

'name' of Jesus Christ – Acts 8:9-24). It is fascinating, therefore, that an early Christian writer called Origen tells us in his writing about a belief that when a 'magic' word was translated from its original language, it lost its power! What may be happening in this Gospel, therefore, is that by translating Jesus' words, Mark specifically nullifies their apparent 'magic' power, and sends the message that people should not try to use Jesus' words as if they had 'magic' power alongside His touch. They was not to be a formula for the resurrection from the dead!

Thirdly, the simple way that Mark records the girl as rising and walking around is significant. Jesus made sure that this was done privately; otherwise this too would be seen by others as part of some 'showmanship'. Mark records what happened in a matter of fact way. The girl's walking around proved she was well and her eating proved that she was no ghost or spirit! Lastly, it is not possible to convey in English the sheer astonishment of the parents and the disciples at what happened; 'they were overcome with amazement' is my translation above, but a closer and more literal translation would be 'they were out of their minds in ecstasy!' Few stronger words for amazement and joy are used in the whole of Mark's Gospel.

Application

Scholars have argued about the last verse of this incident for a long time, debating whether it is part of Jesus' on-going plan to prevent the people from knowing who He was. Throughout my comments on Mark I have found that there are always good reasons for Jesus' apparent caution, and here, an obvious logic applies. Now if everyone wanted to have their loved one's raised from the dead, then the demand would be very high, but this miracle is not a general benefit for whoever asks, but something very special. When Jesus raised the girl to life in this passage, and when He raised Lazarus to life in John 11, Jesus did so to make specific points about His own resurrection and the benefits of eternal life with Christ. Now, I would not necessarily doubt it if I was told that God had brought someone back to life as a consequence of some ministry of healing today. However, I would look to see how this great miracle points to the eternal saving work of God and the great miracle of God's final resurrection into the new spiritual life of the Kingdom of God (Rev 21:1f.). Unless God grants such a miracle for this express purpose, then I would probably remain cautious about its meaning, because Scripture is our guide in all these things, and certainly for meaning of the resurrection of the dead.

If I sound cautious about this miracle, it is because we must not allow ourselves to be diverted from the fundamental importance of the story, which is to give us a glimpse of God's intention to work the miracle of resurrection for all who have faith in Him, eventually through Jesus Himself. If the previous story of healing (of the woman with a chronic haemorrhage) explained the connection between faith and salvation, then for the first time in Mark's Gospel this passage brings to light God's power to defeat the final enemy of death! Out of a ministry amongst thronging crowds which touched the lives of a wide range of people, Jesus began to demonstrate the ultimate saving purposes of God and His power over death.

Questions (for use in groups)

1. In your group, discuss the feelings of the different characters involved in this story
2. Do you believe that Jesus foreknew that the child would die and He would have to call her back to life? What does this mean if He did not?
3. What does this miracle teach us about the Kingdom of God?

Discipleship

If you read widely in Christian literature or on the internet, you will come across claims that Jesus has raised people from the dead. What do you think of such claims? If you have an opportunity to, look at the details of such an incident, and consider yourself whether you believe that it honours what God does for people through the resurrection of the dead which He will one day bring to all who have faith in Him. Making such judgements is hard, but essential.

Final Prayer

Give my mind peace, Lord God, for there is so much to occupy my thoughts. Give me the courage to trust You for what is happening in my own life and the lives of those I Love. Lead me to that place of peace where I can be confident in Your provision not just for me, but also for all my friends and family: AMEN

Prayer

Lord God Almighty, You are always one step ahead of us. We do not always see this or fully appreciate Your command of time, which You alone have created. May we always be thankful, therefore, because Your provision for us is always perfect; and may we not be so blind as to fail to see it or use it as You intend! AMEN

Other Prayer Suggestions

Weekly Theme: Personal Decisions

Offer prayers today for people who will make personal decisions today which will affect them for the rest of their lives: proposals of marriage, accepting jobs, responding to a critical situation at work or at home, for example. The Holy Spirit will lead you in choosing your prayers. Pray that God will use such times for blessing, especially for those who trust His guidance.

Meditation

Jesus, give us a heart to

Have fun whenever we can with others,
Do what we can for those who have less than we do,
Enjoy the company of those younger than ourselves.
Keep our affairs and our homes in good order.
Listen to all who speak to us with our full attention,
Speak with care, and do so with thought and wisdom.

Jesus, may we therefore testify to

Faith which opens doors and is exciting,
Love which always seeks out those who are poor
The Kingdom of God, which a child may enter
Decency and order, which are expressions of love
God's commands to love others as we love ourselves
The utmost importance of following Christ's example.

Jesus, may we connect faith with life.

Bible Study - Mark 5:35-43

³⁵ While Jesus was still speaking, some people came from the synagogue leader to say, 'Your daughter is dead. Why trouble the Teacher anymore?' ³⁶ But Jesus ignored what they were discussing and said to the leader of the synagogue, 'Do not fear, just believe.' ³⁷ He did not allow anyone to accompany Him except Peter, James, and John, the brother of James. ³⁸ When they came to the house of the synagogue leader, Jesus caught sight of the commotion, with people weeping and wailing loudly. ³⁹ When He had gone in, He said to them, 'Why all this uproar and weeping? The child is not dead but asleep.' ⁴⁰ But they laughed at Him. Then He sent them all outside, and took the father and mother of the child and the disciples who were with Him, and went into the room where the child was. ⁴¹ He held the child's hand and said to her, 'Talitha koum,' (which translates as 'Little girl, I say to you, get up!') ⁴² The girl got up immediately and began to walk around (she was twelve years old), and they were overcome with amazement at this! ⁴³ He then gave them firm instruction not to let anyone know about this, and told them to give her something to eat.

Review

Today's passage comes after a scene of pure chaos, in which Jesus healed a woman with a chronic haemorrhage (see yesterday's passage - 5:24-35). This is one of the most remarkable stories of healing in Mark's Gospel and it contains many important points about the healing ministry. However, after Jesus healed this woman, we suddenly realise that what he had done only served to prevent a young girl from receiving her own healing! Imagine the reaction from

the synagogue leader when told that his child had died whilst Jesus gave attention to an unclean woman! Nevertheless, Jesus had everything under control, and it is part of the extraordinary nature of this story that Jesus was delayed in coming to heal this critically ill young girl. The scene was set for yet another major incident in the life of Jesus; and this time, Mark focussed his reader's attention on Jesus' power over death itself! There is no other story in Mark's Gospel of Jesus raising someone to life (the well known story of the raising of Lazarus is found only in John 11), so this incident stands out as having a powerful resurrection message; the life that Christ gives is stronger even than death itself!

Here, in this passage, Jesus rose above the chaos and the trouble of human life. When the news of the child's death came, He immediately spoke to reassure the synagogue leader and implore him to hold on to his faith (5:36). In addition, He also took with Him only His most trusted disciples, Peter, James and John (5:37) to deal with the situation. He brushed aside the professional mourners who would have gathered at the child's house according to the traditions of the day (5:38,39), and created a private setting within which he could help the family (5:40). Then, when all the chaos had been left behind and Jesus was in full control, Mark focuses us on the simple yet powerful events that followed. Jesus took the girl's hand, spoke to her in her natural language of Aramaic, and told her to get up. When she awoke, got up and began to walk around, to the shocked excitement of everyone present (5:42), Jesus told the young girl's parents to give her something to eat (5:43). With such simplicity, a catastrophic and deathly situation was turned around!

This powerful story moves us even today. From the most chaotic of scenes, Jesus took control and demonstrated that the supreme mercy of God lay in His gift of life; a gift that was greater than death itself! At the end of Mark's Gospel, you will find that Mark reports the resurrection of our Lord in a brief and somewhat strange way, as if those who were present were confused and frightened at first by what had happened (see 16:3,6,8). The implications of what they had witnessed were huge. Yet here in this simple and intimate story of life after death there is nothing but sheer delight (5:42) at the mercy and saving grace of God.

Over the centuries, there have been endless arguments about whether the girl was indeed dead, with the suggestion that she was only asleep because Jesus described her as, 'sleeping' (5:39). If we study this passage further, we will find that Jesus used this word in a special way which indicates clearly that He knew the girl had died. Together with all the people of God who had previously died and were awaiting the coming of the Messiah for their own redemption, Jesus described her as 'sleeping'. Jesus therefore used God's power over death and applied it to this little girl, in a demonstration of the same power which would one day raise many people to life in the Kingdom of God.

What had happened with the raising of this little girl was a visible sign that in Jesus, God's Kingdom had come. However, if the crowds outside heard about it, Jesus' ministry would be quickly overtaken by demands for more 'raising from the dead', and Jesus did not want people thinking that this was just another form of personal ministry. The miracle (in Mark's Gospel) would not be repeated until Jesus Himself was raised.

Going Deeper

There is genuine spiritual value in allowing this story to speak to us for what it is, a real story of God's love and compassion which illustrates His resurrection power. Yet the more we meditate upon it or read it, the more it will yield to us. A story such as this was not recorded without attention to detail, and the detail will tell us more.

Jesus is told that the child is dead, and acts

Everything at the beginning of this story happens at a fast pace. Notice how the first verse indicates that the news about the little girl came as Jesus was reassuring the woman who had been healed of her chronic haemorrhage (5:34,35). If we try to reconstruct the scene, the synagogue leader must have been walking with Jesus in the direction of his house before the incident with the woman, but he was separated slightly from Jesus in the ensuing mêlée as He dealt with her (5:25-34). Certainly, his own servants found him to tell him the news about his daughter, and they then came to Jesus to tell him that it was no longer worth His while coming (5:35). Proper decorum dictated that now the synagogue leader was bereaved, he should not be disturbed, and we can imagine him beginning to leave, in sorrow. He and his servants worked on the understandable assumption that death was the end, and once dead, it was not worth bringing a healer. But Jesus emphatically 'ignored' the servants and implored the leader 'do not fear, just believe' (5:36).

Increasingly, Mark presents faith in his Gospel as an opposite to fear. This was the case in the incident when the disciples were afraid of the storm and Jesus challenged them to have faith in Him (4:35-41). The people of the Decapolis were afraid of Jesus because of His authority over demons, but Jesus commissioned the man He healed to go and preach the good news of faith in Jesus Christ to them (5:15-20). Lastly, the woman who was healed of a chronic haemorrhage was afraid of Jesus (5:33), yet He affirmed her faith (5:34). There is certainly a good theological case for us to say that although these two human reactions are often found in close proximity, God is looking to find faith in us; a faith through which we may be saved (5:34). In our passage today, Jesus had just explained this to the woman, and now He was bold enough to cut across social decorum and approach the synagogue leader. His faith was shown by his actions in following Jesus back to his home.

It is noticeable that Jesus selected these same three disciples, Peter, James and John to accompany Him on two other highly significant occasions, the Transfiguration (9:2) and Gethsemane (14:33 – though see also these three plus Andrew on the Mount of Olives, in 13:3). All of these occasions are therefore of key importance for Mark's Gospel. This story is like a prophetic drama foretelling the Resurrection; the Transfiguration is Jesus' vindication in front of these disciples before God, together with Moses and Elijah; and Jesus' prayers in Gethsemane are His final acceptance of God's path of salvation for the world through His death. Altogether, these incidents summarise what Mark wants to teach us in his Gospel about the work of Jesus and the purpose of the Messiah

Jesus arrives at the scene

It is generally well known that in Jesus' day, as in many other cultures even today, as soon as someone died, people skilled in 'mourning' would gather to sing songs of sorrow and 'wail' for the one who had died. These were not people who were easily fooled, and the suggestion of modern critics that Jesus knew the child was not dead but sleeping is somewhat presumptive. In its fullest context, the story makes no sense unless the girl was really dead. Furthermore, Jesus' comment 'she is not dead but asleep' clearly had the effect of making those present laugh at Him (5:40); they knew what death was.

It is only as we look back at the words used here that we can begin to make sense of what Jesus meant by 'sleeping' (see above). Incidentally, the English word 'cemetery' comes, via several languages, from the Greek word used here by Jesus for 'sleeping' ('koimasthai'); a cemetery being a place where believers are 'laid to rest', sleeping until called into glory 'at the last trumpet' (1 Cor 15:52, 1 Thess 4:16).

When Jesus arrived He dismissed all but the girl's father and mother and his three disciples, going in to the 'room where the child was' (5:40). Again, the situation is quite clear, a family in Jesus' day would have laid out someone who had died in a special way according to custom. In this case, she was 'laid out' awaiting the return of her desperate father. The picture is quite clear, and we can almost hear the 'hush' as the door is closed for the private scene of grief.

Jesus raises the young girl from the dead!

Many studies have been done of the miracle workers of ancient times. They frequently used touch, said words in a foreign language (magic) and made their subjects perform feats to prove that a miracle had taken place. With a degree of cynicism, one could say that these features are similar to the practices of 'healing services' observable on some religious digital TV channels today! Our concern, however, is what they meant in this supremely important incident in the life of this young girl, and Jesus.

Firstly, it is typical of Jesus to use touch, in this case to take the young girl's hand to raise her up. Jesus preached that the 'Kingdom of God was present', and what He said could easily be translated 'the Kingdom of God is touchable', so Jesus' touch was itself an expression of the coming of God's Kingdom in power. When Jesus took the young girl's hand, the touch itself was not the means of healing or raising her, but God who used this act to come in power. This was simply the observable, physical act by which people could see that Jesus was 'doing something'.

Secondly, Jesus spoke two special words in Aramaic, 'Talitha koum', which Mark tells us translates as 'little girl, I say to you, get up' (5:41). What is fascinating about this verse is not just the words used by Jesus, which are words the girl would have known in her own local language. It is Mark's translation of this which leads us to discover more about the text. In the early days of the church, there was a general popular belief that touch together with words spoken in foreign languages had some kind of potency in bringing healing (for another example of this, see the interest of one called 'Simon' in the touch of the disciples laying on of hands, and their use of the