

Unprecedented Storm, Unprecedented Response

The remnants of Hurricane Helene blasted through Western North Carolina, dumping 24 inches of rain in the mountainous region of our state. Meteorologists have estimated that the combined rainfall dumped 40 trillion gallons of rain on the Southeastern United States. Wind gusts at Mount Mitchell reached 106 miles an hour at the height of the storm. Villages and homes in North Carolina were submerged because of swollen creeks, rivers, and water runoff from higher elevations. The land's topography funneled three days of precipitation into the area. Bridges were washed away or severely damaged. Portions of roadways collapsed due to mudslides and landslides, often eroding the base beneath them. Water, electricity, and lack of cell phone service isolated much of the region. Once the storm settled in, people were cut-off from evacuation routes. Twenty-five counties and the Eastern Band of the Cherokee Indians are listed as disaster areas in North Carolina alone. Helene is the fourth deadliest hurricane in modern history (since 1950). Unfortunately, there are still people unaccounted for. Photos and videos don't portray the cascade of destruction that is reality. This was an unprecedented storm.

Equally unprecedented is the response of people stepping up to help. I don't remember ever experiencing the groundswell of people willing to step up and show their love and support for those impacted. We hear stories of people jumping into raging rivers for swift-water rescues. Private pilots flew their own aircraft to drop needed supplies to people trapped by the flood waters. Some people are reported to be hiking or driving ATVs to bring supplies to stranded residents. People are doing what they can with whatever resources they have. Businesses, churches, and organizations are collecting truckloads of supplies to deliver as roads begin to open. Our town's police, fire/rescue, and town employees have gone to the area to volunteer. Organizations such as the American Red Cross, Samaritan's Purse, and others are rallying with food, bottled water, medical and cleaning supplies. Construction materials are being assembled, and volunteers are lining up to help rebuild. Rebuilding will be a long process. Some roads will take a year to rebuild. People are willing to contribute money through reputable relief organizations, and convoys of relief vehicles are headed there every day. Every news broadcast informs us of additional efforts and human-interest stories of people helping people. It is genuinely "neighbors helping neighbors." But who is my neighbor?



Our neighbor is anyone in need. In the Good Samaritan parable (Luke 10:29-37), a traveler who is unknown in the area was beaten and robbed and left for dead on the side of the road. The first two people who came by were people you would expect to be compassionate -- a Priest and a Levite. Both moved to the other side of the road and ignored the man. A third person, a Samaritan, helped the man and offered to pay his expenses during his recovery. The Jews despised the Samaritan people, yet the Samaritan was the one willing to step up and sacrifice to help the man who had been beaten.

Most of the people living on Helene's path are unknown to us. Yet, countless everyday citizens *are* stepping up, showing compassion, and giving time, money, and supplies to help those impacted by the storm. When Jesus told the Good Samaritan story to the Jewish lawyers, He asked, "*Who was a good neighbor to the man.*" The answer was "the one who showed mercy upon the man." Then, Jesus said, "*Go and do likewise.*" (Luke 10:36-37).



When I look at my house and yard today, it looks the same as it did before the hurricane. That is not the case for those who live 100 miles to the West, where the storm has torn apart people's lives. Thankfully, people in our area sense the enormity of the need for help. The devastation is so great that only God can put it back together. We are God's hands and feet to help our neighbor. In prayer, ask for God's intervention. Also, in your prayers, ask God what He wants *you* to do. "*Then I heard the voice of the Lord saying, 'Whom shall I send? And who will go for us?' And I said, 'Here am I. Send me!'*" Isaiah 6:8). Tell God of your commitment to help.

There are opportunities to donate and volunteer now and in the future. Everywhere you turn, there is an opportunity to help. Former President Ronald Reagan said, "We can't help everyone, but everyone can help someone." It will take a combined, sustained, long-term effort from the government, non-profit organizations, businesses, the faith community, and private citizens to help God restore the areas affected. I commend those showing mercy and compassion through their prayers and actions. What I see happening gives me hope for the goodness of mankind. Go and do likewise. God has positioned you with skills and a heart to serve. How are you helping?

The Bible Says:

- *If your brother becomes poor and cannot maintain himself with you, you shall support him as though he were a stranger and a sojourner, and he shall live with you.* (Leviticus 25:35).
- *My command is this: Love each other as I have loved you.* (John 15:12).
- *What good is it, my brothers and sisters, if someone claims to have faith but has no deeds? Can such faith save them? Suppose a brother or a sister is without clothes and daily food. If one of you says to them, 'Go in peace; keep warm and well fed,' but does nothing about their physical needs, what good is it? In the same way, faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead.* (James 2:14-17).

Question: How have you responded to the needs of those impacted by Hurricane Helene? Have you said, "Here am I. Send me?"

Conclusion: Biblical scholars conclude that the traveler who was beaten was a Jewish man, yet the Jewish Priest and Levite (assistant to the Jewish Priests) wouldn't help one of their own. The Samaritan, an outcast and despised enemy of the Jewish people was the one who showed compassion to a stranger. Let us show compassion and mercy. Even though we don't know the people impacted, Jesus commands us to love all people.

Closing Prayer: Heavenly Father. We pray for our neighbors impacted by Hurricane Helene. Please keep people safe, help them overcome their hardships, and give them comfort that people do care and help is on the way. Amen.

Biblical perspective: This parable has a broader message than Hurricane Helene. In the parable, the Samaritan represents Jesus Christ, who came to our rescue and offered to pay the price for our salvation. The helpless man is us – helpless without Jesus Christ. Salvation only comes through Jesus Christ. The application to our current Hurricane Helene event gives us a call to action to help our neighbor.