

Awake, O Sleeper!
Mark 5:35-43

INTRODUCTION

When last we left Jairus, the synagogue leader, he had just received some very bad news. Jairus had a daughter who was on the verge of death. He went out to find Jesus, the healing prophet who had been wandering around Galilee. Upon finding Him, Jairus fell to the ground and begged, humiliating himself without shame, for the life of his precious girl was on the line. Jesus agreed to go and see the sick girl. Unfortunately for Jairus, he was not the only one who came looking for Jesus. A great crowd was pressing in on Him from all sides, seeking to touch Him, to gain healing from Him, to be blessed by Him, and to learn from Him. All these people were slowing Jesus down.

To make matters worse, Jesus stopped on His own. For seemingly no reason, He stood still and asked, "Who touched Me?" What a strange question! The answer was "Everyone is touching you!" But there was a delay as He looked for a woman who had received healing for a long-term illness by simply touching His garment. He gave her time to explain her situation, all the while, Jairus's own sick daughter was running out of time. When Jesus finally said goodbye to the grateful woman, Jairus could turn his attention back to traveling home to heal his daughter. However, that's when the bad news arrived . . .

TEXT: MARK 5:35-43

35 While he was still speaking, there came from the ruler's house some who said, "Your daughter is dead. Why trouble the Teacher any further?"

36 But overhearing what they said, Jesus said to the ruler of the synagogue, "Do not fear, only believe."

Who was Jairus to believe? The people who knew him told him that the girl was dead. This is the worst possible news, but then this teacher said, "Do not fear, only believe." It made no sense to believe that the messengers were not correct, for they were bringing eye-witness reports. How could Jesus know anything about what was happening back at his house? But this is the life of his baby girl that is being discussed. If Jesus suggested hope, than he would hope.

37 And he allowed no one to follow him except Peter and James and John the brother of James.

Suddenly, the crowd was no problem. Jesus told everyone to back off except for His three closest friends. The five of them went on together.

As they approached the house, the sounds of the mourners came to them. In those days, the Jews were obligated by religious tradition to hire mourners to come and play instruments and wail. Jairus, being an important man, would have been expected to hire quite a few of them. In the time he was away getting Jesus, his daughter had died, and

family members had already called in the mourners, putting in motion the necessary arrangements that would lead to the girl's burial.

38 They came to the house of the ruler of the synagogue, and Jesus saw a commotion, people weeping and wailing loudly.

39 And when he had entered, he said to them, "Why are you making a commotion and weeping? The child is not dead but sleeping."

40 And they laughed at him. But he put them all outside and took the child's father and mother and those who were with him and went in where the child was.

Jesus dramatically enters, declaring the child to be alive. He accuses the mourners of being there by mistake, an idea that they thought to be humorous. Their mourning became laughter in a moment. They were not really sad. They were just hired to be there. They didn't have a stake in this family, but they did know a dead person when they saw one. This dusty preacher clearly was off His rocker! Their laughter lasted at least until He threw them out of the house, putting an end to the funeral process.

Jesus, the parents, and His three close associates were the only witnesses to what happened next.

41 Taking her by the hand he said to her, "Talitha cumi," which means, "Little girl, I say to you, arise."

42 And immediately the girl got up and began walking (for she was twelve years of age), and they were immediately overcome with amazement.

43 And he strictly charged them that no one should know this, and told them to give her something to eat.

Not only was the girl not dead, she wasn't even sick. In fact, she was hungry! Perhaps in the midst of their amazement, the parents had kind of forgotten that the girl had been without food during her illness. But Jesus attended to this detail. Jesus always attends to this detail, for He feeds every being on the earth every day. He is always concerned with meal planning!

But He does not want the parents to go around telling of the miracle that they had seen. Well, what are the supposed to say? Some people had seen the girl dead. Were they just supposed to say that she had been sleeping? Would that not be a lie? That's a good question, isn't it? Was she dead, or only asleep? The people said dead. Jesus said sleep. How does this work?

Was Jesus lying when He claimed that the girl was dead and not asleep?

No. Jesus never lies. But the girl was indeed dead. The issue is how we define the terms "dead" and "asleep." Many words have more than one meaning. She was not asleep in the normal usage of the word. We could not have come and awaken her, but she was asleep in the sense that she could be awakened by Jesus. So, He woke her up.

What happened to this girl after this? Well, we don't know. We will have to wait until Heaven to find out her story, and a billion other stories of people whose lives history has forgotten, but Heaven has remembered. However, we can guess that she lived a normal life. She was likely one of the first Christians. Perhaps many in her family would become Jesus followers after the resurrection of Jesus, and be part of His church. She likely married, could have had children, grew old, and eventually died (fell asleep?) again.

What did Jesus show us by raising up this girl from the sleep of death?

He showed us that He is the Lord of life. He had shown us that He is Lord over illness with the woman with the bleeding issue. Before that, He had displayed His authority over the demonic realm. Now He shows that death itself is under His charge.

When Jesus raised up this girl, He was demonstrating to her parents, and, more importantly, Peter, John, and James, that His promises regarding eternal life could be trusted. This would not be the only time He used the word "sleep" to speak of death.

In John 11, the friend of Jesus, Lazarus was sick and dying. Then he did die. Look at the conversation between Jesus and the apostles at that time:

So, when he heard that Lazarus was ill, he stayed two days longer in the place where he was. Then after this he said to the disciples, "Let us go to Judea again." The disciples said to him, "Rabbi, the Jews were just now seeking to stone you, and are you going there again?" Jesus answered, "Are there not twelve hours in the day? If anyone walks in the day, he does not stumble, because he sees the light of this world. But if anyone walks in the night, he stumbles, because the light is not in him." After saying these things, he said to them, "Our friend Lazarus has fallen asleep, but I go to awaken him." The disciples said to him, "Lord, if he has fallen asleep, he will recover." Now Jesus had spoken of his death, but they thought that he meant taking rest in sleep. Then Jesus told them plainly, "Lazarus has died, and for your sake I am glad that I was not there, so that you may believe. But let us go to him." (Joh 11:6-15 ESV)

Lazarus had "fallen asleep." Jesus was on His way to "waken him." For Jesus, physical death is also sleep, for He can wake up the dead. (Now, because people often ask about what happens to us after we die, let me repeat that the soul of a person continues on. Those who have faith in Jesus will immediately be with Him after death, but their bodies will "sleep" here on earth. Those who die in their sins will have their souls go to a place of torment, but their bodies will continue to sleep on the earth.)

Implications of Jesus Being Able to Wake Up Dead People:

1. Confirms that He is God

There is only One who has power to give and take life, and that is God. As the Bible says:

"See now that I, even I, am he, and there is no god beside me; I kill and I make alive; I wound and I heal; and there is none that can deliver out of my hand. (Deu 32:39 ESV)

All things were made by God, including all that is alive. Furthermore, only God can make dead things live. No human can do it. God can do it easily. He showed His power to the prophet Ezekiel when He took him out in the wilderness to a valley of dry bones:

And he said to me, "Son of man, can these bones live?" And I answered, "O Lord GOD, you know." Then he said to me, "Prophesy over these bones, and say to them, O dry bones, hear the word of the LORD. Thus says the Lord GOD to these bones: Behold, I will cause breath to enter you, and you shall live. And I will lay sinews upon you, and will cause flesh to come upon you, and cover you with skin, and put breath in you, and you shall live, and you shall know that I am the LORD." So I prophesied as I was commanded. And as I prophesied, there was a sound, and behold, a rattling, and the bones came together, bone to its bone. And I looked, and behold, there were sinews on them, and flesh had come upon them, and skin had covered them. But there was no breath in them. Then he said to me, "Prophesy to the breath; prophesy, son of man, and say to the breath, Thus says the Lord GOD: Come from the four winds, O breath, and breathe on these slain, that they may live." So I prophesied as he commanded me, and the breath came into them, and they lived and stood on their feet, an exceedingly great army. (Eze 37:3-10 ESV)

2. Confirms the coming resurrection

God has promised a resurrection of the dead of the world. Many people like to avoid this truth. Many say that references to resurrection are only symbolic. But it is not so.

And many of those who sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt. (Dan 12:2 ESV)

Sleep is the word used by the prophet Daniel to talk about people who have died. The term "shall awake," represents their resurrection. In fact, God has promised to raise all people from the dead one day. Jesus stepped onto the earth and proved that such a thing is not difficult for God.

3. Confirms that Jesus is the immortal Savior

If Jesus has the power over life and death, He has power over His own life and death. In fact, He says so in the Gospel of John:

For this reason the Father loves me, because I lay down my life that I may take it up again. No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have authority to lay it down, and I have authority to take it up again. This charge I have received from my Father." (Joh 10:17-18 ESV)

When Jesus was hanging on the Cross dying, He knew that He only died by His own permission. He also knew that He had the power to raise Himself to life. He confidently said to the man on the cross next to Him, "Today you will be with Me in paradise," because He knew the destination of His soul. Likewise, He also knew that on the Third Day, He would wake Himself up and leave the tomb forever.

This was not academic exercise. He died not as a carnival trick, but for a very good reason. He died to ransom you and me from death itself. He died for us. He will not do it again. By doing so, He made it possible for sinners to receive forgiveness of sins and to receive eternal, physical life.

4. Makes every moment in the life of every person important

Since God has the power to wake up everyone who dies, and since He promises to do so at the end of all time, everyone's life becomes important. Every moment of everyone's life is remembered by God, and will be measured.

Many people in our world get away with all kinds of crimes –rapes, stealing, killing, lying, embezzling, bribing, cheating, and all the rest. They get to the end of their days, often rich and satisfied, and die, never paying for their crimes. Fidel Castro, the great torturer and killer died without every answering for his sins. Stalin died of a stroke, after killing his millions, surrounded by luxury, never paying for his crimes. Mao Tse Tung died at 82 (1976) of a heart attack, living in power, never paying for the millions he killed. They got away with their crimes. But not just them. The dirt of the local graveyard hides child molesters, killers, rapists, thieves, and adulterers –most of whom got off scot free, finding their liberation in the grave. Or so they thought.

The Word of God says, “Not so fast.”

“The times of ignorance God overlooked, but now he commands all people everywhere to repent, because he has fixed a day on which he will judge the world in righteousness by a man whom he has appointed; and of this he has given assurance to all by raising him from the dead.” (Act 17:30-31 ESV)

Jesus, the Lord of life, will wake everyone up. He will hold Castro and Mao accountable for their sins, as well as Hitler, Napoleon, and Khan. But He is no respecter of persons. He will not only judge the great, but He will judge the small by the same standard. The man sleeping in the grave who molested children will face Him. The thief will be awoken. The liars from the local government who are buried under flowers and stone will pay for their sins.

Then I saw a great white throne and him who was seated on it. From his presence earth and sky fled away, and no place was found for them. And I saw the dead, great and small, standing before the throne, and books were opened. Then another book was opened, which is the book of life. And the dead were judged by what was written in the books, according to what they had done. And the sea gave up the dead who were in it, Death and Hades gave up the dead who were in them, and they were judged, each one of them, according to what they had done. Then Death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. This is the second death, the lake of fire. And if anyone's name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire. (Rev 20:11-15 ESV)

Jesus not only redefines sleep, but He also has another definition for death. To Jesus, death is not when the body dies –that is easily reversed. For Jesus, death is the lake of fire, and that is never reversed.

Every human being who has ever lived must fear God, for He will raise and measure each of us by our deeds. And all are sinners worthy to be punished. But there is a way out – get your name in the Book of Life. How do you do that? Easy, repent of your sins and receive Jesus Christ.