

NOT DEAD, BUT SLEEPING

In Matthew 9:18-19, a ruler worshipfully came to Jesus requesting Jesus to come and resurrect his dead daughter. On the way, Jesus was interrupted by a woman who had a blood flow for 12 years. After healing her, Matthew 9:23 picks up the account where Jesus made His way to the ruler's house (the parallel passages to Matt. 9:18-26 are found in Mk. 5:21-43 and Luke 8:40-56).

This ruler is stated in Mark 5:22 to be a ruler of the synagogue (evidently in Capernaum), and his name was Jairus. As a ruler in the synagogue, he would have been well respected in the Jewish community. These rulers administratively oversaw the activities related to the synagogue and were responsible for lining up teachers, etc.

He came to Christ literally bowing down, indicating humble respect or perhaps even worship as so translated in the NKJV.

In the parallel passages found in Mark 5:23 and Luke 8:42, we are told that initially this ruler's daughter was dying but then in short order a report came saying she had died (cf. Mk. 5:35; Lk. 8:49).

This apparent discrepancy is explained by the fact that while Jesus was speaking to Jairus, someone came from his house to tell him the girl had died. Matthew did not mention that detail, and therefore included the report of the girl's death in Jairus' request.

– ***The Bible Knowledge Commentary***

This ruler definitely had faith that Jesus could heal his dying daughter by simply laying His hand on her. But then, when the report came that she had indeed died, Jesus said to the ruler, “***Do not be afraid; only believe, and she will be made well.***” (Lk. 8:50)

Footnote: The other parallel gospels tell us that this girl was 12 years old (cf. Mk. 5:42; Lk. 8:42). This was the age a Jewish boy was counted as a man and a Jewish girl had reached the initial stage of adulthood.

Matthew 9:23 (NKJV)

23 When Jesus came into the ruler's house, and saw the flute players and the noisy crowd wailing,

Jewish funerals were typically held on the same day the person died, as the warm climate called for quickly disposing of the dead body. By the time they got back to the house, the funeral proceedings were well underway. And it was a noisy affair. The idea was the louder the better.

Jewish funeral customs according to the Talmud required as a duty that even a poor family hire two flute players and one professional wailing woman to properly express grief. A well-to-do leader in the community would probably have had a whole host of mourners in place. As stated the crowd was wailing – and then Jesus showed up. Jesus has a way of changing things when He shows up.

Matthew 9:24 (NKJV)

24 He said to them, “Make room, for the girl is not dead, but sleeping.” And they ridiculed Him.

This is almost comical. They are all carrying on in funeral mode, and Jesus said, “***Make room, for the girl is not dead, but sleeping.***” The sense of “***Make room***” is “***get out***”. Luke 8:54 says, “He put them all outside,” as is also indicated in the next verse here in Matthew.

Jesus does not perform for unbelief. Unbelief gets “put out”. It is noteworthy that this crowd ridiculed Jesus for saying the girl was merely sleeping and not dead, and yet as LORD Jesus put them out. Jesus is always in charge!

Ridiculed is the idea of “laughed at”, “mocked” or “made fun of”. And you can understand why: Luke 8:53 says, “***And they ridiculed Him, knowing that she was dead.***” They absolutely knew she was dead and not merely sleeping.

The Bible often uses “sleep” metaphorically to denote death. The body is pictured as sleeping, denoting a temporary condition. One day the body will awake in resurrected form, but for now it is pictured as being asleep (cf. Dan. 12:2; Jn. 11:11; Acts 7:60; 1 Cor. 15:6, 18; 1 Thess. 4:13-16; 2 Pet. 3:4).

Jesus spoke of this little girl’s death as her being asleep. Again, sleep is a temporary condition. Death, properly understood, is not a permanent condition because one day death will be awakened in the resurrection.

Matthew 9:25 (NKJV)

25 But when the crowd was put outside, He went in and took her by the hand, and the girl arose.

First, the ridiculing crowd was put outside. We know from Luke that there were 5 witnesses to this miracle present in the room.

Luke 8:51 (NKJV)

51 When He came into the house, He permitted no one to go in except Peter, James, and John, and the father and mother of the girl.

Having put everyone out except for these five, Jesus then went in – took the girl by the hand and immediately she arose back to life. There was no long drawn out process. Immediately she came back to life. In Mark 5:41 it says that Jesus said to her, “***Talitha cumi***” which in Aramaic literally means “Little one” or “Little lamb, arise”. That is tender and precious! That is the language of the good Shepherd!

What we have here in this account is two miracles of restoration that were considered to be cases that were “incurable”. The woman with the flow of blood had exhausted all human resources. Humanly speaking, it was hopeless! Jairus, in utter desperation, sought out Christ to help his dying daughter, knowing he had no other recourse. And then it got worse as she was pronounced dead! The case was one of human hopelessness!

In both of these impossible cases Jesus responded to FAITH. He told the woman, “***your faith has made you well***” (Mt. 9:22). And Jairus in Luke 8:49-50, upon hearing that his daughter had died, was told by Christ, “Do not be afraid, ***only believe***, and she will be made well.” In conjunction with FAITH, Christ did the impossible!

Touching a corpse rendered a person ceremonially unclean for 7 days, as seen in Numbers 19:11-21. However, Jesus, in touching the girl, brought her back to life and thus instantly transformed uncleanness into purity. We see the same reality in instantly healing the woman with the flow of blood.

But there is something even greater in view, and that is the Messiah in the OT is depicted as having life-restoring power (cf. Isa. 30:26; 35:5-6; 53:5). In Malachi 4:2 He is pictured as coming with “healing in His wings”. Jesus raising people from the dead was a very important proof of His Messianic identity.

Matthew 11:4–5 (NKJV)

4 Jesus answered and said to them, “Go and tell John the things which you hear and see:

5 The blind see and the lame walk; the lepers are cleansed and the deaf hear; **the dead are raised up** and the poor have the gospel preached to them.

In the ministry of Jesus we have record of Him raising 3 people from the dead. In Luke 7:12-15 Jesus raised from the dead the son of a widow; in John 11:43-44 He raised Lazarus from the dead; and here in Matthew 9 He brought this 12-year-old girl back to life.

This is significant because in the OT in Deut. 32:39 God says, ***“There is no God besides Me; I kill and I make alive...”***. This is distinctly a God thing (cf. 1 Sam. 2:6; 2 Kg. 5:7).

There are a few occasions in the Bible when a prophet or an apostle in imploring God was able to see people brought back to life, such as Elijah through prayer bringing back to life the widow of Zarephath's son (cf. 1 Kg. 17:17-24); or Peter the apostle through prayer seeing Tabitha of Joppa raised to life again (cf. Acts 9:36-42).

But Jesus was different in that He did it first-hand. When Jesus did it – He did it directly first-hand as though He Himself were God. He did not have to ask God to do it – He just did it. That is unique to Him. It is unique to the Messiah Who in truth is God and Man in One person (cf. Isa. 9:6-7; Jer. 23:5-6). This is what makes Jesus raising people to life completely unique. He functioned as though He were God, doing what only God can do precisely because He was God come in the flesh.

Matthew 9:26 (NKJV)

26 And the report of this went out into all that land.

In Mark 5:43 it says that Jesus ***“commanded them strictly that no one should know it”*** and in Luke 8:56 it says that Jesus charged the astonished parents ***“to tell no one what had happened.”***

And yet it is very difficult to hide the reality of a revived living 12-year-old girl who the general public knew for sure had been dead. Somehow word leaked out that Jesus had raised her back to life, and then it went forth like a flood to where the report of this went out into all that land.

What we see in our text today is that Christ brought a whole new JOY dynamic in contrast to the old forms of religious Judaism. Christ did impossible things – bringing restoration in impossible situations that can only be described as a total God-thing.

As a young preacher D.L. Moody was called upon to preach a sermon at a funeral. He searched the gospels to see what Jesus had to say in reference to such an occasion.

He said, "I hunted all through the four Gospels trying to find one of Christ's funeral sermons, but I couldn't find any. I found He broke up every funeral He ever attended! Death couldn't exist where He was."

Jesus broke up every funeral He ever attended. Indeed, Jesus is the resurrection and the life. He is God of very God the divine/human Messiah prophesied and promised in the OT Scriptures.

He is the promised Messiah Who can make all things new and in the end will restore all things. We have just a little sample of this kingdom renewal power in Christ's earthly sign-miracle ministry. This serves to show that indeed Jesus is the true Messiah Who ultimately will bring in the kingdom, and as the Son of David He will indeed yet restore all things in fulfillment of prophecy which will usher in fullness of joy. In His presence is fullness of joy (cf. Ps. 16:11). This ultimately will be completely fulfilled in the coming kingdom.