

Luke 8:52

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

And all wept, and bewailed her: but he said, Weep not; she is not dead, but sleepeth.

Analysis

And all wept, and bewailed her (ἐκλαιον δὲ πάντες καὶ ἐκόπτοντο αὐτήν)—the imperfect tense indicates ongoing weeping and loud lamentation. The verb *koptō* (bewailed) literally means 'to beat' (the breast in mourning), describing the demonstrative grief displays common in ancient Near Eastern death rituals. **But he said, Weep not; she is not dead, but sleepeth** (μὴ κλαίετε· οὐ γὰρ ἀπέθανεν ἀλλὰ καθεύδει)—Jesus's present imperative *klaiete* commands them to stop their weeping immediately.

The statement **she is not dead, but sleepeth** doesn't deny biological death (Luke explicitly states in v.55 that 'her spirit came again') but reframes death from the perspective of Jesus's resurrection power. For Christ, death is temporary sleep because he possesses authority to awaken the dead. This anticipates his declaration at Lazarus's tomb: 'Our friend Lazarus sleepeth; but I go, that I may awake him out of sleep' (John 11:11). Paul later uses this same sleep metaphor for believers who have died (1 Thessalonians 4:13-14).

Historical Context

First-century mourning practices were immediate and intense—bodies were buried within 24 hours due to climate, and mourning began instantly upon death. The presence of mourners confirmed the finality of death in the community's eyes, making their ridicule of Jesus (v.53) a public attestation that the girl was genuinely deceased, not merely unconscious or in a coma.

Related Passages

Hebrews 11:1 — Definition of faith

James 2:17 — Faith and works

Study Questions

1. How does Jesus's reframing of death as 'sleep' transform Christian perspectives on mortality and grief?
2. In what current 'dead' situations (relationships, ministries, hopes) might you need to hear Jesus say, 'She is not dead, but sleepeth'?
3. What does this passage teach about the difference between human perspective ('dead') and divine perspective ('sleeping')?

Interlinear Text

κλαίετε	δὲ	πάντες	καὶ	ἐκόπτοντο	αὐτήν	ὁ	δὲ	εἶπεν
Weep	And	all	and	bewailed	her	G3588	And	he said
G2799	G1161	G3956	G2532	G2875	G846		G1161	G2036

Μὴ	κλαίετε	οὐκ	ἀπέθανεν	ἀλλὰ	καθεύδει
not	Weep	not	dead	but	sleepeth
G3361	G2799	G3756	G599	G235	G2518

Additional Cross-References

John 11:4 (Parallel theme): When Jesus heard that, he said, This sickness is not unto death, but for the glory of God, that the Son of God might be glorified thereby.

Luke 23:27 (Parallel theme): And there followed him a great company of people, and of women, which also bewailed and lamented him.