

## **17 - THE WIDOW'S SON**

### **Luke 7:11-17**

Could this story reassure Luke's audience that resurrection is possible after all? Or does it have some more current meaning: that Jesus is Lord and fully identified with God's saving purpose with power over lie and death? Could those who saw it happen, have regarded it as a case of both?

Several characteristics of Jesus' ministry are demonstrated in this story. He had compassion on a widow whose only support in a very unjust society had suddenly died leaving her destitute. His initial response was to utter some comforting words. Then he took some more creative action: he stepped forward, laid his hand on the coffin and commanded the deceased young man to rise.

Astonishing as it was, the miracle itself was almost an anti-climax. Instead Luke immediately focused attention on the crowd's reaction. That was somewhat mixed. At first fear gripped every one who saw what had happened. Then they praised God, for everyone knew that only God has power over life and death. Finally, they interpreted what they had witnessed in terms of their religious traditions.

This insight gave rise to two distinct expressions: They saw Jesus as a prophet in the mold of Elijah and Elisha. In fact, those two prophets of an earlier era had performed very similar miracles in healing young men. (Cf. 1 Kings 17:17-24; 2 Kings 4: 32-32). In the Elisha story, the Greek text of 1 Kings 17:23 is identical with Luke 7:15. Luke's purpose was to help his audience recognize Jesus as another step in God's revelation to Israel and beyond.

Another more subtle purpose is the way Luke placed this incident immediately after the healing of the

centurion's servant. A widow had the lowest status in Jewish society. The Roman centurion was a representative of the political power structure. Without a husband or son, the woman would have been seen as a danger to every other woman's security. Her only means of support was the compassion of a male relative or the price of her body as a prostitute.

Was Luke not saying to his audience, probably mostly Gentile, that God's concern was for all people of every class from the weakest to the most powerful? Thus with this miracle Jesus demonstrated God's concern for social justice for the weak as well as the strong, yet another prophetic allusion too.

Note also that this is the first time Luke used the word "Lord" in referring to Jesus. The word had occurred in the angel's announcement in the Nativity, but that section is believed to have been composed separately from the main gospel narrative. With the reference to Jesus as Lord, Luke identifies him with God as the only one who has authority over both life and death.

This is a story of family restoration. Nothing suggests that the young man would not die again at some future date. The miracle does not imply any gift of eternal life, nor of the family's spiritual condition.

A distinction is made between resuscitation and resurrection to eternal life. Ordinary life triumphs and a mother's grief is ended.