

# Working Together

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[ 0 : 00 ] Good morning. It's my joy to be with you all again and bring God's Word to you. A special welcome if you're a visitor, but welcome to all of you, whether you've been coming here for many years or this is your first time.

I'm glad you're here. And I'm glad you're here not because we're interested in filling seats or we want high numbers, but I'm glad you're here because we are trying to follow after Jesus. And we're convinced that there is no one so good that they don't need God's grace and no one so bad that they can't have it. And so I'm glad you're here because I know that there is something that all of us need and all of us are here because we have something to learn, to grow as we follow after Jesus, learning how to be disciples.

If you have been with us over the last several weeks, you know that we are in the book of Ruth. And you'll remember I've been saying that the book of Ruth is a book about suffering. It's a book about suffering because it's a book about widows.

And it's a book about suffering because it's a book about people who live in a country where they weren't born. But we've also been saying the last couple of weeks that it's a book about redemption because it's about God meeting and sustaining those very same people in the midst of suffering.

[ 1 : 19 ] And ultimately, it's about God's chesed. Remember we talked about the Hebrew word chesed, which means God's never stopping, never giving up, unbreaking, always and forever love.

And so it's a book about first God's never stopping love to us, primarily. And then secondarily, our never stopping love to those around us.

If you've been with us from the beginning, you know that we started out, we met a woman named Naomi. Naomi originally lived in the land of Israel, but there was a famine in the land of Israel. And so Naomi and her husband Elimelech and their two sons left Israel for the pagan land of Moab.

They left God's people in search of food. And while they were there, Elimelech, Naomi's husband, passed away as well as her two sons. And so we began to ask the question about suffering.

Is God still in charge? Is he still in control when tragedy strikes? And we saw that even in the dark, God was preparing a way for Naomi and her two daughters-in-law to return to the land of Israel.

[ 2 : 28 ] That at the very same time, God had visited his land with food. So we saw them return. And as they were going back, Naomi makes the best case she can to her daughters-in-law, Ruth and Orpah, that they should go back.

That they should not return with her to the land of Israel because that would only be to continue in her suffering. But against all odds, we saw that Ruth committed to Naomi. And so we learn that faith commits to those who are suffering, even when there's nothing to gain.

We continue to follow in chapter 1 the story of Naomi. Naomi, she returned to Israel. And despite all of God's provision around her, the provision of Ruth and the provision of food, she believed that God was against her.

And so we asked the question, is God against us in the midst of tragedy? And we saw again, know that God is working to sustain and redeem his people.

And so we kept going. We saw that Ruth had to suffer the consequences or face the reality of living as a foreigner in the land of Israel.

[ 3 : 36 ] And so we asked, how do we sustain the life of faith day by day? And we saw that when God's people go on God's mission, God sustains them and holds them up.

And so then last week, we asked if God sustains his people when they go on his mission, what is that mission? We'd seen before that it was the commitment of Ruth to Naomi.

But here in the example of Boaz, we saw that God's mission is a mission to the vulnerable, the foreigner, those who are on the outskirts of society.

And now this week, we're going to ask if that is God's mission, if God's mission is to the foreigner, to those who need a home, to those who are helpless without God's grace, then how does God accomplish that mission?

How does God accomplish his mission? I'm going to give you two teasers as we start. As I've done before, there's a few things that I did not highlight last week in our passage that we are now going to look at.

[ 4 : 43 ] So we talked about the concept of the Redeemer last week. Remember that the Redeemer is someone who buys someone else out of slavery in the broad sense. God had redeemed his people out of slavery as a great Redeemer.

And so he called on his people as little Redeemers to keep each other from slavery. And so the Redeemer was a relative who, if someone in their family was sold into slavery, they would buy them back. They would buy their freedom.

If there was land that had been given up, they would buy that land back too. But we did not talk about another responsibility of the Redeemer. And the responsibility we did not talk about was the fact that sometimes Redeemer's job was to continue the family line.

If a man died and he did not have any children, then the Redeemer could marry the widow to continue that man's descendants, to continue his name.

And the reason for that was because God had set up the world in such a way that the family was its core unit. And he also wanted to make sure that there did not come a situation in his land where people were slaves, not maybe formally but informally, where land became diluted, where there were some people who had lots of land and some who had none.

[ 5 : 56 ] And so he wanted to keep there from becoming this great disparity between the rich and the poor. And so sometimes a Redeemer would not just restore someone in terms of their status as a slave or their status as someone without land, but he'd restore them by continuing the family line.

And so in chapter 2, verse 20, when Naomi tells Ruth, this man is a close relative of ours, one of our Redeemers, it raises the question, not only could this man be generous to us, not only could he redeem us out of poverty, but would this be the man that would continue the line of Elimelech? Elimelech's name was repeated multiple times in chapter 2 in reference to Boaz. And so that also raised the question, would Boaz play a role as more than just a generous man? And then finally, in the very end of chapter 2, it says, so she kept close to the young women of Boaz, gleaning until the end of the barley and wheat harvests.

And she, that is Ruth, lived with her mother-in-law. In other words, the author of Ruth is teasing us. The author has laid out these breadcrumbs for us, these hints, and yet nothing has happened.

She's still living with her mother-in-law. In other words, there is still not a man for either of them.

And so that lays the groundwork for chapter 3.

[ 7 : 21 ] I'm also going to give you another teaser. I'm going to test your memory a little bit. All the way back on July 1st, I told you that when we read the book of Ruth, there were going to be a lot of words that appeared only twice in the book.

I'm not going to ask for a show of hands, but I am curious who remembers that all the way back from July 1st. Well, I told you that in preparation for today because we are finally going to have a payoff. We've seen the first occurrence of most of these words, and the second occurrence for most of them is going to occur in chapter 3.

So my challenge for you as we read is to see if you can catch what are the words that only appear twice in the book of Ruth, in the second instance is in chapter 3. So without further ado, we're going to jump right into Ruth chapter 3.

Remember that this is God's word. And God tells us that his word is more precious than gold, even the finest gold. And it is sweeter than honey, even honey that comes straight from the honeycomb.

And so we're going to turn to it now. We're in Ruth chapter 3, starting at verse 1. Verse 4.

[ 8 : 56 ] Verse 5.

Verse 5. Verse 5. Verse 5. Verse 6. Verse 6. Verse 6. And she answered, I am Ruth, your servant. Spread your wings over your servant, for you are a redeemer. And he said, May you be blessed by the Lord, my daughter. You have made this kindness greater than the first, and that you have not gone after young men, whether poor or rich.

And now, my daughter, do not fear. I will do for you all that you ask, for all my fellow townsmen know that you are a worthy woman. Verse 12.

And now it is true that I am a redeemer. Yet there is a redeemer nearer than I. Remain tonight, and in the morning, if he will redeem you, good, let him do it.

[10:17] But if he is not willing to redeem you, then as the Lord lives, I will redeem you. Lie down until the morning. So she lay at his feet until the morning, but arose before one could recognize another.

And he said, Let it not be known that the woman came to the threshing floor. Verse 15. And he said, Bring the garment you are wearing and hold it out. So she held it, and he measured out six measures of barley and put it on her.

Then she went into the city. And when she came to her mother-in-law, she said, How did you fare, my daughter? Then she told her all that the man had done for her, saying, These six measures of barley he gave to me, for he said to me, You must not go back empty-handed to your mother-in-law.

She replied, Wait, my daughter, until you learn how the matter turns out, for the man will not rest, but will settle the matter today. Please pray with me as we come to this portion of God's word.

Dear Father in heaven, we thank you that you are a good and loving Father who wants us to be wise. And so you've given us this story in your word.

[11:29] We ask that you would send your Spirit to help us. Because without your help, we are dead. But with it, we are alive. And so we ask that you would help us understand everything that you have written about yourself in your word.

We ask it in the name of your Son. Amen. Amen. If you remember from the very end of chapter 2, Boaz has not done anything about being a redeemer.

He's made no move. He's done nothing except be generous. And so in the middle of this question about what's going to happen with this final element of redemption, the redemption of the family line, there's not a single thing he's done.

And so we see here that Naomi decides to take action into her own hands. Last week, we saw the first positive word from Naomi in the entire book. In verse 20, she blesses the Lord, whose kindness has not forsaken the living or the dead.

And now we continue to see her progression as she is moving from... Her original statement was that she had gone from full to empty. And now she starts to move from empty to full.

[12:38] And part of it is that she becomes an active player in the process. She comes up with this plan. My daughter, should I not seek rest for you that it may be well with you? Verse 1.

She has found some information. Somehow, Naomi has done gleaning of her own. And she happens to know exactly what Boaz is going to be doing that night.

And so she comes up with a risky but well-calculated plan. It's risky because Ruth is going to have to go down by herself to the threshing floor.

There's the potential of there being other women there, the potential of being other threshers there. But it's also calculated because Naomi has thought through everything. In verse 3, she makes sure that Ruth is going to be very careful and secret.

Do not make yourself known to the man until he has finished eating and drinking. So Ruth is going to stay in hiding until Boaz is at the optimal moment to be as generous as possible. He'll be full of food.

[13:41] He'll have had something good to drink. And he'll be a man who's in a good mood. But she doesn't just think of that. But there's going to potentially be other people at the threshing floor.

And so how is she going to be able to guarantee that only Ruth and Boaz are there together? Well, there's this plan of uncovering the feet.

Go and uncover his feet and lie down and he will tell you what to do. And we see as the plan is carried out that it works perfectly. She goes down and does just as her mother-in-law had commanded her.

Verse 6, Boaz eats and drinks. He's feeling good. He lies down. And then we find out the brilliance of the foot plan. Because it's going to serve as something of a time bomb here.

She's going to uncover his feet after he's gone to sleep. Now think about this for a second. You're outside. We know this in Colorado. What happens in the middle of the night?

[14:39] It gets really cold. Yeah. The temperature drops. And so his feet are waiting there for when the temperature drops. At the right moment. After everyone else has left.

And Ruth is just following the plan. She's lying down at the feet. I'm just going to pause for one second and say there are some people who have suggested that there's some innuendo going on in this chapter. I'm not going to go into all the details of the Hebrew right now.

I'd be happy to talk about it with you later. All I'm going to say is this. There is no innuendo. When she uncovers the feet, she is literally uncovering his literal feet. Okay?

And if you read something else, I'm happy to talk to you about it. But we are told that Boaz is an honorable man and that Ruth is an honorable man. We have no reason to believe otherwise here. So this time bomb goes off. It finally gets cold. Boaz notices that his feet are cold. And he wakes up. [15:41] What does Ruth say? I've been waiting for this since July 1st. I am Ruth, your servant.

Spread your wings over your servant. For you are a redeemer. When was the first time we saw the word wing?

It was in chapter 2. I believe it was verse 9 or 10.

Excuse me, verse 12. Who says wing in verse 12 of chapter 2? It's Boaz. He says, The Lord repay you for what you have done.

And a full reward be given you by the Lord, the God of Israel, under whose wings you have come to take refuge. And so Ruth is telling Boaz, Boaz, I want you to answer your own prayer.

[16:51] And more than that, the author of Ruth is telling us this, that as Boaz lifts his hand to cover Ruth with the wing, God's hand is there on top of it.

And so God is working through Boaz to Ruth. Remember, I asked, how does God accomplish his mission?

And we see here that God accomplishes his mission through his people to his people. God accomplishes his mission through his people to his people.

That the hope, that the sustaining, that the provision that God has given his people is not some pie-in-the-sky hope. It's not some mystical, magical hope, but it's hope in real time and real space.

Oh, and that's not all. Because I skipped the first repeated word. It's all the way back in verse 1.

Then Naomi, her mother-in-law, said to her, My daughter, should I not seek rest for you, that it may be well with you?

[18:22] Do you remember the first time we saw the word rest? It's in chapter 1. Verse 9.

So we saw Boaz's prayer before Boaz, prayed that the Lord would reward Ruth and bless her. Now we see Naomi's prayer. Chapter 1, verse 9. The Lord grant that you may find rest, each of you, in the house of her husband.

Then she kissed them and they lifted up their voices and wept. So Boaz gets to be part of answering his prayer. And Naomi gets to be part of answering hers.

And so God uses his people, his provision, his redemption, his sustaining, never stopping, never giving up, unbreaking, always and forever love is through his people to his people.

And so we see something even more that God's presence and God's power come through God's people. God's presence and God's power come through God's people in real time, in real space.

[19:49] As they act, as both Naomi and Boaz do here, they act with wisdom and calculation. Naomi figures out an excellent plan.

They act with sacrifice. Boaz has already been generous and we're going to see later that he's going to be even more generous next week. And so the question for us is this.

Do you want to experience God's presence God's presence and God's power? Do you want to experience God's presence and God's power? Do you want to experience God's presence and God's power?

God's presence and God's power? If you want to experience God's presence and God's power, then you have to be with God's people.

If you want to experience God's presence and his power, you must be with his people. Let me put it another way. If Ruth had stayed in Moab, this would have never happened.

[20:51] If Naomi had stayed in Moab, this would have never happened. That God's faithfulness, his love to his people is always connected to those very same people.

Now there's a lot of different answers today about where God's power and his presence come from. Some people believe that God's power and his presence are primarily in nature. That we don't need to be a part of the church.

We can actually have a spiritual experience by going on a hike. And that if we can read our Bible out there at the top of a mountain, then we don't need to come to church.

That might work for some people, it might be good, but that's not necessary. I mean, if that works for you, then great, you do it. You sit, you know, on the level plane at the bottom of the mountain where there's not a great view.

You can hang out with some other people, some of whom are great, some of whom might annoy you. But there are other ways to experience God's presence. And his power. Let me tell you a story. [ 21 : 59 ] A few of you know that a few months ago, this past spring, I was, unexpectedly, I had to go to the emergency room. I am fine. I'm not going to go into the uninteresting details of that. But do you know when I went into the emergency room, who came and visited me?

It's funny to think, you know, I actually went on a hike yesterday, and I saw God's beauty and his grandeur. But not a single tree, would you believe it, not a single tree came and visited me. There wasn't a single rock that showed up. None of the great views from Garden of the Gods came. Do you know who came?

It was Mark and Maurice who got up in the middle of the night and came and visited me in the hospital. It was God's people who came. And that emergency room visit originally was billed to be about \$8,000 and ended up costing about \$4,000, which is a commentary on our health care that we can have at another time.

And you know who paid that bill? I'm a part of a group of Christians who joined together to pay each other's health expenses, and so all of that bill was paid by other Christians who sent me checks.

[ 23 : 20 ] Now that's a small example. That's a small S suffering. I don't mean to compare it to big S sufferings. But we could talk about this in many different ways. But we see that God's provision for his people is through his church.

It's the only enduring, the only lasting community. And why is that? Well, I haven't finished telling the story of chapter 3.

So where we left off is Ruth had asked Boaz to spread his wing over her. And we saw that she was asking him to answer his own prayer. What does he say?

This, by the way, is why we're not going to find 12 ways to find your Boaz. It's because of verse 10. And he said, May you be blessed by the Lord, my daughter. You have made this last kindness. Remember, kindness is the word hesed. It's the word that means never stopping, never giving up love. You have made this last kindness greater than the first, and that you have not gone after young men, whether poor or rich.

[ 24 : 26 ] So there's something here that Ruth is doing that's self-sacrificial. He's not saying, Blessed are you.

You have chosen a very fulfilling, romantic relationship. No, he says, not only is this great love that you are showing, but it is even greater than the love that you showed to Naomi.

It's greater than the first, this last kindness. Greater than your first kindness of coming all the way from a foreign country.

And he tells us why. You have not gone after young men, whether poor or rich. There's something that both Boaz and Naomi say to Ruth.

They both call her my daughter. You don't have to be a Hebrew scholar. I don't know why. It's that Naomi and Boaz are most likely of a similar generation.

[ 25 : 26 ] And so Ruth is going and proposing marriage to a man who is probably old enough to be her father. And she's doing it. Think about the risk here for a second.

So Naomi has asked her to go into this very risky situation. This could have gone very badly. But we see in verse 13 that it still might go really badly. She's committed herself to Boaz and he says, if he will redeem you, meaning there's this other man who might redeem you, good, let him do it.

But if he is not willing to do it, then as the Lord lives, I will redeem you. So Ruth at this point could end up with Boaz, but she might not. She might just end up with this other man. But she's showing the never stopping, never giving up love because this is the relative of a Limelech.

And so she's putting herself in a position that's going to be best for Naomi. And Naomi's looking for a situation that's going to be best for Ruth.

And Boaz recognizes that, you know, we don't know 100% what to make of his poor or rich comment, but she hasn't headed after men her own age. And one person has suggested that the poor would be someone that she was infatuated with, someone she just had this intense romantic love for.

[ 26 : 45 ] So she was willing to marry him because he's poor. And the rich would be someone she's willing to marry because he has lots of money. And so she's chosen neither of those. Instead, she's chosen the man who's going to be best for the good of her and the good of Naomi.

And so this is a love story. But it's not an American love story. It's not a 21st century love story. It's not a self-fulfillment love story.

You know, in other love stories in the Bible, we are told about the figure's attraction to one another. In Genesis, we're told about how attractive Rebecca is, for example. In the book of Judges, we're told about how Samson is attracted to the women that he is drawn to.

And what does Boaz say about Ruth here? Verse 11. I will do for you all that you ask, for all my fellow townsmen know that you are a worthy woman.

And so this is a self-sacrificing love story. A love story based not necessarily on attraction, but on character.

[ 28 : 00 ] And so that's the reason that God's presence and God's power come through his people. Because it's in God's people that we find his chesed love.

It's in God's people that we find the never stopping, never giving up, unbreaking, always and forever love. It's the love that Ruth has shown to Naomi. It's the love that Naomi now is trying to show to Ruth.

It's the love that Ruth is showing to Boaz. And we're going to find out next week that this is going to cost Boaz as well. And so it's his love for Ruth too.

There's... All of us at some level long for community. We long for this kind of never stopping, never giving up love. A place where people know us and they'll meet us in our need.

And so my question for all of us for Christians and for non-Christians is this. Where are you going to find true community? We have all kinds of places around us that claim to offer it.

[ 29 : 14 ] I go to a coffee shop that I love here in town and their slogan, one of their slogans is they're building coffee through community. And they do a really good job of it. I love this coffee shop.

They know my name. They give me free coffee sometimes because I'm there a lot. But what if I'm anxious and so I don't want to have any caffeine in my body?

Are they going to be there for me? When I'm in the hospital, am I going to call them? I'm not.

The army wants to be a community too. It wants to be a family. And it will be. But what if you get a DUI? Is the army going to show you never stopping, never giving up love?

It's only in God's people that God gives his presence and his power.

[ 30 : 20 ] And so friends, we have to commit to God's people. We have to commit to God's people because that is the place that he has designed for his presence and his power to be.

That's the place that he's given us. And it's only when we have a self-sacrificing community that we can have a true community, a full community.

So as theologians talk about the difference between thin and thick communities, thin communities would be ones like the coffee shop that I've told you about. It's a community. But it's a thin community.

It's not going to be with me there when I suffer. It's not going to give me answers to explain my experiences in life. But people there are going to know my name.

So it's a thin community. A thick community is a place where people do stick with us when we suffer. People do help us understand the things that happen in life.

[ 31 : 24 ] And we can only have a thick community if there's something that's self-sacrificing in it. And if there's something greater than us. Now we live in a world where we're told that we are the most powerful thing.

We are the answer. We are autonomous. Our choices, our beliefs about ourselves are the most important. But the problem with that is that if you are the end of everything, you have shut yourself off from any true community.

community. As we've been going through this book, I've also been reading a book called Walking with God Through Pain and Suffering. And one of my favorite quotes is this. Community among persons is formed only when there is something more important than one's own interests to which all share a higher allegiance.

Humanism suffers from the valorization of the individual. Now listen to this. When I am the final authority for determining right and wrong, and when nothing is more important than my right to live

as I see fit, tight, supportive community is eroded.

Perhaps even impossible. And so if we want true community, we have to be in God's community.

[ 32 : 41 ] If we want true community, we have to be in God's community. There's one more word.

There's three of them here. And it shows up at the very end of the chapter. Verse 17. Boaz gives an extra measure of food.

To Ruth. To take back to her mother-in-law. Some people think this is some kind of down payment. Sort of like an engagement ring. He's saying, I'm giving you this as a sign of my commitment to you. My generosity. Naomi says, verse 17.

These six measures of barley he gave to me. For he said to me, you must not go back empty-handed to your mother-in-law. When's the last time we saw the word empty?

It was on Naomi's lips. Remember she said, I left full, but God brought me back empty.

[ 33 : 54 ] And so we see at the very end of this chapter that God is working through his people to his people to do what? To take them from empty back to full.

He gave this to me so that you would not be empty-handed. And so we don't need just a religious community. It's not pick between the world's religions so that you can find thick community.

But we need a self-sacrificing community. A community that's based on never stopping, never giving up, unbreaking, always and forever love.

Now, as some of you know, I started working at the church here full-time in June. And that means that I'm here at the church building a lot more than I used to be.

And I've learned some things since I have started just being here during the day. You know, people use our parking lot a lot, for example. My favorite is when the police use it. They'll park right under there under our covering to talk to each other.

[ 35 : 04 ] Just makes me feel good. Sometimes people use it for, you know, random meetings.

Sometimes people need to pull off this road. They pull off the highway. We're one of the first places they can stop. But there's one kind of stopping in our parking lot that I didn't expect.

I've been surprised by. There was a time I was here a few weeks ago and, you know, we've been having a lot of hail recently. And so the hail started and I thought, okay, I don't want to run out in this hail, but I also don't want to get my car to get wrecked again by another hailstorm.

And so I finally put on my rain jacket and I ran outside and I got in the car and I drove it around here to this covering. And I wasn't sure if I was going to be able to find a spot. Because when the hailstorm comes, first place people run to is that covering under our church.

And if you think about it, there's not a lot of places here in this area to cover your car if you don't have a house here. There's an apartment complex over there. They have parking spots. Those are reserved for people who pay. There is only one free offer of car covering here on West Meadow. And you know what? When I pulled up there, it really doesn't matter if your car is expensive or cheap. If it's not under the covering. And there are people who won't show up here in our church parking lot until there's a storm.

[ 36 : 38 ] This passage is telling us, this book of Ruth is telling us that the church, that God's people is the only shelter when there's a storm.

And it doesn't matter what kind of car you have. It doesn't matter if it's cheap or expensive. All that matters is whether you're hidden under the wing.

And so Jesus came to us who are people who are interested in self-fulfillment, not self-sacrifice.

He comes in real time and real space. You know, part of the reason that Christianity has survived as a religion and many others have not is that ours is based in a historical event.

It's not primarily in an idea, but in a person who came and lived a life in real time, in real space, here with us. And he gave up the shelter of God's wing so that we could hide under it.

[ 37 : 57 ] And so he invites you and he invites me. The wing is there for anyone who is willing to come and hide under it.

But you have to come and hide. You have to commit to God and his people because he is the only shelter in the time of storm.

Will you pray with me? Dear Father in heaven, we thank you that you cover us, that you offer to be our protection in the time of trouble.

We confess that we look to ourselves and many other places, but we ask that you would work in our hearts that we would look to you. And so we would commit to you and your people, leaving behind our sin and our self-righteousness, and instead hiding and finding shelter with you.

We thank you for your son, who you sent, that you took shelter away from him, that you could give it to us. We ask it in his name.  
[ 39 : 12 ] Amen. Amen.