

“The Book of Ruth”
A Virtual Bible Study Series on Facebook Live
Thursday Nights @ 7:00 PM

Session 3: “An Example of Conversion”
(Ruth 1:14-18)

Session 2 Recap

Two weeks ago, we looked at different patterns of the Lord’s kindness that were shown in the opening chapter of the Book of Ruth. Naomi was left with the emotion of bitterness as she experienced the losses of her husband, her two sons, and her homeland (Bethlehem), as she was left stranded in Moab with her two daughters-in-law, Orpah and Ruth. Yet despite her circumstance, she recognized God’s hand in the midst and that He was preparing her for what lie ahead in the future.

Three specific patterns of the Lord’s kind dealings were seen...

1. News of the Lord’s aid prompted a return to the Lord. – Word got to Naomi in Moab that the Lord was showing mercy to the Israelite people, and ending the famine. This “good news” prompted Naomi to return to her home, a place that she never should have left in the first place. While God was bringing immediate aid to his people (food), He was also bringing future aid as well (bringing Naomi/Ruth home – line of King David, Jesus).

2. Faith in the Lord promotes faith in the Lord on the part of others. – Naomi tried to get Orpah and Ruth to stay in Moab with their families (better chance for a future). While Orpah decided to stay in Moab, Ruth clings to Naomi and promises to stay with her no matter what. Naomi’s faith was a model for Ruth – a woman of prayer, any good gift came from the Lord’s kindness, unselfish towards others, a balanced view of God, and her faith was attractive. This resulted in Ruth having a determined, wholehearted, and serious faith.

3. Emptiness from the Lord prepares the way for fullness from the Lord. – Naomi returned to Bethlehem empty. She had left with everything one could want, but returned with basically nothing. While she experienced bitterness, she did not speak or act bitterly. She knew the Lord had disciplined her and her

family for the decisions that they had made, but also preparing them for what was to come. Fullness from the Lord.

Session 3: “An Example of Conversion” (Ruth 1:14-18)

Sometimes the significance in the decision that Ruth makes to stay with Naomi and return with her to Bethlehem gets lost in the shuffle. There is something decisive about Ruth’s words and actions in chapter 1. Her decision to go with Naomi meant a radical break with everything that she had known in her life up to this point. Life would never be the same. This was true conversion, because conversion involves decisive separation.

- *Separation from One kingdom for another.* – When Ruth decided to go with Naomi, she was renouncing her citizenship in Moab. She was saying, “I now belong to God’s kingdom.” Jesus’s death on the cross was to separate for himself a people who are his very own. He was saving people from the kingdom of darkness into the kingdom of light. This is separation.
- *Separation from many gods for the One True God.* – In Moab, Ruth would have worshipped many gods. When she decided to follow Naomi, she was separating herself from those gods for the One True God – the Lord. Our God calls us to turn from anything – any “idols” that we might put in place for #1 – and turn to Him.
- *Separation from those who remain as they are.* – Ruth’s decision to follow Naomi also meant that she separated from those who decided to stay behind, including her sister-in-law, Orpah. Orpah’s decision to return to her people was not just practical, but spiritual as well. She was choosing to return to the practice of polytheism, the worship of multiple gods. Christian conversion can lead us to separate us from our peers, because we are no longer the same. The Gospel brings division between the converted and the unconverted – this separation can be costly.

Conversion involves total identification.

Ruth clung to Naomi. This Hebrew term used in Chapter 1 is the same term used in Genesis to describe when a man and woman are united in marriage. They are totally identified with each other. From this point on – as Ruth’s words

suggest – her total identity is wrapped up in Naomi’s identity. Conversion involves many different aspects of Ruth’s life (and our lives as well)...

1. Conversion involves identification with God and with God’s People

In verses 16 and 17, five pairs of clauses are used to heighten the emphasis of this identification. This literary device of coupling of clauses is commonly called “idem per idem”. The use of the same noun or verb repetitively underscores the intensity of the action and the totality of the commitment. The central pair of these clauses, “Your people will be my people and your God my God,” conveys the main point. At the heart of Ruth’s conversion is her identification with Naomi’s people and Naomi’s God. She did not simply separate herself from the Moabite gods, and continue to walk her own way. Instead, she identifies herself fully with Naomi’s God – now her God – and Naomi’s people – now her people.

2. Conversion involves identification, wherever and whatever.

In verse 16, Ruth says, “Where you go, I will go. Where you stay, I will stay.” True conversion covers every aspect of our lives. There is no place that is not covered. There was the real possibility that danger might lie ahead for Ruth as she entered the Promised Land, as Moab was their sworn enemy. We are handing over the reins to God and saying, “You are in control.” This is what Ruth was professing to Naomi, but more importantly, what she was stating to God.

3. Conversion involves identification, now and forever.

In verse 17, Ruth says, “Where you die, I will die, and there I will be buried.” Ruth’s identification with Naomi – and with God – is in life and in death. Naomi was well advanced in years, and she would most likely die long before Ruth. Ruth was stating that she would be buried where Naomi was buried. In a sense, she would not return to Moab. The best Christian practice that displays this idea of “now and forever” is Christian baptism. When a believer is baptized, it signifies total identification with Jesus Christ in his death and resurrection.

Conversion also involved single-minded determination.

As is clearly displayed by Ruth in Chapter 1, she was determined to commit herself to Naomi and to commit herself to God. There was no wavering, even

though the “world” might have suggested the easier path might have been to turn back and go the other way. Conversion involved determination.

Ruth’s determination was not open for discussion. She told Naomi, “Don’t urge me to leave you or turn back from you.” Jesus echoed this same thought In Luke 9:62, “No one who puts his hand to the plough and looks back is fit for service in the kingdom of God.”

Ruth later says in verse 17, “May the Lord deal with me, be it ever severely, if anything but death separates you and me.” Ruth’s determination was a clear statement before the Lord. She invoked the name of the Lord, “Yahweh”, to drive home the weight of this oath. This is the Hebrew, covenantal, sacred name of God. She held herself accountable before the God she just pledged her life and service to. She was going to see her commitment to Naomi through. Jesus calls us to that same commitment. Conversion is a one-way ticket, a one-way journey, a commitment to the Lord Jesus Christ.

Follow Up Questions...

- 1. Why is it impossible to separate identification with the Lord Jesus and identification with his people (Christians, the church)?**
- 2. What are some of the radical consequences of conversion faced by believers in society today? Why is it important not to hide these consequences as part of sharing the gospel?**
- 3. What evidence of conversion would we expect to see in the life of someone who is genuinely converted? Should we expect new converts to show all this evidence immediately?**

Session 4: “What a Difference a Day Can Make!” (Ruth 2:1-23)

Thursday, October 7 7:00 PM

Facebook Live