

Bethel

Pulpit

Ruth's Religion

Sermon Number 467

**Sermon preached at Bethel Chapel, Luton,
by Mr. B. A. Ramsbottom,
on Lord's day morning, 4th September, 2011**

Text: *"But Ruth clave unto her" (Ruth 1. 14).*

Did you notice how this lovely Book of Ruth begins? "Now it came to pass in the days when the judges ruled." What were the days when the judges ruled? Dreadful days, terrible days, when there was not much godliness left in Israel. The very last verse of the Book of Judges, before we have the Book of Ruth, is this: "In those days there was no king in Israel: every man did that which was right in his own eyes." If you read some of those last chapters, there were some dreadful things that were going on – people doing just what was right in their own eyes, no regard for God or godliness. But all this came to pass in those days when the judges ruled, those dreadful days, those terrible days, those God-dishonouring days. The Lord still had His witnesses. The Lord still had one here and one there who loved and feared His name. There were still those who honoured Him. There were still a few, even when they met at their daily work, who greeted one another, "The Lord be with you. And they answered ... The Lord bless thee."

So the Book of Ruth gives a beautiful witness to real religion, true godliness in all its beautiful simplicity in that dark and evil day. God had not forsaken the earth. God had not lost the power to save. God's grace was still going to reign in the salvation of this Moabitish girl. If you read through the Word of God, there is nothing whatsoever good said about Moab. In fact, there is one whole chapter, and it is a very long chapter – it is Jeremiah chapter 48 – and it tells us nothing but the wickedness, the evil of the Moabites.

But here you see the Lord's loving purpose and kindness – an object of mercy, an object of His choice, hidden away in the ruins of the Fall in the land of Moab. It could truly be said,

"Jesus sought me when a stranger,
Wandering from the fold of God."

Even in the land of Moab the Lord had an object of His everlasting love, and He was going to find her out, His lost sheep, and He was going to bring her to the fold.

So I think you follow me this morning, the way in which I am trying to deal with the subject. So often when we come to the Book of Ruth, we speak of it in a symbolical way, an allegorical way, a gleaner in the field, a hungry soul, the heavenly Boaz, the kinsman redeemer, the bridegroom.

“Jesus my Boaz is;
My strength and portion too;
His word of grace the precious field,
Where I a-gleaning go.”

You have often heard me, usually heard me speak from the Book of Ruth like that, and I believe it is right, because it is such a striking illustration of the Lord’s dealing with sinners, and we cannot help notice that Boaz is the redeemer, the first person spoken of as a redeemer, and Boaz came from Bethlehem, and he did “worthily in Ephratah,” and he was “famous in Bethlehem.” He was an ancestor according to the flesh of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

So we cannot help seeing all these things as beautiful types and figures, but I do not want to deal with the subject at all in that way this morning, but with the Lord’s help to speak of Ruth the Moabitess, her religion, the reality of it, the blessedness of it. Now here she was, an object of God’s eternal love, in the ruins of the Fall, in the land of Moab, with evil men, with wicked men, where there was no godliness. How could she be brought to a knowledge of the truth? Well, the Lord is never in want of means. It was a strange way. It seemed that that godly woman Naomi and her husband acted wrongly in fleeing, when trouble came in Bethlehem, to a land where there was no truth. Everything seemed to go wrong. The Lord dealt bitterly with them. Naomi lost her husband and both her sons.

Yet how the Lord overruled what surely must have been a mistake, if not a sin, in Naomi. How He overruled it to the honour and glory of His name! You will find, beloved friends, that the Lord does at times overrule faults, mistakes and sins. But let us be very clear: that is no excuse for them, no justification for them. It seems very clear that Ruth saw that there

was something Naomi had which she did not have. She saw something of vital godliness. Do not forget, it was in a woman in the depths of sorrow under the chastening hand of God. Ruth saw there was something there. She saw something of what real religion was, something of what vital godliness was, and she had not got it, but she wanted it, and she could not be satisfied without it. I do hope there is a Ruth here this morning, that the Holy Spirit is going to find this Ruth out. Perhaps not just one; surely we have a few Ruths here at Bethel.

Often real religion begins something like that. You see the people of God, and you realise they have got something. Perhaps you used to despise them. Perhaps you did not. Perhaps you thought they were a bit too strict, a bit too narrow. Perhaps you thought they were strange. Now you see something in them as the excellent of the earth, and you feel you have not got what they have. As that deepens, you feel it is an eternally-solemn thing if you never do have it, if you live and die without it, because it is vital. You have a little view of the blessedness of the people of God, because they are a blessed people. “Happy art thou, O Israel: who is like unto thee, O people saved by the Lord!”

I have often told you, I go back to it many years ago, and we were singing that lovely hymn, “Immortal honours.” I could just see those three words over the top: “Safety in Christ.” Didn’t I see the everlasting safety and security of the people of God in Christ, loved with an everlasting love and redeemed with the Saviour’s blood! I did not feel I had it. It was as if I was *here*, and they were *there*. O but to see the blessedness of the people of God! And that is what was going on in Ruth’s heart, so that she had that longing desire to be one of them, to have Naomi’s religion, Naomi’s God. She was brought to this: she was willing to give up everything for it. That was what marked the reality of it.

There came the testing time, and there will come the testing time with everyone, especially with a young person in the beginning of true religion. Your religion will be tested. There were two people here, and they both naturally loved Naomi. There was Orpah as well as Ruth. The time came when Naomi resolved to return to Bethlehem. “She had heard ... how that the Lord had visited His people in giving them bread,” and she felt she must return. Both of them were sad and both of them loved her, and both

said they would go with her. Naomi spoke very solemnly. She said, “Go, return each to her mother’s house: the Lord deal kindly with you, as ye have dealt with the dead, and with me.”

Now was Naomi right in the way she spoke? I think in reality it was this vital point, and Naomi wanted to clear her conscience. She wanted to clear it with her two daughters-in-law by telling them to count the cost. It is an important point, and we have a lot of it in the New Testament, and the Lord Jesus spoke very, very closely of it. Those who would follow Him, those who would profess His name, need to count the cost. Naomi was being very, very faithful. They were going to the land of Israel. They would be strangers. They would be foreigners. They would be despised Moabites concerning whom the Lord had said no good. There was not much hope for them of being married again. It was going to be a life of poverty and perhaps a life of shame, a life of isolation. She told them to count the cost.

“And they lifted up their voice, and wept again: and Orpah kissed her mother in law; but Ruth clave unto her.” Now the case of Orpah is a solemn case, and there have been these Orpahs ever since in our chapels, in our congregations. Really, the spirit of Orpah was those solemn words we have been singing just now (hymn 999: “When any turn from Zion’s ways”). One of the greatest disappointments to a gospel minister over the years is to see a person go so far in the things of God, and you were as sure as you could be that this was a work of grace, and then to see them go back and turn right back to their old life and the world and their idols.

Orpah went back to Moab. She went back to Moab’s comforts. It seems she had turned, according to what Naomi said (verse 15), to her pleasures, and to her gods. She turned her back on the people of God. She turned her back on Israel’s God and Lord, and she went back and went back for ever. There has always been that danger, and we still see it in our chapels today: these Orpahs who seem to go so far, but then when the testing time comes – and your religion will be tested – what she had to give up, that choice to be made – she went back, and went back for ever.

“But Ruth clave unto her.” Do you understand what it means when I say this, that Ruth could not go back? There are some here this morning and you cannot go back; you dare not go back. What is it?

“Depart from Thee? – ’tis death – ’tis more;
’Tis endless ruin, deep despair!”

The Lord Jesus had this. It says, “Many of *His disciples* went back, and walked no more with Him.” So they proved they were just like Orpah. They were not real disciples. And the Lord Jesus said, “Will ye also go away?” Now Peter could not. He spoke for the rest of them: “Lord, to whom shall we go? Thou hast the words of eternal life.”

“Depart from Thee? – ’tis death – ’tis more;
’Tis endless ruin, deep despair!”

There was something which held Ruth fast. “Ruth clave unto her,” and not just to Naomi, but to Naomi’s God. In its fullest sense, Ruth clave and clung to Christ. That is the best religion, a religion that clings and cleaves to Christ. Our hymnwriter never wrote a truer word than when he said,

“Happy souls! who cleave to Christ
By pure and living faith.”

“But Ruth clave unto her.” In the religion of Ruth, you do not read anything remarkable. You do not read anything exceptional. You do not read anything striking. When you go to Jacob, didn’t he have some outstanding things! Wrestling with the angel, revelations, visions, hearing God’s voice. With Ruth, you do not read anything striking. She had this one thing, and it is the one thing that really matters: “But Ruth clave unto her.” That is the religion that takes a sinner to heaven. You have to cling to the people of God. You cannot give them up. Even in your darkest moments, you cannot give them up.

I think I have told you how in those days of spiritual prosperity in the Highlands of Scotland, there was a woman under deep soul concern, and year after year she sought and could not get what she wanted. One year, during their communion season, where for a few days godly ministers were going to speak, she went with much prayer that the Lord would sort her case out for her. One day passed, and another, and yet another, and it was the last day and the last preacher. “Well,” she said, “If I don’t get anything, I am going to give it up for ever.” And the last preacher had finished, but before he sat down, he said, “Perhaps there is someone here today and you

feel if you do not get what you want today, you are going to give it up.” He said, “I have got a word for you.” She listened intently. He said, “Give it up *if you can*,” and in that strange way, that opposite way, the Lord sanctified that remark to satisfy her that she could never depart from the Lord, from seeking after Him, cleaving to Him.

O seek that religion, however dark you are, however unbelieving, however hard, however prayerless, however disappointed, whatever troubles, whatever sorrows, whatever things you cannot understand, to cling and to cleave to Christ.

“Nearer, nearer, to Him clinging,
Let my waiting soul be found.”

It is that clinging to Christ. It is that cleaving to the people of God. And there was love in it all. Whatever else there was with Ruth or there was not, there was love to the people of God, and there was love to the God of Israel. Looking through it all, it was love to Christ.

“But Ruth clave unto her.” People talk about godly women of the Word of God, like Esther and Mary of Bethany. They always put Ruth among them. People speak of Solomon for wisdom, and Job for patience. I am speaking of men as well. When they come to Ruth, the point they speak of is *her constancy*. Nobody could move her. Satan could not move her; trials could not move her; the testing time could not move her. She could have said with her great grandson David, “My heart is fixed.” I know some of us get tried about this. We feel our heart is anything but fixed; it is here, there and everywhere. “Fixed on this ground must I remain”: “If ever my poor soul be saved, ’tis Christ must be the way.” The constancy of Ruth. The Word of God uses this word: steadfast. “She was stedfastly minded to go with her.” Now may the grace of God make you and me steadfast. What does the hymnwriter say?

“Steadfast still in faith abiding,
Life deriving from His death.”

“But Ruth clave unto her.” When Naomi “saw that she was stedfastly minded to go with her, then she left speaking unto her.” She was satisfied. And “Ruth clave unto her.” O but that beautiful, well-known language in which she expressed it! Naomi said, “Behold, thy sister in law

is gone back unto her people, and unto her gods.” Naomi saw the root of it all, and put it clearly. “And unto her gods: return thou after thy sister in law.”

Now Ruth’s language: “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: where thou diest, will I die, and there will I be buried: the Lord do so to me, and more also, if ought but death part thee and me.” You can look at this in two ways. First of all, *as a loving desire*. Ruth had it, and I am sure some of you have it, that loving desire, come what may, whatever there might be, to be found amongst the people of God, in life and in death, never to be separated from them.

“With them numbered may I be,
Now, and through eternity.”

Is there that Ruth here this morning – your loving desire, you want to be one among the people of God, “saved in the Lord with an everlasting salvation”?

Also, Ruth spoke it in a second way: *as a resolve*. May there be some of you who go just beyond that desire, and through grace, as led by the Spirit of God, may you speak it as your resolve, to live and die identified with the people of God.

“Intreat me not to leave thee ... thy people shall be my people, and thy God my God.” I wonder if in this sense Ruth looked beyond Naomi, and she looked forward and she had a glimpse of Christ. “Intreat me not to ... return from following after thee.” It was not just Naomi. She was going after Naomi’s Lord. She was going after the Saviour. “Whither thou goest, I will go.” Where did the Lord Jesus go? “Let us go forth therefore unto Him without the camp, bearing His reproach.” Where did He go? “Where thou lodgest, I will lodge.” To have that blessed lodging place: “In union with the Lamb, from condemnation free.” “Where thou diest, will I die, and there will I be buried.” The people of God die in Christ, and when they are buried, they lie in the place where the Saviour lay. “Come, see the place where the Lord lay.”

“Ruth clave unto her,” and this was the language of Ruth cleaving to her. Ruth “was stedfastly minded,” and this was the language of being

stedfastly minded. But is the Holy Spirit finding one out this morning? You are identified with Ruth. You say, This is me, clinging and cleaving to the people of God, stedfastly minded, not daring to go back with Orpah. “Thy people shall be my people, and thy God my God.” “So they two went until they came to Bethlehem,” and you see Ruth clinging and cleaving to the people of God right to the end.

Now we could leave it there, a sinner saved by grace, but I do not want to leave it there, because there was the proof of it. In real religion, when a sinner clings and cleaves to Christ, there will be the fruits of the Spirit. “By their fruits ye shall know them.” There will be a witness. You see the reality of Ruth’s religion, not just in her beginning, not just in her resolve, not just in her profession, but in the way she walked it out. It is a solemn thing if people make a wonderful profession, and then do not walk it out; they dishonour it.

“Ruth clave unto her.” There are a few things which are very striking. Right at the end of the book, the women of Bethlehem said to Naomi, “Thy daughter in law, *which loveth thee*” – right at the end, when she had become a famous women. Boaz was a great man. Ruth was no more a poor Moabiteess gleaning in the field. She was a wealthy woman. She is still clinging and cleaving to Naomi. It is a terrible thing when people get on in the world, and they forget their old friends and even their family and parents. I have witnessed it once or twice very sadly in my native town, people who got on, who would not acknowledge their parents in the streets.

“But Ruth clave unto her” at the end, and right at the very end they are talking of how much she loved Naomi. But the things that strikes me: we all know about Ruth going gleaning, and then going and lying down at the feet of Boaz, and all that, but again and again you find her asking Naomi what she had to do, and Naomi telling her what to do, and Ruth obeying Naomi, and Ruth honouring Naomi, and Ruth thinking all the time about Naomi. It is a blessed thing to see a profession of cleaving to Christ, walked out in humility, and walked out in love.

“Ruth clave unto her.” But there was a witness. In two places you have a most remarkable witness. Here is this young woman who has come. She is a Moabiteess. She is a widow. She has nothing, she has nobody, but when Boaz first meets her, do you know what he says to her? “It hath fully

been shewed me, all that thou hast done unto thy mother in law since the death of thine husband: and how thou hast left thy father and thy mother, and the land of thy nativity, and art come unto a people which thou knewest not heretofore.” She had a blessed witness in Bethlehem. Obviously people were talking about her, saying things about her.

In the next chapter, when Boaz meets her again, he made a most remarkable statement. He said, “*All the city* of my people doth know that thou art a virtuous woman.” How did they know it? Well, she was not anybody. People do take notice, and people do talk. Sometimes they talk wrongly, and sometimes they talk too much, but you cannot stop people talking. They were talking in Bethlehem, and they were talking about this young Moabitess who had come, but everything they said about her was good.

What a blessing, the witness of God’s people! The Lord does not say, Ye must be witnesses. He says, “Ye are My witnesses.” The witness of some of the Lord’s people has had a wonderful effect, perhaps more in the small towns and in the villages. One great difference I found, leaving a little town like Haslingden, coming to a big town like Luton – everybody in Haslingden knew our chapel, and what we were, and what we professed. Everybody knew, and mercifully they were all very respectful and tended to speak well of us. People in Haslingden would say, “Those people are terribly strict, but they are good people.” But in some villages and towns it has been the opposite.

But the point I am emphasising is this: “Ruth clave unto her,” and it was not just in profession; it was not just in talking. “This people have I formed for Myself; they shall shew forth My praise.” It is that living witness in the humble walk and loving obedience of a child of God. Paul says, “Ye are our epistle ... known and read of all men.” Now the world does not read the Epistle to the Romans. It sees the people of God and reads that epistle. O that it might be to the praise and honour and glory of the Lord.

So we see the fruits of the Spirit in Ruth’s love to Naomi and her obedience and her humility, and we see the fruits of the Spirit in her life, walk and conversation becoming the gospel of Christ.

“Ruth clave unto her.” Now Ruth gave up everything for Christ’s sake, and really Christ still demands that His people give up everything for His sake. But she did not lose by it. You think of her poverty. At the end, you think of her riches, her honoured position. There are two things I just want to speak about, coming to a close in this. “Them that honour Me I will honour.” But one thing was this. Ruth’s end was better than her beginning. Like Naomi, she was a young woman of sorrow, and when she forsook all for Christ’s sake, she did not expect anything but poverty and sorrow, but what did she find? How the Lord blessed her and honoured her, and not just in grace, but also in providence. The old hymn is still very true:

“They who trust Him wholly,
Find Him wholly true.”

And also this:

“God always gives the best to those
Who leave the choice to Him.”

But secondly, and more important, we have just a little secret that came out in what Boaz said to her. He said this: “The Lord God of Israel, under whose wings thou art come to trust.” You remember he said, “A full reward be given thee of the Lord God of Israel, under whose wings thou art come to trust.” Boaz lets out the secret there. He must have heard it. Somebody must have told him. But Ruth was not disappointed spiritually in leaving Moab. She found more than she had left. She found her Saviour, found her hope, found her resting place, found her refuge, found her shelter, found her salvation, looking forward to gospel days and Christ.

“The Lord God of Israel, under whose wings thou art come to trust” – whether you think of it in the sense of the overshadowing wings of the blood-sprinkled mercy seat, or whether you think of it, “as a hen gathereth her chickens.” But that place of blessing, that place of safety, that place of security, that Ruth had found beneath His wings, under His shadow, the shadow of His wonderful providence from first to last, the shadow of a Father’s love, the shadow of His gracious protection, and then the shadow, the shelter of the blood of Christ. “He that dwelleth in the secret place of the most High” – and Ruth did, and every true Ruth does – “shall abide under the shadow of the Almighty.”

“But Ruth clave unto her.” We trace it from its beginning, right through to the end, and she had the honour of being mentioned in the New Testament as an ancestor of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. Beloved friends, it was a religion of love – love from first to last, love to Naomi, love to the people of God, love to the Lord.

“But Ruth clave unto her.”

* * *

How sweet, how heavenly is the sight,
When those that love the Lord,
In one another’s peace delight,
And so fulfil his word!

When each can feel his brother’s sigh,
And with him bear a part;
When sorrow flows from eye to eye,
And joy from heart to heart.

When free from envy, scorn, and pride,
Our wishes all above,
Each can his brother’s failings hide,
And show a brother’s love.

When love in one delightful stream
Through every bosom flows;
When union sweet and dear esteem,
In every action glows!

Love is the golden chain that binds
The happy souls above;
And he’s an heir of heaven that finds
His bosom glow with love.

J. Swain