

**“Don’t Miss the Main Event”**  
**Spring Conference 2016**  
**Acts 15:1-20**

There is a story I love from long ago. It is about a little boy and his dad. The little boy hears the circus is coming and goes to his dad and says, ‘Dad, please, please give me a quarter so I can go to the circus.’ A quarter was a lot of money then and the dad didn’t have it to spare, but when he saw the excitement of his son, he dug into his overalls and pulled out a quarter.



The boy was so excited, hugged his dad and ran towards town. **Just as he reached town he saw the circus coming. He saw the flags and heard the trumpets.** He saw the elephants carrying the big tents and poles. Horses were pulling beautiful carriages. So much excitement! And then came the clowns – filled with joy, dancing, juggling. The boy was so amazed.

**One of the clowns stopped right in front of him,** danced a jig, smiled, juggled for a moment and the boy reached into his pocket **and gave the clown his quarter.** He was so happy and he ran home and said, ‘Daddy, I went to the circus. I saw the elephants and horses and the tents and the carriages and the clowns coming in. One of them danced right in front of me and made me smile and I gave him my quarter! I went to the circus. Thank you so much!’

His dad smiled and said, ‘Son, you didn’t go to the circus. You saw the parade coming that was getting ready for the circus.’ **You missed the main event.**

**In Acts 15 the Apostle Paul is on his first missionary journey and is headed for Jerusalem. He is sent there as a delegate to straighten out some important issues for the first century Church.** The good thing about this church is it is diverse – Jesus’ church has been diverse from day one. It is made up of people of different colors, nationalities, languages, traditions and beliefs. It is made up of Jews and non-Jews or Gentiles.

**There is a fierce debate that happens.** Many devout Jews criticize Paul because he says that the Gentiles must be circumcised to be part of the Church. In other words – first become Jewish and then become Christian.

**All the heavy weights are present.** Paul, Peter, even James the brother of Jesus show up and weigh in. Then there the devout Jews from Israel – we will hold on to Abraham and Moses – and they should. I can only imagine it got rather heated sometimes and those watching may have gotten tired of the drama and maybe even bored.

They demand these Gentiles be first circumcised. Then Peter stands up:

*"Brothers, you know that some time ago God made a choice among you that the Gentiles might hear from my lips the message of the gospel and believe. (8) God, who knows the heart, showed that he accepted them by giving the Holy Spirit to them, just as he did to us. (9) He did not discriminate between us and them, for he purified their hearts by faith. (10) Now then, why do you try to test God by putting on the necks of Gentiles a yoke that neither we nor our ancestors have been able to bear?"*

**The whole assembly became silent as they listened to Barnabas and Paul** telling about the signs and wonders God had done among the Gentiles through them. **(13) When they finished, James spoke up.** *"Brothers," he said, "listen to me. (14) Simon has described to us how God first intervened to choose a people for his name from the Gentiles. (15) The words of the prophets are in agreement with this, as it is*

written: (16) *"After this I will return and rebuild David's fallen tent. Its ruins I will rebuild, and I will restore it, (17) that the rest of mankind may seek the Lord, even all the Gentiles who bear my name, says the Lord, who does these things"*

**In a few weeks we head to Lakeside.** We will be sure to hear much debate – human sexuality, abortion, the interpretation of Scripture, on and on... the **heavy weights** will be there.

Things are not a lot different than they were 2000 years ago. It is supposed to be holy conferencing, but I confess I often miss the holy in the conferencing. **Sometimes we get so caught up in all the debate and drama we miss the main event.**

**But here is what I think this story teaches us.** *Peter, Paul and James didn't miss the main event. They didn't get all caught up in the debate, the rhetoric, or the passionate argument because they never forget their purpose.*

**They never lost sight of Jesus and His mission to reach all people – not just those in the church but those outside the church.**

**So as you go to Annual Conference** don't just see the parade of people and information and the journal with 200,000 words in it coming in. Don't mistake the parade for the circus - **the main event.**

**His name is Jesus and He has a mission for us.** To move beyond our arguments, our divisiveness, beyond our preferences of sexual orientation or worship style, so that we can reach this world for Jesus Christ.

Don't give you quarter, or your time, or your energy to the parade. Give it all to Jesus. He is the main event – then, now, and for all time.