Asleep in the Boat with Jesus

Stuart Greaves

WHY I AM SPEAKING

I have gone back and forth in my soul on whether I should speak up or not. One of the greatest reasons is that I do not want to come across as dismissive of the plight of those around me, or seem calloused to what is taking place. Secondly, my hesitation is that I do not want there to be a hint of self-justification before the Lord. I have come to a place of settling, and of believing that this will be helpful to some, as well as a place of understanding toward those critical of what I am going to say.

I will not go back and forth on social media, but I am more than happy to hear you out in person as time permits. Others will appreciate this, while some will hear what I am not saying and say, “Stuart, you’re not from here, you don’t get it.” This criticism, too, I have come to peace with. Yet it will not deter me from speaking the gospel as it has been passed on to me, and as I see it in Scripture.

ASLEEP IN THE BOAT

I have been asked by several how I am doing in light of the recent police incidents involving the death of two black men. I hemmed and hawed, throwing out a party line or two, not wanting to communicate that I am calloused, or to let the honest truth come out: that I have actually been asleep in the boat with Jesus on this.

The truth is, currently I am not afraid of the police. I am not afraid to go for a walk or for a jog, nor am I lost or confused about what is going on. But strangely, by God’s grace, I am asleep in the boat. I have been for some time. I must confess that this has not always been the case, and I am sure there will be moments when I will have to wrestle with that. Yet increasingly it is not the overarching narrative of my soul.

Some of you may ask, “Why? Don’t you care? Aren’t you black? Are you out of touch, or have you gotten drunk with the privilege of those around you?” No. On the contrary, not only do I understand, but I have experienced and felt the fear, the anger, and the rest. Yet the Spirit has continually prodded me to turn to Him. I do not always, but I have in many seasons, and I have found surprising answers, both unsettling and joyous. I gain it, lose it, and have to work my way back, often in turning to Him. I find myself off course easily, but I find my way home time and again after I am done and tired of eating the pig slop of anger and angst in a distant land.

A BURDEN IN THE BONES

For over twenty years, to the consternation of many, I have been speaking, as have many others, on the coming racial conflicts in America, and that through them the Lord is going to, from time to time, begin to rip off the band-aids and expose false peace and safety, and deep-seated racial angst in the land. I spoke as well, along with others, about the calling of Jesus’ Church to grapple with her role as a racially unified witness in the midst of racial conflict, and that the followers of Jesus needed to be delivered both from the politically liberal and the conservative narrative concerning justice, and to discover Jesus’ way as communicated all through the Scripture (Psalm 119:160), both in the Old Testament and the New.

I have spoken on this nearly ten thousand times: in one-on-one settings, in small groups, on stage before hundreds and thousands, on social media, in endless text conversations. Because of this, for over twenty years, nearly thirty, I

have been forced to let my soul tremble at the thought of the coming racial conflict.

This has not been an easy feat. It was met by resistance, misunderstanding, and dismissal, both because of the hearers and because of my own immaturity at times as to how to communicate it. “Why are you talking about this? Are you a liberal? Are you a conservative? What are you? Are you black? Are you anti-black? You don’t get America. Be careful to make sure that this is not out of anger.” I have wanted to quit many times, but the burden was too real. I did not ask for it, nor did I want it, and I am not entirely sure that I still want it. It is a burden in my bones and deeply in my gut, and I continue to experience the Spirit’s unwelcome prompting to lift my voice. I keep thinking this current situation is yet another flashpoint, that it will subside, and then another flash will come, and on and on it goes. Jesus spoke to us about this in the Scripture.

BROTHER HABAKKUK

In the midst of this journey, over twenty years ago, I discovered the one I affectionately call Brother Habakkuk. I found in him a whole wide range of emotions while he was walking out with God the truth about justice. There was a verse that was particularly striking to me.

> *When I heard it, my body trembled; my lips quivered at the voice; rottenness entered my bones; and I trembled in myself, that I might rest in the day of trouble. When he comes up to the people, he will invade them with his troops. — Habakkuk 3:16*

When we look at the details in Scripture of the coming end-time crisis, it forces us to wrestle with certain heart dynamics slightly ahead of time. Brother Habakkuk early on grapples with the Lord about the sad state of affairs in Judah, but the Lord told him that there is a greater crisis coming as part of the mysterious solution to the present problem. Most of us know that while things are “ok,” things at the same time have not been “ok,” and we have been asking Jesus for answers. It is why so many of you are intercessors. In this verse I saw a principle: in the time when things are “ok and yet not ok,” it is time to let ourselves be disrupted further and deeper by truth spoken by the prophets of old.

When we embrace the news of a coming storm, it will do such a work in us that when it comes we can walk in peace, have clarity, and be a voice of wisdom, comfort, and love. Brother Habakkuk tells us great trouble is coming, but it will serve as a context for righteousness-producing faith (Habakkuk 2:4) to emerge, so we can enter and live forever in Jesus’ coming just society on the earth (Habakkuk 2:14)—the kingdom of God. At the same time, I confess that I have not yet attained this by any stretch of the imagination. My soul has yet to fully grapple with the raging storm that is coming to the earth, and there is so much more light that Jesus wants to shine on my heart. There is, however, a surprising peace that is freeing my soul to be shaken by the news of what is coming, insofar as crisis over the next several years and decades.

NATION AGAINST NATION

My friends, I hear us. I hear the news. I hear the “prophecies” about the land shining lighter and brighter. But my personal conflict comes when I look at the prophecies of the Jewish carpenter, the Son of God Himself, and I realize that much of what is being said simply does not line up with His Word. When it comes to the issue of race, He declared, “Nation against nation.” He prophesied ethnic conflict in the earth that will reach apocalyptic proportions. Every social flashpoint is both an indicator toward that reality and an invitation to the followers of Jesus to be disrupted, and to grapple with becoming gospel witnesses in the midst of racial conflict.

The good news is that Jesus does not lie, nor does He exaggerate. The bad news is that Jesus does not lie, nor does He exaggerate. He said very clearly, “For these things must come to pass.” He also said, “See to it that you are not troubled.”

This is not a call to inaction. That is an entirely different subject, of which there is much to be said. This is a call to wrestle with the gospel, instead of, in the name of being woke, empathetic, and virtuous, dismissing both the biblical narrative and the necessary internal heart response before the Lord.

My dear friends, there is coming increasing racial conflict to the land, and the continuing hope for a healed country in this age is going to yield disappointing and disastrous emotional results, and even the shipwreck of faith for some. Christ, and the promise of an entrance into His coming kingdom by faith, and the establishing of that kingdom on the earth, is our only true hope. Peter called it the blessed hope. Part of the challenge before us is how much of our hope lies in a “healed” nation, even when it took a single virus, 20 to 400 nanometers in size, to rock it at its core. Our country may recover and progress again, but let it be known that it is still “a drop in a bucket,” as the Lord told the prophet Isaiah. The prophet Haggai and the writer of Hebrews said that everything that can be shaken will be shaken, so that those things which cannot be shaken remain. Friends, we have received a kingdom that cannot be shaken. To put our hope in the eradication of racial conflict in America in this age is an exercise in futility. What we can contend for is the removal of racial tension, bigotry, and conflict in the church. Can it happen in society? Certainly, to some measure. Even so, it is not our hope.

I get shaken just like the next person. When I am shaken, I know this to be true: it is an indicator, an alarm, that there are areas in my soul wrongly anchored in things that are shakable, and that it is time to readjust, resisting the temptation to look for false relief from the pressure of being disrupted by the gospel. The Lord once spoke to a prophetic friend and said, “I am not saying nearly as much as you say that I am saying, but I am saying a lot more than you are willing to hear.” Let us stand before Him and, through the word of God, incline and listen. The gospel has great news, and yet incredibly uncomfortable things to say about justice, both to those who perpetuate injustice and to those affected by it. His voice will break through. It is quite unsettling to ponder, knowing that He will gently, wisely, lovingly, and determinedly get His point across.

WHAT THEN SHALL WE DO

So some of you are asking what we do with all this.

First. The Father spoke audibly on the mountain to Peter, James, and John, saying, “This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased. Listen to Him.” Jesus spoke to us in many places, but the one I have in mind is Matthew 24, the whole chapter, including both the warnings and the response Jesus urges us to have.

Second. Pray. Spend time with Jesus. Ask Him to reveal His love for you, as in Zephaniah 3:17.

Third. Ask the Lord for grace, and consider taking the posture of Brother Habakkuk, who understood that his internal disruption was an indication of not being aligned with the perspective of heaven, and that the measure in which we lack peace is the measure by which we are not connected with the interests of Christ, but with the interests of self and man, and so are living by our own self-consumed and limited perspective.

Fourth. Consider turning off the news reports for a season, Fox, CNN, and the rest. From heaven’s perspective it is all fake news. There is a report heaven has for us (Isaiah 53:1). It is Aslan’s report. It is not a tame report. It is a dangerous and intrinsically disruptive one. It is still good.

Fifth. Ask for a Holy Spirit escort to go on a journey to discover your heavenly citizenship (Philippians 3:20–21), and what it means to have been bought out of a people (Revelation 5:9) and brought into another (1 Peter 2:9).

A PRAYER

Father, I pray in the name of Jesus that you visit us, visit my brothers and sisters and myself. Give grace to our hearts. Give us the strength to turn and see Your Word, Your ways, and Your purpose. I am grateful, Abba, that You told us we can come to Your Son when we are weighed down and distressed, and that You will not only gently and meekly grant us rest, but You will also instruct us. Father, grant us rest in the storm and instruct us in the way of You. Abba, radiate Your glorious face. Let the light of Your countenance shine on our hearts, filling us with glory, beauty, and the wonder of You and Your ways. Forgive us for the ways of misplaced faith and hope, and instruct us in Your ways, and form Christ within. In Jesus' name, Amen.

See to it that you are not troubled. For these things must come to pass.