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Jairus's Daughter and the Paralytic in Capernaum

Praying for the Dead in Mark and Luke

TORSTEN LÖFSTEDT

Torsten Löfstedt is Professor of Religious Studies at Linnaeus University.

torsten.lofstedt@lnu.se

Introduction

Intercession is petitionary prayer on behalf of another person.[1] It proceeds from the assumption that God can choose to be merciful to one person in response to the prayers of another person. Abraham's prayer for Sodom, where Abraham negotiates with God to try to convince him to spare the city (Gen 18:16–33) is a classic example of intercessory prayer. Another well-known example is when Moses intercedes with God on behalf of his people who had sinned by making themselves a golden calf (Exod 32:11–14, 30–34).[2]

Mark and Luke give many examples of how people ask Jesus to help a third person, and Jesus does so: Jesus' disciples ask him to help Simon's mother-in-law (Mark 1:30; Luke 4:38), people bring all kinds of sick people

1. *Collins Concise English Dictionary*, 8th ed., Glasgow 2012, "Intercession". The *Oxford English Dictionary*, 3rd ed., New York 2015, defines intercession as "pleading on behalf of another". See also Michael Widmer, *Standing in the Breach: An Old Testament Theology and Spirituality of Intercessory Prayer*, Winona Lake, IN 2015, 3. Francois P. Viljoen, "Jesus as Intercessor in Luke–Acts", *Acta Patristica et Byzantina* 19 (2008), 329–349, especially 332, https://doi.org/10.1080/10226486.2008.11745799, distinguishes between petition (*Fürbitte*) that involves making general requests of God on someone's behalf and intercession (*Fürsprache*), which specifically refers to praying that God avert his wrath from another person. I will not make that distinction here, as prayers for healing and prayers for forgiveness and salvation flow into each other in our material. I consider both to be examples of intercession.

2. Viljoen, "Jesus as Intercessor", 333, cites other examples of intercession in the Hebrew Bible, including Isaac (Gen 25:21), Joshua (Josh 7:6–9), Samuel (1 Sam 12:19), Elisha (2 Kgs 4:33; 6:17), and Amos (Amos 7:1–6).

to Jesus (Mark 1:32, 6:55; Luke 4:40), a group of friends bring a paralytic to Jesus (Mark 2:1–12; Luke 5:17–26), the centurion asks that Jesus heal his servant (Luke 7:1–10), Jairus asks Jesus to heal his daughter (Mark 5:22–43; Luke 8:40–56), the Syro-Phoenician woman asks Jesus to cast a demon out of her daughter (Mark 7:24–30), unspecified people bring a deaf man to Jesus (Mark 7:31–37), "some people" bring a blind man to Jesus (Mark 8:22–26), a man brings to Jesus his son who suffered from a demon (Mark 9:14–29; Luke 9:37–43). These people ask Jesus to help a person (ἐρωτάω, Luke 4:38, 7:3), they appeal to him (παρακαλέω, Luke 7:4, 8:41), they beg him (δέομαι, Luke 9:38). These stories model behaviour. They serve to inspire readers to turn to Jesus in prayer when they are worried on someone else's behalf. In addition, Luke 22:32 tells of Jesus himself having prayed to God on behalf of Peter (ἐγὼ δὲ ἐδεήθην περὶ σοῦ),[3] thereby demonstrating the importance of intercessory prayer in Luke's theology.[4]

Most of the accounts that tell of people asking Jesus for help tell of him healing the person of a disease or driving out a demon. But there are also examples in all the Gospels where Jesus raises a dead person to life. The account of how Jesus raised the daughter of a leader of a synagogue is found in all three Synoptic Gospels (Matt 9:18–26; Mark 5:21–43; Luke 8:40–56).[5] Jesus raises the daughter of the synagogue leader in response to his entreaty.

Interpreters generally hold that when the Gospels teach that Jesus raises someone from the dead, these miracles are a display of Jesus' authority or a foretaste of how the hold that death has on humanity is broken as Jesus is raised from the dead.[6] While not disagreeing with those interpretations, I argue that the accounts studied here encourage followers of Christ to pray on behalf of loved ones who have died.[7] I will further argue that the healing of the paralytic in Capernaum in Mark 2:1–12 and Luke 5:17–26 also encourages intercession for the dead.[8] I focus on the Gospels of Mark and

3. On this passage and its connection to Jesus' vision of Satan's fall (Luke 10:18), see David Crump, "Jesus, the Victorious Scribal-Intercessor in Luke's Gospel", *New Testament Studies* 38 (1992), 51–65, https://doi.org/10.1017/S0028688500023079. John 17 further develops this theme and allows the reader to hear Jesus pray for his disciples in the high priestly prayer.

4. For another example of intercessory prayer, consider how Jesus teaches his disciples to pray for their enemies (Luke 6:28). Examples of intercessory prayer in Acts include 7:59–60, 8:24, 9:40, and 28:8.

5. See also Matt 11:5.

6. Joel Marcus, *Mark 1–8*, New Haven, CT 2000, 373.

7. We may also note that according to John 11:1–45, Jesus raised Lazarus from the dead in response to Martha's indirect entreaty (11:22).

8. In an account that is unique to Luke (7:11–17), Jesus raises the son of a widow from the dead. Luke does not say anything about the woman asking Jesus for help, however. Jesus simply sees her and has compassion on her (7:13). As there is no reference to any form of intercessory prayer in this account, I will not focus on it here.

Luke; Matthew also tells about the raising of Jairus's daughter (9:18–26) and the healing of the paralytic (9:1–8), but his accounts are shorter and do not support praying for the dead as clearly.

Some Preliminary Assumptions

I follow the accepted view that Luke bases his Gospel on Mark in addition to other sources which are no longer extant. I further assume that the author of Luke's Gospel also wrote Acts.[9] I will not try to reconstruct earlier accounts that Mark may have based his text on nor do I concern myself with the question whether the historical Jesus really raised people from the dead or not.

While the Gospels have much in common with classical biographies,[10] they are also theological works. Mark and Luke pattern their writing on Jesus' teaching and allow the reader to understand their texts on more than one level.[11] According to the Synoptic Gospels, Jesus generally taught in parables (Mark 4:34; Matt 13:34), creating narrative puzzles for his listeners to puzzle over. C.H. Dodd (1884–1973) famously explained: "At its simplest a parable is a metaphor or simile drawn from nature or common life, arresting the hearer by its vividness or strangeness and leaving the mind in sufficient doubt about its precise meaning to tease it into active thought."[12] But these Gospels contain other narrative puzzles besides Jesus' parables. Mark and Luke create their own narrative puzzles when they write about Jesus' deeds. Jesus' miracles demonstrate his messianic authority (see Luke 7:19–23). They may also function as parables, which may give new insight into who Jesus was or the significance of his teaching. Like parables, miracles could be hard to understand (compare Mark 4:10–12 and 8:14–21) and according to the Gospels, Jesus' miracles were at times interpreted incorrectly. Consider, for example, the discussion of how to explain Jesus' success in casting out

9. This is the majority view. See, for example, Jacob Jervell, *The Theology of the Acts of the Apostles*, Cambridge 1996, 2–4, https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511621345. For a dissenting view, see Richard I. Pervo, *Acts: A Commentary*, Minneapolis, MN 2009.

10. Richard A. Burridge, *What Are the Gospels? A Comparison with Graeco-Roman Biography*, 2nd ed., Grand Rapids, MI 2004.

11. Ardel B. Caneday, "He Wrote in Parables and Riddles: Mark's Gospel as a Literary Reproduction of Jesus' Teaching Method", Διδασκαλια (1999), 35–67. Craig L. Blomberg, "New Testament Miracles and Higher Criticism: Climbing up the Slippery Slope", *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 27 (1984), 426, traces this interpretation to Alexander Balmain Bruce, *The Miraculous Element in the Gospels*, London 1886. See further Craig L. Blomberg, "The Miracles as Parables", in David Wenham & Craig Blomberg (ed.), *Gospel Perspectives: 6. The Miracles of Jesus*, Sheffield 1986, 327–359.

12. C.H. Dodd, *The Parables of the Kingdom*, London 1935, 5.

demons (Mark 3:20–30; Luke 11:14–23); was it because he was serving Satan or because he had subdued him?[13]

One example of how a miracle can function as a parable is Mark's account of Jesus cursing a fig tree for not bearing any fruit; that miracle frames the story of Jesus clearing the temple (Mark 11:12–25). Mark (11:13) explains that it was not season for the fig tree to bear fruit, so on a surface reading Jesus' action seems unreasonable. But Mark has placed this account in a particular context for a reason. Jesus' cursing of the fig tree for not bearing fruit may be seen as a rebuke of the people in charge of the temple who had failed to live in accordance with God's commands. It also presages the destruction of the temple.[14] Luke does not include the story of Jesus cursing the fig tree, but he has Jesus tell a parable about a fig tree that bore no fruit (13:6–9). Luke's parable has a similar message as the account of the miracle in Mark: if the people fail to repent from their evil ways, they will perish from the land.[15] The cursing of the fig tree is not unique. Other reports of miracles in the Gospels may also function as parables.

The Raising of Jairus's Daughter

The story of Jairus's daughter is found in all three Synoptic Gospels, but I will focus on how Mark and Luke tell the story, as their versions seem to more clearly encourage the practice of praying for the dead than does Matthew's version.[16] There are many reasons why Mark and Luke included this miracle. To raise someone from the dead is a most astounding miracle; it causes onlookers as well as later readers to be filled with wonder (see Mark 5:42; Luke 8:56). Like other miracles, this miracle serves to illustrate the kingdom of God. It prefigures Jesus' resurrection,[17] and it illustrates that Jesus had power over life and death and is in line with the early Christian conviction that for those who believe in Jesus, death is not the end, but they will be raised from the dead when he comes again. This conviction is

13. Blomberg, "New Testament Miracles", 427.

14. See R.T. France, *The Gospel of Mark: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, Grand Rapids, MI 2002, 441. James R. Edwards, *The Gospel according to Mark*, Grand Rapids, MI 2002, 340, explains: "Jesus dramatizes the end of the temple by an enacted parable."

15. Luke tempers his message of judgement with a message of mercy. In the parable of the fig tree, the owner of the vineyard is persuaded not to take down the tree immediately but to give it one more season to bear fruit (13:6–9).

16. In Matthew 9:18–26, the ruler of the synagogue initially comes to Jesus after his daughter has already died. The ruler had faith from the beginning that Jesus could wake the dead. The question whether it is appropriate to ask for prayers for the dead does not come as clearly into focus here as in the other Gospels. In Matthew, the focus is rather on the leader's faith and Jesus' authority to heal. See Donald A. Hagner, *Matthew 1–13*, Waco, TX 1993, 247.

17. Robert H. Gundry, *Mark: A Commentary on His Apology for the Cross*, Grand Rapids, MI 1993, 275.

attested already in Paul's letters, which probably antedate the Gospels (see 1 Cor 15:12–57; 1 Thess 4:16).[18] Curiously, although the story of Jairus's daughter tells of Jesus interacting with a person whose loved one has died, the commentaries I have consulted do not discuss whether Mark and Luke in telling this story imply that one should turn to Jesus in prayer on behalf of people who have died.[19]

According to the Gospels of Mark and Luke, Jairus asks Jesus to come and save his daughter who is dying. In Mark's account, Jairus begs Jesus: "Come and lay your hands on her, so that she may be made well and live."[20] The verb phrase translated "that she may be made well" (ἵνα σωθῇ, 5:23) could also be translated "that she be saved". In the context, the man is not worried about eternal salvation but about her physical survival, so the translation "that she be made well" is appropriate.[21] In Luke's account, Jairus asks Jesus to come to his house because his daughter is dying (8:41–42); Luke does not use the verb σῴζω here, he saves it for a later verse. Both Mark and Luke relate that while Jesus was still on his way, Jairus's daughter died, and people tell Jairus not to trouble Jesus anymore (Mark 5:35; Luke 8:49). Jesus ignores them. He disagrees with those who say there is no point in asking him to save someone who has died. Oddly, commentaries do not pay much attention to this fact. While people try to dissuade Jairus from troubling Jesus, Jesus encourages him not to give up on his quest, saying, μὴ φοβοῦ, μόνον πίστευε ("Do not fear, only believe", Mark 5:36, NRSV). Luke expands Jesus' answer: μὴ φοβοῦ, μόνον πίστευσον, καὶ σωθήσεται ("Do not fear. Only believe, and she will be saved", Luke 8:50, NRSV).[22] The RSV translates the verb σωθήσεται with the phrase "she shall be well".[23]

18. Joel B. Green, *The Gospel of Luke*, Grand Rapids, MI 1997, 351; Hagner, *Matthew 1–13*, 250.

19. Commentaries on Mark: Adela Yarbro Collins, *Mark: A Commentary*, Minneapolis, MN 2007, https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctvb6v7zz; Edwards, *The Gospel according to Mark*; France, *The Gospel of Mark*; Gundry, *Mark*; Marcus, *Mark 1–8*; Francis J. Moloney, *The Gospel of Mark: A Commentary*, Peabody, MA 2002; John Painter, *Mark's Gospel: Worlds in Conflict*, London 1997. Commentaries on Luke: François Bovon, *Luke 1: A Commentary on the Gospel of Luke 1:1–9:50*, Minneapolis, MN 2002, https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctvb6v878; James R. Edwards, *The Gospel according to Luke*, Grand Rapids, MI 2015; Joseph A. Fitzmyer, *The Gospel according to Luke I–IX*, New Haven, CT 1970; Green, *The Gospel of Luke*; Luke Timothy Johnson, *The Gospel of Luke*, Collegeville, MN 1991; I. Howard Marshall, *The Gospel of Luke*, Grand Rapids, MI 1978; John Nolland, *Luke 1–9:20*, Waco, TX 1989.

20. Unless otherwise specified, biblical quotes in this article are taken from the New Revised Standard Version Updated Edition (NRSVUE).

21. The King James Version (KJV), the New International Version (NIV), the New Revised Standard Version (NRSV), and the Revised Standard Version (RSV) translate the verb in this sentence as denoting healing rather than salvation.

22. Matthew's account is severely shortened and does not include these words. See Matt 9:18–26.

23. Similarly in KJV: "she shall be made whole"; NASB: "she will be made well"; NIV: "she

While this translation is possible, the translators of the NRSV, who rendered the phrase "she will be saved", have made a better decision. Luke could have used another verb, such as ἰάομαι (to heal), θεραπεύω (to heal), or ὑγιὴς γίνομαι (to become healthy), but he chose to use σῴζω, the verb used in Mark 5:23. This is a key word for Mark and Luke and it carries more than one layer of meaning. Mark uses the verb σῴζω in reference to saving someone's life (Mark 3:4; Luke 6:9) by freeing them from disease (Mark 5:34; Luke 8:48) or death (Mark 8:35; Luke 9:24). Luke retains these uses of the verb but introduces it (or the related noun σωτηρία, "salvation") into other contexts as well. He uses it in references to setting someone free from enemies (1:71), demons (8:36), and sin (7:50) as well as bringing someone back into fellowship with God and his people (19:9–10), for example.[24] As Mark Allan Powell writes, "Luke makes no distinction between [...] physical, spiritual, or social aspects of salvation".[25] God's saving action involves the whole person. In all three Synoptic Gospels, σῴζω may also be used in reference to eternal salvation, as in Jesus' exchange with the rich young man (Matt 19:25; Mark 10:26; Luke 18:26).[26]

Jesus assures Jairus that his daughter will be saved (Luke 8:50), but as Joel Marcus aptly puts it: "Before Jairus' daughter can experience 'salvation', she will first experience death."[27] When Jesus says, "Do not fear. Only believe, and she will be saved" (Luke 8:50, NRSV), several meanings apply. Jairus presumably understands Jesus to be saying that his daughter will be well again. But the reader who is sensitive to Luke's use of the verb σῴζω understands that this text may also speak about salvation more broadly. Here we have a case where Jesus says it is entirely appropriate to ask him to save someone who has already died. Jairus's daughter was brought back to life in response to her father's faith in Jesus.

The Importance of Faith for Salvation

The story of the raising of Jairus's daughter emphasizes the importance of faith for healing and salvation. Sandwiched into our story is another story that further emphasizes the role that faith plays in salvation broadly understood. When Jesus is on his way to heal Jairus's daughter, a woman who had suffered hemorrhages for years reaches out to Jesus in faith and is healed

will be healed".

24. Marcus, *Mark 1–8*, 364. See also Fitzmyer, *The Gospel according to Luke I–IX*, 222–223.

25. Mark Allan Powell, "Salvation in Luke–Acts", *Word and World* 12 (1992), 7–8.

26. When we examine the larger context of this passage, we find that "to be saved" is used synonymously with inheriting eternal life (Matt 19:29; Mark 10:16; Luke 18:18) and entering into the kingdom of God (Matt 19:24; Mark 10:24–25; Luke 18:25). On σῴζω being used in reference to eternal life, see also Mark 8:35, 13:13. Gundry, *Mark*, 268.

27. Marcus, *Mark 1–8*, 366.

(Mark 5:25–34; Luke 8:43–48). Jesus says to her, ἡ πίστις σου σέσωκέν σε ("your faith has saved you", Mark 5:34; Luke 8:48; also Matt 9:22, my translation). This sentence, which includes the verb σῴζω, is found a total of four times in Luke. It is found in two passages that he has taken over from Mark, namely, this passage about the woman who was healed of her hemorrhage and a passage telling of a man whose sight was restored (Mark 10:52; Luke 18:42). Luke also uses it in two additional passages that are unique to his Gospel. He uses it of a leper who was cleansed (17:19) and of the woman whose many sins were forgiven (7:50). For Luke, salvation by faith is something that involves all kinds of healing as well as the forgiveness of sins.

Curiously, according to both Mark and Luke, the woman with the hemorrhages was healed or saved without Jesus even knowing who it was who had touched him. At the surface level, the belief or faith (πίστις) that Jesus speaks of is trust in his power to save.[28] There had not been any personal relationship between Jesus and the woman. That does not mean that the personal relationship is unimportant. Mark and Luke say that Jesus asks who it was that touched him (Mark 5:30; Luke 8:45).[29] The disciples find his question absurd, but he insists on knowing. Joel Marcus suggests that while the woman was healed without Jesus knowing who she was, the evangelists tell of the woman having to identify herself to Jesus probably to underscore the importance of a commitment to Jesus for long-term salvation, the peace of the age to come.[30] As he sends her on her way he addresses her as "daughter" (θυγάτηρ), suggesting that a personal connection between them has now been established, and says: "Go in peace" (ὕπαγε εἰς εἰρήνην, Mark 5:34; πορεύου εἰς εἰρήνην, Luke 8:48; see also Luke 7:50).[31]

Luke emphasizes the importance of faith as a "personal commitment to Jesus" in other passages as well.[32] A classic illustration of how faith in Jesus is salvific is the account of the robber on the cross. Jesus tells the robber on the cross that he would be with him in paradise, although he had clearly not followed the commandments. All he had was a recently established relationship to Jesus, whom he believed to be the Messiah, a willingness

28. Fitzmyer, *The Gospel according to Luke I–IX*, 744: "The faith that is intended is the confidence of the individuals in the power of Jesus."

29. Edwards, *The Gospel according to Luke*, 255, points out that in Luke's version a masculine singular participle (ὁ ἁψάμενός) is used, showing that Jesus did not know that a woman had touched him. Mark 5:31 has Jesus ask, "Who touched me?" (τίς μου ἥψατο). In this direct question no gender can be specified.

30. Marcus, *Mark 1–8*, 361.

31. Nolland, *Luke 1–9:20*, 420, writes regarding Luke 8:48: "The woman's salvation now goes beyond her physical healing, embracing as it does the peace now being eschatologically bestowed by Jesus."

32. Fitzmyer, *The Gospel according to Luke I–IX*, 583, gives as examples Luke 18:8, 22:32; Acts 6:5, 11:24.

to defend him, and an acknowledgement of his own sins (Luke 23:39–43). Luke's point is that the robber received salvation because he trusted in Jesus.

Salvation through the Faith of Others

While the woman with the hemorrhages and the robber on the cross were saved because of their faith, Jairus's daughter was saved because of her father's faith. Is it reasonable to generalize from the story of Jairus's daughter that the faith that leads to eternal salvation need not only be that of the individual in need of salvation?[33] May readers take the story of Jairus's daughter as an illustration for how they may ask Jesus to similarly raise their loved ones from the dead on the last day if they pray to him for their salvation? Luke's use of the verb σῴζω in other contexts may suggest that it is appropriate to ask Jesus on behalf of a dead person that his or her sins be forgiven. Against this view we may note that elsewhere Jesus sets conditions for who may inherit eternal life. In his exchange with the rich young man, Jesus tells him that he has to follow the commandments, sell his possessions, and follow him (Mark 10:19, 21; Luke 18:20, 22). The demands that Jesus makes are many. It may therefore seem preposterous to claim that the passage about Jairus's daughter in Mark and Luke may encourage readers to believe that their prayers on behalf of another could help that person inherit eternal life. But we should bear in mind that Jesus' response to the rich young man answers the question what he had to do to inherit eternal life. It does not address the question whether others can do anything to help him enter into the kingdom of God.[34] I will return to this question shortly in connection with the paralytic in Capernaum.

Was Jairus's Daughter Really Dead?

According to Mark and Luke, Jairus had first asked Jesus for help while his daughter was alive, and the girl had not been dead very long when Jesus came to her. This could be considered a special case; maybe we are to imagine that her spirit was still close by.

In many cultures, it is held that after a person has died, his or her spirit may remain nearby for a while.[35] Luke 8:55 describes Jairus's daughter

33. Powell, "Salvation in Luke–Acts", 9, comparing three parables about salvation in Luke 15, writes: "Luke seems to vary in the extent to which he attributes responsibility for the appropriation of salvation to the person being saved."

34. It bears noting that Jesus' disciples wondered whether anyone could be saved given the heavy requirements Jesus placed on the rich young man. Jesus responded that while it is impossible for man, for God all things are possible (Mark 10:27). The Gospels do not reveal all the means through which God saves. The passage about the robber on the cross shows that Jesus does not require the same thing of all people for salvation.

35. Marshall, *The Gospel of Luke*, 348; Bovon, *Luke 1*, 340.

coming to life again by saying that her spirit returned (ἐπέστρεψεν τὸ πνεῦμα αὐτῆς), which could be taken to support such an interpretation. Joseph Fitzmyer translates πνεῦμα to "breath" in this context and he characterizes this miracle as a "resuscitation".[36] But as Mark and Luke tell it, the girl had not just lost her breath; she was dead (Mark 5:35; Luke 8:49).[37] The word πνεῦμα has various uses, one of which is to designate breath or breathing. The one that applies here is the second listed by Frederick William Danker, namely, "that which animates or gives life to the body".[38] We have no exact equivalent for this concept in modern English, but Danker suggests "(life-)spirit" as a translation.[39] Other examples of the πνεῦμα leaving the body at death are found in Luke 23:46 (when Jesus dies) and Acts 7:59 (when Stephen dies). When a person's (life-)spirit leaves his body, he dies. And normally when someone has died, they stay dead.[40]

There are a few exceptions, however. In the Greek text of Jdg 15:19 there is also a reference to a person's spirit returning. Samson was dying of thirst, but God opened a spring for him to drink from whereupon his spirit returned (ἐπέστρεψεν τὸ πνεῦμα αὐτοῦ ἐν αὐτῷ). Evidently, Samson's spirit had been about to leave; he was about to die, but he got to drink water in the nick of time. We may also compare our account with the account of Elijah raising a widow's son, a story that surely coloured the story of the raising of Jairus's daughter.[41] There, Elijah prays that the boy's "life" would return (1 Kgs 17:21, NRSV). The word translated to "life" in the NRSV is ψυχή in the Septuagint. In this context, there is no significant difference between ψυχή and πνεῦμα, both designate that which gives life to the body.[42] In that account, as in the story of Jairus's daughter, the person being prayed for had died (see 1 Kgs 17:20). The boy was brought back to life only because God heard Elijah's prayer.

In Acts, Luke tells of two instances where the apostles were instrumental in bringing to life someone who was believed to have died. In one of the

36. Fitzmyer, *The Gospel according to Luke I–IX*, 744.

37. Edwards, *The Gospel according to Luke*, 258, notes that both the messenger and the professional mourners attested to the fact that the girl had died.

38. Frederick William Danker, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 3rd ed., Chicago 2000, 833.

39. Danker, *A Greek-English Lexicon*, 832.

40. Luke changes the tense of verb from the aorist to the perfect (τέθνηκεν) to emphasize the resulting state: the girl really is dead. See Daniel B. Wallace, *Greek Grammar beyond the Basics: An Exegetical Syntax of the New Testament*, Grand Rapids, MI 1996, 573–574.

41. Jesus compares himself to Elijah in Luke 4:24–26. For other examples of how Jesus is patterned on Elijah, see J. Severino Croatto, "Jesus, Prophet like Elijah, and Prophet-Teacher like Moses in Luke–Acts", *Journal of Biblical Literature* 124 (2005), 451–465, https://doi.org/10.2307/30041034.

42. For this use of ψυχή, see also Mark 8:35; Luke 9:24; Acts 20:10.

accounts, Eutychus fell from the third story of a building and "was picked up dead" (20:9; ἤρθη νεκρός). Luke continues: "But Paul went down and bent over him, and embracing him said, 'Do not be alarmed, for his life is in him'" (ἡ γὰρ ψυχὴ αὐτοῦ ἐν αὐτῷ ἐστιν, 20:10). Luke includes this story because it witnesses to miraculous healing. He does not say that Paul raised Eutychus from the dead, however, although the reader can interpret the story in this way.[43] In the second account, Luke tells of Peter raising Tabitha from the dead (Acts 9:36–43). According to this account, Tabitha died (9:37). People summon Peter, asking him to come "without delay" (9:38); they probably assumed that Tabitha's soul had not yet completely left her body and that she could still be brought back to life. Peter prayed by her side and then told her to rise. This account parallels the raising of Jairus's daughter, as Tabitha is clearly said to have died and she is raised in response to Peter's prayer.[44] Neither Mark nor Luke says that Jesus commanded his disciples to raise the dead,[45] but it is reasonable to assume that Luke expected his readers to follow the example of Jesus and Peter and to pray for those who had just died.

But while the accounts of the raisings of Jairus's daughter and of Tabitha encourage Christians to pray for people right after they have died, just as the accounts of Jesus healing people encourage readers to pray in Jesus' name for people to be healed, the story of Jairus's daughter may have a wider application. Few theologians appear to generalize from this account to praying for the dead in general. Perhaps they see this as a last-minute resuscitation, a form of healing,[46] as was the case with Samson, rather than as an actual

43. Joseph A. Fitzmyer, *The Acts of the Apostles*, New Haven, CT 1998, 668–669, notes how some have argued against this being intended as an account of a miracle, but following Hans Conzelmann (1915–1989), he believes that Luke intends for the reader to interpret this as an account of someone being raised from the dead. In his *Life of Apollonius of Tyana*, Philostratus (c. 170–c. 245) has the same difficulty in deciding whether he had witnessed a person being raised from the dead or not: "Now whether he detected some spark of life in her, which those who were nursing her had not noticed [...] or whether life really was extinct, and he restored it by the warmth of his touch, is a mysterious problem which neither I myself nor those who were present could decide." Quoted in Collins, *Mark*, 278.

44. The words spoken to the dead person by Jesus and Peter sound remarkably similar: ταλιθα κουμ (Mark 5:41) and Ταβιθά, ἀνάστηθι (Acts 9:40). This similarity appears to lack significance, for in his Gospel, Luke (8:55) does not include Jesus' command in its Aramaic form, only its Greek translation: ἡ παῖς, ἔγειρε. The similarity is only apparent to readers of both Mark and Acts. It is unlikely that Luke expected readers of Acts to have access to Mark's Gospel rather than the one that he wrote.

45. According to Matthew 10:8, when Jesus first commissioned the twelve, among the things he told them to do was to raise the dead. No parallel to this command is found in Mark or Luke (see Mark 6:7–13; Luke 9:1–6, 10:1–12).

46. Edwards, *The Gospel according to Luke*, 258, writes: "A belief that all phenomena can be explained rationally, a hallmark introduced into Western culture at the time of the Enlightenment, causes some commentators to argue that this story is about a 'deliverance from

case of Jesus breaking the power of death, following the example of Elijah. Against seeing the raising of Jairus's daughter as a last-minute healing, we note that neither Mark nor Luke says that Jesus or Jairus believed the girl's spirit was nearby, but they do say that Jairus's neighbours believed that it was pointless to ask for prayer on behalf of someone who had died, and Jesus proved them wrong. I suggest one can generalize from this story to also pray for those who have been dead longer than Jairus's daughter.

"The Child Is Not Dead but Sleeping"

Before I leave the account of the raising of Jairus's daughter, one other detail needs attending to, as it may appear to contradict my thesis. Jesus characterizes the girl as "not dead but sleeping" (Mark 5:39; Luke 8:52). How should this expression be interpreted? In interpreting this expression, R.T. France appears to distinguish her death from other deaths. He writes: "The context here indicates that the girl's death is real, but temporary."[47] While this statement is true, France misses the point. When Jesus says that the girl is sleeping, he is describing the girl's situation from God's point of view. From that point of view, any death is temporary.[48] In addition to suggesting that death need not be a permanent state, the metaphor of sleep also suggests that the person in question can still be the object of God's mercy. Just as one may pray for someone who is asleep, so it is appropriate to pray for someone who has died.[49]

The claim that from God's point of view death is not the end is made more clearly later in Mark and Luke when Jesus debates the resurrection with the Sadducees (Mark 12:18–27; Luke 20:27–40).[50] In responding to the Sadducees, Jesus grounds the doctrine of the resurrection in scripture. He says, "have you not read in the book of Moses, in the story about the bush, how God said to him, 'I am the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob'?", quoting Exod 3:6, 15, 16. Jesus concludes: "He is God not of the dead but of the living; you are quite wrong" (Mark 12:27). In Mark, Jesus' argument appears to hinge on the sentence being in the present tense.[51] If God can say to Moses that he is (still) the God of

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premature burial' rather than a raising from the dead."

47. France, *The Gospel of Mark*, 239. Nolland, *Luke 1–9:20*, 421, writes: "Jesus' remark is directed toward the future and not the past. It is prognosis, not diagnosis."

48. Fitzmyer, *The Gospel according to Luke I–IX*, 749: "with his [Jesus'] coming death is seen to be like sleep, not a permanent state, but transitional." See also Marshall, *The Gospel of Luke*, 347: "death is reinterpreted from the point of view of God."

49. The metaphor of sleep for death is found already in the Hebrew Bible (see 1 Kgdms 1:21, 2:10, 11:21), but is given additional meaning here.

50. This passage is also found in Matt 22:23–33.

51. See Richard N. Longenecker, *Biblical Exegesis in the Apostolic Period*, 2nd ed., Grand

Abraham, does that not suggest that Abraham is somehow still alive to him? R.T. France disagrees with this interpretation on the basis that there is no present tense verb in the sentence in Mark's text.[52] This is true. No verb is used in the Greek text of Exod 3:6 as Mark 12:26 quotes it: ἐγὼ ὁ θεὸς Ἀβραὰμ καὶ [ὁ] θεὸς Ἰσαὰκ καὶ [ὁ] θεὸς Ἰακώβ. Although he is writing in Greek, Mark follows Hebrew syntax here; the Hebrew text of Exod 3:6 has a zero copula.[53] In Biblical Hebrew, the copula may be dropped in the present tense, but not in other tenses.[54] The zero copula in Hebrew thus signals the present tense. This may be hard for a speaker of standard English to accept, but the same situation is found in other languages, such as Russian.[55] A sentence can be in the present tense even if no verb is present. God is the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Jesus' point is that God continues to be their God in the present, implying that the patriarchs are alive to him. In Mark 12:27, Jesus concludes: "He is God not of the dead but of the living; you are quite wrong."[56]

Luke does not reproduce the full quote of Exod 3:6. He drops the first-person pronoun Ἐγώ. The resulting citation is not a complete sentence. The NRSV translates the passage, "he speaks of the Lord as the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob" (20:37). Luke adds the clarification: "Now he is God not of the dead but of the living, for to him all of them are alive" (20:38, NRSVUE), or more accurately, "Now he is God not of the dead, but of the living; for to him all are alive". (The words "of them" were added by the NRSV, in my view mistakenly.[57]) The final clause, "for to him all are alive", is consistent with the point that Mark is making. To God all are alive. From God's point of view, death does not mark the end of anyone's existence.

The idea that death is not the absolute end is found in other passages in the Gospels. In the parable of the rich man and Lazarus (Luke 16:19–31), a

Rapids, MI 1999, 53.

52. France, *The Gospel of Mark*, 471: "an argument based on the tense of an *unexpressed* verb would not be subtle but simply invalid."

53. France, *The Gospel of Mark*, 471.

54. Jacobus A. Naudé & Cynthia L. Miller-Naudé, "At the Interface of Syntax and Prosody: Differentiating Left Dislocated and Tripartite Verbless Clauses in Biblical Hebrew", *Stellenbosch Papers in Linguistics* 48 (2017), 228–229, https://doi.org/10.5774/48-0-293.

55. Alan Timberlake, *A Reference Grammar of Russian*, Cambridge 2004, 292.

56. A present tense form of the verb "to be" is found in the Septuagint of Exod 3:6. It reads: Ἐγώ εἰμι ὁ θεὸς τοῦ πατρός σου, θεὸς Αβρααμ, καὶ θεὸς Ισαακ καὶ θεὸς Ιακωβ, using the first person singular present tense form of the verb "to be". When Matthew (22:32) quotes the passage, he also includes the copula.

57. Joseph A. Fitzmyer, *The Gospel according to Luke X–XXIV*, New Haven, CT 1985, 1307, believes that the word "all" "is probably to be understood [...] of all those considered worthy of sharing in the resurrection and in the age to come".

text that is unique to Luke, Abraham is pictured as still very much alive in the next world. Although this is a parable rather than a description of the world to come, it is taken for granted that the righteous would keep on living.

The notion that death does not necessarily imply the end of people's existence is also reflected in the accounts of Jesus' transfiguration in all three Synoptic Gospels. When Jesus is transfigured, Moses and Elijah appear and speak with him (Matt 17:3; Mark 9:4; Luke 9:30). While they disappeared as suddenly as they had appeared, there is no suggestion that the disciples had seen malevolent ghosts. Rather, the disciples' vision is in line with the belief that the righteous are alive before God.

Philo of Alexandria (c. 20 BCE–c. 50 CE), who was contemporary with Jesus, found this passage in Exod 3:6 problematic, apparently because the immortal God is characterizing himself by referring to his relationship with people who are mortal.[58] Philo apparently feels that a simple reading would imply that the patriarchs are somehow still alive to God. He therefore lets the names of the patriarchs refer to virtues rather than people, "for the nature of man is perishable, but that of virtue is imperishable".[59] Jesus has a very different view. God remains the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob because they indeed are alive to him. As John Nolland writes, "God will not have continued to advertise himself as God of the Patriarchs if he had finished with them and abandoned them to the grave".[60]

There are other Jewish texts from the first century that affirm that the righteous departed are alive to God. We find a close parallel to Mark 12 and Luke 20 in 4 Macc 7:19, a text which probably dates to the first century: "they believe that they, like our patriarchs Abraham and Isaac and Jacob, do not die to God but live to God." Similarly, in Wis 3:1–3, another text that is roughly contemporary with Jesus, it is written: "But the souls of the righteous are in the hand of God, and no torment will ever touch them. / In the eyes of the foolish they seemed to have died, and their departure was thought to be a disaster, and their going from us to be their destruction; but they are at peace."[61] The text goes on to say "their hope is full of immortality" (3:4), "they will receive great good" (3:5), and "they will govern nations

58. F. Gerald Downing, "The Resurrection of the Dead: Jesus and Philo", *Journal for the Study of the New Testament* 15 (1982), 44, https://doi.org/10.1177/0142064X8200501504.

59. Philo, *De Abrahamo* X–XI. Quoted in Downing, "The Resurrection of the Dead", 48; John Nolland, *Luke 18:35–24:53*, Waco, TX 1993, 966.

60. Nolland, *Luke 18:35–24:53*, 967.

61. The Wisdom of Solomon was probably written "sometime between 100 BC and AD 50" according to Peter Enns, "Wisdom of Solomon", in Tremper Longman III & Peter Enns (eds.), *Dictionary of the Old Testament: Wisdom, Poetry and Writings. A Compendium of Contemporary Biblical Scholarship*, Downers Grove, IL 2008, 885.

and rule over peoples" (3:8), showing that the author imagined the righteous would be more than just a memory for God. In short, while the Hebrew Bible does not say much about eternal life, the notion that the lives of the righteous would continue even after they died was not foreign to Jews of Jesus' time. The same belief is also reflected in Paul's earliest letter, 1 Thess 5:9–10: "For God has destined us not for wrath but for obtaining salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ, who died for us, so that whether we are awake or asleep we may live with him."[62]

To return to the raising of Jairus's daughter: Mark and Luke underscore the fact that although the girl had died, Jesus could still help her. I argue that these evangelists are making the point that followers of Jesus may pray to him on behalf of other people, even on behalf of people who have died, and may trust that such prayers can make a difference. Again, in the story, we saw how those who did not know Jesus said there was no point in asking him to intervene on behalf of someone who had died, but Jesus urged Jairus to ignore their advice. Those who have died are from God's point of view asleep, and those who are asleep may be beneficiaries of intercessory prayer.[63]

The Raising of the Paralytic

I have suggested that the story of the raising of Jairus's daughter may encourage readers to pray to Jesus for the salvation of their dearly departed. Now I will look at the account of the raising of the paralytic in Capernaum. This passage is important for my case, as here Jesus not only heals a person, but he forgives him his sins at least in part in response to the faith of others. This text also relates to prayer for the dead even though, on a surface reading, no reference to the dead is made.

Funeral Imagery

Mark and Luke tell of some men carrying a paralyzed man on a pallet or bed (κράβαττος, Mark 2:4; κλίνη, Luke 5:18) who seek to come nearer to Jesus. These friends of the paralyzed man make a hole in the roof either by digging, as in Mark, or by removing roofing tiles, in Luke's account, in

62. Gordon D. Fee, *The First and Second Letters to the Thessalonians*, Grand Rapids, MI 2009, 198–199, rightly rejects the view that Paul would only be speaking about those who are literally asleep at the second coming.

63. Edwards, *The Gospel according to Mark*, 167: "The reference to sleeping may indicate to Jairus the way Jesus wants him to see the girl, and hence the way God would have us regard those who die in faith." I think Edwards is on the right track; this passage surely has implications for how Mark's readers are to regard those who have died. Jairus's daughter is not a good representative of one who dies in faith, however, for we know nothing of her faith, only the faith of her father.

order to be able to lower their friend in front of Jesus. Mark 2:3 specifies that four men were involved. I imagine that two men were placed on either side of his bed to lower him down. John P. Meier (1942–2022) suggests that they used ropes to lower the pallet down, which seems reasonable.[64] Many commentators have remarked at how odd the scene must have been.[65] It is indeed an odd scene, and yet at another level it is a familiar one. In a culture where cremation was not practiced,[66] most people can expect to one day be lying down, completely unable to move, and to be lowered down by a group of friends or relatives into a hole in the earth. In the accounts of the raising of the paralytic as told by Mark and Luke, it is difficult for me not to see symbolic references to a burial.

In Scripture, we read that people were buried in graves hewn out in hillsides, not in holes in the ground. For example, Sarah (Gen 23:19), Abraham (Gen 25:9–10), Isaac, Rebecka, Leah, and Jacob (Gen 49:29–33) were all buried in the family grave in the cave in the field of Machpelah in Hebron. In the New Testament, Lazarus and Jesus were likewise buried in caves (John 11:38), hillside graves, or graves "hewn out of the rock" (Mark 15:46; John 19:41).[67] But although we have more references in Scripture to tombs of this kind than we do to trench graves, and although archeologists appear to have studied more tombs of this kind, these tombs are not representative of the population as a whole. The use of hillside tombs was generally reserved for those who were wealthier. Jodi Magness writes regarding burial practices in first century Israel, that "the poorer classes were buried in simple individual trench graves dug in the ground".[68] Burials were normally carried out within a day of a person's death (see Deut 21:23).[69] People who died unexpectedly, and who had neither a suitable family grave nearby nor rich friends like Joseph of Arimathea who happened to be in possession of

64. John P. Meier, *A Marginal Jew: Rethinking the Historical Jesus, Volume II: Mentor, Message, and Miracles*, New York 1994, 679.

65. Collins, *Mark*, 184, refers to the "extraordinary means" taken by the group that carried the man. Meier, *A Marginal Jew*, 679, considers it a "peculiar story".

66. There is no clear ban on cremation in the Torah, but Tacitus (c. 56–c. 120) noted that Jews are accustomed to bury rather than to burn their dead (*Hist.* 5:5).

67. John's reference to a tomb "in which no one had ever been laid" (19:41) is also a reference to a tomb cut in a rock or hillside, not a trench grave. See also Luke 23:53.

68. Jodi Magness, "Ossuaries and the Burials of Jesus and James", *Journal of Biblical Literature* 124 (2005), 121, https://doi.org/10.2307/30040993. See also David W. Chapman, "Burial of Jesus", in Joel B. Green (ed.), *Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels*, 2nd ed., Downers Grove, IL 2013, 97–100, who refers on p. 98 to Amos Kloner & Boaz Zissu, *The Necropolis of Jerusalem in the Second Temple Period*, Leuven 2007, 95–99. The existence of trench graves is not mentioned by Byron R. McCane, "Burial Practices, Jewish", in Craig A. Evans & Stanley Porter (eds.), *Dictionary of New Testament Background*, Downers Grove, IL 2000, 173–175.

69. McCane, "Burial Practices", 174: "Jews of the NT period buried their dead promptly, as soon as possible after death and almost always on the same day."

a cave grave with space available (Mark 15:43), would probably have been buried in trench graves. For a first century Hellenistic Jewish reader, the description of an immobile person being lowered down by friends in a hole would have called to mind a burial.[70]

Mark 2:4 refers to the friends digging (ἐξορύξαντες) through the roof. This might sound like an exceedingly strange thing to do, but interpreters note that roofs were often made of mud and thatch, which is something that one could dig through.[71] While the verb ἐξορύσσω here is appropriate for describing the kind of action needed to break through the roof of a first-century Palestinian building, it is hard not to see funeral symbolism as well. The non-prefixed verb ὀρύσσω can be used of digging a hole in the ground, thus in Matt 25:18, Mark 12:1, and Jer 2:13 in the Septuagint.[72] The verb (both with and without the prefix) could surely also be used in reference to digging a trench grave.[73] Luke 5:19 modifies the text saying that the men let their friend down through the tiles. Some of the funeral imagery is thereby lost to the modern reader.[74] Luke may have modified the text to make the situation more understandable to readers acquainted with Hellenistic roofing styles,[75] but it also reflects Hellenistic and Roman burial practices where tiles (in some cases used roof tiles) were used to cover graves.[76]

70. Some tombs in Israel had vertical rather than horizontal shafts. J. Ramsey Michaels, *The Gospel of John*, Grand Rapids, MI 2010, 641. The imagery would suit such tombs as well. There is a depiction of two men lowering a coffin into a grave on the Loutrophoros amphora from c. 500 BCE. Robert Garland, *The Greek Way of Death*, 2nd ed., Ithaca, NY 2001, 36; Wendy Closterman, "The Sappho Painter's Loutrophoros Amphora (Athens, NM 450) and Athenian Burial Ritual", *The Classical Bulletin* 83 (2007) 49–64.

71. Meier, *A Marginal Jew*, 680. Nolland, *Luke 1–9:20*, 234, argues that Josephus (*Ant.* 14:459) similarly speaks of digging through a dried mud roof. This is not a perfect parallel, however. While the unprefixed verb σκάπτω means to dig, the prefixed verb ἀνασκάπτω that Josephus uses in this context can be translated to dig up, raze, or destroy, depending on the context. Danker, *A Greek-English Lexicon*, 71. Ralph Marcus and Allen Wikgren translate the passage in question as "pulling down the roofs of the houses". Josephus, *Jewish Antiquities*, vol. 6, Cambridge, MA 1943, 241.

72. Danker, *A Greek-English Lexicon*, 725.

73. See Herodotus, *Histories* 1.68.3–6. Herodotus (c. 484–c. 425 BCE) tells of a man digging a well (the verb ὀρύσσω is used in 1.68.3) and coming upon a coffin. He later digs up the grave (the prefixed verb ἀνορύσσω is used in 1.68.6).

74. Commenting on this passage, Bonaventure, *Commentary on the Gospel of Luke: 1. Chapters 1–8*, St. Bonaventure, NY 2001, 426, misses the funeral symbolism and instead sees it as a picture of baptism, where the friends of the paralytic represent godparents bearing an infant to baptism. This interpretation may be coloured by the Roman Catholic conviction that the sacrament of baptism may take away a person's sins, in contrast to the funeral service, which is not a sacrament.

75. Fitzmyer, *The Gospel according to Luke I–IX*, 582.

76. J.M.C. Toynbee, *Death and Burial in the Roman World*, London 1971, 101–102; Elizabeth G. Pemberton, "The Hellenistic Graves in Ancient Corinth", *Hesperia* 54 (1985), 272–273; Alexander Minchev, "Funerary Practices and Grave Types of 2nd–3d C. AD in the Roman Cemeteries of Marcianopolis (Devnya, Bulgaria)", *Acta Terrae Septemcastrensis* 6

When Matt 9:2–8 retells the story there is no reference to the paralytic being lowered through the roof at all and the funeral symbolism is thereby lost.

The paralyzed man lies on a κράβαττος according to Mark, and according to Luke he lies on a κλίνη (5:18) or κλινίδιον (5:19, 24), using the diminutive form of the same noun. Is there any reason why Luke may have replaced κράβαττος with κλίνη? Translations differ in how they render both terms. κράβαττος in Mark 2:4 is variously translated "mat" (NIV, NRSV), "pallet" (NASB), and "stretcher" (NET), while κλίνη in Luke 5:18 is translated as "mat" (NIV), "stretcher" (NASB, NET), and "bed" (NRSV). Since the context is the same, the translations are similar. Judging by the *Greek-English Lexicon*, both terms are used in a wide range of contexts, although it appears that a κράβαττος is generally lighter (Danker translates it "mattress, pallet"),[77] while a κλίνη is something more substantial (Danker translates it "bed, couch").[78] If this distinction is correct, it seems Mark's term fits the scenario better. Bovon suggests that Luke considered the term κράβαττος "vulgar" and therefore replaced it, but he admits that Luke uses the word in Acts (5:15; 9:33).[79] There may be other reasons why Luke replaced the word κράβαττος with κλίνη. It may be worth noting that the term κλίνη is used of the bier on which Abner/Abenner lay (2 Sam/2 Kgdms 3:31, LXX), and κλίνη was used in reference to a funeral bed in other Greek texts as well.[80] It is possible that Luke preferred this word to make the connection with a funeral clearer.[81]

The Faith of the Friends

The man who is healed is entirely passive. Mark writes: "When Jesus saw their faith, he said to the paralytic, 'Child, your sins are forgiven'" (2:5). Luke's account is quite similar: "When he saw their faith, he said, 'Man, your sins are forgiven you'" (5:20, RSV). From the context we understand that Jesus sees the faith of the man's friends. Does he also see the faith of the paralyzed man himself? Some commentators assume that this is the case.[82]

(2007), 63, 67.

77. Danker, *A Greek-English Lexicon*, 563. Compare John 5:8, where Jesus tells the invalid to take up his κράβαττος and walk.

78. Danker, *A Greek-English Lexicon*, 549.

79. Bovon, *Luke 1*, 179. Moloney, *The Gospel of Mark*, 61: "A κράβαττον [*sic*] is the pallet of the poor, while the rich lie on a κλίνη."

80. Garland, *The Greek Way of Death*, 24: "After the corpse had been bathed, it was clothed and laid out on a bed (*klinē*)."

81. The term σορός is used in Luke 7:14 in reference to the bier carrying the widow's son. This term, variously translated "tomb" or "bier", appears to only be used in reference to the dead and would not have fit the present context, where the paralytic is alive. See Danker, *A Greek-English Lexicon*, 934.

82. Green, *Gospel of Luke*, 240; John Christopher Thomas, *The Devil, Disease and*

But Brett Younger observes: "No one said a word about the faith of the paralyzed person. The man never said a thing, never confessed, never repented, never asked Jesus for forgiveness. All he did was lie there."[83] The paralyzed man is just as passive as Jairus's dead daughter. And yet not only is he healed, his sins are forgiven.[84] The paralyzed man is wholly dependent on others taking the initiative on his behalf. Jesus sees people's faith in him, but also their love and concern for the person they bring to him.[85] Writing about Mark's account of the raising of the paralytic, Younger writes: "The faith of the friends amazes Jesus. He identifies their kindness as faith."[86] The faith that heals and saves is the faith of those who motivated by their love for a person carry him to Jesus.

According to Ambrose of Milan (c. 339–397), Luke 5:20 supports the practice of intercessory prayer:

> Great is the Lord who, because of the merits of some, grants forgiveness to others. [...] Remember that, in the Lord's eyes, His servant is so highly esteemed that he is allowed to make intercession, and has the right to be heard. [...] If your sins are so terrible that you cannot hope for pardon, have recourse to intercessors; have recourse to the Church. She will pray for you, and the Lord, out of regard for her, will grant you the pardon that He might otherwise have refused.[87]

The step from here to intercession for the dead is not long, although Ambrose himself does not take it in this passage.

Forgiveness

When Jesus tells the paralyzed man that his sins are forgiven, the Nestle-Aland text of Mark 2:5 uses the present tense ἀφίενται,"they are [being]

Deliverance: Origins of Illness in New Testament Thought, Cleveland, TN 2010, 130. Bovon, *Luke 1*, 181: "Astonishingly, none of the evangelists states explicitly that this faith is also the faith of the paralyzed individual. This individual is logically included in the αὐτῶν ('their [faith]'), though none of the evangelists specifically mentions the individual's faith." The question of whose faith it was that Jesus saw is not addressed by Marshall, *The Gospel of Luke*.

83. Brett Younger, "An Example of the Narrative Bible Study Model Based on Mark 2:1–12", *Review and Expositor*, 107 (2010), 256, https://doi.org/10.1177/003463731010700212.

84. It may be worth noting that while Jesus addresses the paralytic as "child" (τέκνον) in Mark 2:5, he calls him "human" (or more idiomatically, "man"; ἄνθρωπε) in Luke 5:20. Perhaps the change is meant to underscore that Jesus has the authority to declare the sins of any and every person forgiven.

85. See also John 11:33–35.

86. Younger, "An Example of the Narrative Bible Study Model", 254.

87. Ambrose, *Commentary of Saint Ambrose on the Gospel according to Saint Luke*, Dublin 2001, 121.

forgiven", while Luke 5:20 has the perfect ἀφέωνται, "they have been forgiven". The difference is not that great; in fact, many ancient manuscripts including P[88], א, A, C, and D read ἀφέωνται in Mark 2:5.[88] The present tense form in Mark should be understood in an instantaneous sense (that is, "they are forgiven") rather than as a progressive present, "they are being forgiven".[89] Luke's perfect may also be translated with a present tense form in English, as in the KJV: "Man, thy sins are forgiven thee."[90]

Joel Green takes the passive verb ἀφέωνται as an example of a divine passive: "Jesus' pronouncement of forgiveness is cast in the perfect passive [...] first denoting that the man's sins had been forgiven *by God*, then asserting that Jesus is authorized by God to announce forgiveness on God's behalf."[91] But Green's view is unnecessarily complicated. ἀφέωνται does not have to be a divine passive. The scribes and Pharisees take offense because in their view God alone could forgive sins (Luke 5:21).[92] In other words, Jesus' immediate audience believed he had just claimed to have forgiven the man his sins. It appears that both Mark and Luke mean that it is when Jesus says that the man's sins are forgiven that they are forgiven.

Green notes that healing and forgiveness of sins are connected in other texts from this cultural milieu. Some of Jesus' Jewish contemporaries believed that people became ill and suffered other calamities because of their sins (John 9:2; see also John 5:14; Jas 5:16; Deut 28:15–68).[93] This is true, but we do not know whether the man's paralysis had been caused by sin, and we should not assume that this is why Mark and Luke mention that Jesus forgave the man his sins before healing him. Rather, their point is that the healing proved that Jesus, the Son of Man, had divine authority to forgive the man his sins (Mark 2:10; Luke 5:24).[94] (There is incidentally no reason

88. The United Bible Societies editorial committee believes that copyists have borrowed the form from Luke 5:20. Bruce M. Metzger (ed.), *A Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament*, 2nd ed., Stuttgart 1994, 66.

89. Wallace, *Greek Grammar*, 517–518; Bovon, *Luke 1*, 182.

90. Wallace, *Greek Grammar*, 575, notes that for all its faults, the KJV often renders the perfect more accurately than modern translations.

91. Green, *Gospel of Luke*, 241.

92. This might not be historically accurate, but I am not concerned with reconstructing the historical Jesus here. See Tobias Hägerland, "Prophetic Forgiveness in Josephus and Mark", *Svensk exegetisk årsbok* 79 (2014), 125–139; Bovon, *Luke 1*, 182.

93. Green, *Gospel of Luke*, 241, refers to 4QPrNab ar 1–3:1–4 (= 4Q242), a fragment of the Prayer of Nabonidus that tells of an exorcist forgiving Nabonidus his sin. Thomas R. Blanton IV, "Saved by Obedience: Matthew 1:21 in Light of Jesus' Teaching on the Torah", *Journal of Biblical Literature* 132 (2013), 404, https://doi.org/10.2307/23488019, argues that illness is consistently associated with sin in Matthew; his case hinges on too narrow an understanding of the verb σῴζω, however.

94. Painter, *Mark's Gospel*, 51: "the healing is evidence that demonstrates the reality of the words of forgiveness."

to believe that Jesus is using the expression "the Son of Man" to refer to humanity in general in this passage as it is related by Mark and Luke; the whole point is that Jesus worked a miracle, something no ordinary human could do.[95]) While some people believed that there was a connection between sin and illness, there is no suggestion that the friends had come with the expectation that Jesus would forgive their friend his sins; that idea was probably as foreign to them as it was to the scribes. But they did trust that Jesus could heal their friend from what ailed him, and that is the faith to which Jesus responded.

The book of Acts supports the view that one person's faith can help another person find eternal salvation. In Acts 16:15, 33, Luke tells of cases where a person was baptized together with their whole household. Although it is not specified, we may imagine that among those baptized were children whose parents made the decision that they should be baptized. Admittedly, Luke mentions that Paul and Silas spoke the word of the Lord to both the jailer and his whole household before they were baptized (Acts 16:32). It is theoretically possible that Luke meant that each member of the household decided on their own to be baptized, but I do not find that likely. The Mediterranean culture reflected in Acts was not especially individualistic.[96] Anthony Lane argues persuasively that it is likely that infant baptism was common in the apostolic church, even if it was not a rule.[97] If faith leading to baptism is salvific (as suggested in Acts 2:38), and if children were among those baptized in these two accounts in Acts, they would have been initially saved through the faith of their parents.

The imagery of the friends lowering the paralytic before Jesus, the passivity of the paralytic, and Jesus' words of forgiveness in response to the faith of the friends, taken together allow this story to be used to encourage Christians to pray to Jesus not only on behalf of loved ones who were hurt, sick, or physically ill, but also on behalf of those who have died, even where there is no hope of resuscitation.

The notion that prayers for the dead could be efficacious was not unknown to Jews in late second-temple Judaism. We have a classic example of this in 2 Macc 12:39–45, a text written approximately 100 BCE. Here, Judas

95. France, *The Gospel of Mark*, 128. One might be led to such an interpretation by Matt 9:8: "When the crowds saw it, they were filled with awe, and they glorified God, who had given such authority to human beings." Yet even there, this interpretation is unlikely. See the discussion in R.T. France, *The Gospel of Matthew*, Grand Rapids, MI 2007, 348.

96. Bruce J. Malina, "Collectivism in Mediterranean Culture", in Dietmar Neufeld & Richard E. DeMaris (eds.), *Understanding the Social World of the New Testament*, London 2010, 17–28, https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203865149.

97. Anthony N.S. Lane, "Did the Apostolic Church Baptise Babies? A Seismological Approach", *Tyndale Bulletin* 55 (2004), 109–130, https://doi.org/10.53751/001c.29167.

Maccabeus leads his men in intercessory prayer for fallen Jewish soldiers who he had discovered had broken the Law of Moses and he organizes a collection for a sin offering on their behalf. The text defends the conviction that the prayers of the living can persuade God to forgive the sins of the dead and let them partake in the rewards that will be given the righteous at the resurrection.[98]

Prayers of intercession for the dead are not that different from intercessory prayers asking God to forgive living people their sins. In Job 1:5, we read how the righteous Job made sacrifices in case any of his children had sinned. Job acted on the hope that his sacrifices would take away their sins. There is no suggestion that Job's children had asked for forgiveness themselves; if they were forgiven it is thanks to the prayers and sacrifices of their father.

Conclusion

I have argued that the accounts of the raising of Jairus's daughter and the healing of the paralytic in Capernaum in Mark and Luke may be interpreted as encouraging prayer for the dead. It appears that in Mark and Luke, the faith that leads to salvation is not necessarily always that of the individual who needs to be saved. The faith of those who intercede on a person's behalf may contribute to his salvation. Considering that Mark and Luke use the same terms (σῴζω, σωτηρία) to refer to eternal salvation and to the healing and forgiveness that Jesus gives in this world, and considering that death poses no barrier for Jesus, the view that these texts encourage prayer for the forgiveness of sins and eternal salvation of loved ones who have died is not unreasonable.

One might ask if Mark and Luke want to say that Jesus could forgive dead people their sins in response to intercessory prayers from their friends why they do not portray him saying just that. That is to misunderstand the nature of the Gospels. The Gospels are not self-sufficient texts in systematic theology, ethics, or church order. Instead of giving lectures on dogma, they use parables and other thought-provoking accounts, such as the reports of miracles studied here, which captivate their listeners' attention and encourage deeper reflection. ▲

98. Jeffrey A. Trumbower, *Rescue for the Dead: The Posthumous Salvation of Non-Christians in Early Christianity*, New York 2001, 27, https://doi.org/10.1093/0195140990.001.0001, points out that the interpretation of the sin offering given in 2 Macc 12:43b–45 probably does not match Judas's own intentions (which should be understood in light of Josh 7) but that of the first-century BCE author or editor of 2 Maccabees.

SUMMARY

This paper argues that two passages in Mark and Luke can be used to support intercession for the dead: the raising of Jairus's daughter (Mark 5:21–43; Luke 8:40–56) and the healing of the paralytic in Capernaum (Mark 2:1–12; Luke 5:17–26). In the first account, Jesus encourages Jairus not to give up on his request that Jesus save his daughter even though she has already died. In the second account, the healing of the paralytic, I argue that imagery reminiscent of a funeral is used that encourages the view that Jesus can save a person in response to the faith of those who care for him.