

What Really Matters

Acts 15:1–21

Each day, it's important to take your bearings. Where are you today? In the Easter season, in the scriptures, in your daily life, in your very self? Spend a few minutes getting your bearings for the day.

Let's briefly examine where we are in the Book of Acts and then begin our day with a prayer for deliverance—for ourselves, our fraternity brothers, and all Exodus Men.

You are setting out on mission. We have been watching the growth of the early community. Now a pivotal moment has come of being sent out to the Gentiles to witness to Christ the Lord.

Pray that the Lord grants deliverance to you, your family, and your fraternity.

Pray for freedom for all men in Exodus, just as they are praying for you.

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Come, Holy Spirit, fill the hearts of your faithful and kindle in them the fire of your love. Send forth your Spirit and they shall be created, and you shall renew the face of the earth. O God, who have taught the hearts of the faithful by the light of the Holy Spirit, grant that in the same Spirit we may be truly wise and ever rejoice in his consolation. Through Christ our Lord. Amen.

A Reading from the Book of Acts

But some men came down from Judea and were teaching the brethren, "Unless you are circumcised according to the custom of Moses, you cannot be saved." And when Paul and Barnabas had no small dissension and debate with them, Paul and Barnabas and some of the others were appointed to go up to Jerusalem to the apostles and the elders about this question. So, being sent on their way by the Church, they passed through both Phoenicia and Samaria, reporting the conversion of the Gentiles, and they gave great joy to all the brethren. When they came to Jerusalem, they were welcomed by the Church and the apostles and the elders, and they declared all that God had done with them. But some believers who belonged to the party of the Pharisees rose up, and said, "It is necessary to circumcise them, and to charge them to keep the law of Moses."

The apostles and the elders were gathered together to consider this matter. And after there had been much debate, Peter rose and said to them, "Brethren, you know that in the early days God made choice among you, that by my mouth the Gentiles should hear the word of the gospel and believe. And God who knows the heart bore witness to them, giving them the Holy Spirit just as he did to us; and he made no distinction between us and them, but cleansed their hearts by faith. Now therefore why do you make trial of God by putting a yoke upon the neck of the disciples which neither our fathers nor we have been able to bear? But we believe that we shall be

saved through the grace of the Lord Jesus, just as they will.”

And all the assembly kept silence; and they listened to Barnabas and Paul as they related what signs and wonders God had done through them among the Gentiles. After they finished speaking, James replied, “Brethren, listen to me. Symeon has related how God first visited the Gentiles, to take out of them a people for his name. And with this the words of the prophets agree, as it is written, ‘After this I will return, and I will rebuild the dwelling of David, which has fallen; I will rebuild its ruins, and I will set it up, that the rest of men may seek the Lord, and all the Gentiles who are called by my name, says the Lord, who has made these things known from of old.’ Therefore my judgment is that we should not trouble those of the Gentiles who turn to God, but should write to them to abstain from the pollutions of idols and from unchastity and from what is strangled and from blood. For from early generations Moses has had in every city those who preach him, for he is read every sabbath in the synagogues.”

Reflection

There are things that really matter and other things that do not. We sometimes mix them up. The apostles realized that following the dietary laws of Judaism and circumcision was not necessary for the Gentiles. They did not need to become Jews—enter into the old covenant—because Jesus offered them a new covenant in his blood. This new covenant freed both Jews and Gentiles from exterior burdens, although it did come with expectations.

Notice that James does not say that the Gentiles can live however they like. Even though they would not have to keep the Old Law in all its details, they did have to avoid blood—which would have scandalized Jewish Christians. It is not possible to live in covenantal communion with God while worshipping other gods. This would be contradictory and undermine belief and trust in the one, true God.

More importantly, they had to cease idolatry and sexual immorality. They also cannot live in ways that contradict the dignity of human life and sexuality, which God created for family life, not individual gratification. All Christians, those who came from Judaism or paganism, must respect the truth of God and humanity, made in the image and likeness of God.

We need to avoid two extremes in inviting others to faith. We cannot insist upon things that are not necessary, pushing people away over secondary matters. Conversely, we also have to avoid watering down faith and morality to make them void of the truth and genuine goodness. The Christian faith frees precisely because it brings people into a holy way of life in communion with the one God.

Reflect on the difference in your prayer, making sure you are rooted in what really matters.

Week 4 Action Items

Meditate on the Resurrection.

Get outside.
Continue to focus on Confession.