

## **Pressing Forward in Faith with the Lord**

Read Ruth 1:14-18

Introduction:

### **Examples of OT Conversions**

It is interesting to study examples of individuals in the OT who were converted from an idolatrous Gentile background. Such major figures include Abram in Genesis 12:1-2, “Now the LORD had said unto Abram, Get thee out of thy country, and from thy kindred, and from thy father's house, unto a land that I will shew thee: And I will make of thee a great nation, and I will bless thee, and make thy name great; and thou shalt be a blessing.”

Naaman the leper in II Kings 5:1, “Now Naaman, captain of the host of the king of Syria, was a great man with his master, and honourable, because by him the LORD had given deliverance unto Syria: he was also a mighty man in valour, but he was a leper.”

Rahab the harlot in Joshua 2:1, “And Joshua the son of Nun sent out of Shittim two men to spy secretly, saying, Go view the land, even Jericho. And they went, and came into an harlot's house, named Rahab, and lodged there.”

And here in the Book Ruth we are introduced to another Gentile idolater by the name of Ruth the Moabites (Ruth 1:16, 17, 18).

This morning let us look more closely at the life of Ruth. The Book of Ruth took place during the days of the judges. What do we know about **the days when the judges governed**? The book of Judges sums up these "days" as "dark days" because in those days there was no king in Israel; every man did what was right in his own eyes (Jdg 17:6). The days when the Judges governed marked a time of apostasy, apathy, and anarchy, associated with idolatry, immorality, and war.

A Bible commentator observes, “The lovely story of Ruth is in sharp contrast with the bloody and turbulent annals of Judges. It completes, but does not contradict, these, and happily reminds us of what we are apt to forget in reading such pages, that no times are so wild but that in them are quiet corners, green

oases, all the greener for their surroundings, where life glides on in peaceful isolation from the tumult. Men and women love and work and weep and laugh, the gossips of Bethlehem talk over Naomi's return, Boaz stands among his corn, and no sounds of war disturb them. Thank God! the blackest times were not so dismal in reality as they look in history. There are clefts in the grim rock, and flowers blooming, sheltered in the clefts. The peaceful pictures of this little book, multiplied many thousand times, have to be set as a background to the lurid pictures of the Book of Judges.”

Alexander Maclaren writes, “I believe Ruth’s example has a special message to women, and exhorts them to see to it that, in the cultivation of the so-called womanly excellence of gentleness, they do not let it run into weakness, nor, on the other hand, aim at strength, to the loss of meekness.”

God's strength is gentle strength, and ours is like His when it is meek and lowly, like that of the 'strong Son of God.' When Ruth threw herself on Naomi's withered body, and sobbed out her passionate resolve, she was speaking the eternal language of love, and claiming Naomi for her own, in the very act of giving herself to Naomi, human love should be the parent of all self-sacrificing as of all heroic virtues;

and in our homes we do not live in love, as we ought, unless it leads us to the daily exercise of self-suppression and surrender, which is not felt to be loss but the natural expression of our love, which it would be a crime against it, and a pain to ourselves, to withhold. If Ruth's temper lived in our families, they would be true 'houses of God' and 'gates of heaven.'”

Therefore, we can learn much from the godly woman Ruth. The title of my message is, *Pressing forward in Faith with the Lord.*

The Apostle Paul exhorts the church in Philippians 3:13-15, “Brethren, I count not myself to have apprehended: but this one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before, **I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus.** Let us therefore, as many as be perfect, be thus minded: and if in any thing ye be otherwise minded, God shall reveal even this unto you.”

We see in the book of Ruth how the daughter-in-law of Naomi, Ruth, pressed on with the Lord, facing a future with many unknowns and uncertainties.

Many times we, as God's people must press forward with the Lord when the present is difficult and the future is unclear and uncertain. There are three things we discover about Ruth that should inspire us to press forward with the Lord in faith.

### **1. Ruth pressed on with the Lord despite her sad and difficult circumstances.**

We read in Ruth 1:3-5, "And Elimelech Naomi's husband died; and she was left, and her two sons. And they took them wives of the women of Moab; the name of the one was Orpah, and the name of the other Ruth: and they dwelled there about ten years. And Mahlon and Chilion died also both of them; and the woman was left of her two sons and her husband."

Both women Orpah and Ruth lost their husbands. A state of widowhood is one of peculiar trials, which calls for, and should receive, peculiar sympathy and aid.

Now Orpah returned to her people the Moabites as verse 14 indicates, "And they lifted up their voice, and wept again: and Orpah kissed her mother in law."

But Ruth clave unto her. Orpah loved Naomi, but she did not love her so well, as to quit her country for her sake. Thus many have a value for Christ, and yet come short of salvation by him, because they cannot find in their hearts, to forsake other things for him. They love him, and yet leave him, because they do not love him enough, but love other things better.

The Rich Young Ruler in Mark 10:20-22 said, "Master, all these have I observed from my youth." Then Jesus beholding him loved him, and said unto him, "One thing thou lackest: go thy way, sell whatsoever thou hast, and give to the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven: and come, take up the cross, and follow me. And he was sad at that saying, and went away grieved: for he had great possessions."

The Rich Young Ruler wasn't prepared to give up everything and follow the Lord. But Ruth was. Losing her husband could have left Ruth bitter and angry against the Lord. But Ruth pressed on with the Lord despite her sad and difficult circumstances. Ruth left her friends, family, familiar culture and foreign gods and followed Naomi. What great faith "Ruth the Moabitess" manifested in the Lord!

As Boaz reiterates in the next chapter, Ruth "left (her) father and (her) mother and the land of (her) birth, and came to a people that (she) did not previously know" (Ru 2:11-note) and sought refuge under the wings of "the LORD, the God of Israel" (Ru 2:12-note)

Boaz's declaration implies that Ruth's parents were still alive, making her commitment to the Lord and his people even more striking.

We read in Matthew 10:36-38, "And a man's foes shall be they of his own household. He that loveth father or mother more than me is not worthy of me: and he that loveth son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me. And he that taketh not his cross, and followeth after me, is not worthy of me."

## **2. Ruth pressed on with the Lord despite discouragement and opposition.**

Naomi discouraged her two daughter-in-laws to go back with her back to Israel. We read in verses 11-13, "And Naomi said, Turn again, my daughters: why will ye go with me? are there yet any more sons in my womb, that they may be your husbands? Turn again, my daughters, go your way; for I am too old to

have an husband. If I should say, I have hope, if I should have an husband also to night, and should also bear sons; Would ye tarry for them till they were grown? would ye stay for them from having husbands? nay, my daughters; for it grieveth me much for your sakes that the hand of the LORD is gone out against me.”

Naomi’s discouragement worked on Orpah because she went back to her people. But it didn’t work on Ruth. Ruth wasn’t going anywhere. Ruth exercised great faith despite experiencing opposition from her mother-in-law. Ruth pressed on with the Lord despite her background in pagan religion.

Ruth was not simply a foreigner, but a Moabite and the Law stated that no Moabite could “enter the assembly of the Lord...forever” (Dt 23:3) because of what the Moabites had done to Israel during the wilderness journey (Nu 22-25; Nu 31:15, 16).

Moabites were so abhorred that Jews were forbidden even to “seek their peace (or) their prosperity” (Dt. 23:6). Whether she was aware of this is unknown. Ruth was persistent and would not take no for an answer.



It reminds me of a passage in the New Testament between a woman from Canaan and the Lord Jesus Christ. We read in Matthew 15:22-28, “And, behold, a woman of Canaan came out of the same coasts, and cried unto him, saying, Have mercy on me, O Lord, thou son of David; my daughter is grievously vexed with a devil. But he answered her not a word. And his disciples came and besought him, saying, Send her away; for she crieth after us. But he answered and said, I am not sent but unto the lost sheep of the house of Israel. Then came she and worshipped him, saying, Lord, help me. But he answered and said, It is not meet to take the children's bread, and to cast it to dogs. And she said, Truth, Lord: yet the dogs eat of the crumbs which fall from their masters' table. Then Jesus answered and said unto her, O woman, great is thy faith: be it unto thee even as thou wilt. And her daughter was made whole from that very hour.”

Christ discouraged the Canaanite woman but she persisted and it was her great faith that moved the Lord to cure her vexed daughter. Ruth demonstrates great faith in following Naomi despite difficult and discouraging circumstances.

**3. Ruth pressed on with the Lord because she was a converted woman.** These are the words of a converted lady, verse 16, “And Ruth said, Intreat me not to leave thee, or to return from following after thee: for whither thou goest, I will go; and where thou lodgest, I will lodge: thy people shall be my people, and thy God my God.” Truly this is one of the greatest confessions of faith recorded in the Bible.

A more perfect surrender was never made of friendly feelings to a friend: I will not leave thee-I will follow thee. In effect, Ruth was forsaking all that she had ever known to follow the one true God. She was following in the footsteps of Abraham, who had forsaken his family and his homeland in response to God’s command.

**ENTREAT ME NOT TO LEAVE THEE**

by Fanny Crosby

Entreat me not to leave thee,  
 My heart goes with thee now;  
 Why turn my footsteps homeward?  
 No friend so dear as thou!  
 Thy heart has borne my sorrow,  
 And I have wept for thine;  
 And now how can I leave thee?  
 Oh, let thy lot be mine.

***Refrain***

I'll follow where thou ledest;  
 My love will cling to thee;  
 And where thy head is pillowed,  
 My nightly rest shall be;  
 Thy birthplace and thy kindred  
 I'll cherish like my own;  
 Thy God shall be my refuge,  
 I'll worship at His throne.

***Refrain***

Where death's cold hand shall find thee,  
 There let my eyelids close,  
 And, in the grave beside thee,  
 This mortal frame repose:  
 Oh, do not now entreat me;  
 No friend so dear as thou;  
 My heart would break in anguish  
 If I should leave thee now.

Ruth was living by faith and this is evidenced in **four** things she says.

**1. FOR WHERE YOU GO, I WILL GO.**

She did not know if she was going to a cottage or if she would even have a place to lay her head, so total was her sweet surrender. Ruth was willing to follow Naomi wherever it led!

**2. WHERE YOU LODGE, I WILL LODGE.**

I will call home where you are. Your home is my home.

### **3. YOUR PEOPLE SHALL BE MY PEOPLE.**

Her thoughts go farther than simple association with Israel; she identifies herself with the people, whatever their state might be, in order to belong to the God of Israel, the true God who does not change: “Thy people shall be my people, and thy God my God.”

### **4. YOUR GOD, MY GOD**

Ruth makes this confession during the days of the judges when the majority of the "chosen people" chose to forsake the living God and cleave to dead idols. Ruth's affirmation is similar to the picture of **repentance** among the Thessalonians who heard the gospel, “ For they themselves report about us (Paul, Silvanus, Timothy 1Th 1:1) what kind of a reception we had with you and how you turned to God from idols to serve a living and true God (1Th 1:9-note) Ruth's action of turning from the idols of Moab and unto Jehovah is an excellent illustration of the meaning of genuine Biblical repentance.

It has been well said that faith is not only believing in spite of evidence but obeying in spite of the consequence.

Ruth points the way to that kind of dynamic and exciting faith and all believers do well to emulate her excellent example. True faith is not based on empirical evidence but on divine assurance (He 11:1-note) and "is the gift of God" (Ep 2:8-note).

**How did Ruth know Naomi's God ?** Clearly Naomi's relationship with God had had an impact on Ruth. Can people look at your life, as Ruth looked at Naomi's, and say "I want your God to be my God!"? Our trust in God, and turning towards Him in tough times will often be the very thing that draws others to the Lord. Let's be the kind of persons who draw others to us, and through our friendship, to our God.

Spurgeon draws out this application, "This was a very brave, outspoken confession of faith. Please take notice that it was made by a woman, a young woman, a poor woman, a widow woman, and a foreigner. Remembering all that, I should think there is no condition of gentleness, or of obscurity, or of poverty, or of sorrow, which should prevent anybody from making an open confession of allegiance to God when faith in the Lord Jesus Christ has been exercised. If that is your experience, then whoever you may be, you will find an opportunity, somewhere or other, of declaring that you are on the Lord's side."

Is Christ your God? He may be your parents? But is he yours? Can you say, "Christ is my God." Do you know Christ personally?

**Ruth pressed on with the Lord because she was a changed person.** Ruth was no longer the Moabites' who worshiped idols but she was now a follower of the true and living God, and she was determined to go forward with the Lord.

We read in Ruth 1:18, "When she (Naomi) saw that she was **stedfastly minded** to go with her, then she left speaking unto her."

The Hebrew verb for determined means to stiffen one's self firmly upon a thing which pictures Ruth as strong in her resolve and steadfast in her determination not to go back to her own country, but to go forward with Naomi to the degree that nothing could move her from her firm purpose of mind.

An old preacher observed, "'O you dear young friends who want to be Christians, how glad we are when we see that you are steadfastly minded to go with the people of God! There are so many who are quickly hot and quickly cold,—soon excited towards

good things, and almost as speedily their ardor cools, and they go back into the world. Do ask the Lord to make you steadfastly minded. This is one of the best frames of mind for any of us to be in."

In closing, what does a study on Ruth have to do with the Lord's Supper? Just as Ruth clave to Naomi so too we as believers cleave to Jesus Christ by faith. Despite our difficulties and discouragements in this world we will follow the Lord. "Take the world but give me Jesus," is our cry. We want to and we need to press on with the Lord because we are changed men and women. Only Christ crucified satisfies our souls. We are here today about to observe the Lord's Table. What are we doing? We are pledging ourselves in faith to Christ. We are remembering the ultimate sacrifice of Jesus Christ on the Cross for our sins. May the Lord help us to press forward in faith with the Lord. Let us pray!