

1 Samuel 21:1-6¹
David & his men
eat the sacred bread
of the Temple
2nd Sunday after Pentecost
Supplementary Lectionary Series “B,”
Old Testament

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Grace WELS Durand MI
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Elders’ Meeting

^{21:1} David went to Nob, to Ahimelech the Priest. Ahimelech trembled when he met him, and asked, “Why are you alone? Why is no one with you?”

² David answered Ahimelech the Priest, “The King charged me with a certain matter and said to me, ‘No one is to know anything about your mission and your instructions.’ As for my men, I have told them to meet me at a certain place. ³ Now then, what do you have on hand? Give me five loaves of bread, or whatever you can find.”

⁴ But the Priest answered David, “I do not have any ordinary bread on hand; however, there is some Consecrated Bread² here—provided the men have kept themselves from women.”

⁵ David replied, “Indeed women have been kept from us, as usual whenever I set out. The men’s things are holy even on missions that are not holy. How much more so today!” ⁶ So the Priest gave him the Consecrated Bread, since there was no bread there except the Bread of the Presence that had been removed from before the LORD and replaced by hot bread on the day it was taken away.

LOVE GOVERNS THE EXERCISE OF THE COMMANDMENTS

I. THERE IS A NEED

II. THERE IS A REMEDY

In the Name of Jesus, who heals all of our diseases and forgives all of our sins (cf. Psalm 103:3), Dear Fellow-Redeemed,

Several decades ago, I heard a story about a man who had been caught stealing food for his family. He was brought before a judge on this misdemeanor charge, and the judge followed the law. He fined the man. Obviously, the man could not pay the fine, so the judge ordered everyone in the courtroom to come up with a contribution to pay the man’s fine, and, what was left over, was given to the man so that he could buy food for his family.

¹ *The New International Version*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House) 1984. All Scripture references are taken from this translation unless noted otherwise.

² Each Sabbath twelve fresh baked loaves of bread were set before the LORD on a table of gold in the holy place. There were two rows of six loaves each. This offering was a reminder that Israel depended on the LORD for their food. The loaves were consumed by the priests, presumably a week old, when the new batch was brought in before the LORD.

Three principles are at work in this illustration. The first principle is governed by the Seventh Commandment, “Thou shalt not steal.” The second principle is governed by the Fifth Commandment, “Thou shalt not murder”; the explanation of which includes the idea of taking care of the physical well-being of one’s family. Along with this is an application of the Seventh Commandment, the third principle, that a person is to use a portion of his resources to care for his family (cf. 1 Timothy 5:8). The application of the principles needs balance.

Our text, this morning, as well as the Gospel Lesson (Mark 2:23 – 3:6), deal with the considerations a Christian may give in balancing two or more principles of the law. As we see Jesus working with these principles, we note that the overall governing principle is that of love.

The definition of love with which we are working is not emotional, erotic love. The definition of love with which we are working is this: Love is that which has in mind the best interests of those being loved – both physical interests and spiritual interests. We see this definition of love at work in our text from the Old Testament concerning King David and in the parallel that our Gospel Lesson provides in Mark 2:23 – 3:6, in which we see Jesus applying the principle of love. LOVE GOVERNS THE EXERCISE OF THE COMMANDMENTS. LOVE GOVERNS THE EXERCISE OF THE COMMANDMENTS ... I. THERE IS A NEED; and, II. THERE IS A REMEDY.

LOVE GOVERNS THE EXERCISE OF THE COMMANDMENTS I. THERE IS A NEED

David was running away from King Saul. Saul knew that David would be the next King over Israel. None of Saul’s sons would ascend to the Throne. The reason for this was that Saul had disobeyed the LORD (cf. 1 Chronicles 10:13&14). Saul would not remain on the Throne; none of his sons would succeed him. Saul, knew this, and he was jealous.

Saul was jealous of David. He tried on several occasions to kill David (cf. 1 Samuel Chapters 18,19,24,26). He was intent on murdering David. David was fleeing to preserve his life. Immediately, we sense two principles at work. There is the Fourth Commandment, which orders us to submit to the authority of government; and there is the Fifth Commandment, which orders us to preserve life – including our own life.

In his flight from King Saul, David went to the Priest Ahimelech, who was with the Tabernacle that was located in Nob – a little north and east of Jerusalem. When David arrived there, he again deals with two principles. David lies to Ahimelech and thus transgresses the Eighth Commandment and also the Second Commandment.

21:1 Ahimelech ... asked, “Why are you alone? Why is no one with you?”

² David answered Ahimelech the Priest, “The King charged me with a certain matter and said to me, ‘No one is to know anything about your mission and your instructions.’ As for my men, I have told them to meet me at a certain place” (21:1b,2).

David is lying to Ahimelech when he says that King Saul sent him on a special, secret mission. He is not lying when he refers to meeting his small band of men later on. At the same time, the Fifth Commandment, the second principle, is a consideration, for David is preserving his own life and, also, the lives of the men following him, from the bloodthirsty jealousy of King Saul.

David then continues in his conversation with Ahimelech, and we see him keeping the Fifth Commandment again, when he asks Ahimelech for food. The Fifth Commandment not only specifies that “we [are] not [to] hurt or harm our neighbor in his body” but that we are to “help and befriend [our neighbor] in every bodily need.”³ It is also noted later, after our text, that David asked if Ahimelech had any weapons that David might use (21:8). In addition, the next chapter of First Samuel, indicates that David had come to Ahimelech to inquire of the LORD – to ask the LORD for advice, counsel and direction through the Priest Ahimelech (22:15). How are we to balance these principles with which this incident deals? We look at our LORD Jesus.

Centuries pass and, in our Gospel Lesson (Mark 2:23 – 3:6), we see Jesus confronted by the Pharisees, who accuse Jesus of desecrating – not keeping – the Sabbath Day. Thus, the Pharisees are accusing Jesus of not obeying the Third Commandment:

⁸ “Remember the Sabbath Day by keeping it holy. ⁹ Six days you shall labor and do all your work, ¹⁰ but the Seventh Day is a Sabbath to the LORD your God. On it you shall not do any work (Exodus 20:8-10a).

The need in the first incident is the hunger of Jesus’ disciples – this is similar to the hunger of David and his men for whom David asked the Priest Ahimelech for bread. On the Sabbath Day, Jesus’ disciples were hungry and were picking and eating heads of grain as they were walking along. In the second incident, again on a Sabbath Day, a man with a shriveled hand was in the Synagogue. This man’s need was also a physical need. Jesus confronted the Pharisees with the question that pertains to both incidents, “Which is lawful on the Sabbath: To do good or to do evil, to save life or to kill?” (Mark 3:4a). In dealing with two possible conflicting principles, we see that the overriding principle is that of love.

³ Cf. Kuske, David P., *Luther’s Small Catechism – The Small Catechism of Dr. Martin Luther and an Exposition for Children and Adults Written in Contemporary English, 3rd Edition* (Milwaukee, Wisconsin: Northwestern Publishing House, 1998), pp. 2 & 85.

APPROPRIATION

Recall the incident in the courtroom with which I began the sermon? One principle states that a person should not steal. Another principle states that a person is responsible for providing for himself and his family. What is the balance between these two principles?

Some of the considerations that apply in searching for the balance would be these: Was the person who stole the food able to work? Was there work for that person that was available for him to do? Was he willing to work, if work were available? Was he on some sort of welfare program but had unwisely used the benefits of that program? In seeking solutions to these kinds of dilemmas, the principle of love needs to be applied – love, that which is in the best interests – physical, emotional, mental and spiritual – that which is in the best interests of those being loved. This example, however, is not as urgent as another need, which we all have.

The greater need that all of us have is the need to escape death and hell. Sin is that which brings a person into death and hell. St. Paul stated, “The wages of sin is death” (Romans 6:23a). The LORD said through the Old Testament Prophet Ezekiel, “The soul who sins is the one who will die” (Ezekiel 18:4b). The death about which God is speaking here is not just physical death but eternal death and torment in hell. Here is the need.

The need is clear. In order to eliminate the punishment of death and hell, sin, which is the root cause, has to be removed. God assessed this need and came up with the solution. The solution is stated in “the Gospel in a Nutshell”: “God so loved the world that he gave his One and Only Son” (John 3:16a). Thus, we see that ...

LOVE GOVERNS THE EXERCISE OF THE COMMANDMENTS

- I. THERE IS A NEED; but, also ...
- II. THERE IS A REMEDY

In the case of David, the future King of Israel, the needs have been made clear. He needs food for himself and his men; he needs a weapon; he needs the counsel of the LORD. The Priest Ahimelech fulfills these needs – remedies these needs.

Regarding the bread for which David asked, Ahimelech says,

⁴ ... “I do not have any ordinary bread on hand; however, there is some Consecrated Bread here—provided the men have kept themselves from women.”

⁵ David replied, “Indeed women have been kept from us, as usual whenever I set out. The men’s things are holy even on missions that are not holy. How much more so today!” ⁶ So the Priest gave him the Consecrated Bread, since there was no bread there except the Bread of the Presence that had been removed from before the LORD and replaced by hot bread on the day it was taken away.

Ahimelech was concerned that David and his men were ceremonially clean by not having had recent relations with women. David assured Ahimelech that this was the case. Ahimelech then gave David the Consecrated Bread.

Later we learn that David asked if there were any weapons available that he might have. Ahimelech told him,

**⁹ ... “The sword of Goliath the Philistine, whom you killed in the Valley of Elah, is here; it is wrapped in a cloth behind the ephod. If you want it, take it; there is no sword here but that one.”
David said, “There is none like it; give it to me” (21:9).**

David’s need was for a weapon with which to defend himself. The Priest Ahimelech provided for that need.

Still later, in the next Chapter of First Samuel, we learn that David had also come to Ahimelech, in order to seek guidance from the LORD through the Priest Ahimelech (22:15a). Ahimelech even indicates that this was something David had done on previous occasions. Here was the need for the LORD’s counsel, and Ahimelech has the remedy for that need. We see the parallels in Jesus’ fulfilling needs in our Gospel Lesson (Mark 2:23 – 3:6).

It was the Sabbath Day and Jesus’ disciples were hungry. As they walked through the fields, they picked the heads of grain and ate them. The Pharisees accused Jesus’ disciples of violating the Sabbath Day, on which no work was to be done (cf. Exodus 20:8-10; Deuteronomy 5:5-14). Jesus does not condemn or prohibit his disciples. Instead, Jesus defends his disciples by reminding the Pharisees of what David did in our text:

²⁵ [Jesus] answered, “Have you never read what David did when he and his companions were hungry and in need? ²⁶ In the days of Abiathar the High Priest (another name used for Ahimelech), he entered the House of God and ate the Consecrated Bread, which is lawful only for priests to eat. And he also gave some to his companions” (Mark 2:25,26).

Here we see Jesus keeping the Eighth Commandment by defending his disciples and also keeping the Fifth Commandment by providing for their bodily needs.

The second incident recorded for us in Mark is similar. On the Sabbath, Jesus was in the Synagogue and a man with a shriveled hand was there. The Pharisees were watching to see if Jesus would transgress the Sabbath Day by working – healing the man. You heard Jesus confront them with the question, “Which is lawful on the Sabbath: To do good or to do evil, to save life or to kill?” (Mark 3:4a); but they were silent. Jesus was angered by their silence, which was not helping this man’s need at all. Jesus healed the man on the

Sabbath Day. Jesus proclaimed an overriding principle of love dealing with both of these incidents: “The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath” (Mark 2:27). Jesus also provides the remedy for all mankind’s most significant need.

Mankind’s most significant need is escape from death and from hell. Jesus himself is the remedy for that need by taking away sin, which is the cause of death and condemnation to hell.

Jesus lives the perfect life which no man could live. Jesus “committed no sin and no deceit was found in his mouth” (1 Peter 2:22; cf. Isaiah 53:9). Although Jesus was tempted in every way just as we are, Jesus never fell into sin (cf. Hebrews 4:15b). Moreover, Jesus’ holiness, righteousness, and sinlessness, has been credited to all. “God made [Jesus] who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him [Jesus] we might become the righteousness of God” (2 Corinthians 5:21). The righteousness, holiness and sinlessness that God demands, Jesus provides for all (cf. Romans 3:21-24). In addition, Jesus takes upon himself the punishment that all mankind deserves. Isaiah proclaims this fact clearly.

Isaiah wrote about Jesus as the Suffering Servant:

**⁵ But he was pierced for our transgressions,
he was crushed for our iniquities;
the punishment that brought us peace
was upon him,
and by his wounds we are healed.
⁶ We all, like sheep, have gone astray,
each of us has turned to his own way;
and the LORD has laid on him
the iniquity of us all (Isaiah 53:5,6).**

Jesus is the remedy for our greatest need – the need for the forgiveness of sins, escape from eternal death and damnation, and the receiving of the gift of eternal life.

APPROPRIATION

We may have many needs in our lives. We may be afflicted with sickness or illness or pain or disease or incapacity. We may have anguish of heart, worry, anxiety, stress. But, our greatest need is to escape from death and hell. Jesus came into the world in order to be the remedy for that need.

In order that you might live eternally, Jesus came into the world and took upon himself the sins of the world – your sins included. Jesus became the atoning sacrifice for the sins of the world (cf. 1 John 2:1,2). By faith in Jesus – faith created in your heart by the Holy Spirit through the Good News about Jesus – by faith in Jesus, you have been delivered from sin, death and hell. Death for you now is only physical and temporary. Hell is no more your destiny. Through faith in Jesus, you have eternal life in heaven waiting for you.

Jesus is your remedy. Jesus took away your sin and has given you life instead of death. Jesus did this because he loves you. “Greater love has no one than this, that one lay down his life for his beloved ones” (John 15:13). That is how much Jesus loved you.

CONCLUSION

It is love that governs the exercise of the Commandments. There may be occasions when two or more principles stated in the Commandments come into conflict. Love covers all of this.

Jesus demonstrated this love by his earthly public ministry; by his miracles; by his keeping perfectly all of the Commandments; and by his suffering and dying on the cross – taking upon himself the punishment for the sins of the world. Jesus especially kept the First Commandment by loving his Father above all things and carrying out his Father’s desire to redeem the world through his Son. Amen.