

Title: **When Righteousness is Risky Business (Part 2)**

Passage: **Ruth 3:10**

Theme: **Practicing righteousness while navigating the uncertainties of life**

Number: **0213Ru3.10(11)**

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{Read Passage}

There is a story I heard years ago that came to mind this past wk.

Relates to t/BR in China. If a history buff u r lik. fam. w/TBR.

If ur not, it has nothing to do with any uprising related to a certain breed of dog.

TBR was a Chinese pro-nationalist movement, from 1898-1901, that opposed foreign influences & Xnty (violence).

The rebels were dubbed Boxers. Their full name was "The Society of Righteous and Harmonious Fists" (no joke).

They were a secret society founded in the northern coastal province of Shandong. Most of them were angry/bitter y.m., who had lost their livelihoods due to imperialism & natural disasters.

They were into spirit possession, martial arts, extreme physical discipline. They thought themselves supernatural; impervious to bullets and some believed they could even fly like birds.

One pop. claim among them was that millions of spirit soldiers would come down from t/heavens to help them purge China of all foreign influences.

Was a time of trem. suffering in China - they had endured sev. natural disasters; t/economy was poor; & drug abuse rampant.

Sounds a little fam.

Something else that is likely to become increasingly fam. in our culture - they laid much of t/blame upon Xns.

The Boxers went on a rampage & 1000s of Xns were massacred t/o northern China

By t/end of t/summer of 1900, as many as 2k Chinese Christians had been put to death in the province of Shanxi alone.

Author Nat Brandt called the massacre of Christians in Shanxi "the greatest single tragedy in the history of Christian evangelicalism."

Eventually, an international force of 2,100 troops were sent to subdue the rebellion.

That leads me to my story. . . .

At t/height of t/rebellion t/rebels captured one particular missionary training compound. They sealed off every gate that lead out of the compound except for one which they left open. They then took a cross and set it down in the dirt at the center of the gate and said to all of the missionaries and students who were there that if they were to walk out that gate and trample the cross under their feet, they could then go free. The first 7 students did just that. The 8th student, however, was a young girl who came to the cross, knelt down, prayed for strength, stood up and walked around the cross--right into the firing squad.

92 of the remaining student--all that were left--did the same thing and walked to their deaths rather than to trample the cross of Christ beneath their feet.

There is a cost involved in following JC.

Righteousness can be risky. In t/most extreme examples (such as the one I just gave) it might cost you your life.

It is doubtful that we will ever have to practice that kind of risky righteousness.

For us - doing t/right thing, following JC, can cost us friendships, a job, a promotion, our so-called 'reputation'.

Doing right may result in suffering (ours or someone else).

I want to come back to that in just a moment

As it relates to t/BOR - we're looking at it from 2 diff. persps. (evident in how I've outlined t/book & each passage).

On 1 hand - BOR is an unfolding drama.

I. Act One: The Royal Line with Hope in Ruin (1:1-22)

II. Act Two: The Royal Line with Hope Renewed (2:1-23)

III. Act Three: The Royal Line with Hope at Risk (3:1-18)

IV. Act Four: The Royal Line with Hope Restored (4:1-17)

Back to our 3rd scene (3rd chapt)

III. Act Three: The Royal Line with Hope at Risk (3:1-18)

A. Scene One: Remedy Proposed (vv. 1-5)

{explain}

Looking deeper ==>

1. The Beauty of God's Invisible Hand (1-5)

a. Beauty in the selfless actions of others (1)

Am I selfless or selfish?

b. Beauty in Orchestrated circumstances (2)

Do I see God at work?

c. Beauty in Providence greater than our plans (3-4)

Do I trust God to work?

d. Beauty in simple decisions (5)

Do I trust God with the future?

B. Scene Two: Reception or Rejection (vv. 6-15)

{explain}

B. Scene Two: Reception or Rejection (vv. 6-15) or Righteousness on a Threshing Floor

t/TF is where Scene 2 takes place. Righteousness on a threshing floor begs t/? -- what's going to happen here? Doesn't seem to be a recipe for right.; a W., a M., together in a scene that takes place at night. Yet t/young woman, Ruth, is moving in t/right direction under t/providential hand of God.

Might wonder how that can be true . . . but ==>

Righteousness can be risky business.

1. When Righteousness is Risky Business . . .

What does that mean? How can righteousness (we as believers doing t/right thing) ever be risky?

a. I don't mean risky from God's point of view, but ours

About 15 years ago a theologian by the name of John Sanders wrote a book entitled, "*The God Who Risks: A Theology of Divine Providence.*" In that book, he proposes what has become an increasingly common view in American Evangelicalism: That God does not know all future events. IOW - God's omniscience isn't "omni" it's partly. He writes in his Intro:

. . . God took the risk in creating such beings [mankind] that we might choose to use our freedom to love or we might use it to sin. Those who utilize the freewill defense to handle the problem of evil affirm that God has taken some risks. [The God Who Risks: A Theology of Divine Providence, 13]

Of course, that serves as another example of the old maxim:

God created man in his own image and ever since man has been returning the favor.

And, of course, that's not what I mean at all when I say ==>
Righteousness can be risky business.

God doesn't risk. Ever. He can't. That would be contrary to His nature and would rob Him of His glory.

The risk is from our limited, fallen, human perspective.

From that perspective what it means to "do the right thing" can be a ? that flies into the storm of uncertainty.

There are times when we're not exactly sure what doing the right thing even looks like at it relates to a specific situation.

Do we act? Do we wait? Do we talk? Do we remain silent? What do we do? How much do we do? When do we do?

Afterward ==> Did I do the right thing? Did I do too much? Did I not do enough? How will all this turn out?"

I think this an accurate sub-theme in t/book of Ruth. It relates to God's providence // Our character as those who trust Him // how we make decisions that are difficult.

1. When Righteousness is Risky Business . . .

Through this passage we find some guidelines that will help us navigate our lives with confidence that ultimately nothing is at risk because God is in control. For us, risk becomes trust.

7 principles . . . We only got through the first 2 of 7 last week.

a. Prayerfully Listen to Godly Counsel (v. 6-7a)

Evident in Ruth's Heeding Naomi's Advice

She said to her, "All that you say I will do."

So she went down to the threshing floor and did according to all that her mother-in-law had commanded (instructed) her.

There are times we find ourselves in difficult circumstance & we don't know what we ought to do. It's during those times that God uses t/wise, godly advice of others to steer us through those blinds spots.

Proverbs 1:5 . . . **a man of understanding will acquire wise counsel,**

When righteous living seems risky, seek out those you trust, those who know God's Word, & prayerfully consider what they have to say.

As a prequel to our prayer time on Wed. nights we've been reading through "The Life and Diary of David Brainerd" - classic work by t/great Amer. Colonial theologian, Jonathan Edwards.

The edition I'm reading has a biographical sketch of Edwards. There we read an account of how E., toward t/end of his life, was elected president of Princeton. At this point he had been 6 years pastor of a church at Stockbridge, MA where he also was in charge of a mission to t/American Indians there.

He'd gone through several battles at Northhampton where he was unfairly dismissed. His work in Stockbridge was also quite difficult. His health wasn't good. Now Princeton wanted him to be their president. What was he to do? He couldn't do both

He wrote a long letter to t/church trustees in which he told of his own shortcomings and anxiety over his pending decision.

He asked their advice.

He got counsel from close friends, those whom he trusted.

The biographer writes that ==>

On the fourth of January, 1758, a small council met in Stockbridge and heard Mr. Edwards' objections and the earnest pleas of the Rev. Caleb Smith and the Rev. John Brainerd made on behalf of the college. The group of friends finally decided that it was Mr. Edwards duty to go [to Princeton].

When they told him of their decision, a witness recorded that "he burst into tears, a thing very unusual with him in the presence of others; and soon afterwards remarked to the members of the council, that it was a matter of wonder to him, that they could so easily, as they appeared to have done, obviate the objections which he had urged against his removal. But, as he thought it his duty to be governed by their advice, he determined cheerfully to acquiesce in their decision, and repair to the scene of his future labor." [Life and Diary, 34]

I. When Righteousness is Risky Business . . .

a. Prayerfully Listen to Godly Counsel (v. 6-7a)

Secondly (also from last wk) ==>

b. Patiently Trust God and His Timing (7b-9)

Evident in Ruth's Patience in Waiting for Boaz to Act

She was to go down to the TF and wait

In this case, timing was very important. (v. 3b).

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.

I'm sure that some time passed. Ruth waited until he was asleep and the fire grew cold turning into dim embers.

She sneaks up to him, uncovers his lower legs, and she lies down. and again she waits (probably praying // thinking // wondering).

And it happened in the middle of the night that the man was startled and bent forward . . .

(1) Boaz is fast asleep and suddenly he awakes with a start

Some believe that Boaz trembled/awoke because his feet were uncovered and he felt the chill. No indication of that.

. . . and behold, a woman was lying at his feet.

וַיִּבֶן = introduces 'a surprise clause.' From shock to surprise. From fear to astonishment.

And he said, “Who are you?” And she answered, “I am Ruth your maid.

Word Ruth chose to use for "maid" would have indicated to Boaz that she was available for marriage. ==>

So spread your covering [or wing] over your maid, for you are a close relative.”

Ruth is following Naomi's instructions. Naomi wanted t/best for her daughter-in-law. She didn't want her to become an old maid, an unmarried widow. She wanted security for her, she wanted Ruth to have a husband & a home

Parallel in Ezek. 16:8 (God speaking of Israel). Note marriage analogy ==>

“Then I passed by you and saw you, and behold, you were at the time for love; so I spread My skirt over you and covered your nakedness. I also swore to you and entered into a covenant with you so that you became Mine,” declares the Lord GOD.

So spread your covering [or wing] over your maid . . .

Ruth proposes marriage.

Risky business for a single woman to go alone to a threshing floor at night among a group of men. Her reputation was at risk.

Risky business for a woman in that culture to act and speak as she does: uncovering his lower legs while he slept; waiting at his feet in t/night; when he wakes up she proposes marriage to him!

I. When Righteousness is Risky Business . . .

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Evident in Ruth's Heeding Naomi's Advice

b. Patiently Trust God and His Timing (7b-9)

Evident in Ruth's Patience in Waiting for Boaz to Act

c. Practice Loyalty to Others and Not Self (10)

Evident in Ruth's Hesed Toward Others

(1) Notice how Boaz commends her

Then he said, “May you be blessed of the LORD, my daughter.

(a) No indication that there's anything fishy going on here

No sin; no sexual overtures. Here a man of God recognizes a woman of God -- Integrity.

(b) Why?

You have shown your last kindness to be better than the first by not going after young men, whether poor or rich.

i. "Kindness" -- some translations render it "loyalty"

It's t/Hebrew word אֱמֶנֶת that we have seen 2x already (both used by N)

1:8 And Naomi said to her two daughters-in-law, "Go, return each of you to her mother's house. May the LORD deal kindly with you as you have dealt with the dead and with me.

2:20 Naomi said to her daughter-in-law, "May he be blessed of the LORD who has not withdrawn his kindness to the living and to the dead."

ii. Used in over 125 vv. in the Psalms (exclusively of God)

אֱמֶנֶת is related to G's ==>

1. Promise (77:8)
2. Salvation (85:7)
3. Truth (85:10)
4. Forgiveness (86:5)
5. Slowness to anger (103:8)
6. Comfort (119:64)

Entire Psalm (136) is devoted to t/theme of God's אֱמֶנֶת

Speaks of: trustworthiness; loyalty; covt. faithfulness; compassion; mercy; forgiveness.

1. When Righteousness is Risky Business . . .

c. Practice Loyalty to Others and Not Self (10)

(Think you'll find it's hard to be loyal to God and others while at t/same time being loyal to self.)

(c) This isn't true only when RIRB -- True always

Listen: These are the kinds of things we MUST demonstrate in our own lives! Fruit of a redeemed heart.

Years ago I heard John MacArthur say that he was a fanatic when it came to loyalty. Resonated within me. One of those times when you hear something & realize that you have felt t/same way w/o ever saying so.

i. We are so quick to run out on one another.

There are lots of "one another" vv. in t/NT. "forsake one another" isn't one of them.

I fear that over the past few years we have become increasingly snooty & rude.

Quick to take offense; slow to forgive;

Quick to think t/worst of others.

Grumbling, complaining, discontented sour-puss Xns.

The first 2 points of my last sermon before t/change of t/new year =>

* *Resolved to genuinely love my brothers and sisters in Christ*

* *Resolved to continually humble myself before God and others*

ii. I'm not sure we get it

Like there's a big magnet over t/doors erasing what you hear on Sunday mornings.

* How about thinking t/best of others, rather than t/worst?

* How about putting off complaining; anger; bitterness; self-righteousness?

* Judging each other on how well they perform according to your expectations?

Listen, if you know someone, a brother or sister in X. And you know their character. They've demonstrated that they want to do right and that they do care about more than themselves, then give them t/benefit of t/doubt when they do or say something that can be interpreted in different ways.

We've all been subject to criticism when someone takes something we've said and interprets it in the worst possible way. You wonder, *"Gee is that what you really think about me? That you wouldn't think better of me than that?"*

We need a good dose of old English courtesy. (hard for as a bristly Italian). We all need it!

We can't function as a body if our acceptance of each other is performance based. Friendships don't function under those kinds of conditions.

Please, let these familiar words sink deep into your soul . . .

1 Corinthians 13:1–8 1 If I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, but do not have love, I have become a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal. 2 If I have the gift of prophecy, and know all mysteries and all knowledge; and if I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but do not have love, I am nothing. 3 And if I give all my possessions to feed the poor, and if I surrender my body to be burned, but do not have love, it profits me nothing.

4 Love is patient, love is kind and is not jealous; love does not brag and is not arrogant, 5 does not act unbecomingly; it does not seek its own, is not provoked, does not take into account a wrong suffered,

6 does not rejoice in unrighteousness, but rejoices with the truth;

7 bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.

8 Love never fails . . .

Life is too short to be petty.

(d) I know I run t/risk (risky righteousness) that I will be misinterpreted

That some of you will say, "Oh, he's talking about me. He's using t/sermon to preach against me."

Please, give me t/benefit of t/doubt. I try not to single out people when I preach. I try to be faithful to t/text & draw application to us all. But when I see attitudes in t/CH that need correcting (including my own) I hope that YOU DO ask yourself, "Gee is he talking about me?" And if you conclude that you are guilty of these things, don't blame me, thank God for it and repent so that you can enjoy His HeseD even while you renew your commitment to practice it toward others.

I'm running t/risk here that I'll make some of you angry at me. Please know that it's because I love you, all of you, and I will, by God's grace, be loyal to you. I can't be everything & everywhere. But I want to do my best.

1. When Righteousness is Risky Business . . .

c. Practice Loyalty to Others and Not Self (10)

Evident in Ruth's HeseD Toward Others

Mentioned Jonathan Edwards earlier . . .

Resolved, To act, in all respects, both speaking and doing, as if nobody had been so vile as I, and as if I had committed the same sins, or had the same infirmities or failings as others; and that I will let the knowledge of their failings promote nothing but shame in myself, and prove only an occasion of my confessing my own sins and misery to God. [Resolution 8]

Specifically for Ruth ==>

You have shown your last kindness to be better than the first by not going after young men, whether poor or rich.

(2) Boaz is thinking about 2 specific instances (out of many) where Ruth has demonstrated loyalty

(a) This can be kind of confusing

. . . your last kindness to be better than the first . . .

One of those "the last is really first and the first is really last" sort of things.

Her LK is what she did last, her most recent act of faithfulness ==>

. . . by not going after young men, whether poor or rich.

Most available gals would prefer a young man who is rich & handsome. But I'm told t/way it works is that if he's wealthy he's going to be homely; if he's handsome he's probably going to be poor). BTW - When Lois met me, I wasn't rich

(b) Ruth has not pursued a younger man, either poor or rich (emphasis is on age)

Boaz was likely 15-20 years older than Ruth. Emphasis is on Ruth's character, not so much t/object of her 'pursuit'.

As one commentator notes ==>

Viewed as a whole, this sentence is remarkably deferential. Boaz is obviously not a withered old man (he is still able to put in a full day's work in the fields with his young workers and then stay at the threshing floor all night), and he is obviously not a poor man (he is characterized as a "man of standing" in 2:1, and he owns land and servants). He recognizes, however, that if Ruth would have married for status ("young man") or love ("poor") or money ("rich"), she could have gone elsewhere. Boaz himself may qualify on these counts, but he intentionally deflects the attention from the object of this "search" to the seeker [that is, Ruth]. [Block, 693]

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Psalm 86:5 For You, Lord, are good, and ready to forgive, And abundant in lovingkindness to all who call upon You.

The ability to forgive is one of the surest signs of having been forgiven. It is part of the proof that we have received God's grace... Those who are truly forgiven, truly forgive. The sins they commit are of greater importance to them than the sins they suffer. [Philip Graham Ryken, *As We Forgive Our Debtors from When You Pray*, 138]

See how red your guilt is. Mark the scarlet stain. If you were to wash your soul in the Atlantic Ocean, you might incarnadine every wave that washes all its shores, and yet the crimson spots of your transgression would still remain. But plunge into the “fountain filled with blood, drawn from Immanuel’s veins,” and in an instant you are whiter than snow. Every speck, spot, and stain of sin is gone, and gone forever. -- C.H. Spurgeon