

October 2, 2011

LITTLE LAMB, ARISE! Part Two

Jeffery D. Woodhams

Curtis was a young man of fourteen, with all of the energy and enthusiasm that a young man could have. He was the son of the man who helped me build my house, and I would often see him at the worksite because we built my house over the summer. Curtis was helpful and very funny, and he was determined to leave his mark. You see, in every house he worked on with his father, he wrote “Curtis was here” somewhere inside that house. In my house, it’s on the poured concrete wall at the front of my basement, behind the drywall.

But one day in April of 2004, Curtis made a terrible mistake: he got into his mother’s car and began to drive. No one is really sure why he did that. We can’t ask Curtis because Curtis got into an accident and died.

I remember standing there with his father as people came by to offer their condolences. I’ll tell you right now that some of the things people said to him were meant to help but were very hurtful instead. Some people said, “Maybe this will be a lesson to other kids.” There may be some truth in that, but that is nothing to say to a grieving parent. Another said, “Maybe this was God’s way of preventing something *worse* from happening.” Excuse me? Do people really say such stupid things at funerals? Yes, yes they do. In fact, the pastor we had here at the time made some very hurtful comments, not to the father, but to a school chapel session that included Curtis’s two youngest sisters. So yes, even pastors say inappropriate things, hurtful things, at times.

There is something about the death of a child that strikes us to our innermost core. We never forget. We carry that with us the rest of our lives. We’re going to read a passage today which I truly believe is written for our comfort just as much as it was for the people in the story. Let’s turn to Mark 5 again today, and we’ll read verses 35-40. While you’re turning there, let me remind you of the story up to this point. Jairus, the leader of a large synagogue, has swallowed all his pride and has come to Jesus, begging Him to come to his house and lay His hands on his daughter. There is a crowd all around Jesus, making it difficult to move. Suddenly Jesus felt some of His strength leave Him; he knew that someone in the crowd had touched Him and had been healed from that touch. Jesus stopped and dealt with the woman who had touched Him very tenderly, and gave her permanent healing. That’s where the story picks up.

³⁵ *While he yet spake, there came from the ruler of the synagogue's house certain which said, Thy daughter is dead: why troublest thou the Master any further?*

³⁶ *As soon as Jesus heard the word that was spoken, he saith unto the ruler of the synagogue, Be not afraid, only believe.*

³⁷ *And he suffered no man to follow him, save Peter, and James, and John the brother of James.*

³⁸ *And he cometh to the house of the ruler of the synagogue, and seeth the tumult, and them that wept and wailed greatly.*

³⁹ *And when he was come in, he saith unto them, Why make ye this ado, and weep? the damsel is not dead, but sleepeth.*

^{40a} *And they laughed him to scorn.*

“Thy daughter is dead.” The words must have hit Jairus like a ton of bricks. He was so close! He had almost gotten to Jesus in time. In fact, everything might have been okay if certain other people hadn’t interfered. What a sad, sad day for Jairus!

“Why troublest thou the Master any further?” I’m sure the person who delivered that message did not mean to sound cruel, but that person did say a very hurtful thing. It sounds practical; it sounds logical; but in truth it is a rebuke against Jairus and against Jesus: “Why are you bothering Jesus? He apparently has *other things* to do, *other people* to help. You thought Jesus cared about you? Ha! You have been wasting your time—the time you could have spent saying goodbye to your little girl. Well, let’s be going.” A time of grieving is no time to be handing out advice unless it is requested.

A young woman of about forty unexpectedly became a widow. At her husband’s funeral, while she was standing next to his casket, a man leaned over and said to her, “You’re young. You’ll marry again.” That might be logical to assume, but, friends, I assure you that she was very hurt by that statement. The love of her life was separated from her, and that separation was very painful.

In our passage, Jesus overhears this interchange and He speaks words of comfort: “Be not afraid, only believe.” Faith is the answer to fear. Remember, it’s not the amount of our faith, but the object of our faith. If we believe that God is a God of love, if we believe that He is good and that He has a plan for us, then we can be assured that He is operating in our best interests. We can know that He has something good in store for us although we do not see anything good at the moment. Jesus has assured the father that faith—specifically, faith in God—is the answer to fear. In doing so, He also has assured us that faith is the answer to fear.

This is where I think atheists misunderstand us. I do not believe in a blind faith, which is what I’m accused of as a Christian. I do not like anyone saying to me, “Believe because I said so!” God gave us a brain and we ought to use it. Based on the evidence I see, I know that it is entirely reasonable for me to believe that there is a God who has revealed Himself through the written words of Scripture and through the Living Word, His Son. The alternative is to believe that blind, random chance over the course of untold millennia accidentally did everything just right to make me as I am and the world as it is. If that is the case, there is no plan, there is no purpose, and there is no hope. Some people take the evidence that they see and come to the conclusion that there is no God and consequently no truth in the written word and certainly nothing special about Jesus other than perhaps that He was a good teacher. But from a purely scientific, empirical point of view, no one can “prove” that God does or does not exist. You would have to be everywhere all at the same time to scientifically conclude, “There is no god”; but only God could do that! So while I am accused of holding blind faith in an omnipotent, loving God, the way I see it is that the atheists hold a blind faith in a blind universe of random chance.

In our passage, then, Jesus goes with the father and three of his closest disciples, Peter, James and John. He instructs everyone else to stay behind. I suppose the one who calmed the wind and the waves can also do a little crowd control when necessary.

What a terrible sight greeted them! The mourners had already arrived. It’s hard for us to picture this, because we don’t do it in our culture; but when a person died in that time and place, people would weep and wail and carry on. In fact, there were professionals who would come to the home and provide the service of mourning the dead. The purpose was to show the one who had died, and the family of that one, how much that person was loved and would be missed. They also believed—mistakenly—that

that spirit of the dead person stayed with the body for three days, and then would go on to the afterlife. In this way, the dead person would be able to observe how people felt about his passing.

When Jesus and Jairus arrived at the house, the mourners were in full operation. Jesus said to them, “Why are you making all this noise? She’s not dead; she’s just asleep.” I don’t know how much they knew about Jesus, or if they even knew that He was Jesus; but here’s what they did know: they had seen that girl. They knew she was dead. Here comes this man who hasn’t been to that house yet that day telling them that she’s just asleep? Come on! They stopped mourning and started ridiculing and belittling Jesus. “What do you know? Who do you think you are, Mister?”

Was Jesus lying? No. To Him, she truly was merely asleep; He said the same thing of Lazarus. Someone has posed the question, “Who has the truer view of death, God or man?” For the believer, death is nothing more serious than going to sleep. It is temporary and harmless.

Jesus had another purpose as well. He intended to raise her from the dead, but He needed to do so in secret. These mourners would soon see the little girl alive and well. Let’s see why He had to keep this secret, starting where we left off in verse 40:

But when he had put them all out, he taketh the father and the mother of the damsel, and them that were with him, and entereth in where the damsel was lying.

⁴¹ *And he took the damsel by the hand, and said unto her, Talitha cumi; which is, being interpreted, Damsel, I say unto thee, arise.*

⁴² *And straightway the damsel arose, and walked; for she was of the age of twelve years. And they were astonished with a great astonishment.*

⁴³ *And he charged them straitly that no man should know it; and commanded that something should be given her to eat.*

Jesus set to work clearing the house. He cleared out everyone except the father and mother, and His three disciples. When they were alone, He stretched out His hand and took that little girl’s hand, saying, “Little girl, arise.” And to their great wonder and astonishment, she did just that! The father and mother have their daughter restored to them.

Now, why did Jesus do that? Well, it was not for the little girl’s sake. He called her back to pain, heartache, worry weariness, and ultimate death once again. He did it for the sake of the father and mother, to assuage their agony of heart. He responded to their sorrow and restored this little girl.

“Well,” you say, “that’s fine. I read this story of how he healed the woman and raised the little girl. But he didn’t do that for me. I’m sick, and he hasn’t healed me. My loved ones are in the grave, though I wanted them back, too. Why doesn’t he respond like that today?” What is the answer to that?

The answer is: it is evident from this account that Jesus did not heal the woman and he did not raise the child in order to encourage us to expect the same thing today. This is why he strictly charged that no one should know this, as Mark tells us:

And he strictly charged them that no one should know this, and told them to give her something to eat. (Mark 5:43 RSV)

He did not want this broadcast all around, so that he would get an invitation to every funeral held in Palestine for the next five years! No, he wanted us to learn something else from this. He healed this woman, and he raised this child, in order that we might have a new view of sickness and death, a view that the world will never share, a view that will keep us steady in the midst of this kind of weakness and pressure, will hold us peaceful and calm in the midst of these kinds of hours.¹

Yes, friends, Jesus came and did these things to give us a new view of sickness and death. Jesus, standing on the shores of Heaven, reached out His hand to my friend Tipton and said, "Arise." He stretched out His hand to my friend Lydia and said, "Arise." He said the same to my friends Norris and Margie Palmer, to Clarence Borom and Sherrie Fuson, to my friend Sherry Parker. He stretched out His hand to my grandmother, and said, "Little Lamb, arise." And I know that He said the same to young Curtis.

I will say this one last thing as I close: the preacher at Curtis's funeral said something wonderful, something profoundly comforting to that family and to everyone else that was there. He talked about how Curtis always wrote inside the walls of every house he worked on, "Curtis was here," and that message would be there as long as that house stood. The preacher said that inside our hearts, there was a message as well: "Curtis was here."

Now friends, I do not want to be separated from my children, but I know that ultimately death is a temporary separation for those who trust in Christ as Savior. I urge you today to trust in Christ as Savior so that you too can share in this comfort.

¹ Ray Stedman, "The Weakness of the World." 12 January 1975. Available at <http://www.raystedman.org/new-testament/mark/the-weakness-of-the-world>.