

# Study in Ruth 4

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[ 0 : 00 ] Let us now turn back to the book of Ruth. I want us to try and learn some lessons this morning that are really scattered about through these two chapters of Ruth that we have already read together, chapters 2 and 3.

But perhaps it would be good for us to begin by just reminding ourselves why we have turned to study this book and what sort of things we have learnt so far and that should help us I think with today's study.

We have really turned to this little book in the Old Testament because it's a book that shows us very clearly that God is at work in this world even when everything seems wrong in the church and in the world at large.

Even in dark and confusing days and that's really what links our own day with the day of Ruth.

There were very confusing days, days when the church was at a low ebb and when things in the world as a whole were confusing.

And yet we have learnt that in these days also God in heaven is in control and is at work. And so I think the main lesson that we have been learning through that truth is that a day of difficulty, a day of confusion in the world and maybe in the church as well, is not a day for our burying our heads in the sand and just saying there's not much that we can do and we will just let it all sweep over us.

[ 1 : 49 ] Because that sort of day also is a day in which our God can reveal himself. And it's a day in which our God can be found.

And that of course is what happened to Ruth. And that's what we need to see is happening to all of us.

That this day for us, no matter the difficulties, is a day when we are remembering the God who is revealing himself.

And it is a day when we are finding him and being found of him. That's what happened to Ruth, we say.

And last Sunday we really saw what were the beginnings of this relationship between Ruth and her God. And what we saw was that a right relationship with God always starts with conversion.

[ 2 : 56 ] With a turning for the individual whom God finds. With a transformation. I want to emphasize once again, because I think it's often a difficulty in our tradition, that the work of conversion can be a very quick and dramatic thing in the beginnings.

It may be quite a slow process in the beginning. But conversion, turning, transformation, there must be.

And the wonderful thing is from the book of Ruth that should encourage us all that even in difficult days for the church, conversions can happen.

Because our God is able. Now I think probably I did hint last Sunday, and this is what I want us to dwell on today.

And it's the further truth that's here for us in the book of Ruth, and it's this. That the one proof of conversion. The one proof of conversion.

[ 4 : 14 ] Is a converted life. That is an ongoing converted life.

And what I want you to notice as I say that right from the beginning is this. That no isolated experience in the past.

No matter how dramatic. No matter how real at the time. No one isolated experience in the past. Is sufficient.

As a proof of true conversion. If it doesn't lead constantly to a converted life.

You see, what we found out with Ruth last week, and what we find out with all people in the Bible who are converted.

[ 5 : 14 ] What we find is this. That they come into a living and a real relationship with the living God. Their turning is to do with becoming committed to God as their God.

And that commitment, you see, involves a walking on in life with God. And that new relationship with all other human relationships is a relationship that develops and grows and the life is affected. It's very like a marriage relationship. And of course the Bible often talks of the Christian relationship between the converted man and woman and God as a relationship of marriage.

And we will all have noticed that when people get married, they change. And they keep on changing. Sometimes I think it's true that the one changes more than the other.

One of the partners may have more influence than the other. But that perhaps helps to make the point as well. Because of course in our marriage relationship with God, once we have come to know him by faith and are committed to him, he is the dominant partner in the relationship.

[ 6 : 43 ] And we go on being changed. If you like, it's quite biblical to say we go on being converted. Once we have come to know God and Christ as our God and Saviour.

And I think that's the main lesson that is to be learned from Ruth chapters 2 and 3. We see one who has been converted being converted.

We see the conversion life growing and developing and taking shape as Ruth comes to know her God more and more.

And that's what we have to learn. What does Ruth learn about her God and her Saviour? That enables her to grow and to develop as a converted Christian.

Well, the first thing that we learn about Ruth's God, who is our God, the first thing that we learn of the God of the Bible is that he is the God of Providence.

[ 7 : 59 ] The God of Providence. Notice first of all, chapter 2 and verse 3. And I would like you to have your Bibles open in front of you if you can.

Ruth chapter 2 and at verse 3, we read this. The Bible very clearly says, That Ruth just happened to start gleaning in Boaz's field.

That is, that's seeing it from Ruth's angle. There was no conscious intention as far as Ruth was concerned.

She didn't know whose field it was. It just happened that that's where she started gleaning. But then we go down in chapter 2 to verse 20.

And Ruth has now returned home from this first day of gleaning, which was, of course, a very successful day. Ruth puts her interpretation on it.

[ 9 : 46 ] Naomi rather. And Naomi sees that the Lord has to be blessed for what happened. The Lord, whom Naomi knows, of course, at this stage, much more than Ruth does.

She's still a young Christian. But Naomi sees that this is the Lord's doing. It hasn't just been by chance. Because our God is the God of providence.

All things are finally under his control. And, of course, the later history of the book of Ruth makes perfectly clear to us that God was in it from the beginning.

God had intentions for Boaz and for Ruth to be part of the ancestry of Jesus. And, of course, God wanted Ruth and Naomi to learn that there was indeed a kindness in Boaz towards Ruth.

And what we have to learn is that this is a recurring theme in the Bible. The God of providence is always at work.

[ 10 : 55 ] Sometimes when we would least realize it and would say to ourselves, What is God doing in the midst of this? Surely God has abandoned us.

That may be the very time when our God is doing one of the most important items of his plan.

Remember the way it was with Joseph some generations before Ruth. And how he got into such trouble and was eventually sold down into Egypt.

But, of course, we all know now how the thing worked out. How eventually the brothers came down to Egypt in a time of famine. And by this time, Joseph was the governor.

And Joseph says to the brothers, when they become terrified, what Joseph will do with them.

Joseph says to them in Genesis 45 and at verse 5, Be not grieved that you sold me.

[ 12 : 00 ] For God did send me before you to preserve life. And then towards the end of his life, when the whole family is now living in Goshen in that part of Egypt, Joseph says to them all, You thought evil against me, but God meant it unto good.

The Christian believer has to learn for the good of going on in the Christian life, That his God is the God of providence.

The God who is in control of everything that's happening. Now, of course, the New Testament tells us That this God of providence is none other than our Lord Jesus Christ.

He is the living God, God the Son, and he has all control over all that is. Ephesians chapter 1 and verse 22 says this, He, that's the Father, God the Father, Hath put all things under his feet and gave him, that's Jesus, To be head over all things for the church.

Or it could be paraphrased, For the good of the church. You see, that's adding an extra dimension For all who are God's people.

[13:32] For all who are converted people, Enabling them to move forward, Even in difficult days. It's to know that this God of providence Has put all things under the control Of the second person of the Trinity, God the Son.

Jesus himself said it to the disciples Before he ascended, He said, All authority has been given to me In heaven and in earth. It was like a reward For Jesus fulfilling the work of salvation on the cross.

This is at the heart, you see, Of God's providence. Completing the work of salvation. So everything that happens in this world Is under the control of Jesus For the final good of the church.

And that's why all believers Are encouraged to say with Paul in Romans chapter 8, We know that all things work together for good.

To them that love God, To them who are the called, According to his purpose. And this is exactly what Ruth's life story speaks of.

[14:57] It's an example of what happens to a converted life. It's an example of the sureness, Of the assurance, That every Christian believer can have, No matter the difficulties and the trials, No matter though they live in the darkest day of world history.

There is a sureness and a certainty To the path that every Christian believer trades. And they can know and experience that assurance in their lives, Because they know that the God of providence Is their saviour, The Lord Jesus Christ.

And what the converted believer has to do, And what is the mark of a converted life is this, That when all the tests and the trials of life come, As they inevitably do, The converted person, Goes on in its relationship with God, By bringing all these circumstances, All these happenings of this life, Into this context, Of remembering, That it's all under the control, Of my saviour Jesus, And ultimately, It can work out, Indeed it will work out, For the good, Of all his people.

That's one of the things that, Paul is encouraging in all Christians, In Philippians chapter 4, When he says, Rejoice in the Lord, And then he goes on a little later, And he says, Think on those things that are lovely, Those things that are of good report, And so on.

And then he says, What will be the effect of that? What will be the effect of rejoicing in the Lord? What will be the effect of thinking on the things that are lovely, That are of good report, That are strengthening?

[17:15] The peace of God, And the God of peace, Will be with you. I think that was the way, Especially with Naomi, And it came to be the way with Ruth, Once they returned to Bethlehem.

The concern, And the not knowing the best thing to do, When they were in Moab, Changed into a peace, And a slow learning, From God.

That's the way with converted believers, That's the way we must seek, If we are the Lord's, And it's one of the great witnesses, That we can give to the world, That is so confused, That is often so frightened.

That is often so unwilling, To face up to what's happening in our world, And so they try all sorts of ways, Just to bury their heads in the sand.

But the Christian doesn't do that. The Christian looks fair and square, At the awful happenings of this world, And yes, Finds these happenings, Very disconcerting at times, But then, The Christian believer, Follows the instructions of the Bible, And rejoices in the Lord, And says, But my God and my Saviour, Does not change, All these things are under his control, Oh, How I can rejoice in my heart, That I can cling to him, Through thick and thin, And learn from him, And then there are other things, That I have to think about, As well as thinking about, The difficulties, And the trials, And the problems, Of this world, Oh, I can't shut my mind, To these things, But there are other things, I have to think about, Things that are lovely, Things that are of good report,

[19:15] Things that are strengthening, To my faith, And to my heart, The truths concerning Jesus, What he has done, What he has promised, And when I think about these things, My heart is strengthened, With the peace of God, And I can go forward, In the Christian life, And maybe by

God's grace, I can help others, One further application, So often in the Christian life, The troubles of life, Have the effect of, Knocking Christians, Off their balance, We all have our weak spots, We all have our, Restrictions in the way, We think about, What God may do, Or what God may allow, In our world, Even in the church itself, And sometimes, There is something terrible, That happens, Maybe in our family circle, Maybe some death, Or some illness, Maybe a Christian, To whom we looked up, And that Christian, Falls into some sin, Maybe some great disaster, That just seems so overwhelming, Because of the suffering it brings, And with always the work, Of the evil one using these things, We can so easily be overwhelmed, Well, I could never have believed, That that would happen, We say, And we go on from there, To all sorts of doubts, And fears, The Christian believer, Needs to keep his eye, On Christ, The God of providence, Nothing is a surprise to him, Nothing is a shock to him, He never says, Well, I never thought, That would happen, He knows it all, And even in that experience, As we bring our perplexities, And our difficulties, To him in prayer, He can reassure us, But I know what I am doing, You cling to me, You follow me, There is no foundation, In the circumstances of this life, But I, The Lord Jesus Christ, Who died and rose again, I am that foundation stone, I am that sure cornerstone, And I will remain, With all your perplexities,

Come to me, And cling to me, These are the tastes, That the converted person, Slowly but surely, Comes to understand, And to know about, Ruth came to know, The God of providence, But she also came to know, The God who lives, Among his people, The God who lives, Among his people, Now we found out, That Ruth came to know, This truth early, In her experience, But what we see, In chapters two and three, Is that she comes to know, More about it, And the significance of it, And the importance of it, You'll remember, That right at the beginning, Of Ruth's decision, To turn to the Lord, And to follow the God of Naomi, Right from the beginning,

Was her understanding, That to cling to God, Was also to cling, To the people of God, And so she said, In these beautiful words, To Naomi, Thy people, Shall be my people, And thy God, Shall be my God, But what we see, You see in chapters two and three, Is that Ruth is learning, That the development, Of her converted life, Her whole relationship, With God as it goes on, Is very much bound up, With Christian friends, And advisors, Right through these chapters, We've seen it already, And you would have seen it, From time to time, She has to depend so much, On Naomi, Interpreting what's happening, In her life, And helping her to understand, How God is working, In the midst of it, And then Boaz is introduced, And whatever we have to learn, About Boaz, We have to learn,

[ 24 : 22 ] Right at the beginning, That he was a good, Mature, Christian man, Who understood, The laws of God, As he had given them, To the people of Israel, In the times, That they were in the wilderness, And his concern, Is to interpret, And to work out, And to live by these laws, At every stage, And his concern, Is obviously, To help Ruth, To learn these laws, And to learn these ways, And to learn, That they are good, But Ruth cannot learn, All these things, All at once, So it's all so new to her, And she needs, Bit by bit, To learn, And she needs, Christian fellowship, To enable her to learn, Because God lives, Amongst his people, And to know more of God, Will always involve, Coming to know more, Of his people, And coming to be more,

Interrelated, And inter-involved, With his people, And this also, Is not just something, That happens in Ruth, But it's a principle, That's there, Throughout the Bible, It's there particularly, We can only just use, One example, It's there, In Paul's prayers, For the different, Congregations, To whom he writes, And we have these letters, As some of the books, Of the New Testament, And when Paul prays, For them, He shows to them, That if they are going, To grow in knowledge, Of God, They will also, Have to grow, In love, And in fellowship, For the Lord's people, The two go together, Philippians chapter 1, And verse 9, Paul's prayer, For the congregation, In Philippi, He says, This I pray,

That your love, May abound, More and more, Your love, May abound, More and more, But he adds, In knowledge, And in all judgment, He wants them, To abound in love, But if they're going, To abound in love, They'll have to abound, In understanding, In knowledge, And the way, To apply that knowledge, He says the same thing, In Colossians, To the Christians, Leia, Epaphras declared unto us, He says, Your love in the spirit, For this cause, We also, Since the day we heard of it, Do not cease to pray, That you might be filled, With the knowledge of his will, In all wisdom, If your love is growing, Then your knowledge, And your understanding, Must grow, Along with it, And so that's the reason,

That so often, In the Bible, God shows, That it is his purpose, That Christians interact, Together, In his service, And that's the reason, For the calling of the disciples, We're told, That the first reason was, That they might be with him, The man Christ Jesus, Needed, Friendship, And fellowship, And of course, Through that friendship, And fellowship, The disciples were taught, And could become teachers of others, When the disciples are finally sent out, They're sent out in twos, There would be difficulties, There would be problems, They needed each other, To help them, With their understanding, We read of David and Jonathan, In the Old Testament, We read of Paul and Barnabas, In the New Testament, We read of the young Christian, Apollos, Who had much understanding,

But oh, There was the temptation, That in his isolation, He would misuse that understanding, That knowledge, And so God sends Priscilla, And Aquila, To give him Christian fellowship, And to temper his knowledge, With love, And understanding, Of the Christian fellowship, That he was serving, You see, We need to learn, In fellowship, Because we can only truly learn, We can only truly grow in knowledge, As we are humble, And one of the ways, That God would humble us, Is by insisting, On us seeking, Christian fellowship, Because we need each other, To learn from one another, And then we also need, Christian fellowship, To grow in knowledge, So that we might always see, What is the end,

[ 29 : 32 ] Of the knowledge, That God gives to us, What is the purpose, Of God teaching us, Of God instructing us, Is it just so that we can, Fill our minds, With facts, And with theory, No, It's so that we can live, For God, And so as we grow, In what we know, We have to grow, In the way we love, In the way we practice, That knowledge, With our Christian friends, And acquaintances, You very often find, That people who, Avidly and voraciously, Search after more knowledge, More doctrine, More theology, That it can sometimes be, That they become more, And more isolated, From Christian fellowship, Because they become more,

Interested in filling their minds, Than in serving the Lord, And his people, And the two need to go together, The one practical application, Of this would be just this, That in a congregation, Of this size, If you see that to grow, As a converted person, You need Christian friends, You need Christian fellowship, Then I think most of you, Will find that what you need to do, Is not just to come, To the larger meetings, On Sunday, When we all meet together, For worship, And where you may be so lost, When it is more difficult, To get to know one another, But you need to see, That you need also, The smaller meetings, For fellowship, For fellowship, And for worship,

Where you may be more noticed, And where you may begin, To come into closer contact, With Christian people, The prayer meeting, Is a good place to start, But there are other meetings, There are meetings for the ladies, Smaller meetings, There's the home Bible study meeting, And there are these meetings, Where the numbers are smaller, And where Christian fellowship, And Christian friendship, More easily grows, Perhaps in that very instruction, There's a challenge, To some of you sitting here, Perhaps the smaller meetings, Are the meetings that, You desperately want to stay away from, Quite happy to be in church on Sunday, One of the crowd, You can be there on your own terms, But to get more involved,

To seek out, Deeper fellowship, With the Lord's people, You draw back from that, You must ask yourself, Is that because I'm not converted?

Is that because there's something wrong, Between me and my God, And so I want to keep my distance, From becoming more deeply involved, With the Lord's people, You must ask that, Between yourself and the Lord, And he will instruct you, But then the last thing, That Ruth came to know, She came to know the God of providence, She came to know the God, Who lives among his people, And she came to know, The God who blesses, The faithful, I want us to look just very briefly, At chapter 3, And at verses 9 and 10, And I imagine that, This may very well have been, The part of the reading, That you latched on to, And that you found most strange, When we read earlier, A lot of it would have seemed strange to us, Going and gleaning in the field, Picking up the pieces of,

[ 34 : 01 ] Of the barley that were left over, That in itself is strange to us, And now this episode of, Of a Ruth being instructed by Naomi, And going to the threshing floor, Where Boas was, And when he had fallen asleep, And covering his feet, And lying down at his feet, Now in our modern age, We inevitably are a bit suspicious, But here was Ruth, Surely being just, Surely at least a little bit, A bit of a hussy, What was she doing, Doing such a thing, Surely it was going to be, Misinterpreted, Well there is, The slightest suggestion, That yes it might, Be misinterpreted, And Boas does send her

home, In the morning, Very quickly, In these days also, There would be those gossip mongers, Who were always out, To misinterpret the truth,

But there is no doubt, That Ruth only goes, Because she is instructed, Very carefully, By her mature, Christian mother-in-law, Naomi, And there is also no doubt, That Boas takes no advantage, Of what Ruth does, He does not misinterpret, What Ruth does, He commends her, For what she does, And it is the beginning, Of a new episode, It is of course, The beginning of finally, Ruth becoming the wife of Boas, And we will finally see, In the story, That this is very much, At the centre, Of God's purpose, You see, The truth of the matter is, That Ruth's doing, What she did, Was in line, With God's law, God had given, So many laws,

For his people, That are recorded for us, Mostly in the book of Leviticus, Some in Exodus, Some in Deuteronomy, But mostly in Leviticus, And the gleaning was done, According to God's law, There were laws, So that the poor, Could glean, And gather up, What was left over, In the harvest fields, And there were also, Marriage laws, And these laws, Went as far, As to protect those, Who might become widows, And who might be left, Without possession, Because that was the way, With the female line, According to God's law, In Old Testament times, And what is really, Happening here, Is Ruth, Under Naomi's instruction, Committing herself, To the law of God, And saying, As far as we know, Boaz, You are our nearest, Kinsman, You are the one,

Who has responsibility, To work out, This marriage difficulty, And I put myself, At your feet, And I give myself, Over to your authority, As the man, Who can speak, In the community, On my behalf, That's what was happening, And Ruth, And Ruth, And Naomi, And Naomi, Were giving themselves, Over to laws, That of course, Were calculated, To hinder, Greed, And selfishness, And to develop, Love, And kindness, They were good laws, Because they were, God's laws, And Boaz, Commends Ruth, For her virtue, She might have, Set the laws aside, And set her cap, At some younger man, But she didn't do that,

She developed, In her belief, That to follow her God, Was to take on board, All his laws, Because they are his laws, And they are good, And she puts herself, In the hands, Of a much older man, And he will work out, With the community, What ought to be done, In line, With God's law, And that perhaps, Is the most, Vital mark, Of the converted life, And of the development, Of the converted life, It is learning, More and more, That God's laws, Are good, And that they will, Do us good, And that with the keeping, Of God's law, Always,

[ 39 : 09 ] Comes God's blessing, Maybe not always, Immediately, In the way of, Outward blessing, But certainly, Always in the way, Of inward blessing, Because it's the law, Of God, That transforms, And develops, The heart, Towards righteousness, And certainly, In the life, To can, The way of God's law, Is the way, To final blessing, That's why we sang, In Psalm, In Psalm 19, Rather, The law of the Lord, Is perfect, Converting the soul, The testimony, Of the Lord, Is sure, Making wise, The simple, The statutes, Of the Lord, Are right, Rejoicing the heart, The commandment, Of the Lord, Is pure, Enlightening the eyes, And you see,

There is only one way, For the converted life, To go wrong, And it's when we depart, From God's law, And there is only one way, Of putting the converted life, Right again, And it's returning, To God's law, And of course, Knowing that we can return, Because as converted people, We don't trust in ourselves, Finally, But we trust in our God, And our Saviour, And the power of his Spirit, Are you converted, Today, There is only one way, Of knowing, It's,

Are you living, The converted life, Are you growing, In the converted life, Are you committed, To the converted life, Paul says in Colossians, As you have received, Christ Jesus the Lord, So walk ye in him, If you're not converted, You must receive, Christ Jesus the Lord, If you are converted, You must remember, How you have received him, And you must walk on, In him, Amen, Amen, Amen, Amen, flooring,vene, Amen, Amen, Amen, Amen, Amen, Amen, Amen, Amen, Amen, Amen, Amen, Amen, Amen, Amen, Amen, Amen,