



GracePoint: A Weekly Sermon Discussion

23 – Not Dead But Sleeping

Announcements:

3/30 @7:00 -

*Corporate
Prayer*

3/31 @6:30 -

Grace Group

4/3 @7:00 -

Sunday School

ICE BREAKER: Can you describe a time when you were profoundly misunderstood? What was that like?

READ: Matthew 9:18-26

On Sunday, as we covered this passage of Scripture, our focus was what this told us about those who have faith in Jesus, and what it said about the one that the faith is put in. What we didn't cover was the somewhat puzzling statement that Jesus makes regarding the little girl. Upon arriving at her funeral he kicks out everyone and says "the girl is not dead but sleeping!" It is this phrase that we will look at in detail today.

Some like to read this passage at face value. They say Jesus was right, she was not dead, and she was just sleeping. They picture this scene as if Jesus bursts in at the last moment with the correct "diagnosis". This would be what we would call the literal interpretation. And while it sounds good to say: "I take the Bible literally" it is not good to take non-literal passages that way. For this particular passage the consequences are fairly dire. First of all, it shows what I would call a first century prejudice. Do we think we are so much more intelligent that we know the difference between sleep and death but those in the first century didn't? That seems a bit prideful to say the least. Secondly, while it claims to take Jesus' words at face value, it denies the face value of the other words in this passage (like when the ruler says: "my daughter has just died"!). But even more than that, there is a more fundamental problem: it reduces Jesus' greatest miracle to date to nothing more than keen powers of observation. And as we see later, robbing Jesus of that power does more than just rob us of a cool story.

DISCUSS: can you think of other passages where a too-literal interpretation might be problematic? Conversely, are there any passages you can think of where a literal interpretation is *necessary*?

There is another thought: Maybe Jesus was just trying to keep what he was really doing a secret. He *knew* she was dead, but didn't want everyone knowing he raised her right now. That is clearly what Jesus does in the next passage where he heals two blind men (more on this next week!). There *might* be some support for this in the context (why else would he send everyone away?) and there is a 100% chance that Mark gives this detail in *his* telling of this miracle. "And he strictly charged them that no one should know this, and told them to give her something to eat." (Mark 5:43). But this thought is not without problems, and they can be summed up in one question: Would this make Jesus a liar? If Jesus knew she was dead and said she was not, regardless of his reasons, he would be lying. There is a huge difference between charging someone not to tell (which they usually did anyway!) and Jesus intentionally lying to cover up a miracle. So this option is just unacceptable.

DISCUSS: Another problem with this view is it might make us misunderstand other parts of the story. So if he didn't send everyone away to keep a secret - why else would he do it? (Hint: there are two pretty good options here, one has to do with what the people were doing the other has to do with what Jesus said to the woman in verse 22)

If these options will not work, how else are we to interpret this saying of Jesus? What becomes incredible here is that Jesus is communicating for us a great spiritual truth. From Morris: "Matthew is not telling a story of how Jesus woke a girl from a daytime nap, but recounting a miracle of a raising from the dead. For him what we call death is nothing more than sleep (cf. John 11:11); *the girl's death, though real, was not permanent.*" Jesus is saying that he has power over death. In a real way he is using words to tell us what his own resurrection would prove, that even death has no sway over those who trust in him. In this short phrase is hope for the resurrection, and life everlasting. This is exactly what Paul was getting at when he encouraged the Thessalonians by saying: "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. For since we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so, through Jesus, God will bring with him those who have fallen asleep." (1 Thessalonians 4:13-14).

DISCUSS: Why is it so encouraging for us that "she is not dead, but sleeping"?