

# Everybody Up

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Well, I missed preaching last week because I was attending a funeral service. My wife's abuelita was laid to rest in Jefferson City, Missouri, and all of her children and grandchildren and, even, her great-grandchildren were there to celebrate her life as well as comfort one another.

And, just before leaving for Missouri, I officiated my first memorial service since moving to Chicago—my first memorial service as your pastor. Frank Lavicka (my friend and brother in Christ) passed-away rather suddenly just over a month ago. So, a number of his church family gathered online and remembered him and prayed and shared memories and encouraged one another to place our faith in Christ Jesus as our Savior and our Lord.

It feels like death has loomed large lately—Covid-19, George Floyd, funeral after funeral. And, for this reason, I'm so thankful that God has placed this passage before us today—a passage about a desperate dad, his dying daughter, and our Lord who demonstrates compassion and comfort and power in the face of death.

Let's look at the text together, with an eye on the enigmatic way which Jesus describes death as some kind of sleep. This is our next hard saying.

## **Mark 5:21-24, 35-43**

<sup>21</sup> When Jesus had again crossed over by boat to the other side of the lake, a large crowd gathered around him while he was by the lake. <sup>22</sup> Then one of the synagogue leaders, named Jairus, came, and when he saw Jesus, he fell at his feet. <sup>23</sup> He pleaded earnestly with him, "My little daughter is dying. Please come and put your hands on her so that she will be healed and live." <sup>24</sup> So Jesus went with him.

...some people came from the house of Jairus, the synagogue leader. "Your daughter is dead," they said. "Why bother the teacher anymore?"

<sup>36</sup> Overhearing what they said, Jesus told him, "Don't be afraid; just believe."

<sup>37</sup> He did not let anyone follow him except Peter, James and John the brother of James. <sup>38</sup> When they came to the home of the synagogue leader, Jesus saw a commotion, with people crying and wailing loudly. <sup>39</sup> He went in and said to

them, “Why all this commotion and wailing? The child is not dead but asleep.”<sup>40</sup> But they laughed at him.

After he put them all out, he took the child’s father and mother and the disciples who were with him, and went in where the child was.<sup>41</sup> He took her by the hand and said to her, *“Talitha koum!”* (which means “Little girl, I say to you, get up!”).<sup>42</sup> Immediately the girl stood up and began to walk around (she was twelve years old). At this they were completely astonished.<sup>43</sup> He gave strict orders not to let anyone know about this, and told them to give her something to eat.

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I want us to observe three things in this text. (1<sup>st</sup>) Notice the beauty of Jesus. We don’t want to miss his compassion and love here. (2<sup>nd</sup>) Notice the harsh reality of death. It is final. We are helpless before it. It comes to destroy our hope and faith. (3<sup>rd</sup>) Notice death before Jesus. It is helpless. It has to flee. Jesus gets the last laugh when it comes to death.

So, let’s consider each of these three things in turn.

### **1. Notice the beauty of Jesus (v. 24).**

Well, here we are at Father’s Day. And, many of you have had good fathers. That’s a gift. Having a dad who has loved you and nurtured you well is a great gift. Fatherhood (and motherhood for that matter) should image our Creator’s love for us. That’s one of the primary tasks we have as parents—to reflect God’s parental love to our children. So, if you’ve had a Father who’s done this well for you, tell him so. And, if he’s no longer with you, praise the Lord for him.

Yet, let’s not be naïve. Some of you have not had good representative fathers. Some of you have not had fathers who loved and nurtured you. And, consequently, it can be hard to hear God described as Father. This can be a terrible stumbling-block for some people. This is a sad reality.

In today’s passage, I believe we see the love of two fathers. And, it’s my hope and prayer that this picture might soften and endear all our hearts to the idea of God as our heavenly Father. For, we all long for such fatherly love.

**First**, we encounter a good human daddy here. This father of a dying daughter exudes compassion and care; doesn’t he? We meet him rather abruptly in this text.

Jesus is teaching a large crowd and here comes this desperate dad interrupting it all. He doesn't give a flip about etiquette or manners. He doesn't care about appearances. His daughter is dying, so he throws himself at Jesus's feet and begs for help.

Praise God that my children have been super healthy. But, in those moments when they've been badly hurt, I've known what it means to be crazy and desperate and undone out of love for them. Once at a playground, Ezra fell-off of a jungle gym. Natalie and I didn't see it, but we heard him yell in shock—"Oh, I broke my arm!" And, when he came around the playset, he had most definitely broken his little arm. Seeing it sent *me* into shock. His forearm was bent at a right angle.

Well, I don't remember saying anything, though I probably was saying things. I just remember picking him up in my arms and sprinting to our house to get our car, which was about a half-mile away. I just wanted to get him help as soon as possible. That's all I could think about. Just get him to the doctor—to the hospital.

Now magnify my concern by about a billion, and you've got this girl's father. Getting help for his daughter is all that matters to him. He'll do anything to find help. He's a good daddy. He's a loving father. And, when Jesus sees this dad's desperation and concern and love. We get to see his love. We see Jesus's beautiful heart.

Mark simply puts it this way: "...Jesus went with him" (v. 24). Crowds are all around him. People are crying for his attention. He's in demand. Jesus's teaching is in demand; his healing is in demand. He is a really big deal. Nevertheless, he stops what he's doing because he sees this father, and he empathizes with this man's need. He feels this man's desperation. And, he will not ignore it. So, he walks off the stage and goes to care for this family. *Friends, don't miss the beauty of our Lord.*

Most of us have to admit this isn't often, or even typically, our first response when people barge-in upon us in need. You might argue—"But the little girl is dying. This is an emergency." Yet, I've been in many a hospital room, where death is near, and witnessed less than urgent and less than compassionate care. And, that's no shot against doctors and nurses either. How can finite people consistently provide love and compassion as well as treatment for those facing death?! It's beyond us; isn't it? We don't have that capacity. Mostly, it's all we can do to just give people treatment and medicine let alone our undivided emotional and spiritual attention and empathy. But, that's what Jesus does. That's what's so beautiful about him.

I've met a few people in my life who really listen whenever I come to them or readily help whenever I'm in need. It's a rare and beautiful characteristic; isn't it? I see Jesus in people who love like that. And, I want that in me! Don't you?

Now, earlier, I mentioned that we could see the love of two fathers in this text. And, it is in Jesus that we see the **second** and ultimate Father's love. He is the image of the invisible God (Colossians 1:15). And, Jesus teaches his disciples as well as us that, if we have seen him, then we have also seen our heavenly Father (John 14:9). In Jesus's compassion for this desperate dad, in his attention and care for this family, we see the love of God the Father for us all. In fact, Jesus doesn't only show the love of the Father; Jesus is the love of the Father.

Friends, God the Father sent Jesus because of his love. Not simply to feed us and heal us and reflect his love for us, but to love us back into relationship with him. This is why Jesus came. That's why the apostle John wrote this in his gospel.

*...God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save [it] (John 3:16-17).*

If we want to see the love of our heavenly Father, then we must look to Christ. If we want to experience the love of God the Father, we must turn and trust in Jesus. This is the good news, the gospel, that no matter how good or bad your earthly father is or was, you have a heavenly Father who loves you perfectly in the person of Jesus. So friends, turn to him and rest in his compassionate care for you.

Well, now we come to the second thing we must see.

## **2. Notice the harsh reality of death (v. 35).**

When I read this text, one verse epitomizes the brutal reality of death to us all. Jesus is on his way with this now hopeful father when a few messengers show up. Mark gives us the encounter.

*...some people came from the house of Jairus, the synagogue leader. "Your daughter is dead," they said. "Why bother the teacher anymore?" (v. 35).*

In preparing the memorial service we had for Frank just a couple weeks ago, I came across an ancient letter written by a woman named Irene. She was writing it to a family who had recently lost a child. And, in trying to console them in their loss,

she shares that she has experienced a similar loss—the loss of someone very close to her. So, she explains that she understands their pain. She understand their sadness. She understands the harsh reality of death. Then, she ends with this consolation.

*...nevertheless against such things [against death] one can do nothing. Therefore, comfort one another. Farwell.<sup>1</sup>*

*This is the end, she tells them. This is the harsh, inevitable conclusion of it all. There's nothing left but the living and the comfort they can give you and you them. Death wins again. It always will, she explains.*

And, don't you hear some of this brutal, futility in the words of the messengers to the girl's father and Jesus? *Why bother anymore? It's over; your daughter's dead! Death does what it always does. There's nothing you can do. It's time to move on. Don't bother the rabbi anymore about it. All hope is gone, they say.* This is the reality of death. And it's awful. And it's harsh. But, there's no way around it; right?

I was recently sitting outside with Natalie and a neighbor, who isn't a believer, and, according to her, this was a good reason not to believe—that death always wins, that death always gets the last say, that the world is so ugly and harsh and hopeless. And, her view isn't just her own, many people feel this way. Death and pain and evil (in this world) often challenge our faith in God. They often distract us from his love. They often make us wonder how he can be good. And, they often tempt us to believe that, if God does exist, he must be powerless in the face of death.

And, that's what's happening here to this father. The devil sent this message. Satan sent this worldview to make him doubt the goodness and the power of God—to make him doubt the goodness and the power of this rabbi.

In the face of the challenge, our Lord simply and gently says, “Don't be afraid; just believe” (v. 37). He says—*Trust me. Follow me. Let's go now to your daughter.* And, the man goes with him. For, where else can he go? No one else offers any hope. Only Jesus does. Only Jesus is unwavering in the face of death.

And so, finally, we come to the last thing we have to see.

### **3. Notice death before Jesus (v. 42).**

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<sup>1</sup> John Stott, *The Gospel and the End of Time*, 106.

Here we come to the truly difficult saying on the lips of Jesus in this passage. Listen to the end of the story again with a special focus on a seemingly absurd thing which Jesus says—the thing which makes the mourners laugh at him and mock him. Here’s what Mark records for us.

*When they came to the home of the synagogue leader, Jesus saw a commotion, with people crying and wailing loudly. He went in and said to them, “Why all this commotion and wailing? The child is not dead but asleep.” But they laughed at him.*

*After he put them all out, he took the child’s father and mother and the disciples who were with him, and went in where the child was. He took her by the hand and said to her, “Talitha koum!” (which means “Little girl, I say to you, get up!”). Immediately the girl stood up and began to walk around (she was twelve years old). At this they were completely astonished. He gave strict orders not to let anyone know about this, and told them to give her something to eat (vv. 38-43).*

How do you think of death? Is it final? Is it permanent? Is there truly nothing after death? Does death really get the last word in all things? I know this is the view of many around us today.<sup>2</sup> And, it was for many in Jesus’s day too. For the ancients, death was ultimate and final, as Irene’s condolence letter shows.

However, friends, that’s not Jesus’s view. Death is merely some kind of sleep when it comes to him—a temporary state that can and will be ended.

He chooses his words carefully here—as he does before the tomb of Lazarus. This girl and his friend Lazarus have merely fallen asleep in death, just as we all will unless Jesus returns first. This is the clear teaching of Scripture—that we’ll all die but that we won’t stay dead. In the end, every man and woman, who has ever lived, will be woken to eternal life, *with or without God*—either eternal joy with our God or eternal despair apart from our God. That’s the picture in Scripture.

*Death doesn’t get the final word. Only Jesus, God’s Son, gets the final word!*

Friends, some laugh at this idea—even as they laughed at Jesus in our passage. Yet, the hope in the resurrection is no laughing matter for believers. It isn’t laughable

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<sup>2</sup> See [these](#) responses in *The Atlantic*, “What Do Atheists Think of Death?”: May 16, 2010.

for me when I stand with grieving family members at the graveside of a loved one. It isn't laughable whenever I'm performing a memorial service for an old, old friend who suddenly passed away. It isn't laughable in the midst of George Floyd's death or in the midst of a pandemic. *Rather, it's the only hope there is!*

Friends, run to Jesus for this hope. Don't wait until you're desperate. Go now! Follow him and trust in him. He's beautiful and kind and loving. He's incarnate God, God in the flesh. He's the resurrection and the life (John 11:25).

Before him, death is a mere sleep. It has no power! Amen.