

## Prayer

Lord Jesus, Your ways are ways of peace; may we be agents of reconciliation and a driving force for harmony. Lord Jesus, Your ways are ways of love; may we be carers of others and people who practice forgiveness. Lord Jesus, Your ways are ways of truth; may we be men and women who value truth and guardians of what is right and true. We ask this in Your name, because You alone are peace, love, and truth. AMEN

## Prayer Suggestions

### Prayer ideas

*Write down a brief list of the things you will do in the coming day. As you look at the list, ask yourself whether these things are honouring to God. Prayerfully, ask the help of the Holy Spirit as you seek to honour God through all that you do*

### On-going prayers

- **Pray for the carers in your church:** *Pray for carers who are employed either by the state or by individuals. This can be hard and demanding work, so pray for true care to be shown to those who need it*
- *Continue to pray for the Middle East and the regional unrest caused by the situation in Egypt*
- *Give thanks to God for the faithful work of missionaries and aid workers throughout the world*

## Meditation

My soul cries out to the true and living God

Save me from sin; save me from all that it is  
And save me, even now, from all that it means.

Save me Lord God, from the simple human fact  
That I 'miss the mark' in the everyday things of life:

Save me, Lord Jesus, from rejecting what is right,  
And fostering rebellion against You in my heart:

Save me, I pray, from the bad and evil things  
I do, and I know it, but seem powerless to stop:

And save me, Holy Spirit, from the oppressions of guilt,  
Which press down on my spirit when I stop trusting You.

My soul cries out to the true and living God;  
Save me and heal me, and deliver me from sin.

Set me free to be me, and serve You guiltless, again

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## Bible passage - Luke 7:11-17

<sup>11</sup> Next, Jesus went to a town called Nain, and His disciples went with Him together with a large crowd. <sup>12</sup> As He came towards the town gate, a dead man was being carried out, the only son of his mother, who was a widow. She was accompanied by a large crowd from the town. <sup>13</sup> When the Lord saw her, He felt deeply for her and said to her,

'Do not weep.'

<sup>14</sup> Then He came forward and took hold of the coffin, and the bearers stood still. He said,

'Young man, I say to you, get up!'

<sup>15</sup> The dead man sat up and began to speak, and Jesus gave him to his mother. <sup>16</sup> All of them were filled with awe, and they gave glory to God, saying,

‘A great prophet has risen among us!’

and

‘God has helped His people!’

<sup>17</sup> This news about Jesus spread throughout Judea and the surrounding country.

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## Bible Study

### Review

This is a deeply moving passage of Scripture. At a purely human level, the story touches the heart in many ways. It describes a scene of tragedy, which is met by the love and passion of God found through Jesus Christ. Through His intervention, the bleak future of a widowed and childless woman in Israel is transformed. In addition, the disciples and the crowds see Jesus do the works of the Messiah by raising someone from the dead, and they respond with awe. Last and not least, a young man whose life has been cut short receives his life back again. All these things are wondrous in themselves, and a good preacher can make a great deal of them, but this story has even more to tell us about God and His work through the Messiah.

In the Gospels, stories of Jesus raising people from the dead are few and far between, but are highly significant. The most famous of these is the story of the raising of Jairus' daughter, which is found in three Gospels (Matt 9:18-26, Mark 5:35-43 and Luke 8:40-56). Apart from this, there are only two other such stories. The raising of Lazarus in John's Gospel (John 11), and the story of the raising of the widow of Nain's son here in Luke's Gospel.

Luke is the only Gospel writer who includes two stories of Jesus raising people from the dead. This one is unique, and it echoes the ministry of Elijah and Elisha. Elijah raised the son of the widow of Zarephath (1 Kings 17), and later, after Elijah died, Elisha raised the son of the Shunammite widow (2 Kings 4). Now if we look at all three stories of Elijah, Elisha, and Jesus, we will discover that they fit a pattern commonly true of the ministry of all three. The things Elijah did were done even more by Elisha, and the things Elisha did were done even more by Jesus. So when Elijah raised the son of the widow of Zarephath, it was a remarkable demonstration of God's power. When Elisha raised the Shunammite woman's son, however, this spoke prophetically of God's care for His people beyond death. Then, when Jesus raised the widow of Nain's son, He demonstrated God's great plan to overcome death through the work of the Messiah.

This is the ultimate truth of Jesus' ministry; He had power and authority over life and death because He was the Messiah. This may be seen partly through His work of healing and more so through His raising people from the dead, but it is shown supremely through His own resurrection. So, however much hope and joy we may have through reading about Jesus' healing ministry, we will be even more blessed by the stories of Jesus raising people from the dead, and the fact of His resurrection. The Messiah had come not just to offer help for this life, He had come to offer life eternal, and conquer the power of death for all. Through Him, God promises new life, and we see the beginning of this message in our passage today.

The details of the story are interesting. The town of Nain is in the hill country some way from Capernaum, a few miles from Shunem, the site of Elisha's famous miracle. When Jesus arrived there, He came across a funeral. He went straight to the heart of the proceedings and brought them to a halt, before simply commanding the dead man to get up (7:14)! If the man had not moved we might call Jesus audacious, but because he did, we should recognise Jesus' authority with awe, just as those who saw the incident (7:16).

Jesus was followed there by a large crowd because of His notoriety. His preaching, teaching and healing had made Him undeniably famous, at least amongst the Jewish people of that region. This, however, was something different, and by the time Jesus had raised the widow's son, Luke reports that '*news of Jesus spread throughout Judea and the surrounding country*' (7:17). Whatever the Pharisees thought of Jesus, they could not stop people being fascinated by Him. Some people thought that He was a great prophet, and there seems to have been a consensus that through Him, God was doing something powerful in the midst of His people (7:16).

### Going Deeper

The Bible study goes deeper to look at these issues:

- Why did Jesus choose to perform this miracle?

- The importance of Luke calling Jesus 'the Lord' (7:13)
- Prophecies fulfilled, and prophecy yet to be fulfilled

## Notes on the text and translation

### V11 'Next ...'

Other translations:

'Soon afterwards ...' (NIV)

'Now it happened, the day after ...' (NKJV)

Why should the NKJV have a reference to 'the day after', when others do not? Here, scholars have to make a difficult decision about which of the most ancient texts is the most accurate. Tiny variations between the lettering of Greek words hold the difference between 'soon afterwards ...', and 'on the next day ...', so with the ancient texts being unclear, most translators are cautious and use the more general expression 'soon afterwards ...'. However, the Greek word has the basic meaning of 'next', so I have chosen to go for this.

### V13 'He felt deeply for her'

Other translations:

'His heart went out to her' (NIV)

'He had compassion for her' (NRSV)

The Greek word at the centre of this sentence is 'splangnidzomai', which refers literally to feelings 'in the bowels'. It therefore means deep feelings of some kind, and every translator finds different ways of expressing this.

### V14 'He came forward and took hold of the coffin'

Other translations:

'Then He went up and touched the coffin' (NIV)

'Then He came forward and touched the bier' (NRSV)

It may seem as if the differences between the translations are mere words, and the gist of the sentence is clear without further discussion. However, it is not that simple. The Greek words indicate that Jesus did more than touch, He 'took hold of', or 'grasped' the coffin. Further, the word for 'coffin' refers most likely to something used to carry a body out in the open, for which there is not an equivalent word in English. All in all, the Greek gives a dramatic picture of Jesus taking control of the situation in stronger language than the English conveys.

### V16 'God has helped His people'

Other translations:

'God has come to help His people' (NIV)

'God has looked favourably on His people' (NRSV)

The Greek word 'episkepomai' simply means to visit, to care or to look out for someone, and here, it is in the past tense. It seems to me that any number of current English expressions will do well here; 'God has helped His people' seems to me to be the best.

## Going Deeper

### **Why did Jesus choose to perform this miracle?**

When we look at the wider importance of stories such as this as we have done so far, it can be easy to lose sight of some of the simple facts. While the events of Jesus' life were undoubtedly part of God's greater plan, Luke records quite simply that as Jesus went to Nain, He came across a funeral procession, and felt deeply for those involved. As I have indicated in the translation notes above, the word 'deeply' translates a Greek word that suggests that this was no casual emotion. Jesus was moved to pity by what he saw.

Throughout the Gospels this same Greek word is used in a number of places to describe Jesus' feelings for the people to whom He ministered. In Matthew's Gospel, we read that Jesus felt deeply for the crowds who followed Him (Matthew 9:36, 14:14), and He was also deeply moved by the plight of two blind men who accosted Him at the side of the road on His way to Jerusalem (Matthew 20:34). Luke shows this depth of emotion only here, except that Jesus describes the father of the prodigal son as having this same feeling upon seeing his son return home.

So the truth is this, whatever internal purposes lay behind Jesus' deeds that day, Jesus acted to raise the son of the widow at Nain because He felt their plight deeply. Jesus would have known, as everyone did in those days, that a widow with no husband and no son to provide for her was the most exposed person in Jewish society. Now, Jesus had just taught powerfully, to say that faith in God required good deeds of the believer. It could well be that by raising the dead, Jesus was giving a good example of His own teaching. He observed desperate human need that was not handled well in His day, and He acted immediately to meet it.

Sometimes, as in this story of the raising of the dead, a miracle may happen for two reasons. Firstly because there is an observed need to be met, and secondly, because the miracle will make plain a deeper truth. Out of human tragedy, God can make His purposes known, bringing peace and hope to men and women on earth.

### ***The importance of Luke calling Jesus 'the Lord' (7:13)***

Most of the stories of Jesus take place against a background of people asking about whether they believed that He was the Messiah, and this is no exception here. Apart from it being a story about the raising of the dead, there is one other feature of this story that makes it stand out from nearly all others. It is something a reader might quickly pass over, but it is found in verse 13, where Luke says, *'when the Lord saw her'* (7:13).

Now we may be used to calling Jesus *'the Lord'*, and there are a number of places within the New Testament where its writers address Jesus in exactly this way, but there are few instances of this within the Gospels. Mostly, Luke uses the expression *'the Lord'*, to refer to Almighty God Himself; for example, where Jesus quotes the prophet Isaiah, saying, *'The spirit of the Lord is upon me ...'* (4:18). Here however, Luke is clearly speaking about Jesus personally when he says *'the Lord'*.

The most obvious conclusion we must draw is that Luke was calling Jesus *'God'*. There was no ambiguity in his mind, Jesus was the Messiah and when he wrote his gospel, he wrote to people who would have spoken about Jesus in exactly the same way. Even though it has become normal for Christians to refer to Jesus like this, we should not forget the importance of this word. The expression *'the Lord'*, was not a term of respect, as is spoken to some earthly master or superior. It was specifically used of God. Jewish people and ancient Israelites used it to refer to Almighty God, but out of respect, they never spoke God's real written name. The full name of God is spelt *'JHWH'*, but the word was never pronounced it was only ever replaced, according to tradition, by the Hebrew word *'adonai'* meaning *'the Lord'*.

It is worth noting that Matthew and Mark never speak of Jesus as *'the Lord'*. John says this occasionally, for example, *'after the Lord had given thanks ...'* (John 6:23), and *'I have seen the Lord ...'* (John 20:18), which is Mary's famous cry upon seeing the risen Christ.

When reporting the raising of the widow of Nain's son, Luke may have been particularly sensitive to the Lordship of Christ, because its subject was the raising of the dead. What greater demonstration could Jesus give of His divine power and authority than to raise from the dead.

### ***Prophecies fulfilled, and prophecy yet to be fulfilled***

When the people at Nain saw what Jesus had done, their first cry was, *'a great prophet has risen among us!'* (7:16). It is very likely that they let out this cry because they saw the connection between what Jesus had done and what Elijah and Elisha has done. Elisha had raised the Shunammite woman's son not far from where they lived, and this may well have been part of their folklore.

The next comment reported by Luke is this; he describes the people as saying, *'God has helped his people!'* (7:16). Of course this is something completely different and it represents an alternative conclusion about the work of Jesus, one that people had seen. Those who said this believed that Jesus was doing the works of God in their midst, and they suspected that He was not so much a prophet as the long awaited Messiah. Throughout His ministry, people seem to have swayed between describing Him as a prophet and as the servant of God. Indeed, when Jesus took His disciples to Caesarea Philippi, He asked them, *'who do people say that the Son of Man is?'* (Matthew 16:13, Mark 8:27). The reply He received reflected these two opinions, prophet or Messiah, and He asked Peter for clarification ...

In His own day, people questioned whether Jesus was a prophet, or God himself come to earth as the fulfilment of prophecy. To a certain extent, the same question is placed before people today. It is possible to read the stories of Jesus and conclude that He was a prophet, closely connected to God, and doing good things. However, the entire New Testament calls on us to accept that Jesus was more than this. He stands at the centre of history as the man who has overcome death, and who can therefore both raise people to life and promise eternal life to all who believe in Him.

## Application

Today, many people struggle with the idea of resurrection from the dead. The world in which we live is so materialistic that many people find it hard to imagine life beyond what they know. If they have a picture of heaven beyond this earth, then it may well contain beautiful hills, scenery and music, but perhaps not video games and mobile phones! In addition, the Christian doctrine of the resurrection from the dead is treated by many as no more than a doctrine to be discussed and debated. It is not surprising that some decide to try and continue the path of Christian discipleship while rejecting the idea that there is anything beyond this life, given the complexity of what the Bible is purported to say about it. Lastly, because most people today are reluctant to pry into the lives of others or challenge their beliefs, Christian churches often contain worshippers who do not necessarily believe that God has saved them and given them eternal life!

I point this out because God's people have a duty to propagate the Gospel as found in God's Word, and an important part of this Gospel is the news that Jesus has died to pave the way for us to be with the Father in heaven. The stories of Jesus raising people from the dead are important for preachers to preach upon and for Bible studies to read. Yes, these are stories of miracles and people can often doubt miracles. However, if the intelligent preacher or Bible study leader helps people to appreciate the greater significance of these miracles in the life and ministry of Jesus, then perhaps they will be challenged about their beliefs concerning what happens after death.

To this day, Jesus seeks to enter our lives especially at critical moments (in this story, during a funeral), and show us that He cares for us deeply. If we will let Him, He will perform miracles of grace for us. The best way to apply the teaching of this passage of Scripture may well be to expect Jesus to do this. He longs to come and bring us new life and new hope, both now and in the future.

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## Discipleship

### **Questions** (for use in groups)

1. How does this passage of Scripture make you feel? In your group, share your feelings about the raising of the widow of Nain's son, and how this applies to you and your life.
2. What does this story tell us about the work of Jesus, the Messiah?
3. In your experience, do all Christians you have met accept that God has power over death and that Jesus can raise people from the dead?

### **Personal comments by author**

*I would love to see someone raised from the dead, and there are times when I have prayed that Jesus would perform this very miracle; but I have not seen it. Yet I have faith that Jesus did these things and that He has conquered death on the Cross so that I may have eternal life. Some say that to hold such a position is ridiculous. I believe it is classical Christianity, and though I would be deeply grateful to God to see a miracle such as the raising of the dead myself, my faith in Him does not depend on it. It depends on Jesus, who was raised from the dead!*

### **Ideas for exploring discipleship**

- *Write down a few sentences or bullet points concerning your beliefs about the afterlife, and how you will meet God. If you are uncertain about some things, do your best to check them up preferably with the Bible. Read back over the list from time to time, and as time goes by, see if you can firm up what you have written.*
- *Pray for all those who read the story of the raising of the widow of Nain's son with difficulty, because they have lost someone close, and wish that Jesus had been present to raise them up. Make sure that you have something kind and Godly to say to any such folk you meet.*

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## Final Prayer

Save us, good Lord, from being so wrapped up in our own circumstances that we are unable to see life from a broader perspective, or see beyond the present to the future You have for us. Come to us with Your power and break down our self-centredness, so that we may be free to see the great things You want to give us both in this life and beyond. AMEN

