

Prayer

Rescue us and restore us, merciful Saviour and Lord! When we feel oppressed, come to us with Your peace and set us free from evil. When we feel disheartened, inspire our hearts with Your love and raise our spirits. When we feel let down, encourage us to forgive and restore our relationships. Truly, all things are possible with You: AMEN

Prayer Suggestions

Prayer ideas

Pray for those you see during your day. You do not know them, but do not let this be a barrier to your prayers.

On-going prayers

- **Pray for North Africa and the Arab world:** *Let us pray with concerted effort this week for countries of North Africa and Arabia, in view of the turmoil there. Pray for the long term future of people living in these countries.*
- *Give thanks to God for Christian communities throughout the world who serve You in difficult circumstances*
- *Continue to pray for the people of New Zealand as they suffer the appalling results of the earthquake there. Pray for all who suffer the loss of loved ones and property*

Meditation

Jesus, Your kindness touches every part of our being.

You inspire us by Your example of love and forgiveness;
You assure us of Your presence throughout all of our days;
You lift us when we fall, and continue to look after for us;
You empower us to stand firm in doing what is right;
You comfort us in tenderness when rejected by others;
You encourage us by Your Spirit, whose assistance never fails;
You care for us each day, for our welfare as Your disciples;
You sustain us in hope with the promise of eternal life;
You protect us from trouble when the trials of life persist

Jesus, Your kindness touches every part of our being.
Thank You.

Bible passage - Luke 8:49-56

⁴⁹ While Jesus was still speaking, someone came from the leader's house to say,
'Your daughter is dead; do not trouble the teacher anymore.'

⁵⁰ When Jesus heard this, He said,

'Do not fear! Only believe, and she will be saved.'

⁵¹ When He came to the house, Jesus allowed no one to go in with Him, except Peter, John, and James, and the child's father and mother.

⁵² They were all crying and grieving for her; but He said,

'Do not weep, for she has not died! No, she is asleep!'

⁵³ Then they began to laugh at Him, knowing that she was dead. ⁵⁴ But, He took her by the hand and called out,

'Child, get up!'

⁵⁵ Her spirit returned, and she immediately got up. Then He arranged for them to give her something to eat.

⁵⁶ Her parents were stunned; but He told them firmly not to tell anyone what had happened.

Bible Study

Review

The raising of Jairus' daughter is a moving story, and together with that of the woman with a haemorrhage, it touches our deepest emotions. Death is by far the most difficult of subjects. We may imagine that other things are hard, but if we have lost someone close, then we know immediately that it is life's toughest call. Any interpretation of this passage of Scripture needs to recognise this.

While illness is one thing, death is another. To a certain extent, medical practice has always sought to prevent death, because doctors possess the skill and knowledge to assist the body's ability to heal, and halt or reverse the body's decay. They do not however have the power to deal with death itself. Death remains a great barrier, and humanity is defined by how it handles death, both philosophically and practically.

The Christian knows that Christ has overcome death to make salvation available for all, and our story today clearly points towards this supreme event. For example, when speaking to Jairus, Jesus links faith with salvation (8:50). This is a crucial step forward in the account of 'faith' found within Luke's Gospel. This began with the hope of the friends of the paralysed man (5:20), and continued with the blind trust of the woman who anointed Jesus (7:50). The faith Jesus now asks of Jairus is one that trusts Him for life and death itself, and its reward will be salvation (8:50)!

Jesus undoubtedly performed this miracle for the benefit of a grieving mother and father, but He also did it to show that God had power over death as well as life. It was part of the great work of Salvation, which certainly included giving life to one young girl, but also confirmed the eternal purpose of God to overcome the power of death through Christ!

The story is fascinating, and we can check it out against the same story found in Matthew (9:18-26) and Mark (5:21-34). One unique feature of Luke is the fact that he says nothing about the crowds mourning the young girl. We are told that Jesus entered the house with three disciples acting as necessary independent witness, and the child's parents (8:51). In response to their grieving, Jesus tears at the emotions by treating the difference between sleeping and death as slight (8:52). Then, using the simple words of a mother when waking a child in the morning, Jesus raised a girl who had previously been verified as dead! It was done by an awesome combination of His firm command and God's power to return the girl's 'spirit' (8:55)!

For those who can stand back from their emotions about death, many great spiritual themes stand out within this story: the power of God over death, the connections between faith and salvation, the nature of death and the hope of the afterlife, and much more. As individuals with our own experiences of death, however, this passage could be the cause of some spiritual uncertainty, and it is important to look into this.

If Jesus raised this little girl out of compassion for her parents, why has Jesus not done the same for other parents and relatives throughout the centuries? What can we say about all the grief and distress that is within the world now, concerning sons or daughters who have died unexpectedly? But, although Jesus undoubtedly raised up Jairus' daughter out of compassion, we cannot allow ourselves to think that such a miracle is merely a special favour available to those who are spiritual. The undeserving gift given to this little girl and her family was given not just for their benefit, even though Jesus told her parents not to talk about it. It was given so that when the three disciples who saw it told others about it later, people would realise that God's gift of life through Jesus was a free gift for all, through faith!

We therefore share this story today not merely as an example of God's power to influence the life of those He favours. We share it as evidence of God's supreme power over life as well as death, confident that it will ultimately work to the supreme benefit of those who have faith in Him for salvation.

Going Deeper

The Bible study goes deeper to look at these issues:

- What really happened when Jesus came to the house?
- Why did Jesus say that Jairus' daughter was sleeping?
- What does this passage tell us about faith and salvation?

Notes on the text and translation

V49 **'do not trouble the teacher anymore'**

Other translations:

'Don't bother the teacher anymore' (NIV)

"Do not trouble the teacher (NKJV)

This is only a small point, but it illustrates the trouble that scholars have in determining the original text of the New Testament. Most of the ancient copies of the New Testament in our possession translate '*do not trouble the teacher*'. However, there is very strong evidence from the earliest possible parchments that a word has been miscopied. These suggest that the correct translation should be '*do not trouble the teacher anymore*'. There is not too much difficulty if we get this wrong, but the principle we use to get this right must be used consistently throughout the New Testament if we are to be true to our desire to use a text that is as close as possible to what was first written.

V50 **'and she will be saved'**

Other translations:

'and she will be healed' (NIV)

'and she will be made well' (NKJV)

The Greek word at the end of the sentence is 'sodzo', which means 'to be saved'. However, this does not mean 'salvation' in the sense of 'saved from the wrath of God'. It means quite generally 'saved from trouble', and in this case, the trouble is illness and being close to death; hence the NIV translation '*she will be healed*'. In this instance I have chosen to keep the English the same as the Greek, '*and she will be saved*'. This is because it seems obvious to me that the girl must be saved from illness, though the salvation she receives is somewhat more sensational!

V52 **'they were all crying and grieving for her ...'**

Other translations:

'all the people were wailing and mourning for her' (NIV)

'they were all weeping and wailing for her' (NRSV)

If you read these translations carefully, you will see that some assume that the weeping and wailing is done by 'all' the people and others that it is done by the parents and the disciples. Which is right? Most naturally, it should be the latter, the parents and the disciples. Although some powerful and influential translations suggest that it is others, I prefer to keep with this interpretation, because it seems to me to best fit Luke's report here. It also fits with Luke's general tendency to be descriptive of the feelings of individuals and those close to the major healing miracles of Jesus.

At the end of the sentence, the Greek Word 'kopto', translated by me here as 'grieving', connects with the idea of 'being cut off', and came to mean 'mourning' or 'grieving' because of being cut off through death. I prefer 'grieving' because it fits with the general picture painted, and the flow of the story (see study).

V52 **'... she has not died! No, she is asleep!'**

Other translations:

'... she is not dead but asleep' (NIV)

'... she is not dead but sleeping' (NRSV)

I have translated the Greek here in a way that preserved the tenses of the Greek verbs. This however, makes the translation sound as if Jesus is denying that the girl is dead, as if Jesus did not raise a girl from the dead, just woke her up! In order to avoid any hint of this, many translators have changed the verb tenses to make the whole scenario seem more ambiguous. I do not feel this is necessary, and the study looks more closely at the issue of what Jesus means here.

Going Deeper

What really happened when Jesus came to the house?

It is rather strange to find that Matthew and Mark's story is different to that of Luke. Matthew and Mark describe a crowd of people weeping and wailing and creating a scene outside Jairus' house; *'when they came to the house ... He saw a commotion ...'* (Matt 9:23, Mark 5:39). They then report that Jesus rebuked them for weeping and wailing, shouting out to them His opinion that *'the child is not dead, but sleeping'* (Matt 9:24, Mark 5:39). Luke uses the same words about weeping and wailing, but addresses them to the parents and to the accompanying disciples; he simply does not mention any crowds outside.

Some translations change the text here to make it seem that Jesus was addressing a crowd rather than the small group entering the house. They do this in order to make the account fit with Matthew and Mark. But why should we do this? Do we imagine that in the fractions of a second of time when Jesus arrived and went into the house, it is possible to tie down an exact sequence of events to satisfy our notions of accuracy? There is more at stake here than our need to try and unify the account of Jesus' ministry.

Most scholars reckon that Luke had before him copies of Mark's Gospel at least, certainly this part of it, yet he chose to leave out all mention of the crowd and write as if this was all a private moment between Jesus and the parents, with the disciples as witnesses. He may simply not be interested to make any point about what Jesus said to the crowds, but the recollection that Jesus said these words as He entered the house suggest to him something completely different to what it meant to Matthew and Mark.

Further research will show that Matthew was not concerned that the news of this incident was spread around afterwards. Mark, surprisingly for a Gospel that contains many instructions from Jesus telling people to keep things quiet, does not have Jesus saying anything about being quiet! Because of all this, it seems that Luke alone was concerned that this incident be kept private.

The reason for this is simple, for Luke saw this remarkable event as something that should not be spoken about openly. As a doctor, he knew that if 'raising from the dead' became generally expected, then it would debase Jesus' ministry. Why would people worry too much about sickness, or indeed anything, if at the critical moment, resurrection was on immediate offer!

Luke knew that Jesus did not go around raising people from the dead with any great frequency; Jesus knew that it was God intent that He be raised Himself, and all His miracles and wonders were designed to point towards this one, great and defining miracle. Before this took place, any raising of the dead must be a part of God's special plan to work towards the supreme centre piece of history, the resurrection.

Why did Jesus say Jairus' daughter was sleeping?

After Jesus came to the house and went in with the parents and the disciples, he quickly came into the dead girl's presence. Jairus had of course been away to tell Jesus, and it was at this moment that he saw his dead child for the first time. It seems that everyone knew full well that the child was dead, but Jesus' words sounded equivocal, *'... she has not died! No, she is asleep!'* (8:52).

For this reason, people have for centuries argued that Jesus could see what the others could not see, which was that the girl was not dead; she was sleeping. Luke, however, seems on the one hand to report Jesus' words accurately, but on the other, reinforce the fact that the girl was dead. He says this both at the beginning of the story (8:49), and at the end, where He reports that *'her spirit returned'* (8:56), something that would only be necessary if she was indeed dead and not sleeping. Because of this, it would surely be unworthy of us to try and give the theory life by suggesting that the girl had been kept in a zombie like trance for the sake of an illusion, something that Jesus spotted, which others didn't!

Luke is a faithful and accurate reporter, so why then did Jesus say that the girl was sleeping? Firstly, it was a characteristic of Jesus to speak of death as 'sleep'. He did this when raising Lazarus from the dead, causing untold confusion in the minds of others, as John reports:

After saying this, he told them, 'Our friend Lazarus has fallen asleep, but I am going there to awaken him.' The disciples said to him, 'Lord, if he has fallen asleep, he will be all right.' Jesus, however, had been speaking about his death, but they thought that he was referring merely to sleep. (John 11:11-13)

There is no clear statement of Jesus to explain why He tended to speak in this way, even though in John chapter 11, He did go on to explain that He was talking about death! It is possible that because of Jesus' closeness to His Father, He saw things a little differently, even though life and death was as real for Him as for any man. His very nature as God's Son meant that for Him, the difference between life and death was not as great as it is for us.

Because of this, early Christians began to speak of those who had died in faith as 'sleeping in death', until the Lord's return. It is an idea that persists to this day, and we will only find out whether this is a reasonable explanation of what happens after death when Jesus does indeed come in glory!

In the mean time, we could take comfort in what Jesus said. He was able to testify to all humanity that in the Spirit, there is only a thin line between this life and God's eternity.

What does this passage tell us about faith and salvation?

In verse 50, Jesus says '*do not fear, only believe, and she will be saved*'. The significant thing about this sentence is that it is indeed something new in Luke's Gospel. It contains Jesus call to people to believe, or in other words, have faith. Moreover, the tense of the verb used here indicates that such faith is a decision once made. In the story, Jesus asks Jairus to make a decision about whether he does indeed place his daughter in Jesus' hands or not, and whether he trusts Jesus or not. There is no halfway house for Jairus, it is 'now or never'.

Of course, this is close to the manner of faith that we think of as defining Christianity today. How significant it is that it occurs in a story about raising from the dead! This passage of Scripture therefore confirms our belief that true faith is faith that God will do for us what we cannot do for ourselves. In this case, break down the barrier between life and death, and between death and the eternity of God's blessings.

Application

It can be very difficult for some to discuss this passage of Scripture, because they have children who have died or because they feel that someone close to them has died who might perhaps have been saved. We cannot therefore avoid the necessity of explaining this passage as an important text about faith, and trust in God. Jesus makes a direct appeal to Jairus to have absolute faith in Him, and this challenge comes directly to us today.

One other important feature of this story is Jesus' clear compassion. True, He called on Jairus and his wife to stop grieving, but in the light of what happened next, and probably very quickly, this can hardly be said to be cruel. Luke reports that they '*laughed at Him*', but Jesus was not diverted from His task, He did not respond, He quickly raised the child, and in doing so, showed immense love and compassion. Firstly, His manner with the child seems calm and reassuring. He took her hand and said words that were typical of calling a child to wake up in the morning, and then as she rose, he '*arranged*' for her to eat something (8:55). The contrast between the staggering sight of a child raised from the dead and the gentle manner of Christ at such a moment, is extraordinary. If the Lord were to lead anyone to seek the raising of the dead today, it would seem inappropriate to do this by anything more than the calmest and simplest of prayer, placing all trust in God.

This story concludes the great chapter 8 of Luke's Gospel, which contains a condensed 'manual for mission' for the early church. Did the early Christians pray for people to be raised from the dead? Were they effective in their ministry just as Jesus was? There is a small amount of evidence from early Christians about people being raised, but just as today, the evidence is small and sometimes thin on the ground. What is perhaps far more important is that fact that the early Christians exercised great faith in Jesus and learned through every means to trust Him completely, certainly for all life and death situations. Perhaps this is what we should learn. For if we trust Him completely, there will be no doubt in our minds that He 'can' raise the dead through even our ministry and in our midst. Whether or not He chooses to do so is another matter, for our priority must be to promote the 'faith' by which we are saved.

Discipleship

Questions (for use in groups)

1. Is it right that we should expect people to be raised from the dead today? How does this story help us deal with this question?
2. What does this passage of Scripture tell us about faith?
3. Share in your group what you feel about reading a story about a child being raised from the dead. Help each other deal with this question

Personal comments by author

I will make no excuses. This passage is hard for me to write about because my son died suddenly and unexpectedly just six months ago. The reason he died was because he had an undiagnosed heart condition. Unless I could accept that this story was about more than the raising of this little girl, I would be left envious

and desperately upset that God did not raise my son. Yet I know that while I can cope with this (just about), there are many who do not. The pathway of faith can be a tough ride, but its end is indeed salvation.

Ideas for exploring discipleship

- *Sometimes, Christians will tell of people being raised from the dead, and this is certainly a dramatic thing. Discuss this issue with a friend, and explore what it means for God to raise people from the dead today.*
 - *Are there any people you know who have lost a son or a daughter? Do your best to minister to them and stand alongside them in their faith.*
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Final Prayer

Lord God, You are the victor over all sin and all death. Come and lift our spirits by Your comforting love. Bless those who mourn the loss of loved ones, and surround them with Your compassion. Give all of us who are Your Church the heart to care for those who have lost those who are close to them; may we show the same quality of love to others that You have shown to us. AMEN
