

Monday, January 30 – Read Luke 7:11-15. The widow’s situation was serious. She had lost her husband, and here her only son was dead – her last means of support. The crowd of mourners would go home, and she would be left penniless and alone. The widow was probably past the age of childbearing and would not marry again. Unless a relative came to her aid, her future was bleak. She would be an easy prey for swindlers, and she would likely be reduced to begging for food. In fact, as Luke repeatedly emphasizes, this woman was just the kind of person Jesus had come to help – and help her he did. Jesus has the power to bring hope out of tragedy.

Tuesday, January 31 – Read Luke 7:11-17. This story illustrates salvation. The whole world was dead in sin (Ephesians 2:1), just as the widow’s son was dead. Being dead, we could do nothing to help ourselves – we couldn’t even ask for help. But God had compassion on us, and he sent Jesus to raise us to life with him (Ephesians 2:4-7). The dead man did not earn his second chance at life, and we cannot earn our new life in Christ. But we can accept God’s gift of life, praise God for it, and use our lives to do his will. Honoring the dead was important in Jewish tradition. A funeral procession – the relatives of the dead person following the body that was wrapped and carried on a kind of stretcher – would make its way through town, and bystanders would be expected to join in the procession. In addition, hired mourners would cry aloud and draw attention to the procession. The family’s mourning would continue for 30 days.

Wednesday, February 1 – Read Ephesians 2:1-3. “The ruler of the kingdom of the air” was understood by Paul’s readers to mean Satan. They believed that Satan and the evil spiritual forces inhabited the region between earth and sky. Satan is thus pictured as ruling an evil spiritual kingdom – the demons and those who are against Christ. Satan means “the accuser.” He is also called the devil (Ephesians 4:27). In the resurrection, Christ was victorious over Satan and his power. Therefore, Jesus Christ is the permanent ruler of the whole world; Satan is only the temporary ruler of the part of the world that chooses to follow him. The fact that all people, without exception, commit sin proves that without Christ we have a sinful nature. We are lost in sin and cannot save ourselves. Does this mean that only Christians do good? Of course not – many people do good to others. On a relative scale, many are moral, kind and law-abiding. Comparing these people to criminals, we would say that they are very good indeed. But on God’s absolute scale, no one is good enough to earn salvation. Only through being united with Christ’s perfect life can we become good in God’s sight. “Objects of wrath” refers to those who are to receive God’s wrath because of their rejection of Christ.

Thursday, February 2 – Read Ephesians 2:4-5. In the previous verses Paul wrote about our old sinful nature. Here Paul emphasizes that we do not need to live any longer under sin’s power. The penalty of sin and its power over us were miraculously destroyed by Christ on the cross. Through faith in Christ we stand acquitted, or not guilty, before God (Romans 3:21-22). God does not take us out of the world or make us robots – we will still feel like sinning and sometimes we will sin. The difference is that before we became Christians, we were dead in sin and were slaves to our sinful nature. But now we are alive with Christ (Galatians 2:20).

Friday, February 3 – Read Ephesians 2:8-10. When someone gives you a gift, do you say, “That’s very nice – now how much do I owe you?” No, the appropriate response to a gift is “Thank you.” Yet how often Christians, even after they have been given the gift of salvation, feel obligated to try to work their way to God. Because our salvation and even our faith are gifts, we should respond with gratitude, praise and joy. We become Christians through God’s unmerited grace, not as the result of any effort, ability, intelligent choice, or act of service on our part. However, out of gratitude for this free gift, we will seek to help and serve others with kindness, love and gentleness, and not merely to please ourselves. While no action or work we do can help us obtain salvation, God’s intention is that our salvation will result in acts of service. We are not saved merely for our own benefit but to serve Christ and build up the church (Ephesians 4:12).