72221 - Is Al-Fatihah Part of the Funeral Prayer?

the question

What is the status/class of Hadith: Nafi` reported that Abdullah Ibn Umar did not use to recite (Fatihah) over the dead person. (Muwatta Imam Malik)?

Summary of answer

Al-Fatihah is a pillar or essential part of the funeral prayer because the Prophet said: “There is no prayer for the one who does not recite the Opening of the Book,” and the funeral prayer is a prayer.

Detailed answer

Praise be to Allah.

This report is of the highest degree of soundness. Imam Malik narrated it in Al-Muwatta’ (535) from Nafi` from Ibn `Umar, and this is what some of the scholars called As-silsilah Al-dhahabiyyah (the golden chain), which is the soundest, or one of the soundest, of Isnads (chains of narration).

The wording is: It was narrated from Nafi` (may Allah have mercy on him) that `Abdullah ibn `Umar (may Allah be pleased with him) did not recite in the funeral prayer .

The meaning of the phrase “did not recite” is that he did not recite the Opening of the Book (Al-Fatihah) or anything else. This is one of the well-known topics of dispute among the scholars. Some of them are of the view that it is a pillar or essential part of the funeral prayer , and others are of the view that it is not a pillar or even recommended. Others adopt a middle view and say that it is recommended but not obligatory.

This is the view favoured by Shaykh Al-Islam Ibn Taymiyah (may Allah have mercy on him) who said:

“The scholars differed concerning recitation of the Quran in the funeral prayer . There are three views.

1. It was said that it is not recommended under any circumstances, as is the view of Abu Hanifah and Malik.
2. And it was that it is obligatory to recite Al-Fatihah , as is the view of some of the companions of Al-Shafi`i and Ahmad.
3. And it was said that reciting Al-Fatihah in the funeral prayer is Sunnah, but not reciting it and saying Du`a’ without reciting is permissible. This is the correct view.” (Al-Fatawa Al-Kubra, 2/121)

It seems – and true knowledge belongs to Allah – that reciting Al-Fatihah is a pillar or essential part of the funeral prayer. This comes under the general meaning of the words of the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him): “There is no prayer for the one who does not recite the Opening of the Book .” Narrated by Al-Bukhari, 714; Muslim, 595). Perhaps because Ibn `Umar (may Allah be pleased with him) held this view, Ibn `Abbas (may Allah be pleased with him) used to recite it out loud sometimes, although the Sunnah is to recite it quietly, in order to demonstrate that it should be recited in the funeral prayer. He was asked about that and he said: “So that you will know that it is Sunnah.” (Narrated by Al-Bukhari, 1249)

His saying that it is Sunnah does not mean that it is recommended, rather what he means is that it was the way of the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him), i.e., the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) used to recite it.

Shaykh Ibn ‘Uthaymin (may Allah have mercy on him) said:

“Al-Fatihah is a pillar or essential part of the funeral prayer, because the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) said: “There is no prayer for the one who does not recite the Opening of the Book,” and the funeral prayer is a prayer, because Allah says (interpretation of the meaning): “And never (O Muhammad) pray (funeral prayer) for any of them (hypocrites) who dies” [At-Tawbah 9:84]. So Allah calls it a prayer. And Ibn `Abbas (may Allah be pleased with him)

recited Al-Fatihah in the funeral prayer, and said: “So that you will know that it is Sunnah.” (Ash-Sharh Al-Mumti’, 5/401)

Shaykh `Abd Al-`Aziz ibn Baz (may Allah have mercy on him) was asked:

What is the ruling on reciting Al-Fatihah in the funeral prayer ?

He replied:

It is obligatory, as the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) said: “Pray as you have seen me praying.” And he (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) said: “There is no prayer for the one who does not recite the Opening of the Book.” (Al-Bukhari and Muslim)

(Majmu` Fatawa Al-Shaykh Ibn Baz, 13/143)

And Allah knows best.