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Sermon

Introduction.

- a. The Pharisee Nicodemus who came to Jesus by night had spent a lifetime studying the Scriptures, his knowledge of the content and substance of the Word would have been great. Jesus stunned Nicodemus when he said, *'Most assuredly I say to you, unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God.'* (**John 3:3**) Nicodemus had missed this vital truth even though he had spent years in study and days in prayer. Jesus explains the new-birth in **John 3:5-8**, *"Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God. That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. Do not marvel that I said to you, 'You must be born again.' The wind blows where it wishes, and you hear the sound of it, but cannot tell where it comes from and where it goes. So is everyone who is born of the Spirit."* The new-birth is the sovereign work of the Holy Spirit who brings life, faith and light to sinners dead in trespass and sin. The work of the Spirit of God changes unbelievers into believers who love, adore, serve, and worship the only true and living God. Jesus Christ in his sacrifice of atonement effectively dealt with the sins of his people and thereby removed every obstacle that hindered full reconciliation between God and all Jesus Christ came to save. The powerful work of God's grace transforms enemies into sons of God and co-heirs with Christ. Our greatest cause for rejoicing ought to be the fact that we belong to God, through the grace of the Father, and the work of Christ and by the power of the Holy Spirit. Nothing can eclipse the glory of belonging to the only true God.
- b. When you talk about being saved the terms born-again, converted, regenerated, baptised in the Spirit, coming to faith, redeemed, justified, and reconciled all speak of the wonderful and powerful grace of God bringing salvation to the elect. While we may be able to debate the particular meaning of each of these terms and their exact sequence in the order of salvation, what is not debateable is that all these terms explain what has happened to everyone called by God to come to Christ. You cannot be a Christian and lack the substance of any of these terms. You cannot be converted and not baptised in the Spirit, nor can you be redeemed and

not be born-again. These different terms explain how God's grace transforms a sinner into a son of the Almighty. **A W Pink** said, *'Conversion is the heart turning from Satan's control to God's, from sin to holiness, from the world to Christ.'* The affect of conversion is so great that Paul in **2 Corinthians 5:17** says, *'Therefore if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation: old things have passed away: behold, all things have become new.'* The work of conversion is not a renovation, but a new creation. The evidence that reveals that a person is a new creation in Christ is, *'old things have passed away and new things have taken their place.'* Evidence of being made a new creation must show itself. As **Horace Wood** says, *'Before coming to Christ, a man loves things and uses people; after Christ he loves people and uses things.'* In **Ruth 1:16-17**, Ruth gives a full declaration of the changes that have come about in her by the powerful grace of God. Listen once more to her declaration:

"Entreat me not to leave you, or to turn back from following after you; For wherever you go, I will go; and wherever you lodge, I will lodge; your people shall be my people, and your God, my God. Where you die, I will die, and there will I be buried. The Lord do so to me, and more also, if anything but death parts you and me."

It is vital that we do not take this wonderful declaration primarily as a statement of Ruth's commitment to Naomi, but as a proclamation of her faith in the LORD Almighty. Ruth loved Naomi greatly, but she loved the LORD Almighty more. I do not believe that this is the place to really focus on the bond between Naomi and Ruth, I believe the right place to do that is **Ruth 4:15** listen to the words of the women who attended the birth of Obed in NAB translation, *"He (Obed) will be your comfort and the support of your old age, for his mother is the daughter-in-law who loves you. She is worth more to you than seven sons!"* We need to understand Ruth's profession of faith in order to grasp the wonder and power of God's grace. In her declaration of faith Ruth clearly reveals five fundament truths about true conversion.

1. Conversion is a thorough work of God's grace changing a person's life.

- a. *The first mark of conversion is an uncompromised commitment to God.* Ruth declares the *Lord is my God*, indicating that she belongs to God. The *LORD Almighty* is a covenant God, his relationship with his people is always a covenantal relationship. At the very heart of the covenant is the statement, *'You shall be my people and I shall be your God.'* This is not only a statement of belonging, but also a statement concerning the structure of the covenant. The covenants God makes are always one-sided or suzerain covenants. The covenants between God and mankind are not negotiated between equals: God sets all the terms, conditions, benefits and privileges of the covenant. What do condemned sinners have to offer the *LORD Almighty*? That the *LORD Almighty* has chosen a people to be his own is an act of free sovereign grace towards those who deserved eternal punishment in hell. Ruth used to believe in the god Chemosh, but now her God is Yahweh, the God who *revealed* himself to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. In the closing line of her profession of faith Ruth uses the covenantal name of the *Lord* indicating her relationship with God. Ruth will live her life in submission to the will and purpose of God declared in the covenant. The first mark of conversion is to know God out of a changed heart, mind and will. Ruth knew God and was totally committed to pleasing the Lord by worshipping, serving and obeying his commands. Ruth no longer had any obligations to Chemosh and denounced this false god.
- b. *The second mark of conversion is a commitment to the Lord's people.* Ruth proclaimed *'your people shall be my people.'* This is not an optional extra, but an essential aspect of God's covenant with his people. Jesus emphasises this in **John 13:34-35**, *'A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; as I have loved you, that you also love one another. By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another.'* In **1 John 4:20**, *'if someone says, "I love God," and hates his brother, he is a liar; for he who does not love his brother whom he has seen, how can he love God whom he has not seen?'* You cannot be committed to God and not to God's people; the New Covenant secured by the blood of Jesus binds the two inseparably. In **Ruth 2:11**, Boaz says, *"It has been fully reported to me, all that you have done for your mother-in-law since the death of your husband, and how you have left your father and your mother and the land of your birth, and have come to a people whom you did not know before.'* Ruth embraced the Lord's people in love before she had met them. Our

love for the Lord's people should not be restricted to those we know. If God has changed you by his powerful grace then you will love him and his people.

- c. *The third mark of conversion is fellowship with the Lord's people.* Fellowship means sharing the joys and the sorrows of God's people. Paul in **Romans 12:15** emphasises the outworking of fellowship when he says, '*Rejoice with those who rejoice, and weep with those who weep.*' Ruth tells Naomi, '*For wherever you go, I will go; and wherever you lodge, I will lodge.*' Humanly speaking when Ruth said this she faced a future that was very bleak and uncertain. She was leaving a mother and probably many loved ones to be one with the Lord's people. The covenant requires God's people to fully identify with their brothers and sisters in Christ and to partake in life together. There are many who call themselves Christian when in Christian company, but act as undercover agents when in the company of the world. Living the Christian life incognito is not a covenantal option. Fellowship is much more than sharing the things of God with fellow believers it is sharing life together.
- d. *The fourth mark of conversion is faithfulness to the Lord.* To be faithful to the Lord means trusting him for grace and submitting to his will in all situations and circumstances. In this life the Gospel calls us to live the more abundant life in Christ, which must not be confused with a life on easy-street. Many of the early Christians walked the more abundant life but were martyred for their faith. This is a commitment that says, '*God is my God and I live under his providence and accept his will.*' Ruth tells Naomi, '*Where you die, I will die, and there will I be buried.*' Ruth's faith in the Lord and her commitment to the Lord's people would not end when Naomi died, but continue faithfully until the Lord called her home.
- e. *The fifth mark of conversion is living God's way.* Listen to the vow that Ruth makes, '*The Lord do so to me, and more also, if anything but death parts you and me.*' Ruth recognised that the Lord was with her and would deal with her if she dealt falsely with her mother-in-law. God's children cannot sin and expect no response from their heavenly Father. As **Hebrews 12:5-6** says, '*My son, do not despise the chastening of the Lord, nor be discouraged when you are rebuked by him; For whom the Lord loves He chastens, and scourges every son whom He receives.*' In the New Covenant everyone who believes is adopted as a son, and God exercises loving fatherhood over them. God's covenantal purpose is for you to be like Jesus Christ, and he will accomplish his purpose. Those converted by the powerful grace know God owns them completely and totally. In **1 Corinthians 6:19-20** Paul spells out this principle to those who were immoral. He says '*Or do you not know that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and you are not your own? For you were bought at a price; therefore glorify God in your body and in your spirit, which are God's.*' You, everything that makes you who you are, belongs to God and he requires you to bring your thoughts, feelings, attitudes, words, actions and affections into line with the teaching of the New Covenant. You live your life for God; you do not live your own life with God's help.
- f. These are the five marks of conversion wrought by the powerful grace of God in the life of Ruth. Ruth was prepared to leave her former life in Moab behind her to live for the *LORD Almighty* because her heart had been changed. Ruth's departure from Moab was symbolic of putting off her old life; her going to Bethlehem is symbolic of her putting on her new life in the Lord. Ruth's actions proclaimed that walking with the *LORD Almighty* was more important to her than anything else. Conversion had changed Ruth's heart, mind, will, and purpose for living, her life was God centred, she had been changed by the powerful grace of God. Why did God set his grace upon Ruth? God's grace came to Ruth because before the foundation of the world he exercised his sovereign free will and set his electing love on her. The *LORD Almighty* by his providence had brought Elimelech and his family to Moab, so that Ruth, one of God's elect would come to faith.

2. Conversion is worked by Almighty God using imperfect messengers.

- a. In **Romans 10:17** says, '*Faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God.*' God by his sovereign free will chose to give his children a role in the conversion of others, that role is sharing the Word with others. Ruth would have heard from Naomi that Yahweh was the only true and living God, and God used that communication of truth to convert Ruth. Every believer has been made a co-worker in the Gospel of Jesus and is commanded to share the glorious

gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ with others. Being given the task of taking the Gospel to others is a great privilege and we need to embrace it joyfully, purposely and energetically.

- b. God determined to use saved sinners as his primary instruments in spreading the truth verbally, he did this totally aware of the fact that saved sinners are imperfect instruments. Naomi was a very imperfect instrument: she was backslidden, weighed down with the sin of bitterness, grieving deeply, blaming God for her grim circumstances, and harbouring anger against God. Naomi told the women in Bethlehem to call her *Mara not Naomi*. Naomi was a saved sinner in whom the poison of bitterness had infected heart and mind. Was Naomi a good witness to her daughters-in-law? I do not believe so. What was the message her witness had communicated to her daughters-in-law? The message of her witness I believe is found in **Ruth 1:13b**, *'the hand of the Lord has gone out against me*, and **Ruth 1:20-21**, *'the Almighty has dealt very bitterly with me. I went out full and the LORD has brought me back empty. Why do you call me Naomi, since the Lord has testified against me, and the Almighty has afflicted me.'* The sentiments reflected in these statements would have been the dominant themes of Naomi's conversations with others. What conclusion would others have drawn from these statements? It would not be surprising if the Moabites thought that the God of Israel was a God who made his people miserable. Ruth would have heard over and over again from Naomi that God was against her, afflicted her, dealt with her bitterly, and made her life empty. In spite of this negative witness by Naomi, Ruth comes to know and love the *LORD Almighty*. God's powerful grace had used Naomi as an instrument in Ruth conversion even though Naomi was a very imperfect witness. Conversion is the work of God not man.
- c. As God's instruments we realize that at best we are but sowers of the seed, it is the Lord himself who causes the seed to grow. We sow the seed because the Lord has instructed us to do so. We sow the seed and look to the Lord to work by his grace and bring the seed to fruition. Conversion does not depend upon the talents, ability, gifts, knowledge, wisdom, will of men, or evangelism technique but on the power of God. Jonah preaching God's Judgement to the city of Nineveh is a good example of a very imperfect vessel. He preached under duress and hoped in his heart that not one citizen of Nineveh would repent. He was angry with the Lord for granting the gift of repentance to the enemies of Israel. The people of Nineveh were saved from judgement by God's grace and not Jonah's preaching and witness. Naomi was an imperfect vessel with a poor witness, yet God's powerful grace used her as an instrument to bring Ruth to faith. Conversions are the work of God's grace and not the product of human effort. God has commissioned us to sow the seed; this is a gracious privilege and responsibility which we must diligently fulfil.

3. Ruth's profession of faith was prompted by Naomi's urging her to return to her mother's home.

- a. Ruth's profession of faith comes in response to Naomi's proposal that she follow the example of her sister in-law. In **Ruth 1:8 & 11** Naomi exhorts or instructs her daughters-in-law to stay in Moab, to return to their mother's homes and not to go with her to Bethlehem. Naomi does not ask Orpah and Ruth to make a decision about going to Bethlehem; she has made it clear that she does not want them to accompany her. Orpah is persuaded by Naomi's arguments that going back to her mother's home is the best thing to do. Ruth refuses to go back to her mother's house and clings to Naomi. Listen to what Naomi says, *"Look, your sister-in-law has gone back to her people and to her gods; return after your sister-in-law."* I believe that when Ruth heard this there was a fundamental objection in the soul of Ruth to being asked to return to follow Chemosh and belong to his people. As Ruth had been converted by the power of God's grace I am convinced that she was cut to the heart at her mother-in-law's proposal that she go back to the gods of Moab. In her soul there was a strong sense of I cannot do what Naomi asks for I belong to Yahweh and his people. The Holy Spirit would have made her very much aware that what Naomi was proposing was sinful, and she must not do it.

Conclusion.

Conversion by the powerful grace of God is the personal miracle every true believer experiences. It is an experience that changes you forever, God has changed you forever, and you know that you belong to God and that he is your God. If you are converted rejoice in the fact that you are a son of God

forever. Live a covenant life to honour Jesus Christ. Embrace the privilege of being called by God to share the truth with others and praise God that he has chosen to use imperfect vessels as instruments of grace.