

## Repentance by God's Grace

Preached in New Hope Reformed Fellowship Church, Middleville, MI, on Sunday morning, February 20, 2022 by C. VanSteenselen.

Text: Ruth 1:6-7  
Psalter 60  
Psalter 190  
Psalter 220:1,3,6  
Psalter 196

Congregation,

“What do I need to do to be saved?” was the question of Pilgrim. Evangelist answers him, “Wherefore do you cry?” Pilgrim says, “It is because of the book in my hand. I am condemned to die and then the judgment. Where do I need to fly?” Evangelist, “Do you see the gate?” Pilgrim, “No.” Evangelist, “Do you see that shining light?” Pilgrim answered, “I think I do.” Then Pilgrim begins to run and cries, “Life! Life! Eternal Life!” Some time later he comes at the gate. He knocks and asks, “May I enter?” The watchman, called Goodwill, asks, “Who are you? Where did you come from? What do you want of me?” Pilgrim answers him, “I am a poor burdened sinner. I came from the city of destruction and go to the mount Zion to be delivered from the wrath to come. Goodwill answers him, “I am willing.” He opens the gate. In this way Pilgrim is saved. This is an example of true repentance, which is also proclaimed this morning.

### Theme: Repentance by God's Grace

- I. The Mortification in Repentance
- II. The Quickening in Repentance
- III. The Cause of Repentance

### I. The Mortification in Repentance

#### *Awakening in Repentance*

In the first place, we will see in our passage an awakening in the repentance. We read in verse 6, “Then she arose with her daughters in law.” This arising means to move, rise up, or get up. We do the same every morning when we get up from our bed. We arise from the our chair after lunch. It means for us the beginning of a new day, and a new time. It is time for work and activity. For Naomi, it was her preparation to go to Israel. The beginning of activity. May we ask you, who also did arise in the Bible? Yes, the prodigal son. He arose out of his sinful lifestyle. We read in Luke, “And he *arose*, and came to his father” (Luke 15:20). When did he do this? We can mention four things. First, he had spend all. There was nothing left. Second, he was perishing of hunger. This is certainly what he felt. Third, he realized his sin and unworthiness. We can read this in the phrase, “I have sinned” (Luke 15:18). And lastly, he had knowledge of his father’s goodness. It states, “The servants of my father have bread enough” (Luke 15:17) When we look to our passage, who did arise? It says “she.” That points to Naomi. In the original it is even emphasized. When we compare this with the prodigal son, we see similar tings. First, there was nothing left (1:21). Second, she was spiritually perishing. Third, she felt guilty. We see later in verse 21, “The LORD hath testified against me” (1:21). And lastly, she knew of the goodness of the LORD. He had “visited His people” (1:6). Was she alone? No. Two others went with her. Verse 6 says, “with her daughters in law.” It seems that both are truly desiring to go to Israel. There is a real beginning, although it seems. Later verses show that this was a true beginning for the one and a false one for the other. Think also about the parable of the four soils. The same sower goes out. The same seed is sown. But the fruit is different. Ruth is like that good ground. There is a root. When trails come, she endures. Orpah, on the other hand, is like the stony or thorny ground. When trials and cares of this world come, she turns back.

#### *Application*

In our passage, Naomi did arise. Spiritually, there is also an arising, or better said an awakening. We read in Ephesians, “Awake thou that sleepest, and *arise* from the dead, and Christ shall give thee light” (Eph. 5:14). That means, to arise out of your spiritual death. Out of a state of slumber and false security. Maybe you ask, What is awakening? This is related to the conviction of sin. But there is a difference between common convictions and saving convictions. Both Ruth and Orpah arose. For the one it was true, but for the other it stopped at the border of Israel.

This is also what true for convictions. The common conviction will not come in truth to Jesus Christ. You can find that in the Canons of Dort. What does then belong to the saving conviction? First, one receives new light of the Holy Spirit. The person begins to see things in a different light. He reads his Bible differently. He prays differently. Before, it was out of custom, but now he does it out of necessity. Congregation, do you know of this moment? The true believer can say, “One thing I know, that whereas I was blind, now I see” (John 9:25). Second, there is conviction of sin. In other words, knowing of a spiritual perishing. You see if you will remain this way, you will perish. You begin to seek the LORD. It is true. Some have very deep convictions, but others have it in a more evangelical way. Third, the person will feel guilty. The LORD and the law of Him testifies against him. For one with common convictions, it causes him to run away from God. Think about Cain. For the person with saving convictions, it will not drive him from God but bring him at His feet. Fourth, you will experience an emptiness. You see more and more that you cannot find it in yourself. You need to have it from Another. For Naomi this was little by little. More and more was taken away from her until she was totally empty. With the sinner, God breaks him of bit by bit. Even his own ‘faith.’ Fifth, there is a knowledge of the goodness of the LORD. Knowing that He cares for His people. It leads the person to flee to Jesus Christ. This is missing in the one awakened with common convictions. Remember, this conviction is never saving. In our passage Naomi arose. We can also say, she awoke and repented. But what did she repent from? It was from the world and from sin.

#### *Repentance from the World*

Second, we see that Naomi repents from the world. It is said in verse 6, “That she might return from the country of Moab.” To return means to turn back, to change the mind, or to repent. The last one can be found in the prophets where the same word is used. Ezekiel says, “*Repent*, and turn yourselves from all your transgressions; so iniquity shall not be your ruin” (Ezek. 18:30). Our passage shows that there is an intention and desire to repent from Moab. Maybe you ask, what is repentance? For this, the Westminster Shorter Catechism is helpful. It says, “Repentance...[is that] a sinner, out of a true sense of his sin, and apprehension of the mercy of God in Christ, doth, with grief and hatred of his sin, *turn from it...*” (WSC, Q87). In summary, we can say that one side of repentance is to turn from sin and from the world.

The question is then, how does Naomi return from the world? Verse 6 says, “*return* from the country [or: field, territory] of *Moab*.” Do you remember? What was Moab? What was the issue? Four different things can be said. First, it had a wrong origin. It came into being by an intercourse of Lot and his oldest daughter (Gen. 19:37). Second, it was hostile to Israel. One example is related to Eglon, the king of Moab. We read, “[Eglon] went and smote Israel...the children of Israel served Eglon the king of Moab eighteen years” (Judg. 3:12-14). Third, Moab served false gods. Their main god was Chemosh. The meaning of this name is unknown. Some think that it means destroyer and others the subduer. At least it was a fish-god. Also, it was related to Aseroth, the fertility god. We read even that Solomon served this god, “Then did Solomon build an high place for Chemosh, the abomination of Moab...likewise did he for all his strange wives” (1 Kings 11:7). Do you see, congregation, the Bible calls it an abomination. Fourth, this people was under God’s curse. They were not allowed to enter into the temple, “An Ammonite or Moabite shall not enter into the congregation of the LORD; even to their tenth generation...for ever” (Deut. 23:3). This had two causes. On the one hand, they had not given food and drink when Israel came through the way of Moab to Canaan. On the other hand, they had hired Balaam to curse the people. God’s curse was severe. Israel was not allowed to “seek their peace nor their prosperity” (Deut. 23:6). Thus, when Naomi turns from Moab, she turns from the world.

What about Ruth? How did she turn from the world? She left many things behind. Think about her parents, siblings, and friends. Also, she had to forsake her possessions, a place worship, her own gods, the nation, and her people. The Targum explains her high position, “Ruth, the daughter of Eglon, the king of Moab.” But she turns unto an unknown country, unknown people and unknown God. What can she expect? Is it enmity? Will they help her? How does her future look like?

#### *Application*

Let us draw a few lines to our days. The world of today is very much like Moab. First, since the fall there is a wrong origin. We all came from a sinful relation between Adam and Eve. Each is born as sinner. Second, the world is hostile to God and His people. When we are converted, we will meet hostility. Others do not like it when we want to be honest, have free on Sundays, or when we say something about their cursing. This is even true for the religious world. You can find much hostility to ‘strict’ people. Though such desire to keep the law out of love, it is called legalism.

They have also an envy against a ‘difficult’ way of salvation. The religious world wants to be converted in an easy way. But what does Bunyan say? “Conversion is not the smooth, easy-going process some men seem to think...It is wounding work, this breaking of the hearts, but without wounding there is no saving...Where there is grafting there will always be a cutting, the graft must be let in with a wound; to stick it onto the outside or to tie it on with a string would be of no use.” He is an example himself. After his conversion, he received hatred. Have you experienced this, congregation? Or are you able to have friends of each ‘christian’ religion? Third, many people in our world serve false gods. There are many false religions or others fall into atheism. We see the worship of self and of the environment. In this world we live. Are we maybe influenced by environmentalists? Or have our minds changed by ‘neutral’ science? But not only the secular world. Even the religious world today serves a false god. They like to hear about a god of love, but do not want to hear about a god that is just. They do like to speak about heaven but not about hell. A question to us is, have we experienced this in our hearts? Have we had trouble with the fact that God is just? That we shrunk back at the thought of the existence of hell? Fourth, the world lies under God’s wrath and curse (Eph. 2:3, Rom. 5:16). This is true for each person, unless we are born again. If we were converted, was this not realized? And my unconverted friend, you are still under God’s curse, but God calls now you to repent.

Congregation, we need to repent. Also, from the religious world. We need to leave behind all that we have. That means to hate self and my own ability to save me. Do we have knowledge of this? How was it? Not painful? It is like a birth. It gives pain, but later we can say, it had to go this way. Now, conversion is not only the mortification of the old man, but also a making alive of the new man. This is what we find in our second thought.

## II. The Quickening in Repentance

### *Actual Outgoing in Repentance*

In the first place, we see an actual outgoing in repentance. We read in verse 7, “Wherefore she went forth out of the place where she was, and her two daughters in law with her.” Again, the focus is in “she” that is Naomi. We see four references to her: “*she* went forth,” “where *she* was,” and “*her* daughters-in-law,” and “with *her*.” In the first two instances, Naomi is the subject. In the last two, all is related to her. But what did she do? We read, “she went forth” (1:7). That means to go or come out. Sometimes, this word is translated with “forsake” (Jer. 10:20). The picture of Naomi reminds us of Israel leaving Egypt, “I am the LORD thy God, which have *brought* [literally: caused to go out] thee out of the land of Egypt” (Ex. 20:2). It shows for Naomi that it is not only an arising, an idea, but also an actual going. What did she take with her? Not much. Verse 21 says that she returned empty. Only “her two daughters-in-law [go] with her.” In relation to these daughters, is this not a strange sentence? Why had they not gone to their parents after the death of their husbands? One commentator gives the following reason, “In Eastern countries women occupy apartments separate from those of men, and daughters are most frequently in those of their mother.” Now, the question is why would these two Moabitish women go with her? That would mean to go to a strange land and strange gods. In the case of Ruth, we can say with one commentator that she entrusted her future in the hand of the LORD.

### *Application*

Congregation, this passage shows the difference between thinking about repentance and actual repentance. Some do not even want to think about it. They are too busy with things in life or do not like to think about it. Others will say, “I will repent in the future, but I will first continue in sin and enjoy life.” Again others are convicted on the Lord’s Day but the next Monday these feelings disappear. It shows, congregation, that repentance cost our time, effort, and even more, ourselves. It is an actual breaking with sin and actual confessing to the LORD. No, we do not like to be open before the LORD. But may we say this, He knows all things. Why would you not confess it?

Those that know Jesus Christ, was there not an outgoing to Him? No longer a seeking in self but in Him. A going after Him. A needing of Him. A dependence on Him. Was there then not a joy in the heart? Did you not have a relief after your confession? Then you knew, God knows about it. And was it not true, to go to a strange land and a ‘strange’ God? But did God disappoint? No! We do, but He never. Will you then not entrust yourself for all things in future unto Him? Will you not do it with all your heart? Now, if we think about outgoing, what does Naomi go to? In our text, it is a repentance unto the promised land.

### *Repentance unto the Promised Land*

In the second place, we see that our text speaks about repentance unto the promised land. Verse 7 says, “And they went on the way to return unto the land Judah.” It is not longer “she” but “they.” All three are involved. Yes, we read

that “they went.” What a difference with verse 1 where “they went to sojourn in the country of Moab.” Now it is the reverse. It is to Judah. Yes, a return. The verse continues by saying, “to return unto.” The word for return is the same as in verse 6, “that she might return.” In that verse it was an idea, here it is the reality. Keil and Delitzsch say, “Strictly it only speaks of Naomi[‘s return], but her daughter-in-law accompany her.” This verse further speaks of a “return unto.” We can say this, true repentance exist of two things: first, a turning from sin, and second, a turning unto God. The Westminster Larger Catechism says, “[The sinner] turns from all [his sins] to God, purposing and endeavouring constantly to walk with him in all the ways of new obedience” (WLC, Q76). Is this a Biblical thought? Yes. We read of the prodigal son, “And he arose, and *came* to his father” (Luke 15:20). We could say, this returning unto is related to the “quickenings” in repentance. A making alive. What is it? The Heidelberg Catechism says, “It is a sincere joy of heart in God, through Christ, and with love and delight to live according to the will of God in all good works” (HC, Q90). We find this thought also in Ephesians, “Even when we were dead in sins, *hath quickened* [made alive] us together with Christ, (by grace ye are saved)” (Eph. 2:5). But where did Naomi and her two daughters-in-law return unto? The text says “Judah.” Why this and not Canaan or Israel? Two things can be said. First, David would be born out of the tribe of Judah. He would become the king of Israel. Second, Judah had received a special blessing. Jacob had blessed all his sons. When he came to Judah, he said, “The sceptre shall not depart from Judah, nor a lawgiver from between his feet, until Shiloh come; and unto him shall the gathering of the people be” (Gen. 49:10). Yes, this promise ultimately refers to the coming of Jesus Christ.

#### *Application*

Congregation, do you know about this quickening? This making alive? What does that mean? A sincere joy in God through Jesus Christ. When that is true, you came with all your need to the Father. He kissed you. He put on the best robe and killed the fat calf. Then there was rejoicing in heaven. Yes, the true believer knows about such joy. Then there is peace and joy in his heart. What a wonder that God did it. But what will be true afterwards? Will he not live out of gratitude? Shall he not live according to God’s command. Yes. Then it is no longer that he must do something to earn heaven or salvation. Oh, no. But it is like having a spouse. You like to do it because you love the other. The question comes to us, how is it with us to seek God’s will? Do we ask for it every day? Or do we backslide? Is it not often that the true believer has to complain with Paul, I do not as I would? Also, Naomi sought to go to Canaan. Believer, do you seek to go to the heavenly Canaan? We mean heaven, the things that are above, “If ye then be risen with Christ, seek those things which are above...Set your affection on things above, not on things on the earth” (Col. 3:1-2). How is that in your life? Do you seek the things on earth? Are you busy with the matters of the earth? Or do you truly seek that which belongs to heaven? Examine your heart, friend.

My unbelieving friend, we call you to seek the things above. The world perishes. And if that happen, what do you have? Nothing. But God desires to give a Savior and a Promised Land. Then you will have all you need. Then you can say, away world, away treasures, I have lost all but gained Jesus Christ. Friend, he is worth more than all the gold of the earth. Why would you not seek for Him before it is too late? Let us now return to our text. What caused Naomi to return? What causes a sinner to repent? This is what we will see in our third thought.

### **III. The Cause for Repentance**

When we think about the cause of repentance, our passage points to two things. First, it is by the hearing of the Word, and second, it is because of God’s covenant faithfulness.

#### *Caused by Hearing the Word*

For this cause, we need to go back to the last part of verse 6, “For she [Naomi] had heard in the country of Moab.” Maybe you ask, why is this a cause? Well, the verse begins with “for.” This is the reason or ground for the previous verse. You may also translate it as “because.” What is the cause then? We read, “she had heard.” How did she hear this? The Targum, an Aramaic translation of the Old Testament, says, “She was informed *by an angel*, in the field of Moab, that the Lord had remembered his people.” Is this true? It could be, but we are not sure. At least we see that the LORD cared for her. We know for sure that she heard the *Word* about the LORD. That caused her to go. It is the same as the woman with the issue of blood in the New Testament. Then we read, “When *she had heard* of Jesus, came in the press behind, and touched his garment” (Mark 5:27). This is also true for faith. It comes by hearing, “So then faith *cometh by hearing*, and hearing *by the word of God*” (Rom. 10:17). Notice that there is a difference between the preaching of the Word and true conversion. For the latter, we need the work of the Holy Spirit for application. Now the question is, where did Naomi hear it? We read, “in the country of Moab.” It is a beautiful picture of mankind. By

nature, he is spiritually in Moab, he is born in sin. There God calls him unto life. One example is Paul. While he persecuted the church, we read, “And he fell to the earth, and heard a voice saying unto him, Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me?” (Acts 9:4). For Naomi, she had lost all. And there she heard the Word of God. What a Wonder. The Word causes her to turn.

#### *Application*

Let us apply this text to today. How are sinners brought to repentance? One of the means is the hearing of the Word, the preaching. It is not by shows, healings, or miracles. In the time that Jesus walked on earth, he did many miracles. Many Israelites saw it, but many remained unconverted. No, true conversion takes place by the Word. If you are converted, the Word opens up to you. You are enlightened. Then you see the promises of God. They are applied by the Holy Spirit. Oh yes, before you had that arrow of conviction. There was only condemnation. But now the promises open up. There comes light from heaven. A star arises. Then the soul hears the marks of grace and the state of his soul. Then he thinks, can it be for me? Yes, I find myself in it. He hears that God desires to see sinners. How can that be? That is me. Yes, then you desire also to hear about Jesus Christ. About His work and person. When that happens, there are tears of joy. Then He comes, leaping on the hills. When He reveals Himself, you see His beauty. He is white and ruddy. Such one is my beloved. Ah, then you hear first about Him as a Prophet. You desire instruction and to know more. After that, you hear about His priestly work. His sacrifice. And that for all my sins. Lastly, you hear about His kingly work. You desire to live according to His laws. Then He will preserve you being a King. But do you remember? Where is this heard? Naomi heard it in Moab. Yes, the sinner will hear it in the spiritual world, his sinful heart. What a wonder. Certainly, the Word is needed. But that is not the only reason. Another cause is God's goodness and covenant faithfulness.

#### *Caused by God's Goodness*

In the second place, the return of Naomi was caused by God's goodness. We read in verse 6, “For she had heard...how that the LORD had visited his people in giving them bread.” What a wonder do we see here. It is the first time that we see the name LORD. That means, the covenant God. The One who keeps His promise. No, not because of man but because of Himself (Ezek. 36:22). But what did the LORD do? Well, “the LORD had visited.” No, it is not what we often think of visiting. The word in the original has both a positive and a negative meaning. In a positive sense, it means to take care of, or to turn favor upon the person. For instance, “They heard that the Lord *had visited* the children of Israel, and that he had looked upon their affliction” (Ex. 4:31). It shows that the LORD saw their affliction and helped out. In a negative sense, it is to avenge or to punish. We see this in the Ten Commandments, “Thou shalt not bow down thyself to [idols], nor serve them: for I the Lord thy God am a jealous God, *visiting* the iniquity of the fathers upon the children” (Ex. 20:5). In our text, it is in the positive way. God showed again His care for Israel. This is probably after 7 years of famine. Can you imagine what that must have been? But how did God visit them? For this we have to look at the last part of the sentence, “in giving them bread.” It is a visible picture of His grace. Like Hannah, “For this child I prayed; and the LORD *hath given* me my petition which I asked of him” (1 Sam. 1:27). Yes, the LORD gave bread. No, not like Israel in the wilderness with manna. But it means that God gave wheat and barley in the field. He gave sunshine and rain. He caused the food to grow. And notice that bread in this verse points to food in general.

#### *Application*

Believer, was it not true? God visited your soul. No, this was not with His judgment and grace. Oh no, but it was with His grace, goodness, and kindness. When that happened, it overwhelmed your soul. What did God then give? Spiritual bread. First, some food during the preaching. Later, also the Bread, Jesus Christ Himself. What did you learn? First, that your salvation is only grounded in the covenant between the Father and the Son, election. Second, that He is my God and Father and that I am His child. What a wonder. Yes, He wants it. And that is only because the Father has love in His heart. Oh yes, it can be a struggle for a long time. Some can so easily say that God is their Father. Especially the religious world in our days does that. But God's child is careful. This only happens at God's time. Then they get to know Him as Father. What a wonder.

Unbeliever, we have also a message for you. God will visit. Yes, but then in the negative. He will avenge you. Why? Because of sin. Your sin. But, He still draws? Why? Out of love. It is because of His goodness and His desire for conversion that people will be saved. How much did He not give you in the past year? Think only of that in a material

way. But also in the church and catechism classes. Will you despise that? Please do not. Then you step on the heart of the Father. Repent from your sin, turn unto Him. Yes, that only happens by His Word and because of His goodness.

### **Conclusion**

We have heard the history of Naomi and Ruth. How will it go further? We know. They both will return to Canaan. Ruth will glean ears and get married to Boaz. Yes, God works through sinful ways. He used such ways for the birth of Christ. He used this way to bring Naomi and Ruth to repentance. Also, the marriage between Boaz and Ruth is a beautiful picture of Jesus Christ and the church. May we ask you, do you know the spiritual Boaz, Jesus Christ? Ruth only got to know Boaz by her repentance from Moab. The same is true for the believer. Only by repentance from the world and from sin, will he come to God. Why? That is ultimately because of God's good pleasure, nothing else. Yes, that is what God's people will eternally rejoice over. That became such a wonder. Is it also a wonder for you? Amen.