

Savior in a Thicket

Lent 2—March 11, 2020

Introduction

My mom always made me wash my hands before eating. Of course, her reasons were hygienic. She didn't want me to get sick from germs I had picked up while playing in the sandbox, or wherever. The hand washing to which the Pharisees were referring was a **ceremonial** washing, part of the **cleanliness** code of Israel. Today, we see them question Jesus about the fact that His disciples aren't observing the **ceremonial** law. Jesus could have responded in different ways. He could have given the political answer: "Yes, that's a good question. I'll look into it the first chance I get." He could have claimed authority over the law, as He had before (**Matthew 12:1-8**). He could have tried to downplay it as only a **ceremonial** law. Instead, He went on the **offensive** and turned the question around.

Whose Law Do You Keep?

Jesus says, "*And why do you break the commandment of God for the sake of your tradition?*" (**v. 3**). Over the years, the Jews had developed a system of giving called **CORBAN**. If something was Corban, it was devoted to God. This money couldn't be used for anything during your life and went to God when you died. I guess you could call it an endowment. It was like leaving money to the church in your will. Jesus says that people were claiming that the savings they had was Corban and if their aging parents were in need, it couldn't be used to help them out. Thus, they were breaking the **4TH COMMANDMENT**, *Honor your father and your mother*. I know the LC-MS encourages leaving money to the church, and I'm not saying that Jesus is calling this a bad practice. I don't understand enough about high finance to make that call. I don't have money to leave anyone and can't understand what's wrong with giving it now if you don't need it or aren't going to use it in this life. The point is, they were using a man-made law to justify breaking a divine Law.

On the Question of Defilement

After giving the Pharisees that to digest, he turns to the people and begins to teach them about defilement. Here, Jesus is saying that the **moral** Law of God is more important than the **ceremonial** law. Eating with unwashed hands (and by extension, eating "unclean" food) doesn't defile a person. What defiles is what a person says. Words begin as thoughts and attitudes and these come from the heart. All evil thoughts come from our fallen hearts. Our sins are a result of **ORIGINAL SIN**. Sin is what defiles, what makes a person **spiritually** unclean, not just **ceremonially** unclean. This makes us unfit for life and unfit for heaven.

A Depressing Ending

Now, our reading ends there, with the Law, defilement and death. But the answer to defilement isn't keeping the Law, for several reasons: First, we **can't** keep the Law. Remember, our hearts are fallen and sinful and can only produce sinful thoughts, words and deeds. But even if we could keep the Law, that **wouldn't erase** the **ORIGINAL SIN** and the ones already committed. The fact is, we can't find life in the Law. Where must we look?

Turning to Abraham

This is where we turn to the **Old Testament** lesson for today. Abraham was told by God to take His son, his only son whom he loved, to the mountain and sacrifice him to God. Abraham was faithful and obeyed God to the letter. He didn't question Him, or even ask, "Why?" He built an altar, put his son on it and drew the knife back. Then, an angel stopped him (Read **Genesis 22:10-12**). Now, look at what Abraham did next.

Shifting His Focus

(Read **Genesis 22:13**). Abraham *lifted up his eyes*. He changed his focus. He took his eyes off the altar where his son lay and off the law. He lifted them up and saw a ram caught in a thicket. This was the answer to his prayer. This was life. He had told Isaac, "*God will provide*" (**v.8**) when Isaac had asked about the lamb earlier. And sure enough, the Lord had provided a ram, a lamb, a substitute for Isaac. But Abraham had to "lift up his eyes" and look to the thicket.

Shifting Our Focus

Under the law, we are deserving death. But the Lord has provided us with a **Substitute**, a **Lamb** to die in our place. But we must change our focus from the law and "lift up our eyes." When we turn from the altar of the **Law** to the thicket of the **Gospel**, we will see the **Lamb** that gives life by dying in our place. Indeed, the Lord has provided our **SAVIOR IN A THICKET**. Look to Him and live.

*May the peace of God,
Which passes all understanding,
Keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus.*
