

## SHADOWLANDS 3: A STUDY IN THE BOOK OF RUTH

### RUTH 3

APRIL 17, 2016

I want to start with a survey today, who here thinks one or all of their children are ugly? Hmm...no takers? Let me ask you a follow up question. Nod your head if you have ever seen an ugly child. Now we are getting a bit more honest, but something makes us feel uncomfortable talking about kids and ugliness. There are several things we can be objective about with kids, but for some reason, we steer well clear of personal aesthetics, maybe because beauty is subjective. Maybe because we don't want our kids to be shallow and only see people's beauty or lack thereof. Or maybe, we are worried about the brutal honesty of kids, and with no filter, they seem willing to call someone fat or ugly out loud and in public.

Robert Hoge recently wrote a memoir of his life titled *Ugly*. Mr. Hoge was born with several tumors that rendered his legs unusable and his face quite malformed. The tumors were removed and his legs were amputated but the surgeries left their mark. Mr. Hoge describes himself as the "ugliest person you have never met." His appearance was so rough that his parents left him at the hospital. He was despised and rejected. There was nothing beautiful to attract people to him. There was nothing in his appearance that people desired him.

That marked his whole life. His parents eventually agreed to bring him home after the pleadings of the other four Hoge children. His whole life was shaped by his appearance. People pointed and stared. People whispered and laughed. He was a boy well acquainted with suffering. In the midst of writing his memoirs, Mr. Hoge has taken special initiative to interact with kids, but he doesn't try to tell them that everyone is beautiful. He doesn't mislead them and tell them ugly ducklings become beautiful swans. He actually goes out of his way to be honest with them. He says that is the right message. He says it is misleading to tell them beauty or lack thereof doesn't matter because it does. He does make one point quite clear, it's okay to be honest and talk honestly about beauty as long as kids learn that is but one part of what makes a person who they are.

This is a lesson, I am guessing Boaz did not need to learn. All the clues of the story of Ruth make it clear that Boaz was not a looker. He was more Jack Black than Brad Pitt. We tend to sterilize and sensationalize the Bible, which includes renderings of most of them as fit and good-looking people. But there had to be a few ugly ones, and I am guessing Boaz was one of them, yet Ruth loves him anyway. Why?

If you are new here or haven't been here in awhile, we are in the third week of our series in Ruth. We are calling this series Shadowlands. Shadowlands is the term C.S. Lewis used to refer to this world we live in. Our culture and especially Christian culture tends to promote a false dichotomy when it comes to this world, all light or all darkness. But Shadowlands says sometimes there is dark in light places and vice versa. Sometimes the shadows creep in. Sometimes the light dims. Sometimes this world is a bit gray.

The purpose of this series is to help you see in the dark. I've told you that as Christians, one of the number one conundrums we will face is when the darkness of suffering comes into our lives. When everything is shining and bright, it is easy to feel God's presence and love, but when the darkness seeps in via disease or debt or death, it makes us wonder where God could be. Then we read Bible verses that say God is light, in him there are no shifting shadows. His word is a lamp unto our feet. Jesus says, "I am the light of the world." The problem of course is that all of this creates a problem when we find ourselves in a dark place. If God is light and we are surrounded by darkness, then where is God? Has he left? Is he punishing us? Was he ever there?

My ongoing secret for you throughout this series is that God does some of his best work in the dark. Some of the bleakest moments and darkest moments in the Bible were when God was most active. God moves even in the darkness. God is there even in the darkness. You just have to have eyes to see.

I have told you each week about dark adaptation. That is the process of seeing in the dark. But it's really not. Dark adaptation is just your eyes learning to be more sensitive to light even in the darkness. I want to help you see light in dark places because many people lose

their faith or steer clear of faith because of dark times in their lives. If there is a day on the horizon when your world goes dark, I don't want you to flip out or run away. I want you to be able to see that God has not left you nor forsaken you. He is still right there, loving you and caring for you.

Which brings us to today. Ruth has been gleaning in the fields of Boaz. As a reminder, this was a biblical concept from Deuteronomy 24. It was God's social safety net to care for the poor and powerless. Ruth began to glean in Boaz's field and a relationship began to bloom. The only problem? Boaz was not the most eligible bachelor. As you read between the lines in the book, it becomes clear that Boaz has a lot going for him just not in the looks department. Ruth sees something in him anyway.

### *Ruth 3:1-5*

Verse 1 - Naomi is seeking rest for Ruth. This is the same word used in Ruth 1:9 when Naomi encourages her daughters-in-law to find new husbands. Naomi knows that Boaz, the man they have just happened to stumble upon, was a kinsman who could potentially redeem them. A kinsman redeemer is a term used in association with the idea of levirate marriage in the Bible. If a husband died, ideally a brother was supposed to marry the widow so his brother's wife was protected and his name would carry on. This is a common theme in the Bible. If a brother was not available, you could potentially explore other people in the extended family moving out in concentric circles of proximity who might be able to marry the widow.

Here's what you need to remember today, men held all the power and influence in this culture. All of it. You will also find as a theme in the Bible that many men opt out of levirate marriage because it is costly. They didn't want another mouth to feed. They often had children of their own or a wife of their own, so they dodged this responsibility. That means what Naomi was proposing for Ruth to do could have been quite risky.

Up until now, they had a pretty good thing going on. Ruth was gleaning more than her fair share of grain. They had a home. Life was good, far better than a foreign widow probably thought she deserved. This forward request could make it all awkward. Naomi tells Ruth to go and get prettied up and wait until Boaz is full and a little drunk then sneak into where he is sleeping and uncover his feet.

Now, some people think uncovering feet could be a euphemism. From what I read, that is not the case. Some people think uncovering his feet means uncovering his entire lower half. Maybe, this is a euphemism, however it doesn't need to be. Naomi has just told her young and beautiful daughter-in-law to go to a man while he is lying down in a private place after a few glasses of wine, uncover his feet which will wake him up and wait because he will tell you what to do.

I think most men in this room have some inkling of what Boaz might potentially say. A single woman approaching a single man, she looks beautiful and smells great and she approaches, seemingly ready and willing for whatever is next. Or at least that is what Naomi is expecting. She had a plan to get a husband for Ruth one way or another. Go wake this man up, make yourself vulnerable to him and he will tell you what to do. Naomi might not have had the best of intentions or the best of plans. Don't miss that, but don't miss how much Ruth is putting herself out there. Boaz could take what he wants and not marry her. Boaz could tell her to scram and to stop coming back to his fields.

Seemingly Ruth was in the low power position here. She was the one forcing the question and putting herself on the line. Seemingly Boaz had all of the options and she had none. Which is what makes what happens next so bizarre.

### *Ruth 3:6-10*

Ruth goes and surprises Boaz in the dark. He is startled awake by a person at his feet, and he finds out it is the young woman who has been working in his fields. We then come to verse 10; Boaz says that Ruth is showing him kindness or "hesed," loving-kindness. Hesed

is the nearest analogue in the Old Testament to the New Testament's word "grace." It is not just a kind favor. It is an unmerited and unexpected act of extravagant love.

The question comes, why would Boaz say such a thing? Remember the state of affairs. Ruth is a foreigner. She is a widow. She has no money. No power. To many, she was a liability, another mouth to feed, someone who would want children. Boaz, on the other hand, was a landowner, a respected man and a man of means. All the cost was seemingly on her side. Boaz seemingly holds all of the chips and all of the power, yet Boaz says, "Why are you showing me this kindness?" Shouldn't it be the other way around? Ruth, after he accepts her, shows great gratitude for taking in a poor, powerless outsider. Instead, he is thanking her for the hesed of coming to him. Why?

This is inference, but it is strong inference. Boaz was ugly. In a culture where men wielded the power and sometimes had multiple wives, why has this man never married? As we will see, it's not for lack of interest. In this culture, being single was not something people pursued. The social and religious structure led you to get married and a man with money and means would have a wife, unless something was really off. It's not just because he is old because at some point he wasn't old and he still didn't get married. Boaz just might not be that much to look at, and that is saying a lot because people didn't marry for love in this culture. Love might come later, but it was mainly for making families, so the aesthetics of the man had to be pretty low.

Something made Boaz un-marriable. Something. So much so that when an eligible woman presents herself to him, he says why are you showing me this kindness. Boaz has lived in the dark for a long time. Relationships did not turn out the way he had hoped, and he had probably resigned himself to the fact that they never would. In the midst of that darkness, he continued to be faithful then someone found him in the dark.

Some of you today are in a dark situation, an ugly situation. I want you to know that there is hope for you. I want you to see yourself and God through the lens of Ruth and Boaz. Ruth goes stumbling into the darkness and she looks past the ugliness. Many times in the book of

Ruth we see a glimmer of the gospel in the idea of Boaz as the redeemer, which is true. It is a two way street in this passage. In Ruth, we also see a glimmer of the gospel in which she offers unmerited hesed, loving-kindness. She offers hesed to a man who the world has called ugly and unworthy.

Sin is the ugliest thing in this world. It's easy to talk about problems and suffering, and it's just as easy to never talk about sin. Sin seems antiquated and anachronistic, but it is real and it is ugly. We all wear it on our faces. It can make us feel unloved, unworthy and weathered, but God finds us there. Some of you today have been hiding in the dark and assuming that is your lot in life. Something in your life is ugly or unbearable, but God still wants to show you hesed.

Not only can we see the way God sees us from Ruth to Boaz, but also Boaz to Ruth. Ruth was a poor, powerless, foreign pagan and this redeemer showed her hesed. He found beauty in her. What are we then to make of the seemingly unappealing nature of this redeemer? Boaz's condition was Jesus' condition. Isaiah 53 is the prophecy for the messiah often called the "suffering servant." In it, we read there is no beauty in him, nothing that should attract us to him. We often think of Jesus and we immediately picture him looking like this:

<https://ignite4christ.files.wordpress.com/2013/01/the-beautiful-jesus.jpg>  
<https://s-media-cache-ak0.pinimg.com/236x/bb/c5/52/bbc55222f99fdf67f83bbaa26a87e8cf.jpg>

Those are some good-looking pictures of Jesus. Of course, there are several problems; one is especially how white he is but also how good looking he is. When in all reality, he was probably smallish and non-descript. Since he lived most of his life outside and not under the roof of a palace, he was probably weathered. His hands were rough. Recently a study was commenced and people said what would a first century Jew in Palestine have looked like? Probably something like this:

<http://pop.h-cdn.co/assets/15/51/1450102826-jesus.png>

I think that's not far off. He's not grotesque, but he also isn't a hunk. He's just a guy. The Romans and Greeks presented their pantheon of gods and goddesses as beautiful. That's why today in the movies those pagan gods are played by the likes of Brad Pitt and Angelina Jolie, the most gorgeous among us, and that is what the Greeks and Romans wanted. It makes sense; we want our gods to be beautiful, powerful and impressive. We want our saviors and kings to be tall and good-looking. The first king the Israelites ever sought out was who? Saul. He was good looking, athletic and a head taller than everyone else. He was someone who was beautiful and whose appearance would commend him to us.

So why send an average looking guy as god among us? God was incarnate among us as an average looking guy for the same reason he came as a carpenter. For the same reason he hung out with tax collectors and prostitutes. God's glory is magnified through weakness. If Jesus came as a conquering general with the looks of Brad Pitt, you would have missed the work, but when you see the work, you see God in the details.

When you see a new movie star who shoots to success in Hollywood, a movie star with huge muscles or a perfect body with a perfect face and an amazing set of talents including the ability to sing and dance, you say, "Of course they made it." However, when you see Paul Giamatti getting nominated for Oscars, you pay attention to the work.

God chose to reveal himself through a non-descript, average looking, average talented carpenter. He was unexpected. God chose to show himself in this way so you would know it was God. If he was a beautiful, talented, powerful and muscled man, the glory might have gone to him. God often reveals himself through dark and ugly places so that more glory goes to him.

Paul was described by early church writers as smallish and stooped over with a large nose and an unattractive face. Paul even comments on this in his letter to the Corinthians saying his bodily presence was weak and his speaking skills contemptible and yet for some reason,

God used him to write half the New Testament and start dozens of churches. He chose someone ugly to magnify his own beauty. He chose something weak to show that he was strong.

If you want to see in the dark, you need to be reminded of the people God uses. We tend to think he only uses talented or successful people, people who don't struggle, people who rarely sin, people who are bright and full of light. But more often than not, God uses humble broken vessels. He uses people that are frail and vulnerable, so people will be able to see God.

Robert Hoge underwent numerous surgeries to repair the damage the tumor had done to his face. By the time he was 14, the doctors were ready to try more surgeries that would move around his facial features including his eyes. At this age, his parents gave him the right to decide if he wanted more surgery. The surgeries could make him more aesthetically pleasing but they could also cause damage and even blind him. He aptly noted, "What good is it to be pretty if you can't even see it?" He chose to embrace who he was. He wanted to see the world, and he wanted the world to see him. He has since worked as a journalist, political speechwriter and now noted author. Robert is married with a beautiful daughter. God brings beauty from ashes. God redeems broken things. God's glory shines in dark places.