

Mark 5:39

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

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

Analysis

And when he was come in, he saith unto them, Why make ye this ado, and weep? the damsel is not dead, but sleepeth. Jesus confronts the mourning crowd with challenging words. 'Why make ye this ado, and weep?' (τί θορυβεῖσθε καὶ κλαίετε, ti thorybeisthe kai klaiete) questions their excessive commotion. The word θορυβέω (thorybeō) means to make uproar, create disturbance—Jesus challenged their chaotic mourning. His statement 'the damsel is not dead, but sleepeth' (τὸ παιδίον οὐκ ἀπέθανεν ἀλλὰ καθεύδει, to paidion ouk apethanen alla katheudei) uses sleep as metaphor for death from divine perspective.

Was Jesus denying the girl's actual death? No—the mourners and narrative clearly indicate genuine death occurred. Rather, Jesus spoke from God's viewpoint: death is temporary, like sleep before awakening. For One with power to raise the dead, death becomes merely sleep—a temporary state before resurrection awakening. This language became Christian terminology for death (1 Thessalonians 4:13-14; 1 Corinthians 15:51). Jesus' words challenged unbelieving mourning, replacing despair with hope. Their mockery (v. 40) proved they understood He meant she would awaken—they just didn't believe it possible. Jesus' statement previewed His ultimate victory over death through resurrection and pointed toward final resurrection when all believers will 'awaken' to eternal life.

Historical Context

The metaphor of death as sleep appears in Old Testament (Daniel 12:2) and Greek literature, but with different implications. Greeks viewed death as eternal sleep (hence sleep deities in mythology). Biblical usage, especially after Christ, presented death as temporary sleep before resurrection awakening. Jesus' terminology was provocative—declaring someone only sleeping when obviously dead seemed to deny reality. Yet He was asserting a higher reality: from God's eternal perspective, physical death is temporary pause before resurrection. The mourners' scornful laughter (v. 40) showed they took His words as absurd denial of observable fact. This prefigured how the resurrection gospel would sound foolish to natural wisdom (1 Corinthians 1:18). Paul later used similar language: believers who die are 'asleep in Christ' (1 Corinthians 15:18), awaiting resurrection morning. Early church transformed funeral customs based on this teaching—Christian burial inscriptions often used sleep metaphors, and funeral services emphasized resurrection hope rather than final goodbye.

Related Passages

1 John 4:8 — God is love

1 Corinthians 13:4 — Characteristics of love

Study Questions

1. How does viewing death as 'sleep' from God's perspective change your response to mortality and grief?
2. What does the mourners' scornful laughter at Jesus' words reveal about natural human inability to grasp resurrection reality without divine revelation?

Interlinear Text

καὶ	εἰσελθὼν	λέγει	αὐτοῖς	Τί	θορυβεῖσθε	καὶ
And	when he was come in	he saith	unto them	Why	make ye this ado	And
G2532	G1525	G3004	G846	G5101	G2350	G2532
κλαίετε	τὸ	παιδίον	οὐκ	ἀπέθανεν	ἀλλὰ	καθεύδει
weep	G3588	the damsel	not	dead	but	sleepeth
G2799		G3813	G3756	G599	G235	G2518

Additional Cross-References

Acts 20:10 (Parallel theme): And Paul went down, and fell on him, and embracing him said, Trouble not yourselves; for his life is in him.

1 Thessalonians 5:10 (Parallel theme): Who died for us, that, whether we wake or sleep, we should live together with him.

1 Corinthians 11:30 (Parallel theme): For this cause many are weak and sickly among you, and many sleep.

Daniel 12:2 (Parallel theme): And many of them that sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt.