

INTRODUCTION

(Title Slide) “Jesus the rescuer”

This week we experienced some of the destructive power of hurricane Ian. Most of us here in Orlando, have had relatively minor problems, but we are finding more and more that flooding is occurring all around us.

The other day, Jeanine and I were driving down Rouse road and saw that it was flooded. I heard that One Hope Church that meets at Blanchard park at the YMCA is flooded. I have spoken to Pastor Justin, and they might be able to use our facility if they find that is the best option for them.

There have been some evacuations right here in Orlando due to flooding of a nursing home.

(Slide #2)

But Ian was for more powerful than anyone imagined. We have seen scenes of complete destruction. So much that we can't imagine it ever being rebuilt.

(Slides # 3, 4, 5, 6, 7) (5 seconds each)

When a disaster like this happens, people just want to be able to get back to “normal.” They want life to be normal so that they will not have to suffer and also be able to seek their various pleasures as before. “Life is supposed to be nice, so we think.”

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As much as we want God to be present during a crisis, we also need him when things are “normal.” God is interested in the everyday too.

Jesus said when he was speaking of his ministry as a “shepherd of God’s people,” “I came that they might have life and have it abundantly.” God is concerned about our “normal lives” just as he is when we are in a crisis.

As we travel through the book of Matthew, we need to see that Jesus was on a mission. Just like a “first-responder” would be in a crisis. We need to understand the life of Jesus from the perspective of the Old Testament.

In the book of Ezekiel, the nation of Israel had gone through a crisis of God’s judgment. Because they perpetually disobeyed God over many years, God brought judgment. Their judgment was they would lose their land and their “normal” lives. They were carried away by enemies to Babylon. During this time, Ezekiel prophesied that God saw their plight and was going to restore them.

Ezekiel is going to use the metaphor of a shepherd; it is a far different metaphor than that of a hurricane. But we need to see that in the passage in Ezekiel, that God is seeing a “crisis” too. He is responding, like a first responder to come in and do what only he can do. We also need to see that Jesus is the fulfillment of these prophecies and when we see what he does in the book of Matthew, that he is fulfilling the prophecies of Ezekiel in the role of a shepherd! Let’s look at this important passage.

(Slide # 10)

Ezekiel 34:1–2 (ESV)

¹The word of the LORD came to me:

²“Son of man, prophesy against the shepherds of Israel; prophesy, and say to them, even to the shepherds, Thus says the Lord GOD: Ah, shepherds of Israel who have been feeding yourselves! Should not shepherds feed the sheep?

(slide #11)

Ezekiel 34:4–6 (ESV)

⁴The weak you have not strengthened, the sick you have not healed, the injured you have not bound up, the strayed you have not brought back, the lost you have not sought, and with force and harshness you have ruled them. ⁵So they were scattered, because there was no shepherd,

(slide #12)

and they became food for all the wild beasts.

[Look at this picture. There is a shark swimming down the street and a gator in the other pic. The predators come out to take advantage when there is a crisis.]

(slide #13)

My sheep were scattered; ⁶they wandered over all the mountains and on every high hill. My sheep were scattered over all the face of the earth, with none to search or seek for them.

(slide #14)

Ezekiel 34:11–16 (ESV)

¹¹“For thus says the Lord GOD: Behold, I, I myself will search for my sheep and will seek them out.

(slide #15)

¹²As a shepherd seeks out his flock when he is among his sheep that have been scattered, so will I seek out my sheep, and I will rescue

them from all places where they have been scattered on a day of clouds and thick darkness.

(slide 16 & 17)

¹³And I will bring them out from the peoples and gather them from the countries, and will bring them into their own land. And I will feed them on the mountains of Israel, by the ravines, and in all the inhabited places of the country. ¹⁴I will feed them with good pasture, and on the mountain heights of Israel shall be their grazing land. There they shall lie down in good grazing land, and on rich pasture they shall feed on the mountains of Israel. ¹⁵I myself will be the shepherd of my sheep, and I myself will make them lie down, declares the Lord GOD.

(slide # 18)

¹⁶I will seek the lost,

(slide #19)

and I will bring back the strayed,

(slide #20)

and I will bind up the injured, and I will strengthen the weak,

(slide #21)

and the fat and the strong I will destroy. I will feed them in justice.

As we read Matthew chapter 8, we need to see that Jesus saw himself as fulfilling these prophecies. He was the Lord that said, "I, I myself will search for sheep and I will seek them out."

Matthew, when he wrote the book, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit and using his own mind, had to decide which of the very many stories he would include. This means that as we think about Matthew, we should be asking ourselves, “Why is he telling me this? What am I supposed to see?”

Matthew wants to show us some things:

- That Jesus is on a mission to gather his sheep, that’s you, part of his church.
- He wants us to see Jesus as the one that has authority in various ways.
- He wants us to see that Jesus has compassion that transcends various boundaries.
- He wants us to see some surprising things about who God is, that would break their “grid.”
- And he wants us to respond as the people in these stories in faith.

OUR CONDITION

The fact is, we can tend to not ask God for help. There are many reasons: We think that we are unworthy; We think that God has determined the outcome and will not change his mind; We set practical limits on what God can do.

Jesus wants us to learn to ask. Ask and you will receive. Seek and you will find. Knock and it will be opened to you.

PROPOSITION

We need to ask of Jesus in faith, that sees no boundaries in what God can do.

We are going to take two passes through Chapters 8-9. The verses we will touch this week have to do with personal encounters with Jesus and his

compassion. Next week we look at verses that have to do with discipleship.

Let's begin by reading from Matthew chapter 8, verses 1-4.

¹ When he came down from the mountain, great crowds followed him. ² And behold, a leper came to him and knelt before him, saying, "Lord, if you will, you can make me clean." ³ And Jesus stretched out his hand and touched him, saying, "I will; be clean." And immediately his leprosy was cleansed. ⁴ And Jesus said to him, "See that you say nothing to anyone, but go, show yourself to the priest and offer the gift that Moses commanded, for a proof to them."

The leper was an outcast. They did not have the simple antibiotics that could heal his disease. Lepers had to call out, "unclean, unclean" anytime someone came near. They were pariahs that could have no social interaction with even their own families.

This man had faith in Jesus, *"Lord, if you will, you can make me clean."*

Jesus showed that he had power and authority over leprosy. He showed his compassion, and that surprisingly, he would dare touch a leper and that such people were not beyond God's care; it was not an irrevocable "curse" upon them.

We need to have faith in Jesus and come even when we feel unclean and unworthy.

Let's continue in verse 5,

⁵ When he had entered Capernaum, a centurion came forward to him, appealing to him, ⁶ "Lord, my servant is lying paralyzed at home, suffering terribly." ⁷ And he said to him, "I will come and heal him." ⁸ But the centurion replied, "Lord, I am not worthy to have you come under my roof, but only say the word, and my servant will be healed. ⁹ For I too am a man under authority, with soldiers under

*me. And I say to one, 'Go,' and he goes, and to another, 'Come,' and he comes, and to my servant, 'Do this,' and he does it."*¹⁰ When Jesus heard this, he marveled and said to those who followed him, *"Truly, I tell you, with no one in Israel have I found such faith."*¹¹ I tell you, many will come from east and west and recline at table with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven,¹² while the sons of the kingdom will be thrown into the outer darkness. In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth."¹³ And to the centurion Jesus said, "Go; let it be done for you as you have believed." And the servant was healed at that very moment.

In this story, there is a centurion that humbled himself to come to Jesus, a Jew. This was no small step for a Roman and a higher ranking one at that. But he was willing to swallow his pride because of his compassion for his servant. That may have been shocking for people to see the compassion of a Roman.

He came to ask of Jesus, and when Jesus agrees to come to his house, he actually accommodates the Jewish scruple of not entering the house of a non-Jew. He said, "Lord, I am not worthy to have you come under my roof..." And his faith is so large that he sees that just as authority is delegated through him from his superiors, the same principle must be in action through Jesus, from God. His faith allows him to see what others cannot.

And Jesus marvels, *"Truly, I tell you, with no one in Israel have I found such faith."* And Jesus goes on to make a teaching moment out of this. He explains that the Kingdom of heaven is being opened to everyone: *"many will come from east and west and recline at table with Abraham."* While this is true, some of the "sons", the Jews, will be cast out. Why? Because they are not willing to come as the centurion, in faith.

Jesus shows that his authority is not limited to his touch or his reach. He shows surprisingly that even Gentiles could come to him without barriers; Jesus would have entered the centurion's house and broken the prideful Jewish tradition.

We need to come in the same way, if we think that we are not one of the "blessed ones," or special ones, that God still hears us. This centurion was previously one without hope, excluded from God's covenant people. Now he is included. **Jesus shows that he is the shepherd to those who are lost.**

Continuing in verse 14,

¹⁴ And when Jesus entered Peter's house, he saw his mother-in-law lying sick with a fever. ¹⁵ He touched her hand, and the fever left her, and she rose and began to serve him. ¹⁶ That evening they brought to him many who were oppressed by demons, and he cast out the spirits with a word and healed all who were sick. ¹⁷ This was to fulfill what was spoken by the prophet Isaiah: "He took our illnesses and bore our diseases."

Jesus entered Peter's home and healed his mother-in-law. We don't see any evidence that Jesus was asked to do this. We should not get the idea that God will only do what we ask for. Most of what God does for us is outside of our asking, but he does want us to learn to ask.

Even when we prayed to be saved, it was because God first worked in our hearts to cause us to ask.

John 6:44 (ESV)

⁴⁴ No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him. And I will raise him up on the last day.

Was Peter too humble? Did he not want to be seen as imposing on Jesus by asking? Was it that he did not want to somehow ply on his relationship with Jesus for personal advantage? Is that a form of pride? We don't know.

But what we see is Jesus acting without being asked, and for the rest of that evening Jesus healed people who were sick; **he was the shepherd that healed the sick** in fulfillment of another prophecy from Isaiah chapter 53,

Isaiah 53:4 (ESV)

⁴ Surely he has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows;

Jesus showed that he has authority over all sicknesses and also the spiritual forces of oppression. Jesus has compassion for those oppressed with "demons," with forces or even addictions beyond their ability to handle. **Jesus is the shepherd that brings back those who stray.**

Let's continue with another encounter in verse 23,

²³ *And when he got into the boat, his disciples followed him.* ²⁴ *And behold, there arose a great storm on the sea, so that the boat was being swamped by the waves; but he was asleep.* ²⁵ *And they went and woke him, saying, "Save us, Lord; we are perishing."* ²⁶ *And he said to them, "Why are you afraid, O you of little faith?"* *Then he rose and rebuked the winds and the sea, and there was a great calm.* ²⁷ *And the men marveled, saying, "What sort of man is this, that even winds and sea obey him?"*

²⁸ *And when he came to the other side, to the country of the Gadarenes, two demon-possessed men met him, coming out of the tombs, so fierce that no one could pass that way.* ²⁹ *And behold, they cried out, "What have you to do with us, O Son of God? Have you come here to torment us before the time?"* ³⁰ *Now a herd of many pigs was feeding at some distance from them.* ³¹ *And the demons begged him, saying, "If you cast us out, send us away into the herd of pigs."* ³² *And he said to*

them, "Go." So they came out and went into the pigs, and behold, the whole herd rushed down the steep bank into the sea and drowned in the waters.³³ The herdsmen fled, and going into the city they told everything, especially what had happened to the demon-possessed men.³⁴ And behold, all the city came out to meet Jesus, and when they saw him, they begged him to leave their region.

We see that Jesus surprised his disciples again, by having power and authority even over the storm! Then he shows his power over the spiritual forces by casting them out of the men, once again on his initiative. Jesus does not like those that oppress and use their advantage. **He is the shepherd that judges the "fat and the strong."**

We see that the people of the village were perverse in that they just wanted Jesus to leave them alone. It is as if they were saying, "Don't do anything to rock the boat God." "I like my sin; leave me to it; please leave!" When Jesus spoke to the Samaritan woman at the well, the whole city came out to see Jesus!

We need to desire to see Jesus and put our sins behind us.

Continuing in verse 1 of chapter 9,

¹ And getting into a boat he crossed over and came to his own city. ² And behold, some people brought to him a paralytic, lying on a bed. And when Jesus saw their faith, he said to the paralytic, "Take heart, my son; your sins are forgiven." ³ And behold, some of the scribes said to themselves, "This man is blaspheming." ⁴ But Jesus, knowing their thoughts, said, "Why do you think evil in your hearts? ⁵ For which is easier, to say, 'Your sins are forgiven,' or to say, 'Rise and walk'? ⁶ But that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins" —he then said to the paralytic— "Rise, pick up your bed and go home." ⁷ And he rose and went home. ⁸ When the crowds saw it, they were afraid, and they glorified God, who had given such authority to men.

Jesus showed that he has the authority to forgive sin.

Jesus surprises everyone again, by forgiving sins. Which is easier? Forgiving sin is much harder, but is invisible. Healing the man is easier, but is visible and Jesus uses that to prove the greater authority that he has..

Jesus is the shepherd that binds up the injured.

We need to be willing to perhaps embarrass ourselves and be lower through a roof opening, in faith that God will see. We are too sophisticated. We say, "Oh, I'll just sit here on my chair and ask, not doing anything too undignified." We should ask people to pray with us, confess our sins to one another that we may be healed!

Verse 18,

¹⁸ While he was saying these things to them, behold, a ruler came in and knelt before him, saying, "My daughter has just died, but come and lay your hand on her, and she will live." ¹⁹ And Jesus rose and followed him, with his disciples. ²⁰ And behold, a woman who had suffered from a discharge of blood for twelve years came up behind him and touched the fringe of his garment, ²¹ for she said to herself, "If I only touch his garment, I will be made well." ²² Jesus turned, and seeing her he said, "Take heart, daughter; your faith has made you well." And instantly the woman was made well. ²³ And when Jesus came to the ruler's house and saw the flute players and the crowd making a commotion, ²⁴ he said, "Go away, for the girl is not dead but sleeping." And they laughed at him. ²⁵ But when the crowd had been put outside, he went in and took her by the hand, and the girl arose. ²⁶ And the report of this went through all that district.

Jesus showed that he had authority over death. He raised the young girl back to life. Jesus shows that his power does not have term limits. There is no expiration date, death is not a final barrier to him, though others would

say not to bother the teacher. The father persisted in faith even though his daughter was dead.

Jesus showed that his compassion extended to the woman that has spent years searching for an answer. The woman showed faith despite trying everything for years, that Jesus could heal her.

Jesus is the shepherd that strengthens the weak. We need to trust God and ask, even when it seems impossible.

Verse 27,

²⁷ And as Jesus passed on from there, two blind men followed him, crying aloud, "Have mercy on us, Son of David."²⁸ When he entered the house, the blind men came to him, and Jesus said to them, "Do you believe that I am able to do this?" They said to him, "Yes, Lord."²⁹ Then he touched their eyes, saying, "According to your faith be it done to you."³⁰ And their eyes were opened. And Jesus sternly warned them, "See that no one knows about it."³¹ But they went away and spread his fame through all that district.

³² As they were going away, behold, a demon-oppressed man who was mute was brought to him.³³ And when the demon had been cast out, the mute man spoke. And the crowds marveled, saying, "Never was anything like this seen in Israel."³⁴ But the Pharisees said, "He casts out demons by the prince of demons."

*³⁵ And Jesus went throughout all the cities and villages, **teaching in their synagogues** and proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom and healing every disease and every affliction.³⁶ **When he saw the crowds, he had compassion for them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd.***

In the final miracles of chapter nine, we see Jesus heal two blind men, cast out a demon and get ridiculed by unbelieving Pharisees.

Jesus shows that he has authority over blindness while the Pharisees show that they are blind and cannot see what is right in front of them.

Jesus went throughout the land, and he proclaimed the gospel, which is basically that God is favorably disposed to forgive all our sins, if we will come to him by faith in Jesus' death for us on the cross! There is no other way, but there is a way.

Jesus' teaching is what the teachers of Israel in Ezekiel and the present day were not doing. His teaching, like the sermon on the mount, is what brings us back to "normal" life. It is what causes us to lie down in green pastures, as God promised to do for his people, his sheep.

God cares not only about great crises, but also about us living in peace in a normal everyday life.

Jesus healed, he restored, he forgave, he showed that his power and authority were complete; over the winds and demons and even death itself.

Jesus wants us, like these people, to learn to come and ask. Just to ask.

We need to ask when it seems we are not worthy; we need to ask when it seems impossible, or that the time is somehow past. We need to ask and lay down our pride as we are asking. We need to be willing to be embarrassed, to humble ourselves despite the fact that we have some rank in the world, like the centurion.

Jesus saw himself as a shepherd, our shepherd. He is calling the lost, the weak, the sick, the injured, those that have strayed.

Before Jesus ascended, he told Peter, "Feed my sheep." He knew he fulfilled his role as shepherd and wanted Peter to continue being a shepherd and to teach.

Will you pray with me please?

Dear Jesus, we thank you that you are the good shepherd and have shown in so many ways that you care that there are not limits on your caring. We don't have to be worthy or in the right group of people, or have certain kinds of problems only. Lord help our faith to call out to despite what we think are the obstacle or limitations. Strengthen our weak faith. Amen.