

What Harvey Can Teach Us

Sunday morning was already odd. Rather than stand before the church to speak, I sat in front of the television and watched the news. As far as I know, this was the first time we'd ever cancelled all services on all campuses. It was not an easy decision. With city officials urging everyone to stay home and off the streets because of Hurricane Harvey, however, I believe it was the correct one. So I found myself with a lazy Sunday morning. (Ok, I confess, the extra sleep was nice.) But then came the news reports. Image after image from Rockport. Story after story from Houston. The devastation was breathtaking and ongoing. Like many of you, I sat glued to the television screen, toggling back and forth between CNN, FOX, and the Weather Channel. I heard the phrase "once in a thousand year flood". I received texts like: "We are safe, but our neighbors aren't." And who will ever forget the images of citizens heeding the call to steer their shallow-bottomed boats through neighborhoods on rescue missions.

Stunning. If only it were a movie. But it isn't. It is history. So what do we do?

First and foremost, *we pray*. We pray for God to redirect the storm and alleviate the suffering.

Next, *we help*. At this initial stage, the biggest need besides prayer is for **financial donations** to organizations providing disaster relief.

Not only do we pray and help, I think we need to learn. What spiritual lessons do these moments teach us?

Jesus criticized the leaders of his day for focusing on the weather and ignoring the signals: "You find it easy enough to forecast the weather—why can't you read the signs of the times?" (Matthew 16:3 MSG).

What are we to learn from all of this? Is God sending us some reminders? I think so. At least three come to mind:

Lesson #1- Stuff doesn't last. Relationships do.

As you've listened to evacuees and survivors, have you noticed their words? No one laments a lost plasma television or submerged SUV. No one runs through the streets yelling, "My cordless drill is missing" or "My golf clubs have washed away." If they mourn, it is for people lost. If they rejoice, it is for people found.

Could Jesus be reminding us that people matter more than possessions? In a land where we have more malls than high schools, more debt than credit, more clothes to wear than we can wear, could Christ be saying:

“Watch out! Be on your guard against all kinds of greed; a man’s life does not consist in the abundance of possessions” (Luke 12:15 NIV).

You see demolished \$40,000 cars that will never be driven again, hidden in debris. And in the background of our minds we hear the quiet echoes of Jesus saying, “What good will it be for someone to gain the whole world, yet forfeit their soul?” (Matthew 16:26 NIV).

Raging hurricanes and swollen bayous have a way of prying our fingers off the stuff we love. What was once most precious now means little; what we once ignored is now of eternal significance.

Think about what matters to you.

Lesson #2: We really are in this together.

We saw, and are seeing, how humanity can come together and help each other. Lifeboats did not discriminate by color of skin. Rescuers did not ask if the needy were Republican or Democrat. Helicopter rescue wasn’t offered only to the rich or educated. People came together to help people.

We don’t have to have a Harvey to prompt us to help others, however. Someone in your office could use your assistance. They aren’t stranded on a rooftop, but they are likely struggling with a decision. Someone in your neighborhood could use a friend. They didn’t lose their house, but, perhaps they lost their way.

Let’s let Harvey remind us: we really are in this together.

Lesson #3: This world doesn’t work but the next one will.

“The whole creation has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth right up to the present time” (Romans 8:19-22 NIV).

The creation is third trimester heavy. Birth pangs must occur before a new birth. During the birth pangs the mother keeps focused on the end result: the moment that she will hold her beautiful

baby in her arms. She knows that birth pangs don't last forever; indeed, the more intense the pangs, the nearer the delivery.

Our world is experiencing a rash of birth pangs these days. It is not to me to declare the day the Lord will return. But we know this much: it's the beginning of the end and the beginning of new beginnings. Calamities and catastrophes must occur before the birth of the new world. In the meantime- practice what they teach in Lamaze classes- take some deep breaths and hold the hand of the one who loves you.

Jesus made this point in one of his final messages. He referred to the increased frequency of disasters and then said: "See to it that you are not alarmed" (Matthew 24:6 NIV). Jesus chose a stout term for "alarmed" that he used on no other occasion. It means, "to wail, to cry aloud" as if Jesus counseled the disciple: "Don't freak out when bad stuff happens."

Jesus promised that bad things would occur. But they won't occur forever.

What rescuers are doing for Houstonians, God will do for you. He has entered your world. He has dropped a rope into your sin-swamped life. He will rescue, you simply need to do what many stranded people are doing—let him lift you out.

Listen to the lessons of Harvey. Let the storm remind you of the value of relationships, people and, most of all, the promise of heaven. In the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina, I attended a prayer service at a downtown church. A local minister gave a message on this verse: "But Noah found grace in the eyes of the Lord" (Genesis 6:8 NKJV).

The minister helped us see all the things Noah could not find because of the flood. He could not find his neighborhood. He could not find his house. He could not find the comforts of home or the people down the street—there was much he could not find. But what he could find made all the difference. Noah found grace in the eyes of the Lord.

Noah found grace in the eyes of God. If you have everything and no grace, you have nothing. If you have nothing but grace, you have everything.

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