

Homiletics Analysis: Ruth 3

Content & Intent

This Text — Content

Ruth 3 occupies the narrative hinge of the book. The preceding two chapters have established the crisis (Naomi widowed, landless, and bitter; Ruth a foreign widow clinging to her mother-in-law and her God), introduced Boaz as a man of noble character, and begun the thread of providential provision through Ruth's gleaning in Boaz's field. Chapter 3 shifts the movement from passive providence to active pursuit. Naomi, no longer paralyzed by grief, devises a plan rooted in covenant institution: Ruth should approach Boaz at the threshing floor, invoke his role as kinsman-redeemer, and seek his covering. Ruth executes the plan with precision, courage, and evident faith. Boaz responds — not with scandal or rejection but with blessing, affirmation of Ruth's covenant loyalty (*hesed*), reassurance, and a pledge to act. The chapter closes with both characters bound in expectation and the reader drawn forward to resolution.

The narrative is carefully constructed around three movements: Naomi's instruction (vv. 1–5), Ruth's approach and Boaz's response (vv. 6–15), and Ruth's return and Naomi's confident waiting (vv. 16–18). The threshing floor scene is the dramatic and theological center, but it is framed on both sides by Naomi — a woman who entered the chapter anxious for Ruth's security and exits it at rest, confident that “the man will not rest until the matter is settled today” (v. 18). The transformation of Naomi from bitter resignation (chapter 1) to active hope to trusting confidence is one of the passage's quiet theological achievements.

This Text — Intent

God is seeking to accomplish two interconnected effects through this chapter. First, He is displaying what covenant loyalty (*hesed*) looks like when it is active rather than passive — how it initiates, risks, trusts, and waits. Second, He is calling the reader to recognize that human *hesed* — Naomi's, Ruth's, and Boaz's — is derivative of and reflective of divine *hesed*: God's own covenant faithfulness expressed through the willing acts of faithful people. The reader is meant to see that God redeems not only by direct intervention but through the willing agency of those who share His character, and to be moved to inhabit that same posture of covenant loyalty in their own lives. The chapter also works to produce trust in the reader: if Naomi can move from “don't call me Naomi, call me Mara” (1:20) to “the man will not rest until the matter is settled” (3:18), the God who produced that transformation is trustworthy to complete what He has begun.

Subject Sentence: Covenant loyalty — human and divine — presses actively toward redemption and calls the faithful to confident, expectant waiting.

Primary Claim: God is demonstrating through Ruth, Boaz, and Naomi that *hesed* — covenant loyalty — is never merely passive; it risks, initiates, and acts, because it mirrors the faithfulness of a God who will not leave His covenant commitments unfinished. The reader is called to inhabit this same active, trusting *hesed* and to wait — as Naomi waited — with confidence that God completes what He begins.

Interpretive Evaluation

The nature of the threshing floor scene

The most common interpretive controversy surrounding Ruth 3 is whether the threshing floor encounter carries sexual overtones. Some interpreters — including critical scholars and some evangelical commentators — read “uncover his feet” (v. 7) as a euphemism, and the encounter as sexually charged or ambiguous by design. This reading is typically supported by the observation that “feet” (*regel*) is sometimes a euphemism in the Old Testament (cf. Isaiah 7:20; Judges 3:24) and that a woman approaching a man at night on a threshing floor would have been understood in the ancient Near East as an invitation to sexual encounter.

Evaluation: *Acknowledge the literary ambiguity; qualify the conclusion; the Reformed reading resists the sexual interpretation as the primary frame.* The text does use language that ancient readers may have recognized as having dual valence — this is almost certainly intentional, generating narrative suspense. However, the trajectory of the scene resolves the ambiguity firmly in the direction of covenant faithfulness, not sexual impropriety. Boaz’s first words are a blessing (v. 10); his second move is to affirm Ruth’s *hesed* and her reputation; his third is to name the legal complication (the nearer redeemer) and pledge to act properly. The narrator has Boaz send Ruth away before dawn specifically so that she will not be “recognized” — protecting her honor, not concealing guilt. The text is designed to raise a question and then answer it: this was not what it might have looked like. To preach the scene primarily as sexually ambiguous is to stop reading before the text delivers its verdict. The Reformed reading acknowledges the narrative tension and uses it — as the text does — to highlight the extraordinary character of both Ruth and Boaz, both of whom navigate a potentially compromising situation with integrity.

The kinsman-redeemer institution and its application

A second interpretive issue concerns how directly the *go’el* (kinsman-redeemer) institution maps onto Ruth’s situation. Some dispensational readers emphasize the legal precision of the institution, treating this chapter primarily as a typological pattern for Christ’s redemptive work. Some Lutheran readers emphasize the Law/Gospel structure: Naomi’s

initiative is Law, Boaz's free response is Gospel. Wesleyan-Arminian readers tend to emphasize the human agency throughout — Naomi devising, Ruth risking, Boaz choosing — as evidence that God works through willing human cooperation in a way that is not deterministic.

Evaluation: The Reformed reading holds all three strands without collapsing them. The *go'el* institution is genuinely load-bearing — the story cannot be understood without it — and its typological resonance with Christ's redemption is not imposed but organic: a redeemer who is near of kin, who acts freely and at cost to himself, who covers the destitute and gives them a new name and standing. The human agency throughout (Naomi's plan, Ruth's courage, Boaz's pledge) is real and significant — this is not a mechanical legal transaction but a story of willing covenant loyalty. And there is a genuine Law/Gospel structure: the institution creates the obligation, but Boaz's response exceeds the obligation in warmth, affirmation, and generosity. The Reformed reading refuses to flatten any of these: the institution is real, the typology is real, the human agency is real, and the divine governance behind all of it is the ground of the narrative's confidence.

Naomi's role — scheming or faithful?

A third issue: Is Naomi's plan in verses 1–5 an act of covenant wisdom or human manipulation? Some readers are uncomfortable with what looks like Naomi engineering an outcome, and some preachers soften her role. Others read the plan as a model of practical wisdom in service of redemption.

Evaluation: The text does not present Naomi's plan as morally compromising. She is working *within* covenant structures — the *go'el* institution — not around them. Her instruction to Ruth reflects knowledge of covenant law, love for Ruth's future, and a recovery of hope that is itself a theological development from her bitterness in chapter 1. The plan is not manipulation; it is covenant wisdom. The text consistently validates Naomi's initiative: Ruth follows it, Boaz commends it, and God honors it. The Reformed reading affirms Naomi's role as a picture of sanctified wisdom — grief transformed into active, covenant-shaped love for another.

Key Canonical Support

- **Leviticus 25:25; Deuteronomy 25:5–10** — The *go'el* and levirate institutions that provide the legal framework for the entire chapter; Boaz's pledge to act is not personal romanticism but covenant obligation freely embraced.
- **Proverbs 31:10** — Boaz's description of Ruth as a “woman of noble character” (*eshet hayil*, v. 11) deliberately echoes this phrase, suggesting Ruth is the embodiment of covenant wisdom; the text is doing more than offering a compliment.
- **Ezekiel 16:8** — God's covenant with Israel described as spreading His “corner of the garment” (*kanaf*) over her — the identical word Ruth uses in verse 9 when she

asks Boaz to spread his “wings/corner” (*kanaf*) over her. The marriage covenant enacted by Boaz is a human image of God’s own covenant-making with His people.

- **Ephesians 5:25–27** — The husband who gives himself for his bride, covering and presenting her holy, as the New Testament elaboration of the pattern Boaz embodies; the *go’el* typology reaches its fulfillment in Christ’s self-giving for the church.
- **Romans 8:28–32** — The confidence with which Naomi waits in verse 18 (“the man will not rest until the matter is settled”) mirrors the confidence of those who know that God, who did not spare His own Son, will surely accomplish what He has begun; Naomi’s rest is a particular instance of the believer’s eschatological confidence.

Aim: To demonstrate from Ruth 3 that covenant loyalty — *hesed* — is always active, never merely passive, and to call the congregation to inhabit the same trusting, risk-taking, expectant posture in their own lives, confident that the God who has begun His redemptive work will not leave it unfinished.

Content Table

Verse(s)	Content	Notes
3:1	Naomi asks: “Shall I not seek <i>rest</i> (<i>manoah</i>) for you?” — her stated motivation is Ruth’s shalom and security	<i>Manoah</i> = resting place, security; same concern as 1:9 (“may the LORD grant you rest”) — Naomi now actively pursuing what she once only prayed for
3:2	Naomi identifies Boaz: “Is he not our kinsman?” — threshing floor timing established	Naomi knows Boaz’s schedule; her plan is grounded in knowledge and covenant structure, not improvisation
3:3	Detailed instructions: wash, anoint, dress; go to the threshing floor but do not reveal yourself until Boaz has finished eating and drinking	The sequence signals preparation for a significant encounter; discretion (“do not reveal yourself”) protects all parties
3:4	“When he lies down, note the place; uncover his feet and lie down; he will tell you	The instruction’s ambiguity is part of the narrative design; Ruth is told to

Verse(s)	Content	Notes
	what to do”	initiate and then defer — she makes the petition, Boaz will determine the response
3:5	Ruth’s complete compliance: “All that you say I will do”	Her response mirrors her commitment in 1:16; Ruth is presented as entirely yielded to Naomi’s covenant wisdom
3:6	Ruth goes to the threshing floor; does exactly as Naomi commanded	The narrator emphasizes her faithful execution: no deviation, no hesitation
3:7	Boaz eats, drinks, is “merry,” lies down at the end of the grain heap; Ruth uncovers his feet and lies down	“Merry” (<i>yitav libo</i>) = content, at ease; the threshing floor scene begins
3:8	At midnight Boaz is startled, turns, and discovers a woman lying at his feet	The midnight timing heightens the drama and the intimacy of the scene
3:9	Boaz asks, “Who are you?” Ruth identifies herself and asks him to spread his <i>kanaf</i> (wing/corner of garment) over her “for you are a redeemer (<i>go’el</i>)”	The petition is clear, direct, and legally grounded; <i>kanaf</i> ties back to 2:12 (Boaz’s prayer that Ruth find refuge under God’s <i>kanaf</i>); Ruth is asking Boaz to be the human answer to his own prayer
3:10	Boaz’s first response: “May you be blessed by the LORD, my daughter” — commends her <i>hesed</i> , notes she has not pursued younger men	Boaz is not surprised by the request; he responds with blessing, not scandal. He immediately frames her action as <i>hesed</i>
3:11	“Do not fear. I will do for you all that you ask, for all my fellow townsmen know that you are a worthy woman (<i>eshet hayil</i>)”	The pledge is given; her reputation in the community is confirmed; the <i>eshet hayil</i> echo (Proverbs 31) is explicit
3:12	Boaz names the complication: “There is a redeemer nearer than I”	The narrative is not resolved yet; the nearer kinsman is the remaining obstacle; Boaz’s honesty reflects his

Verse(s)	Content	Notes
3:13	Boaz pledges: “If he will redeem you, good; let him do it. But if he is not willing, then, as the LORD lives, I will redeem you”	integrity An oath sworn by the LORD; Boaz commits fully within the covenant framework; the LORD is invoked as witness
3:14	Ruth lies at his feet until morning; rises before she can be recognized; Boaz instructs her to keep the meeting secret	His care for her reputation is explicit: “Let it not be known that the woman came to the threshing floor” — protects her honor and prevents premature complications
3:15	Boaz gives Ruth six measures of barley: “Do not go back empty-handed to your mother-in-law”	The provision is generous and deliberate; <i>empty-handed</i> echoes Naomi’s bitter complaint in 1:21 (“I went away full, the LORD has brought me back empty”) — the emptiness is now being reversed
3:16–17	Ruth returns, reports everything to Naomi, presents the barley: “He gave me these six measures and said, ‘Do not go back empty-handed to your mother-in-law’”	The gift is not only for Ruth; Boaz’s provision encompasses Naomi; the reversal of her emptiness is intentional
3:18	Naomi’s closing word: “Wait, my daughter, until you learn how the matter turns out, for the man will not rest until he has settled it today”	Naomi’s final word in the chapter is a word of <i>confident rest</i> ; her transformation from bitterness (1:20) to active hope to trusting confidence is complete

Divisions Table

Division	Verses	Label
1	3:1–5	Naomi’s Initiative: Covenant Wisdom in Action

Division	Verses	Label
2	3:6–9	Ruth’s Courage: The Petition at the Threshing Floor
3	3:10–13	Boaz’s Response: Blessing, Pledge, and Honest Complication
4	3:14–15	Protected and Provided For: Dawn and the Gift
5	3:16–18	Naomi’s Confident Rest: Waiting on What God Has Begun

Subject Sentence & Primary Claim (*restated*)

Subject Sentence: Covenant loyalty — human and divine — presses actively toward redemption and calls the faithful to confident, expectant waiting.

Primary Claim: God is demonstrating through Ruth, Boaz, and Naomi that *hesed* — covenant loyalty — is never merely passive; it risks, initiates, and acts, because it mirrors the faithfulness of a God who will not leave His covenant commitments unfinished. The reader is called to inhabit this same active, trusting *hesed* and to wait — as Naomi waited — with confidence that God completes what He begins.

Applications (Five)

1. [Mind/Belief] — Recognize that God redeems through the willing agency of faithful people, not only through direct intervention.

The striking feature of Ruth 3 is that God’s name appears almost nowhere in the chapter’s action — and yet His purposes are being accomplished at every verse. Naomi devises, Ruth risks, Boaz pledges, and God governs it all without interrupting any of them. The reader who is waiting for God to act in their own life may be missing the fact that He is already acting — through the wisdom of a counselor, the courage of someone who loves them, the faithfulness of someone who has pledged their word. Reframe “waiting for God to act” to include discerning where God is already acting through the people and structures He has placed in your life.

2. [Will/Behavior] — Identify the specific form of *hesed* that is being asked of you right now — and act on it.

Ruth’s *hesed* was concrete: she dressed, walked to a threshing floor in the dark, lay down at a man’s feet, and made a direct petition. Boaz’s *hesed* was concrete: he blessed,

pledged an oath, gave six measures of barley, and promised to act by morning. Neither of them performed a vague, generalized “loyalty.” The question for the hearer is not “are you a loyal person?” but “what specific act of covenant faithfulness is in front of you this week that you are delaying, avoiding, or softening into something less costly than Ruth and Boaz modeled?” Name it. Do it.

3. [Affections/Worship] — Let Naomi’s transformation from bitterness to confident rest recalibrate your emotional posture toward God’s unfinished work in your life.

Naomi entered this book calling herself Mara — bitter — and insisting that the LORD had brought her back empty and testified against her (1:20–21). By the end of chapter 3 she is at rest, confident in the character of a man who reflects the character of God: “the man will not rest until the matter is settled today.” The same God who reversed Naomi’s emptiness — through real people, in real time, within real covenant structures — is the God who holds your own unfinished story. Where are you still living at chapter 1:20, when God has already moved you to chapter 3:18? Let Naomi’s rest be an invitation to worship a God who is already at work completing what He began.

4. [Mind/Belief] — Understand Ruth’s petition as the correct theological move: asking the human *go’el* to be the answer to the divine prayer Boaz himself had prayed.

In 2:12, Boaz prayed that Ruth would find refuge under the wings (*kanaf*) of the LORD God of Israel. In 3:9, Ruth asks Boaz to spread his *kanaf* over her — using the identical word. She is not merely making a marriage proposal; she is asking Boaz to be the human instrument of the divine blessing he himself had invoked. This is a theologically sophisticated act: Ruth understands that God typically works through appointed human means, and she is asking the right man to be that means. The application for the hearer is that prayer for God’s provision and action through His appointed human instruments are not competing postures — they are one posture. Praying for God’s covering and asking His appointed instruments to act are the same request made in two registers.

5. [Affections/Worship] — Allow Boaz’s free, generous, oath-sealed response to Ruth’s petition to deepen your understanding of and gratitude for what Christ has done as your ultimate Kinsman-Redeemer.

Boaz was not obligated to respond as he did. He was obligated by the *go’el* institution to act; he was not obligated to bless, to commend, to protect her reputation, to send her home with provision, and to pledge action before the day was out. He exceeded the legal minimum at every point. The ultimate Kinsman-Redeemer — near of kin because He took on flesh, acting at immeasurable cost to Himself — did not merely fulfill the minimum obligation of our redemption. He loved, covered, blessed, and gave Himself entirely. If Boaz’s response to Ruth moves you, it is pointing you toward a greater generosity from a greater Redeemer. Let the chapter warm your affections toward Christ, not merely inform your understanding of Him.

Theological Importance

Theological Importance: Ruth 3 establishes that *hesed* — covenant faithfulness — is inherently active, not passive. It presses toward the welfare of the other, takes initiative within covenant structures, and does not rest until the obligation of love is honored. The chapter also displays a crucial theological pattern: God accomplishes His redemptive purposes not by bypassing human agency but by working *through* the willing faithfulness of those who share His character. Naomi's wisdom, Ruth's courage, and Boaz's generosity are not merely admirable human traits — they are vehicles of divine faithfulness in a world where God typically works through appointed means. The *kanaf* wordplay in 2:12 and 3:9 makes this explicit: Boaz's covering of Ruth is the human execution of God's own covenantal covering. The text refuses to separate divine sovereignty and human agency; both are fully present, and the beauty of the chapter depends on holding them together.

Reformed Theological Significance

Reformed Theological Significance: Ruth 3 illustrates with narrative precision what the Reformed tradition confesses about the relationship between divine sovereignty and human agency: God's purposes are certain and His governance is complete, yet He accomplishes those purposes through the genuine, willing, morally serious acts of real people. The chapter is also a controlled typological preview of the gospel: the kinsman-redeemer who is near of kin, who acts freely and at cost, who covers the destitute foreigner and gives her standing she could never achieve by merit, and who does so within a covenant framework that he honors rather than circumvents — this is the shape of what Christ does. The Reformed tradition's commitment to Christological interpretation is not imported onto the text here; it is demanded by the text's own structure and its placement within the canon that climaxes in Christ. Naomi's confident rest in verse 18 also models the believer's eschatological posture: she has received the pledge, she knows the character of the one who made it, and she waits — not anxiously, but with the quiet confidence that what has been begun will be completed. This is precisely the posture Paul calls the believer to in Philippians 1:6: confident that “he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion.”

Main Takeaway

Hesed — covenant faithfulness — does not wait to be convenient. It plans, risks, asks, acts, and then rests in the character of the one who has given His word. God is not passively watching your life; He is governing it through the same mechanisms on display in this chapter: covenant structures, willing instruments, and His own unbreakable faithfulness. The question Ruth 3 puts to you is not “do you trust God?” in the abstract — it is “what specific act of covenant loyalty is in front of you right now, and are you willing to walk to the

threshing floor in the dark to do it?” And when you have done your part, Naomi’s word is your permission: wait. The matter will be settled.

Preaching/Teaching Pitfalls

- **Moralizing the characters rather than preaching the claim.** The most common homiletical failure with Ruth 3 is preaching “be like Ruth” or “look for a Boaz” — extracting character traits and holding them up as models without grounding them in the theological claim the narrative is making. Ruth’s courage and Boaz’s generosity are not the sermon’s destination; they are illustrations of *hesed*, which is itself a reflection of God’s own covenant faithfulness. The application must trace back through the character traits to the God whose character they reflect, or the sermon becomes a self-help lecture with a biblical backdrop.
- **Over-sexualizing or over-sanitizing the threshing floor scene.** Preachers who dwell on the scene’s ambiguity without resolving it the way the text does distort the passage’s intent. Preachers who pretend the scene has no tension at all forfeit the narrative’s dramatic power and the theological point that both Ruth and Boaz navigated a potentially compromising situation with complete integrity. Read the scene as the text reads it: tension introduced, tension resolved, characters vindicated. The ambiguity is a literary tool, not an invitation to speculation.
- **Treating the *go’el* typology as the whole sermon.** The kinsman-redeemer connection to Christ is genuine, important, and should be preached — but it should not consume the entire exposition. Ruth 3 has a complete claim of its own that does not require the typological move to be meaningful. Preachers who spend the majority of their time on the typological overlay can leave their congregation without the chapter’s immediate, present-tense application: *hesed* is the call now, not only a preview of Christ’s work then.
- **Leaving Naomi’s transformation unpreachy.** Naomi’s movement from bitterness to confident rest is one of the chapter’s most pastorally powerful features and is frequently overlooked because preachers focus on the Ruth-Boaz dynamic. Verse 18 — “the man will not rest until the matter is settled today” — is the emotional and pastoral climax of the chapter: a woman who once accused God of moving against her now rests in confident expectation. This transformation is a direct pastoral gift to anyone in the congregation who is living at 1:20 and needs permission to move toward 3:18.
- **Disconnecting Ruth’s petition from Boaz’s prior prayer.** The *kanaf* wordplay between 2:12 and 3:9 is one of the chapter’s most theologically precise moves, and it is easily missed in preaching. If the preacher does not surface this connection, the congregation will miss the insight that Ruth is not merely making a personal request — she is asking Boaz to be the human answer to the divine blessing he

invoked. This connection teaches something essential about how prayer and human agency relate, and it should not be left on the table.

- **Failing to preach the *hesed* of God through the *hesed* of the characters.** The word *hesed* appears three times in Ruth (1:8; 2:20; 3:10) and is the book's controlling theological concept. If the preacher does not explicitly name it and show how it connects the characters' actions to God's own covenant faithfulness, the congregation will understand Ruth 3 as a story about good people doing good things — morally inspiring but theologically thin. The *hesed* of Ruth, Naomi, and Boaz is load-bearing evidence of the *hesed* of God, who governs the story toward redemption through the faithfulness He has worked in His people.