

## Isolation

Many times, when we look at Scripture, we often take it out of context. We look at a few verses that relate a story; or as in today's Gospel reading, Jesus tells us a parable. However, when the authors of the Gospels were writing their accounts, we need to remember that the accounts did not have chapter and verse designations. Therefore, where we have 'breaks' in the text because of the chapter designation, the author may not have intended to be a break at all. The author may have included the particular stories and its sequence to make a particular point about Jesus and His teachings. That is why it is important that when we study the Gospels, we do not look at the passage as an isolated text, but as a part of whole story. We can even expand that further and look to see how it fits in with the rest of the whole of the Biblical story. By doing so, we may get a clearer picture of what the text means. While we can isolate a text and look at it as a stand-alone text, by considering the unit in which it is included may help us in understanding the text better.

This parable of the rich man and Lazarus is part of the unit that begins in chapter 15 and continues through this chapter 16 of Luke's Gospel account. The parables of the lost sheep, lost coin, lost son, the dishonest manager & this one of the rich man & Lazarus, could be seen to be having a similar theme to them, or at least a movement in themes of being lost and found, God's role in that finding, our role in the finding as we go from the first parable to this last one. This flow of themes culminates with the emphasis that although people may be at the fringes of society and not noticed by others, God still notices them and knows their name.

We see in other instances in the Bible where it is God who notices those whom society seems to have pushed to the side. Several times in the Old Testament Scriptures there is the reminder to people to take care of the widow, the orphan and the alien who lives among God's people. In the Beatitudes in

Matthew's Gospel account, it is God who notices those who are poor in spirit, who thirst for righteousness, who are meek, who are the peacemakers, who seek justice and blesses them.

In the parable, Lazarus was someone who was dumped off at the gate of the rich man, hoping that he would be able to get even some crumbs from the table of the rich man. It wouldn't necessarily be the literal crumbs from the table, but more likely the garbage as it was being taken away from the rich man's house. Regardless of how many times a day that the rich man went through the gate to his house, he did not notice Lazarus. Lazarus was probably not noticed by the people who went by the rich man's house. The rich man only noticed Lazarus when Lazarus could be of use to him; where he hoped to have his tongue cooled while being tormented in hell after he died.

Today, who would be considered, 'Lazarus' in our time? Who among us are the unnoticed? Who has been 'dumped off' somewhere? We hear stories of people going hungry not only around the world, but also even in our cities and towns; where food is sometimes withheld for political reasons. When we hear of stories of domestic abuse that are ignored or downplayed. There are stories where the basic needs of people are not met because others believe they should be able to take care of themselves. We hear stories of mental health issues that are downplayed or ignored. Whenever someone or a group of people is just forgotten, ignored or taken advantage of becomes the 'Lazarus' of today.

But there is another group who could be 'Lazarus' today. Consider this:

In a nice city church as the service was about to begin, a man wearing a large hat sat in the front pew. An usher leaned in discreetly asking him to remove his hat. "No!" The Head Usher asked. "No!" The president of the women's society asked. "No!" As the service was to begin, the congregational president tiptoed forward trying to seize the hat, but he

missed. The man stood with the opening hymn, took off his hat and never put it back on. At the conclusion of the service, the four frustrated people approached him. "Sir, about the hat: in this church, men do not wear hats at worship." The man replied: "I understand. I have been a member of this denomination all my life and a member here for five years, never meeting anyone. Today, I met an usher, head usher, women's president and congregational president."

So you see, most anyone can be a 'Lazarus'. People who we might encounter but not really see could include custodians who keep the stores, schools and churches clean, people who clean up messy plates from the tables in restaurants, as well as others who are in low paying jobs but are essential to society.

However, when we isolate this parable of Lazarus and the rich man from the rest of the text, we miss the main point that Jesus is trying to make with the Pharisees. We see this same point being made by Jesus in the verses just prior to this parable as well as in the last few verses of this text. In these verses, Jesus is showing the need for both the law and the Gospel. There should not be an overemphasis on one over the other, but a proper balance between the two. In the prior verses, Jesus hints that He did not come to replace the law, and that the law will not pass away. Which, as an aside, hints at the eternalness of God since the law is basically the word of God. By having a proper balance between the law and Gospel, we can have a completeness in life.

This balance of law and Gospel shows the balance between our relationship with God and our relationship with others. The law, which in its basic form are the two tablets of the Ten Commandments, shows our relationship with God and each other. In the Gospel, God restores the relationship with humanity through the sacrifice of Jesus, thus allowing us to not only have a right relationship with God but also with our neighbors, a relationship that is guided by the law of the Ten

Commandments. It may sound circular, but it actually is a spiral where each enhances the other, increasing our faith and trust in God and guiding how we are to continually improve our relationships with others.

This parable of Jesus is a good example of what can happen when we isolate a passage from the Bible. While there are lessons that can be learned from this, we may tend to miss the more important points made when we consider the context of the passage and the overarching storyline of the Bible, the story of God's interaction with God's creation. While we may be inclined to treat passages as stand-alone texts, we get a clearer picture of God and of God's love for us when we consider the surrounding text of a particular passage, keeping in mind God's ultimate goal of giving eternal life to all who believe in God through Jesus Christ. This text reminds us that neither our relationship with God nor our relationships with others are isolated from each other, but are intertwined through the love of God for us.

YouTube links:

Gospel and Sermon: <https://youtu.be/EBzGovosYrs>

Service: [https://youtu.be/tsMfP1jR\\_Zg](https://youtu.be/tsMfP1jR_Zg)