

Mark 5:38

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

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

Analysis

And he cometh to the house of the ruler of the synagogue, and seeth the tumult, and them that wept and wailed greatly. The scene at Jairus's house contrasts sharply with Jesus' calm authority. 'The tumult' (τὸν θόρυβον, *ton thorybon*) describes chaotic confusion—loud noises, disorder, and commotion characteristic of ancient mourning practices. 'Them that wept and wailed greatly' (κλαίοντας καὶ ἀλαλάζοντας πολλά, *klaiontas kai alalazontas polla*) depicts intense public grief display. The verb ἀλαλάζω (*alalazō*) means to wail loudly, shriek, or make loud lamentation—customary mourning demonstration.

First-century Mediterranean culture expressed grief publicly and dramatically, unlike modern Western restraint. Professional mourners were hired to ensure proper social display befitting the deceased's status. For a synagogue ruler's daughter, extensive mourning was expected. Yet Jesus' response (v. 39) reveals this outward display lacked genuine faith-filled hope. The dramatic mourning actually hindered rather than helped—their certainty of death's finality created atmosphere of unbelief. This scene illustrates how cultural customs, even religious ones, can become obstacles to experiencing God's power when they embody unbelief rather than faith. Jesus would silence the tumult before performing the miracle, teaching that faith requires quieting faithless noise to hear and receive God's word.

Historical Context

Jewish mourning customs, described in Mishnah and other sources, involved specific practices: tearing garments, hiring professional mourners (mostly women), playing flutes, loud wailing, and gathering crowds to demonstrate proper grief. Larger crowds indicated greater honor to the deceased. For a prominent family like a synagogue ruler's, extensive mourning would be expected—failure to provide adequate mourning would bring shame. Professional mourners were paid to wail loudly and lead others in lamentation. This cultural context explains the scene's chaos—it wasn't spontaneous grief but organized mourning ritual. The speed with which mourners assembled (the girl just died) reflects cultural efficiency—professional mourners maintained readiness for quick deployment. Archaeologists have found tomb inscriptions and art depicting mourning scenes with multiple figures in exaggerated grief postures. Early church fathers contrasted pagan-style desperate mourning with Christian hope-filled grief (1 Thessalonians 4:13). This passage illustrates pre-resurrection mourning—after Christ's victory over death, Christian funerals reflected hope, not hopelessness.

Related Passages

Genesis 1:1 — Creation of heavens and earth

Colossians 1:16 — All things created through Christ

Study Questions

1. How do cultural religious customs or traditions sometimes become obstacles to experiencing God's power rather than expressions of genuine faith?
2. What 'tumult'—noise, chaos, or faithless assumptions—needs to be silenced in your life before you can hear Christ's voice and receive His work?

Interlinear Text

καὶ	ἔρχεται	εἰς	τὸν	οἶκον	τοῦ	ἀρχισυναγώγου	καὶ
And	he cometh	to	G3588	the house	G3588	of the ruler of the synagogue	And
G2532	G2064	G1519		G3624		G752	G2532
θεωρεῖ	θόρυβον	κλαίοντας	καὶ	ἀλαλάζοντας	πολλά		
seeth	the tumult	and them that wept	And	wailed	greatly		
G2334	G2351	G2799	G2532	G214	G4183		

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