

Study in Ruth 3

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[0 : 00] Let us turn now to our studies in the book of Ruth in the Old Testament, Joshua Judges Ruth near the beginning of the Bible. I want us to look this morning at verses that are probably the best known verses in this little book of Ruth.

Ruth chapter 1 and these lovely words of Ruth in verses 16 and 17. And Ruth said, If aught but death part thee and me.

I would like to begin this morning by asking a question. And I would like the young people to listen to the question as well to see what their answer might be.

And it's good to see so many of the young folks here this morning. I'm feeling a little bit guilty that I didn't have a word particularly for you. But I would like to think that there would be something in the sermon that you would be able to understand.

And that you would be able to remember and that it would help you. Because God's word really is for everybody. Whatever age we are. And I'm sure that you will have an answer to this question.

[1 : 39] And I just wonder what the answer might be. And the question is if you could just have one thing that you could see happening in the church, in our church, in these days.

If God was willing to give us one thing that he would do in our congregation or through our congregation in these days.

What would it be? What would be the one thing that we should be wanting to see happening in our congregation more than anything else?

I wonder what your answer to that question is. Well, I believe that there is good warrant from the Bible for us all being agreed on the answer.

It's certainly true that we want to see more than just one thing happening in our congregation or through our congregation.

[2 : 50] But I do believe that the one thing that we should want more than anything else to be happening in our congregation. Is to have people being converted.

Conversions. Conversions. Conversions. Are what we should be looking for. More than anything else. Now, perhaps the young people are finding it difficult to follow me already.

Perhaps you're not sure what it is. What the word conversion means. Perhaps you're not very sure what it is to be converted. Well, there may be older people here this morning and maybe they're not very sure either what it means to be converted.

And I hope that I'll be able to help with that before the sermon is finished. But for the young people, if perhaps you find it difficult to follow the whole of the sermon, I think it would be a good idea if when you go home and you're gathered round the lunch table this afternoon.

If you ask the grown-up that's what it means to be converted. If you ask the grown-ups that are at the lunch table what it means to be converted. What does conversion mean?

[4 : 05] I think that young and old could have a very good discussion over lunch today. So try and remember that.

I think that I can quite confidently say that that's what we should be wanting in these days. Because I think the Bible makes clear to us that it's the very reason why the church is left in this world.

It's because the church needs to be used so that others will be converted. when Jesus prayed his great high priestly prayer perhaps prayed it in the garden of Gethsemane or in the upper room before they left for the garden but perhaps in the garden when he prayed that prayer that's recorded for us in John chapter 17 he prays this he's praying for the disciples he's praying for his Christian followers and he says I pray not that thou shouldest take them out of the world he knew that it was God's purpose that Christians be left in the world that the church is not immediately taken up to heaven there's work for the church to do here in this world and then just a few verses later on he tells us why he's not praying that the church be taken out of the world he says neither pray I for these alone but for them also which shall believe on me through their word I don't pray that you will take the Christians immediately out of the world

I know that that's not your purpose leave them in the world and so he says in a moment or two I'm not praying for them only I'm not praying for those who are already Christians who are my disciples I'm not just praying for them but I'm praying for all who shall come to believe who shall come to be converted through their word now of course the book of Acts bears out that this was indeed Christ's great purpose for the church because the book of Acts in the New Testament is of course the story of the church as it begins to grow as it begins to develop the church that is not taken out of the world but is left in the world is left to serve Christ is left to follow Christ and we ask ourselves what is the great mark of the church in the book of Acts and the great mark of the church in the book of Acts is evangelism missionary activity leading to conversions and when we turn to Ruth's testimony here in the first chapter Ruth chapter 1 verses 16 and 17

I believe that what we have there is the testimony of Ruth's conversion it's the testimony of Ruth turning it's her saying it's her telling her mother-in-law Naomi that she sees that she has to take the way of a converted life converted which just means changing over changing your direction you convert a house you convert it from one way to another you do a house conversion to make it different from what it was before some of the rooms perhaps it's the same word used here in the life of the Christian and here was Ruth saying that she was converting and that her life was to be a converted life and it was to be different from the old way and surely it's not surprising that in this book this book and we've already found out the great purpose of this book the book of Ruth

[8 : 21] God's purpose to show us that he is working out his plan his plan for setting out his kingdom even in the dark days of the days of the judges when Ruth and Naomi were alive when there was very little spiritual leadership and when the church was really in a mess just like it is today that God's purposes were going on and so it's not surprising to find that when we read about God's purposes going on even in difficult days we read about conversions and here in these verses we read of the conversion of Ruth and Ruth's testimony in these verses helps us to learn what's involved in Christian conversion one of the most important subjects in the whole Bible and here is Ruth testifying to what's involved two things basically and I want to look at both of them if we have time first of all conversion involves a commitment to the living God a commitment to the living God this is at the heart of Ruth's profession this is what she leads to in verse 16 don't entreat me to leave you and she builds up to a climax there in that verse where you go

I will go where you lodge I will lodge your people will be my people and your God will be my God that's what it all hinges on your God will be my God Ruth is saying and therefore where you go I will go because that's where I will find and I will learn and I will come to know your God and your people will be my people and I'll stay there because your God is going to be my God that's the thrust of what Ruth is saying there in verse 16 and that's why it comes last it's her building up to the climax your God will be my God he's not just going to be a God he's not just going to be the God of Israel and then there are the gods of Moab that I've learnt about from my childhood no the living God your God the God of Israel the God of the Bible he is going to be my God that was at the heart of Ruth's conversion and she re-emphasizes it in verse 17 it's with this God that she rests her case she sees she's become so convinced of him that she must commit herself to him that's what she's saying at verse 17 where thou diest will I die and there will I be buried the Lord your God the God of Israel

Jehovah do so to me and more also I think the New International Version says the Lord deal with me ever so severely if anything but death part thee and me I have got to commit myself to the living God I am in his hands anyway he is the only God but I have to take him seriously as my God and my Lord and my Master my leader my guide that's what's involved in being converted we ask ourselves how does it come about how does it happen we try and investigate a little bit more under the surface how is a person converted how does this commitment come about well I think we can begin by learning from another woman important in this line of the ancestry of Jesus remember we've seen already that the book of Ruth is important because it shows us how Ruth is included amongst the ancestors the forebears of the man

Christ Jesus but the Old Testament tells us of another woman also not belonging to the Israelite line who was brought in to be amongst the people of God and I think you will know her name very well it's the name Rahab the young people here this morning will also know about Rahab Rahab the prostitute and that certainly means that she was a very bad woman who lived in Jericho when the people of Israel came in from the wilderness and overthrew Jericho and I think there's evidence that Rahab also even although she was a prostitute God is able to save whoever comes to him no sin that we've committed in the past need necessarily keep us from becoming committed to God from becoming converted and Rahab the prostitute she said this and she gives a clue as to how she became converted how she came to that point of committing herself to God she says in

Joshua chapter 2 verses 9 and 10 I know that the Lord has given you the land for we have heard how the Lord dried up the waters of the Red Sea she heard and she became convinced that the God of the people of Israel the God of the Bible is the only God the real God the God who has made this world the God of eternal power the living and the true God she heard she heard about his wonderful works the information came into her mind she thought about it and she came to the conviction that this was the God to follow so yes she would convert she would abandon the people of Jericho and she would cast in her lot she would be faithful to the people of God to the spies and so she hid them and she took great risks to be committed to the living

[15 : 21] God I'll do it because I've heard about your God and here's Ruth the same thing is happening to her she also has heard about the God of Israel no doubt through her husband and through her father-in-law now dead and certainly through her mother-in-law who throughout the story is Ruth's instructor is Ruth's guide is the one she goes to and Naomi passes on to her the ways of God's word and Naomi has no doubt told her about the history of Israel and about the great salvation that God gave to his people from Egypt and Naomi has been convinced what has happened you see really what happened with Rahab and what has happened with Naomi is that God himself comes and reveals himself God makes himself known and God comes and first of all he begins to work on our minds on our thinking and he begins to cause us to think about these things and to think about them most deeply and that's always what happens when someone is converted although their conversion may happen slowly and the evidence of it may be very slow or it may be very sudden and immediate always be it for a short period of time or a long period of time things start to go on in their minds maybe that's happening to someone more than one person in the congregation this morning

I wouldn't be surprised if it's happening and you're beginning to think in a way that you didn't used to think you had quite a casual attitude to life before and you just got on with living earning a week's wage as best you could looking after your family or your own affairs and just getting on with life but you've began to think and now you're thinking a little bit more deeply about what life is about and where life is going and what's going to happen to you at the end of this life you've perhaps begun to think about God himself and you're finding that coming to church is not just a case of coming because well you think it's a good practice and it eases your conscience and you can forget about it for the rest of the week maybe you're beginning to think during the week as well maybe you're beginning to think about something you heard in a sermon or something a text from the Bible that you heard years and years ago and it's sticking with you and you're thinking and perhaps you haven't realized what's happening and you've got to face up to the fact that it's maybe

God revealing himself this is what God does in the work of conversion it's we who have to convert it's we who have to change it's we who have to turn like Ruth did but it's God's work we will never do it without God without God taking the initiative and without God working there all through the process and that's what had happened with Ruth that's what God says you see at the beginning of the great prophecies of Isaiah and he says to the people of Israel oh they had a tradition of religion but they had forgotten about him and they were living as if there was no God and he comes to them again through the prophet and he has these great words at the beginning of Isaiah chapter 1 and verse 18 where he says come now and let us reason together says the Lord there's no brainwashing with God there's no mere emotionalism

God never fools people into becoming Christians God is absolutely open in his dealings with men and we who are Christians must be that as well in all our dealings with men honest and open that's the way our God works he's the God of truth you won't be forced into anything against your will God will reason with you and by his power he will mould your will and make you willing he says come let us reason I've given you my word the word of God that speaks first of all to our minds before it reaches into our hearts and to our wills and he said I've opened up my plan before you I'm not hiding anything from you that you need to know in order for me to be your

God and you to be my people in order for you to be converted and I want you to be convinced that I am the only God that I am the God of truth that I am the God who alone can do you good that I am the God whom you will meet at the end of time on the great day of judgment and you will be without excuse in that day if you are not converted because you see I haven't hid anything from you God to say I've opened it out before you in my word and you are without excuse if you do not come and listen and think and turn and be converted begins you see with an ascent of the mind that's the first work that

[21 : 48] God does by his spirit in the work of conversion he reasons with us he brings us to a conviction in our minds but it goes beyond that and there's evidence that with Ruth also it went beyond that she had heard she had become convinced with her mind just like Rahab her well not her ancestor but in the ancestry of Christ further back but it goes further it brings not just being convinced with our minds with our thinking but it brings an entrusting of our lives God that's that's really what Isaiah says in chapter 1 when he is the spokesman of God where God says come let us reason together says the Lord though your sins be as scarlet they shall be as white as snow though they be red like crimson they shall be as wool

God you see is saying come let us reason come see that there is some deep wrong some deep evil in your life as it appears before me the God of heaven the holy one come and entrust to me your whole life because I need to do a work that is going to transform you spiritually from within to the outside and we have clues here in Ruth that Ruth understood that this was involved I think we have clues especially with the fact that in verse 17 Ruth rather calls God the Lord this was a very special name amongst the Jews it was the name for

God and the young people here will know this story as well it was the name for God that God first gave the people to use at the time of the burning bush when Moses appeared there and God spoke to him out of the burning bush and he was sent back to Egypt to begin the salvation of his people from Egypt and Moses had all sorts of difficulties you'll remember and finally he said to God in the bush what name shall I give them whom shall I say has sent me what name shall I give them and some of you may remember the name that God said Moses was to use do you remember he said tell them I am has sent you I am the name that came to be known as Yahweh among the Jews the holiest of all their names for

God so that they used other ways of other letters other characters of their language because the real name was too holy to use and that's still the way amongst the Jews down to this day and that's the name that Ruth uses in verse 17 so we've got to expect that Naomi taught her about the I am God that's the God who came to deliver his children from Egypt the one who said I'll be faithful I'll never leave you although you've left me although you've gone down into the ways of sin I've come for you I've come to rescue you and you must trust in me and you must follow me you must entrust everything that you have to me because you've gone wrong when you've entrusted yourselves to yourselves and this was the God whom

Ruth began to follow she entrusted her whole life to the God who was able to save our souls who was able to change us who was able to renew us who was able to turn us from the way that he is displeased with and he is able to turn us to the way that leads to heaven there's another clue in the book of Ruth a clue when Boaz whom we're going to read about later on in the story who eventually becomes Ruth husband and he begins to speak about Ruth and he says in chapter 2 of Ruth and at verse 12 a full reward be given to thee of the Lord God of Israel under whose wings thou art come to trust that's a lovely expression that can be applied to any converted person you've come to trust under the wings so deep rooted that you cannot trust in yourself it may happen suddenly

[27 : 46] I say again it may happen very slowly but there comes this turning this commitment to the living God for protection and direction you come to trust under his wings life it's the same process that Jesus explained to Nicodemus in the passage that we read from John chapter 3 he said to Nicodemus you must be born again you can't be right with God except God himself does a work by the power of his spirit a work that only God can do that's why it's called the new birth all of us when we were born when we were conceived we had nothing to do with that conception it was all in the power of our parents father and mother it was out with our power we were absolutely in the hands of others that's the way it is with the new birth it's

God's work we're absolutely under his control we're absolutely within his power at his disposal and so that's why Jesus says there's a mystery about it just like there is with the wind you don't know where it's coming from you don't know where it's going but you feel its effects you know it's there you know it's at work so is everyone who was born of the spirit and what is that effect is deliver you and you'll be saved and you'll have new life and

Jesus is like that serpent in the wilderness Jesus himself said God gave his only son to die on the cross for sinners and he says turn be converted look away to him and when you do that when you come under the shadow of his wings when you cling and become committed to Jesus for protection and for direction when your life is changed because you are now following Jesus the one who said to his disciples follow me not a once for all thing but follow me cling to me day after day after day learn of me follow me when that happens that is the evidence of the new birth within only outward conversion that changes the life because we follow

Jesus as saviour and lord day after day that is the only evidence of the new birth within that's what happened to Ruth she became committed to the living God have you but there's another evidence of Christian conversion that we can deal with just in a moment but I don't want to leave it out it's important because the two go together Christian conversion involves a commitment to the living God but it also involves a commitment to the people of God the two commitments are inseparable in the text where you go I will go where you lodge I will lodge thy people shall be my people and thy

God my God and that's always the way with Christian conversion that was the way when Christ began to call people to him when he began to call his disciples to him when they were converted when they turned to follow Jesus he said that he wanted them to be with him and then later on indeed wasn't it that time when Mary his natural mother came and was worried about him and she had some of her later offspring with him but Jesus turned to his disciples and he said these are my brothers and sisters and of course he was saying there that when people come to him they come to each other when people are united to Christ they become united with his other followers with the other members of his family and there's a change in relationship you see that's what it's all about and when we come and we are converted and we have a new relationship with

[33 : 38] God then we find that we have a new relationship with other people who have also been converted and to have come to God we understand them now we understand their spiritual history because it's like our spiritual history and they become brothers and sisters and there's a closeness this also was evident in the book of Acts when people began to turn to Christ in Acts chapter 5 at verse 12 we have very interesting words they were all that means all the believers in Jerusalem at the time all who had been converted all who were Christians they were all with one accord in Solomon's porch and of the rest those who had an interest to hear the preaching of the gospel and who knew that there was something going on in Jerusalem in these days of the rest durst no man join himself to them they saw that there was a difference between those who were the

Lord's people and those who were not just like Ruth she was leaving the people of Moab to cleave to the people of God in Israel of the rest durst no man join themselves to them and believers were the more added to the Lord the people recognized that there was a difference between the people of God and the people who were not the people of God and they could only be part of the people of God when they came in faith to Jesus Christ you don't belong to the people of God you see merely by attending church you only belong to the people of God when you are converted wasn't that the way with Paul when

Paul went to Damascus he saw one group of people there in Damascus and he saw them as his enemies he saw another group of people in Damascus and they were his friends that was when he left Jerusalem he knew who his friends were in Damascus he knew who his enemies were but of course on the road to Damascus he was converted and we find that when he reaches Damascus those whom he thought were his enemies were now his friends and those whom he thought he would be meeting as friends in Damascus became his enemies so that he had to leave Damascus in a basket for fear of his life one or two applications on that point and then

I'm finished to be converted brings a change of relationship I speak here to anyone who is not converted this is one of the costs that you will have to weigh at Jesus tells us to count the cost even before we're converted you're going to change in your relationship to God if you're converted he's going to become your friend he's going to become your saviour he's going to be your father in heaven his people are going to be the members of your family your spiritual family your relationships will change and your relationships will change with those who remain unconverted and that can happen even within your own family not so very long ago in the manse

I don't think the couple's concern will mind me using them as example we had two Christian couples from this congregation in the manse with us and it was true of both of them that one in the marriage was converted before the other I think if I'm right with one of the couples the wife was converted first and then later on the husband and I think I'm true that in the other couple the husband was converted first and then later on the wife and both the wife who had been converted first who had been converted second rather and the husband who had been converted second they professed to the difficulties they had the difficulties they had in the relationship they thought that their world had just been turned upside down that they would never be able to cope with this new thing that could come in didn't mean that the husband stopped loving the wife or the wife stopped loving the husband but it brought attention because one was the

[39 : 21] Lord's and one was not and that's one of the costs of Christian conversion and we can't get away from it and the only answer to it is to see that Christ and eternal life is worth the price the other application I want to make is this that when we are committed to Christ we are committed to his people to all his people and I just want to apply it in this way that's one of the motives that should bring us to church if we are the Lord's people that's one of the motives that should bring us to the prayer meeting if we're the

Lord's people it's because it gives us the opportunity to be together with the people of God if there are any who are the Lord's people and you are becoming slack with your Sunday attendance or you're becoming slack with your prayer meeting attendance think of it in this way if God's people are my people is it right for me when they gather together for worship to be at home separating myself keeping myself away from them we may all have legitimate reasons why we always cannot be together with the Lord's people we cannot lay down hard and fast rules nor would I want to but if it is for some peculiar reason or other you are just simply staying away when you could be there with the people of

God because his people are my people and the joy of being together and receiving comfort from one another now think about these things and pray about these things and surely the same goes for sitting at the Lord's table and there are people in the congregation here who are the Lord's but who never sit at the Lord's table with us when it comes round and don't you see what's happening distinctions are blurred the watching world is confused as to who are the Lord's and who are not the Lord's now you may have difficulties you may have problems come and discuss these problems tell me about these problems or tell one of the elders about these problems and we'll discuss them and we'll try to help you but can you take the law into your own hand and can you say when the people of

God come together and when they come in this unique way amongst other things to witness that they are the Lord's I will stay away and I will give a different witness and although I will say their God is my God I will not say his people are my people that's what you're saying when you stay away from the Lord's table you are saying I won't identify with the people of God I will stay away I've got this difficulty I've got that difficulty I've got the next difficulty the two go together thy people shall be my people and thy God shall be my God the last application is this are you am

I living a converted life I think too often we talk about conversion as an isolated event we need to talk about being converted going on being converted and living a converted life if you're converted if you do a house conversion then the house remains changed according to the way it was converted that was the way with Ruth that must be the way with all converted people I say again it may happen suddenly it may happen slowly at the beginning but there will always be this that if you're converted you'll go on living a converted life and Jesus said except you be converted and become as little children you shall not enter in to the kingdom of heaven amen now let us sing once again to

[45 : 03] God's praise psalm 133 that lovely psalm that of course