

February 20, 2011

## *Little Girl, Arise!*

Mark 5:35-43

### INTRODUCTION

How do we pray for our children? How do we pray for their temporary, earthly needs and how do we pray for the salvation of their souls? I hope it is clear by now—especially after last week—that we ought to. And while we are at it, let's confess some things here. As parents, we are afraid for our kids in unhealthy ways. At our worst, we do not trust God as we ought to even with their physical life, much less so with their souls.

- JESUS IN-FORMS THE FAITH OF PARENTS
- JESUS IN-FORMS THE LIFE OF OUR CHILDREN

Now let me explain that verb “inform” that I am using here. In the biblical worldview God speaks and the world is made. That is the creative word of God. But also in the Bible God speaks and his people listen and obey. That is the prescriptive word of God. In both cases, the information of God makes the form of everything else. As the Creator, God gives form to the things He makes by his word. As our covenant Lord, God gives form to the life of his people by his word. Information in-forms. Please do not forget these foundational truths of the biblical worldview when you read the narrative of the life of Jesus on earth. He is fully God in addition to being fully man, so what do you think He uses his words for?

**The Big Idea** is that if anyone is going to bring our children to life it is Christ alone.

I have another operative assumption going into this text. We have seen it every time Jesus performs a miracle; and that is that our physical diseases and the healings of them are signs of our deeper spiritual disease and its solution. Physical death is no exception. Paul tells us in 1 Corinthians 15, after quoting from the prophet Hosea on the Messiah's victory over death: “The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law” [15:56]. What Paul means is that what makes death so bad is the sin which caused it. If all we are in death is “eaten by worms,” well, then that is the worst of it. But if the law tells me that my sin separates me from God, then my death separates me from God forever unless He gives me a new life. That is what makes death so bad. Death isn't natural. In fact, Jesus hates death.

## DOCTRINE

### I. JESUS IN-FORMS THE FAITH OF PARENTS

#### A) Do Not Fear, Only Believe {35-37}

1. *While he was still speaking, there came from the ruler's house some who said, "Your daughter is dead" (35a).* And this is the moment we all fear as parents: when we're busy about our lives, to get a call from the hospital or a knock on the door from the police, and all that it would mean if one of our children were suddenly taken from us forever. Now the messengers finished their message in an interesting way: *"Why trouble the Teacher any further?" (35b).* Is this deference to a Rabbi or just misery talking? It's hard to say. An impersonal plural pronoun is used of these messengers. It is likely that Mark wants to paint any disbelievers here as noisy, discouraging background. But remember that Jairus had fallen down before him earlier and so Jesus was commanding every step of this journey. He would inform Jairus' way back home too.

2. Mark points out that Jesus **overheard** *what they said (36a).* He hears all of these fears, one way or the other. We might as well intentionally bring these fears to him: "For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin. Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need" [Heb. 2:15-16]. We should remember that Jesus was intentional about healing the bleeding woman so that He was in no hurry. Does this remind us of any similar stories? Think of when Jesus' presence was requested to heal Lazarus:

Now Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus. **So**, when he heard that Lazarus was ill, he stayed two days longer in the place where he was [Jn. 11:5-6].

*Because* Jesus loved them, *therefore* He stayed two days longer so that Lazarus would die. Now why would He do that? If we read the rest of Jesus' words in John 11 we will be informed that if God really loves us then He has to give us the one thing that will be best for us, namely, to see Him in all his glory. A resurrection in both of these cases will bring Jesus more glory than another healing of sickness, and therefore it is a more loving act toward us.

3. The focus of this fear can be summarize as: 'It is too late, too hopeless, too far gone.' When we hear the messengers first come up to Jairus and when we arrive back at the home to the scene of mourning, the message is clear—it's over, give up, abandon hope. The

unbelieving sympathizer with your parenting may have what looks like good intentions. But his outlook is not informed by trust in God: “For there is no truth in their mouth; their inmost self is destruction; their throat is an open grave; they flatter with their tongue” [Ps. 5:9].

4. Now contrast this with the simple words of Jesus: “*Do not fear, only believe*” (36b). Jesus doesn’t specify whether Jairus should believe in Him or believe in God; but there is no distinction anyway. He is “the Christ who is God over all” [Rom. 9:5]. Sometimes we resent advice like this—Just believe; Just trust God; Just pray, etc. But could it be that in these cases the simplest and oldest advice is the most profound and we only dismiss it as simplistic because we choose to hear it on the surface and not look deeper into its meaning?

5. As a side-note that comes into play later on, it says that *he allowed no one to follow him except Peter and James and John the brother of James* (37). These three disciples were already pegged as the inner-circle back in 3:17 and they’ll show up again on the Mount of Transfiguration [9:2] and the Garden of Gethsemane [14:33]. The reason it is significant here is that Jesus takes only a small group into the see the miracle and shuts out the crowds. Hold that thought.

#### B) They’re Not Dead Until the Final Death {38-40}

1. *They came to the house of the ruler of the synagogue, and Jesus saw a commotion, people weeping and wailing loudly* (38). The atmosphere here, if we can see it, is like vultures gathering around a carcass. That may seem off-base because these people are only sympathizing, or actually mourning the loss of this girl. But just watch the picture develop: *And when he had entered, he said to them, “Why are you making a commotion and weeping?”* (39a). Now if Jesus himself is posing this question as a problem, you have to adjust your view to his.

2. One of the main things we have to do in interpreting this passage is to tackle the meaning of *The child is not dead but sleeping* (39b). Let me suggest that Jesus knows very well that the girl is dead; but from an eternal perspective, sleep here represents our death in Adam that Jesus wakes some up from. So He uses the same language of Lazarus: “Our friend Lazarus has fallen asleep, but I go to awaken him” [Jn. 11:11]. This sleep of death is viewed as a bad thing in Scripture: “Consider and answer me, O LORD my God; light up my eyes, lest I sleep the sleep of death” [Ps. 13:3]. But the Bible also informs us that when believers “sleep the sleep of death,” our response should be different than unbelievers. So Paul says, “But we do not want you to be uninformed, brothers, about those who are asleep, that you may not grieve as others do who have no hope” [1 Thess. 4:13]. So as far as the intensity of your

prayers and the longing of your heart is concerned, if they're here, they're not dead, but only asleep.

4. Concentrated faith has to shut the doors on the chatter of unbelief. It says that *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 (40)*. It was Jesus who “put them” out.

## II. JESUS IN-FORMS THE LIFE OF OUR CHILDREN

### A) God's Sovereignty Over the Life of Our Children {41-42}

1. This is not a formula; but it is a form. Just like we saw last week, in the case of the woman with the hemorrhage: avoiding one extreme, we could say that there was no magic in the garment of Jesus and there was no creative power in her faith over Jesus; but, avoiding the other extreme, her faith was instrumental and therefore there were things about it that mattered. Likewise, here, avoiding one extreme, the use of the Aramaic words and the order of everything Jesus did is not some kind a mantra or model for us; but, avoiding the other extreme, this girl's death and Jesus' miracle is not irrelevant to our death and his miracles performed on us. So, *Taking her by the hand he said to her, "Talitha cumi," which means, "Little girl, I say to you, arise" (42)*. This tells us the story of the resurrection of Christ and the new birth of the Christian. They go together. Those who Jesus comes to, even though they are currently spiritual dead, will be made alive in the power of his resurrection—**“you have been raised with Christ”** [Col. 3:1]. What Paul is saying in Colossians is taught throughout the New Testament, namely that when God saves a sinner, he raises them within the resurrection of Christ. That's what being born again is. Jesus says, “Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life. He does not come into judgment, but has passed from death to life” [Jn. 5:24]. Or elsewhere,

he has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead [1 Pet. 1:3].

even when we were dead in our trespasses, (He) made us alive together with Christ—by grace you have been saved—and raised us up with him [Eph. 2:5-6].

Truly, truly, I say to you, an hour is coming, and is now here, when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God, and those who hear will live [Jn. 5:25].

2. Jesus here shows us **divine power** in his creative word **through human lips** giving the gospel call—Rise! Get up! Come! Follow! Look to Jesus! And the very first thing she saw when she opened her eyes was the face of Jesus Christ: “For God, who said, ‘Let light shine out of darkness,’ has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ” [2 Cor. 4:6]. Notice the double-use of *euthys* here: *And immediately the girl got up and began walking (for she was twelve years of age), and they were immediately overcome with amazement (42)*. God spoke into darkness and immediately the corpse became a life and immediately it looked different than it did just seconds before. This miracle shows us that death is subservient to life, and that this points to this little girl’s ultimate rising from the dead: “Blessed and holy is the one who shares in the first resurrection! Over such the second death has no power” [Rev. 20:6].

3. God is one-hundred percent sovereign over our children’s salvation; and we are one-hundred percent responsible to faithfully parent our children. You may respond, “Well how am I supposed to draw a pie chart representing that!” You aren’t. If anything, there would be two pies in that chart—one representing God’s sovereignty to bring to life, the other representing the parent’s responsibility to shepherd that life. They are two utterly different job descriptions. But this kind of truth about God’s sovereignty over life and death causes us to act with more faith in relation to our kids. Think of Abraham’s radical trust in God when he was ready to give up his son: “He considered that God was able even to raise him from the dead, from which, figuratively speaking, he did receive him back” [Heb. 11:19].

#### B) Our Responsibility Over the Life of Our Children {43}

1. Jesus gives two pieces of instruction. First, *he strictly charged them that no one should know this (43a)*. Their uninformed amazement was his secret. Why? Think about it. Of all the times that Jesus told people to keep things quiet for now, surely this was not the kind of thing that could be kept secret! And this is one more piece of evidence that this ‘Messianic Secret’ of Jesus isn’t about him being insecure about getting in trouble or not knowing how this is going to turn out. It’s about setting a priority for we who would read these things.

2. Jesus also had to tell *them to give her something to eat (43b)*. They were so stunned and overjoyed and grateful that they couldn’t think straight practically yet. So notice that God alone informs the life of our children *through* the instruction and modeling and provision of parents. He uses physical means even, like food. A truly born again Christian is alive to the reality of their children’s souls. If we really believe what we say we believe, then our first test of sincerity is with our easiest mission field—our pliable, tender-hearted children who

will believe us! We need to understand that they start off dead because they come from the same dead race we come from, “by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind” [Eph. 2:3], and the natural parenting that we do will teach them death and idolatry, as God said of natural Israel: “but [they] have stubbornly followed their own hearts and have gone after the Baals, as their fathers taught them” [Jer. 9:13]. So God alone makes children alive *and* God uses parental informing more than He uses anything else (at least in the formative years)!

3. Is this passage teaching us that if we are believers and if we just ‘believe enough,’ that our children will be brought to life? The short answer is No. But that doesn’t mean that the gospel doesn’t have good news about our children. We just have to be willing to press through cheap cultural crutches that we call the ‘gospel’ so that we can get to an even more powerful *real* gospel. As much as it hurts to think about the fact that our children are real souls that are going to wind up in either heaven or hell, they are! And the same rules of love and evangelism that apply out there apply in your home. Parenting isn’t the time to check your brain at the door in the name of your emotion. I know it hurts to put it like that. But the truth is that the pain is already there. You’re just suppressing it. It is a pain that is really a longing that (trust me) we don’t want to get rid of, or ignore—the longing to awaken one day to eternal bliss with the people we love the most. The gospel does not promise that our loved ones will be there “no matter what,” but it does promise a day where all who put their trust in Jesus will live forever with him. And the Old Testament tells us to look forward to a day when the fruit of how God has used believing parents is seen for what it is:

Thus says the Lord GOD: “Behold, I will lift up my hand to the nations, and raise my signal to the peoples; and they shall bring your sons in their bosom, and your daughters shall be carried on their shoulders [Is. 49:22].

So pray hard, live authentic lives with your kids, and trust God for the results.

## APPLICATION

**You Decide!** How can such a passage be practically applied? Does God communicate this to us so that we can be better at raising people from the dead? Obviously not. He is showing us this so that we can worship him for in-forming our kids’ life—i.e. giving them the form of their life. We didn’t create their biological form (yeah, I know, we were the material cause of that!) and we don’t create their spiritual form either. John Piper gives us a helpful summary of our part in his book *Finally Alive*:

The seed that saves is the word of God—the gospel preached. The seed that creates new life is the gospel in the mouths of believers, spoken to unbelievers. The surgical instrument that opens the eyes of the blind is your words telling and explaining the gospel.<sup>1</sup>

Preach the gospel to your children because God alone makes alive, but He uses the words of the gospel spoken by people like you—parents like you.

Question 4 of the Children’s Catechism: How can you glorify God? Answer: ‘By loving him and doing what He commands.’ Now how do you think you would answer that question if it was specified to the parent who hears this message: How can you glorify the God who alone can raise your children to life? Answer: By loving him for it and then doing, as a parent, all that He commands. So I have good news for you today—*God makes your children alive through the Word*—“faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ” [Rom. 10:17].

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<sup>1</sup> John Piper, *Finally Alive* (Christian Focus, Scotland 2009); p. 170