

Hierarchy for Help —

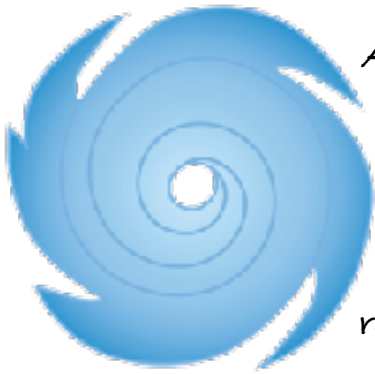
a Modern Day Parable inspired by Matthew 20:1-16



Mr. Breaux told his Religion class this story:

The kingdom of Heaven is like the South after a big hurricane.

There are droves of people going home. Returning to where they belong. Anticipating what they will find, and learning it is very different from the image they have each created in their own minds.



A wealthy South Louisiana businessman showed up in an abandoned parking lot shortly after a category 3 hurricane destroyed most of the area. He brought several trucks. Trucks with food. Trucks with supplies. Trucks with tools. He spread the word for anyone in need to show up the next day at 10 am to receive free assistance.

Toby arrived before dawn. He shook hands with the man who headed up the mission and said, "We really appreciate you and your team helping us out. We've never seen anything like this before. It's gonna be a long haul." Toby was offered a cup of coffee, then the businessman said, "You're early, young man. We won't be ready for a few hours yet. I'm terribly sorry. We thought the announcements were clear. Handouts begin at 10 am sharp. We are still getting organized here." Toby accepted the cup of strong coffee and chuckled. "No man," he replied. "It was clear. Thing is, I don't take handouts. No one should get something for nothing. I'm here to help set up so I can earn the items my family needs." Toby rolled up his sleeves and began to help sort the boxes.

Debra lived on the other side of town in a small two bedroom house which was heavily damaged but still standing. She is a divorced mother of three with no family nearby. COVID severely cut her work hours and they were struggling to survive. Then the hurricane hit. She heard the news of the Mission trucks, and was so extremely thankful. She desperately needed help. Her goal was to be there at 10:00 sharp! She wrote down the address and set her alarm as soon as she heard about it.

Morning came. The alarm rang. Debra packed the kids in the car and searched for her note where she had jotted down the location. It wasn't on her side table. It wasn't in the junk drawer. It wasn't in her Bible. It wasn't in her purse. Where could it possibly be? Time was running out. She took a deep breath and thought she remembered the pick-up spot was in the parking lot of the old General Store on the north side of town.

She arrived right on time, but no one was there! Debra was obviously at the wrong place. Where could the food distribution site be? She drove around town looking for the trucks and the crowds. Debra finally found the correct location at 12:30. There was a long line, so she and her children took their place at the end of the line. She was already exhausted with this day, but extremely grateful to have made it. Toby noted her late arrival, and wondered why a mother with children would not be respectful of this generous man and arrive on time for the free items? Perhaps they should limit what she receives since she hasn't waited as long as the others, he thought to himself.

Mallory and Mike lived in a mobile home with their infant son who was born with serious medical problems, and Mike's elderly father who has dementia and a recent diagnosis of cancer. Mike had lost his job last month, so they were even more behind on the mounds of medical bills. Mike was picking up any odd job he could find to put food on the table. Then the hurricane hit. They evacuated to a shelter and waited. Upon returning, they found their home miraculously intact, but the winds had weakened the walls and let in a good bit of rain. It smelled. It still had no power. Still had no water. But, it was the only home they had.

Mike was out all night helping neighbors move downed trees and debris. He made it home in the wee hours of the morning and woke Mallory to tell her about the Mission trucks. "Will you please go see what you can get for us? I will try to sleep a few hours then do some more clean up work here at our place," he said. "And I'll keep an eye on Dad and the baby." Mallory sleepily agreed and rolled over. What Mike didn't know was that their son was up all night with a fever. She did everything she could to

lower his temperature by giving him medicine, bathing him in the tub of water they had filled before the hurricane, and held him in front of the one box fan running from the old generator. Relief and sleep had finally come just an hour before Mike made it home. Several hours later, Mallory awoke to their son crying. Mike was still sleeping. Everyone had finally had a stretch of good sleep, and it was well past noon. The baby still had a slight fever, but he was mainly hungry. Mallory fed him, but didn't eat anything herself. Mike needed the food since he was doing mostly manual labor. Their rations were getting low, and she wasn't sure there would be anything left for them at the food distribution site.

Mallory arrived around 4:00 in the afternoon. She prayed there would be something left for them to give her. The parking lot was nearly empty. Toby was still there helping the man pack up the remaining few items left. He was hoping to get a double share since he had worked all day with the Mission Team. The man looked up to see Mallory approaching. She looked worn and weary, like all the others they had served that day. "Thank God, we have two full boxes left," the man said to Toby. "One for this lady and one for you." Toby looked shocked. "This woman came at the last hour, and you are giving her a share equal to mine?" he questioned growing a little angry. "I have been here all day working."

The man said in reply, "My friend, I am not cheating you. Did you not come here for an equal share? Did you not volunteer to help others? Take what is yours and go. What if I wish to give this last one the same as you? Or am I not free to do as I wish with my own resources? Are you envious because I am generous?"

The man carried the large box to Mallory's car. Then, as Toby picked up his box the man turned to him and said, "Have you ever heard? 'The last will be first, and the first will be last.' "

