

RUTH 3:1-18

God's Providential Timing

Children sleep better when close to their parents. When storms hit, parents know they will be visited by their young children wanting to sleep with them. Rest comes easy when we are safe, comforted, and content. As chapter 3 opens in the book of Ruth, the titular character learns to rest under the providential wings of our Redeemer.

The harvest season has come to an end and Naomi knows they figure out how to provide for themselves again. She wisely sees God's hand at work with the arrival of Boaz. Given that Ruth is still young, Naomi hatches a plan. She knows the conclusion of the harvest would be celebrated in town, especially after the famine that wrecked the land previously.

Naomi's plan is for Ruth to meet Boaz while celebrating with his workers. She dresses up for the occasion - a significant change as Ruth has been a poor day worker. There is significant symbolism here. Although Naomi has a personal interest in this relationship, Ruth changing her clothes is signaling her time of grief are over. Thus far, Ruth has been a poor widow trying to survive. Now, however, she marches forward with her life. Her time of mourning has concluded. Naomi is aware that one of the barriers between her and Boaz is her identity as a grieving widow. Now, however, she is ready to "date again."

Providence is the doctrine that describes God's sovereign care over history and events. It explains how God orchestrates events as he wills. The book of Ruth is littered with God's providential grace. The most notable example is the arrival of Boaz. Naomi seems sensitive to God's providential work in their lives. God is providing for them. Ruth, however, must receive this grace and move forward.

Moving forward is difficult. The sorrow of loss, the pain of suffering, the triggering of dark memories, and the hurts of our past and experiences can be overwhelming. If God is provident (and he is!), then we must trust that though times are hard and the past is difficult, healing is still possible. This does not mean that we forget, ignore, or never remember special dates or anniversaries, but it does mean that we can trust God for our future.

In short, if we want to find rest, we must find it in a providential God.

The scene then changes from Ruth and Naomi to Ruth and Boaz. After taking her advice to proactively pursue the kinsmen-redeemer, Ruth marches to the threshing floor where Boaz is celebrating with his workers. When she approaches him, she states, “I am Ruth, your servant. Spread your wings over your servant, for you are a redeemer” (vs. 9) Translations vary due to the play on words. She is likely referencing marriage. However, the word “wings” (ESV, see Ruth 2:12) can mean “covering” (NIV) or even “skirt” (KJV).

Ultimately, Ruth is asking Boaz to be an answer to his own prayer. She is asking for Boaz to redeem her through marriage. Ruth, then, is taking advantage of provisions made by God in the Mosaic law. God’s providential grace allowed for poor widows like Ruth to find security and rest in kinsmen-redeemers.

Boaz eagerly agrees to the proposal. He evidently was aware he was a kinsman-redeemer, but his hesitancy to pursue his legal right is due to a closer relative with greater rights. However, once Ruth makes her wants clear, Boaz moves quickly. He assures her of his intentions and begins the process of redeeming her through their marriage.

Interestingly, however, Boaz describes Ruth’s actions as “kindness” (vs. 10) – a major theme in the book (see Ruth 1:8; 2:20). The first kindness Boaz references is when she left Moab to travel with Naomi to Bethlehem. However, redemption will take time. Ruth must return home and wait.

When she returns to Naomi, she shares everything, but announces it will take time. It is this final requirement that is the hardest. Ruth’s courage to go before Boaz and make her wants clear was difficult. Waiting upon the Lord is particularly difficult.

Faith requires patience. Noah waited a century before the rains fell. Abraham waited a quarter century before receiving the promises of a son. Joseph suffering unjustly in prison for years. Moses waited 40 years in Midian before God appeared to him at a burning bush. So too Ruth, and we with her, must wait with patient faith. God is provident. He will be glorified in the end.