

GREATER THINGS - OVERCOMING OBSTACLES

Scripture used: [John 11:35-39 \(NLT\)](#)

OVERVIEW

Last week, Pastor Hurmon addressed the racial turmoil in the US. Pastor Hurmon taught us to listen, lament, learn, and act together by walking alongside those in grief. In this way, God can work through us to overturn what seems like the permanent reality of injustice. This week, Pastor Hurmon reflected on this Scripture from the Gospel of John about the raising of Lazarus from the dead to tell us about the pitfalls that can undermine any conversation about race and how to overcome these obstacles.

KEY POINTS

- 1) **Hidden trauma.** Pastor Hurmon used the analogy of his own shame as a schoolchild when he was pressed by teachers to remove his cap that hid his terrible scar. In the same way, Mary asks Jesus “Where were you when we needed you?” She implies that Jesus is at fault. Jesus does not deflect; he does not take her criticism personally. When she takes off her allegorical cap and is honest about her pain, Jesus responds by sharing in her story. Both He and Mary are deeply troubled and weep together. If someone is sharing their trauma, it is not a time for argument, debate, and policy options. It’s a time to enter into someone else’s perspective, to allow that perspective to enlarge our own.
- 2) **Unspoken skepticism.** Mary reveals hidden feelings that Jesus has not been reliable, that He may even have used her and her family. Jesus sees the context: that Mary has been shaped by her experience of trauma and now is wrestling with skepticism. Black people in the US are often skeptical about discussions on race as those have often been leveraged to affirm or confirm pre-existing points and positions. In the same way, other cultures also have their own skeptical lenses that they bring to the table. We must name our skepticism and get beyond it. Pastor Hurmon used the example of one of NBCC staff who grew up in South Korea exposed to images of black people as slaves or criminals, and that was her lens in viewing the LA riots of 1992. Later in the US she befriended black people in her workplace and took a risk by having meaningful conversations about race which smashed her long-held stereotypes.
 - a. **One area of unspoken skepticism often surrounds the lived experience of systemic racism.** Menlo Church’s John Ortberg preached a powerful sermon about the pervasive stench of racism, which has permeated every institution, and the very fabric of America. In our Scripture, Jesus is asked to “come and see.” What a metaphor! It is an invitation to ask Black friends to speak about their experience, to dismantle skepticism, and be transformed as a result.
- 3) **Displaced guilt.** Jesus does not take criticism from Mary personally. Some black people will argue that all white people are complicit in the history and tradition of racism and are at fault. Pastor Hurmon does not agree. To white people and others who have not directly sought to harm others he says: This is not your fault, but **it is your moment!** It is our shared responsibility to acknowledge this legacy and push back on the sin of racism. In the sphere we each operate in, in the conversations we have with friends and family, we ought to be like the stone-movers of our text: the volunteers who moved the huge stone that covered Lazarus’ tomb and then unwrapped his bandages. This awesome miracle is what convinced the authorities that Jesus was becoming too much trouble and should be eliminated. In this way, Jesus identifies with every victim of injustice in the world: he is the innocent put to death, yet his legacy cannot be kept subjugated and silenced. By His example, He becomes the irrefutable powerhouse of liberation.

DISCUSSION

- 1) **HEAR** - What are your biggest obstacles when talking about race and justice?
- 2) **UNDERSTAND** - Consider the dynamics of trauma, skepticism, and the potential for guilt in the account of [John 11 \(NLT\)](#) and the interaction between Jesus and Mary. Have you had an experience where one of these obstacles affected your ability to have a conversation about race or another sensitive topic? What adjustments would make a difference in your posture and the posture of the one listening to have a more constructive conversation? Is it possible to have this conversation together as a Life Group?
- 3) **DO** - In your LG or with another person, share stories about your personal experiences of race and justice. As your perspective grows, consider your sphere of influence to work for change. Take a step to make a difference! Don’t forget to join NBCC for Father’s Day this coming Sunday!