

Learn Who Matters to God

“I urge, then, first of all, that requests, prayers, intercessions and thanksgiving be made for everyone—for kings and all those in authority, that we may live peaceful and quiet lives in all godliness and holiness. This is good, and pleases God our Savior, who wants all men to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth. For there is one God and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, who gave himself as a ransom for all men—the testimony given in its proper time.” (1 Timothy 2:1-6)

When I first heard about the mission and goal of Ablaze— “to share the Good News of Jesus with 100 million unreached or uncommitted people by the 500th anniversary of the Reformation in 2017”—I laughed. My laughter was not necessarily one of joyous faith and thanks. It was more like that of Sarah and Abraham when they heard that they would have a baby: “Yeah, right.” I thought, “How crazy is this? This is just about numbers—another wild idea by people who sit in offices and have no grasp on reality.”

But the vision would not let me go. The question that kept surfacing was, “Can we do any less?” This was especially brought home to me when I read these words:

“I urge, then, first of all, that requests, prayers, intercessions and thanksgiving be made for everyone . . . This is good, and pleases God our Savior, who wants all men to be saved . . . For there is one God and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, who gave himself as a ransom for all men . . .”
(1 Timothy 2:1-6).

Do you hear the reoccurring theme as to who matters to God? Everyone! Christ gave Himself as a ransom for all men—not just *some* or *most*—but *all* men.

I have heard it said that numbers are not important when it comes to matters of faith. Don’t tell that to God. A book of the Bible is

named “Numbers.” If you read the book of Acts, you will very quickly get the impression that numbers do matter to God and to the early Christian Church—twelve, to begin with, and then one hundred twenty. Soon there were three thousand added to their number. But who’s counting? God apparently was. Why? Because numbers matter to God.

Remember what Jesus said about the shepherd: One, two, three, fifty-six, fifty-seven, eighty-nine, ninety-one, ninety-nine—where is number one hundred? The shepherd went out looking for the one. Why? Because numbers mattered to the shepherd.

Remember the woman with the ten precious coins? One, two, three, four, five, six, seven, eight, nine—where is the tenth coin? She turns the entire house upside down in search of it—and when it is found, there is partying and celebrating among her friends. Why? Because numbers mattered to the woman.

Picture it this way if you will: A family of six goes to the zoo. After a very nice day, they head home. Only when they get home do they realize that one of their four children is not with them, apparently left behind and lost. Can you imagine the wife saying to her husband, “I am so glad that we have the three children we do. After all, it is quality that counts and not numbers”? Ridiculous to even consider. Those parents would waste no time in going back to find that child. In fact, they would never

have been placed in this situation in the first place, because they would have been keeping count. Why? Because numbers matter to those parents.

Who matters to God? Everyone! God wants all to be saved! Not most. Not a majority. He wants all to be saved. So, He keeps count. Like the woman with the coins and the shepherd with the sheep, numbers matter to God. Not numbers in themselves, but *who* those numbers represent. Each number represents a soul for whom Jesus gave His life as a ransom. He paid the debt that each of us owed to God on account of our disobedience. His final words, “It is finished,” literally mean “paid in full.”

Numbers matter to God because each and everyone of them is someone for whom

blood was shed. Jesus tells us that the angels celebrate and party in heaven when just one person repents and comes home to God. Why? Because numbers matter to God. He is keeping count.

Prayer: Jesus, you are my ransom. You are my mediator. There is no way that I could have paid the debt that you so willingly offered on my behalf. You stand before the Father on my behalf as my mediator. Only through you can I approach the throne in prayer and have confidence that on the Day of Judgment I will be able to stand before the Father with confidence and peace. Thank you, that in the multitude of people upon this earth, I matter to you. Move my heart, Jesus, that those in my life who matter to you will matter to me as well. In your name I ask this. **Amen.**

Challenge: Think about who matters to you. Who matters to you but does not know or believe that they matter to God? For the next 48 days, would you be willing to pray for them? Pray for their family, their job, their health and, yes, pray for their relationship to God through Jesus Christ.

Scripture Reading: Matthew 11

From the Book of Concord: “But since the Confutation condemns us for assigning these two parts to repentance, we must show that Scripture makes them the chief parts in repentance or the conversion of the ungodly. For Christ says in Matthew 11[:28], ‘Come to me, all you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest.’ There are two parts here: being weary and carrying heavy burdens refer to contrition, anxieties, and the terrors of sin and death; to come to Christ is to believe that on account of Christ sins are forgiven. When we believe, our hearts are made alive by the Holy Spirit through the Word of Christ. Therefore, these are the two chief parts: contrition and faith. In the first chapter of Mark [v. 15] Christ says, ‘Repent and believe the gospel.’ Where in the first part he denounces sin, in the second part he consoles us and shows us the forgiveness of sins. For ‘to believe in the gospel’ is not that general faith, which the demons also possess, but it is properly speaking to believe the forgiveness of sins given on account of Christ. For this is revealed in the gospel. Here you also see that these two parts are joined: contrition, when sins are condemned, and faith, when it is said, ‘believe the gospel.’ We will not argue if someone says that Christ also included the fruits of repentance or the entire new life. It is enough for us that he names these two chief parts: contrition and faith” (Apology of the Augsburg Confession, Article XII: Repentance, pp. 193-194.44-45).