

Topic 2: Miracle of reviving widow’s son (Luke 7:11-17)
Chong Ho Yu

Purpose of Miracle

The role the miracle plays in this story: Although Luke mentioned that Jesus’s heart went out to the widow, Luke didn’t emphasize their reaction after the miracle. Suffering, compassion, and gratefulness are not the major themes of this story. The thesis statement of this miracle is about the divine power of Jesus. It is manifested in Verse 16 and 17. The key phrase is “**God has visited his people.**” In the Synoptic the aim of Jesus’ miracles is to **proclaim the advent of the kingdom of God** (Blackburn, 1992).

Ancient Jewish culture

Widow: The bearing of children was viewed as a great honor and barrenness was regarded as a shame in Jewish culture (Douglas & Tasker, 1996). No doubt in this story the widow was in a very desperate situation. A widow can no longer give birth to another child. Luke said that the dead young man is the only son of the widow. Hence, losing the only son means losing almost everything to her. Specifically, the death of her only son would deprive her of the sole remaining male protector. In the Jewish society she might lose her economic viability (Carroll, 2012). Because men often neglect widows in the Old Testament era, God commended that caring for them is one of the manifestation of true piety (Pss. 68:5; 146:9; Pr. 15:25) (Douglas & Tasker, 1996). In this case Jesus set an example of genuine religiosity to His disciples and the crowd.

Great prophet: The basic elements of a prophet include declaring God’s word, having supernatural knowledge, and evidencing the power of God (Jn. 3:2; 4:19; Mt. 26:68; Lk. 7:39). This was commonly understood by Israelites based on the Old Testament (Baker, 1996). In the Old Testament there is a similar story: **Elijah** raised a widow’s dead son (1 Kings 17:17-24) and **Elisha** did the same to another woman’s dead son (2 Kings 4:32-37)(Carroll, 2012). Indeed the NT and the OT stories have a high degree of resemblance, as shown in the following table.

Luke 7:11-17 (NIV)	1 Kings 17:8-24 (NIV)
12 As he (Jesus) approached the town gate...	8 When he (Elijah) came to the town gate...
12 She was a widow	8 A widow was there.
12 A dead person was being carried out	17 He grew worse and worse, and finally stopped breathing
14 He (Jesus) said, “Young man, I say to you, get up!”	21 Then he (Elijah) stretched himself out on the boy three times and cried out to the Lord, “Lord my God, let this boy’s life return to him!”
15 Jesus gave him back to his mother.	23 Elijah picked up the child and carried him down from the room into the house. He gave him to his mother (In Greek Luke quotes the Septuagint of 1 Kings 17:23 verbatim).
16 They were all filled with awe and praised God. “A great prophet has appeared among us,” they said. “God has come to help his people.”	24 Then the woman said to Elijah, “Now I know that you are a man of God and that the word of the Lord from your mouth is the truth.”

In Luke the crowd shouted that a great prophet had appeared among them because they saw the evidence of the divine power in Jesus, especially the parallel between Jesus and the two OT prophets, namely, Elijah and Elisha.

Visited: "God has visited his people!" (Luke 7:16) Visiting by God is not new to the Jewish people. In **Zechariah** the prophet announced that when God visits the house of Judah, He would rescue his people out of the hands of the empires that were threatening them (Carroll, 2012). It is probable that when the crowd shouted that God had visited his people, what they had in mind was the announcement of Zechariah.

Immediate context

In Luke 17 there are two miracles. One is the story of hearing the Centurion’s servant and the other is the story of reviving the widow’s son. The two stories are similar, yet there are many subtle differences between them:

Luke 17:1-10	Luke 17:11-17
The centurion was a gentile	It is likely that the widow was a Jewish woman because of the burial custom.
The servant was sick only.	The young man was dead.
The centurion had a high status in the Roman Empire and made significant contributions to the Jewish people by building the synagogue.	The widow was powerless and she was going to lose her only son.
The Centurion sent his elders to Jesus	The widow approached Jesus.
Jesus performed his miracle in a distance.	Jesus revived the dead man by both touching and saying.
There was no concluding remark about the miracle.	Luke wrote: They were all filled with awe and praised God. "A great prophet has appeared among us," they said. "God has come to help his people." This news about Jesus spread throughout Judea and the surrounding country.

By seeing the difference between the immediate context and the story of the widow, the reader can see that God’s mercy extends to **both Gentiles and Jews**, as well as **both the powerful and the powerless**. Further, sometimes gentiles might have more faith than Jews. Also, 7:18-23 reinforces the Christological emphasis and mentions **resurrection**.

Bibliography

Baker, J. P., "Prophecy in the New Testament later ages." In *New Bible Dictionary* (3rd ed.). Eds. D. R. W. Wood, I. H. Marshall, A. R. Millard, J. I. Packer, and D. J. Wiseman, 973. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1996.

Blackburn, B. L., "Miracles and Miracle Stories." In *Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels*. Eds. J. B. Green and S. McKnight, 550. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1992.

Carroll, John T. *Luke: A Commentary*. New Testament Library. Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2012.

Douglas, J. D., & Tasker, R. V. G. "Widow." In *New Bible Dictionary* (3rd ed.). Eds. D. R. W. Wood, I. H. Marshall, A. R. Millard, J. I. Packer, and D. J. Wiseman, 1239. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1996.