by the phrase eternal life, joy and peace in the Holy Spirit, blessedness, purposefulness, life everlasting, all to be found in the Lord Jesus Christ. What a great request it is to make of Jesus when we come to him for salvation. But he is pleased when we come with such a request, because this is a model for anyone who will come to Christ in faith. Look now at Boaz's response to this bold request. He responds with grace and grace and grace and uprightness. Think again of the atmosphere here. Remember, it's a charged atmosphere.

It's night. There's the wine and the perfume, and there's the warm physical presence of a woman. And Boaz is a normal, red-blooded man. This situation is full of moral risk. It's dark, and there is no one else around.

[ 29 : 52 ] There is no one who is going to see. He could so easily have taken advantage of the situation. He could have taken advantage of the rashness of Naomi's plan and Ruth's naivety. But he doesn't.

And even although Boaz is still groggy with sleep, even although his mind is processing the situation as he comes to, he is so, we could say, saturated with righteousness, that he instinctively does the godly thing.

His response is one of self-control and of grace and of kindness. Even before he has had time to think carefully, God and his ways are at the center of his thoughts, and he honors God in this situation.

Now, there's a tremendous example, isn't there? There's an example here, especially for every young person with us tonight, and all of us indeed. Let us resolve to be like Boaz in a world where people will snatch at the slightest opportunity to gratify themselves with illicit pleasure.

When the temptation comes, when the lights are down and there is no one else around, no one else to know, let our first thought be always to honor God and to do the righteous thing.

[ 31 : 55 ] What a guy Boaz is. What a hero he is in the Scriptures, that he should respond in such an honorable way, that his heart should be so set on pleasing his God, that in this strange, unusual situation in which he finds himself by no fault of his own, he instinctively responds in a godly manner.

John Adams was one of the, I think he was America's second president, and he was no prude, but he was a godly man, but he was a godly man, and he wrote at the end of his life, looking back in his life, he wrote these words. He said, "No virgin or matron ever had cause to blush at the sight of me, or to regret acquaintance with me.

No father, brother, son or friend ever had grief or resentment for any relationship between me and any daughter, sister, mother, or any other relation of the female sex." Let us ask God that our hope in Him might bring to us self-control. Boaz addresses Ruth then as daughter. It's a lovely way of addressing Ruth. It has the effect, I think, of diffusing the situation somewhat. Instead of berating her for the impropriety of her coming to Him at night in this way, he gently commends her. He's so gracious in his dealings, and he speaks of her latest act of kindness being greater than her first. And the word kindness is the Hebrew word *chesed*, loyal love, love shown when it's not demanded, committed love.

And he sees Ruth here not only on her own behalf, but also on Naomi's behalf, and he is impressed by her loyal love. He's been watching her, and he's observed that she's not a man-mad girl who has run after the younger men. She is more virtuous than that, and that the love that she seeks is one of character and commitment. And he promises to be her kinsman redeemer, but there's a snag.

We're kept waiting in the story because there is a man who is more closely related to Naomi than Boaz himself is. And Boaz, being a man of integrity, has to give him the opportunity to do the part of the kinsman redeemer. If he's unwilling to do this, then Boaz most certainly will act on their behalf.

[ 34 : 59 ] But for the moment, there's a priority, and that is that Ruth's reputation should be preserved. And he doesn't send her home there and then into the danger of the pitch darkness, but she's to wait until just before dawn and has to go home so that no one will see her. And Boaz will later tell his staff that no one is to mention anything, and no one who saw her is to mention anything about her visit. And so Ruth goes back home, and Boaz sees to it that she is sent home not empty-handed. In fact, she is given an incredible weight of grain. It's calculated to be about 80 pounds worth of grain. So she must have been a pretty strong girl. She carries this back to Naomi. And Naomi, of course, earlier in the book, has been complaining that God has made her life empty. And of course, the book is showing that

God is the one who is filling up their lives with all good things. And so the chapter ends with these two women waiting now on Boaz's next move, buoyed up with the confidence that God is in this. God is the God who is directing all of the detail of their lives. He is the God who fills them with good things. As we close, let me just reinforce a couple of the applications from this part of the book of Ruth. And first of all, to anyone at all who is in the congregation tonight who is not a Christian, I don't know you, but maybe you're here tonight and you don't know the Lord Jesus as your Savior, or you're not sure that you're a Christian. This is where we are to take our cue from the approach of

Ruth to one who was to be her Redeemer. Your part is to cast yourself, to come by faith to Jesus, believing that He is able to save you from hell, from an eternal separation from God, and that if you will come trusting in His goodness, He will not send you away. He will receive you and He will forgive you because He is good and has given His word to receive those who come to Him in faith." Come with a simple trust in the goodness of Jesus that Ruth shows so beautifully here in her approach to Boaz. Trust in Jesus to work out whatever the issues there are in your life. Some people make the mistake of thinking, I need to get my life sorted out before I start to think about religion.

Believe me, Jesus is the only one who can make sense of our lives and who can bring us through the challenges that we have in this life and take us safely to heaven. If you're not a Christian tonight, will you come to Jesus with that confidence? And for all of us, there is a call on us from the example we have here to live a life for God which is purposeful and which is lived with bold confidence in a sovereign God who is able to take up and to direct even our most flawed efforts to please Him.

[ 39 : 03 ] We don't need to snatch at the world's illicit prizes. We may entrust ourselves to God to bring out blessing in our lives and in the lives of others far greater than anything the world could give us.

And if we will be willing to live adventurously in hope for the Lord, there is no telling what God may do.

God is ready to take our availability and to use it to advance His kingdom. That's what Ruth and Naomi were finding out, that when we step out to help others in a broken world, we may be confident that God Himself will do the work. God has not redeemed us to live passively and fearfully, trying to avoid evil, but not daring to do good. But we have been redeemed, we have been freed to strike out in hope for the kingdom of God, and with confidence in a sovereign, almighty, all-wise, and good Redeemer.

May God bless to us all the preaching of His holy word. Amen. We're going to close our service now with Psalm 113, which is a lovely psalm about how God delights in bestowing His grace upon people just like Ruth and Naomi, people who are at the bottom of the heap, who have nothing in themselves, and blesses them and sets them high. O praise you, servants of the Lord, sing praises to His holy name. O blessed be the name of God. His praise forevermore proclaim from east to west the praise of God each day is to be spread abroad. Psalm 113 on page 151, O praise you, servants of the Lord.

O praise you, servants of the Lord, sing praises to His holy name. O blessed be the name of God, O blessed be the name of God. His praise forevermore proclaim. His praise forevermore proclaim.

[ 42 : 06 ] Promise to west the praise of God each day is to be spread to the broad.

The Lord is high above the earth, His glory far above the sky.

Who else is like the Lord our God, the one who's His enthroned on high? He is the one who stirs down low, to blue on heaven and earth below. He raises our cast from the dust, and from the air, He raises our cast from the dust, and from the air, He lifts the poor.

He raises our cast from the dust, and from the air, He lifts the poor. He raises our cast from the dust, and from the air, He lifts the poor.

He raises our cast from the dust, and from the air, He lifts the poor. He raises our cast from the earth, and from the air, He lifts the poor.

[ 43 : 46 ] Bear. Can you hear me. à Am I? Bur actors saw. fatto And the want. As things are our verAA is ah. Is to tell you I can'touleh, But still, It remains there.

Of course in 309. Godless woman, here reward, with home and children, praise the Lord.

Now may the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit rest upon you now and forevermore. Amen.