

Becoming a Modern Day Nazarite

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Turn in your Bibles in the Old Testament to the book of Numbers 6. Now the reason we're turning to the book of Numbers is this is actually the chapter in the Bible where that incredible blessing, that incredible prayer takes place and I want us today to understand who has set aside their life for some special calling, a distinct manner of living. In fact, when we think Nazarite, probably the best person to illustrate is Samson. Samson in the Bible is one of the best known of the Nazarites and yet we're going to see in just a moment that his life was even different than what we're about to read here in Numbers 6, beginning in verse 1. It says,

1 And the LORD spake unto Moses, saying, 2 Speak unto the children of Israel, and say unto them, When either man or woman shall separate themselves to vow a vow of a Nazarite, to separate themselves unto the LORD: 3 He shall separate himself from wine and strong drink, and shall drink no vinegar of wine, or vinegar of strong drink, neither shall he drink any liquor of grapes, nor eat moist grapes, or dried. 4 All the days of his separation shall he eat nothing that is made of the vine tree, from the kernels even to the husk. 5 All the days of the vow of his separation there shall no razor come upon his head: until the days be fulfilled, in the which he separateth himself unto the LORD, he shall be holy, and shall let the locks of the hair of his head grow. 6 All the days that he separateth himself unto the LORD he shall come at no dead body. 7 He shall not make himself unclean for his father, or for his mother, for his brother, or for his sister, when they die: because the consecration of his God is upon his head. 8 All the days of his separation he is holy unto the LORD.

I want you to fast forward to verse 22 on the backside of this calling of being a Nazarite, it says,

22 And the LORD spake unto Moses, saying, 23 Speak unto Aaron and unto his sons, saying, On this wise ye shall bless the children of Israel, saying unto them, 24 The LORD bless thee, and keep thee: 25 The LORD make his face shine upon thee, and be gracious unto thee: 26 The LORD lift up his countenance upon thee, and give thee peace. 27 And they shall put my name upon the children of Israel; and I will bless them.

The entire context of that famous blessing or that prayer is a vow to be a Nazarite, a vow to be distinct, a vow to be different. You'll notice as we read the word "to separate" one's self, if we were to read the entirety of the chapter, 16 times it is a call to separation, it is a call to distinctiveness, and the challenge for us today is to be the life not of a literal Nazarite but of a modern day one. What does it look like to apply these verses to our lives? Let me begin by making a comparison. A Nazarite is someone who is separate, one who is distinctly different, who has decided that his life will not look like the lives of the rest of the world.

Let me make this comparison into the New Testament. The book of Acts 9 hopefully is a part of our Bible reading plan, you read through that this week. We have an individual who will become the Apostle Paul, probably the most well known and most favored not just of the apostles but maybe of anybody in the entirety of the church, but in Acts 9, he has certain letters in his hand, he's making his way to Damascus for one purpose, to take those who believe in the Lord Jesus Christ and to inflict as much harm, pain, punishment and possibly even death on their lives. He is a modern-day mercenary, that's who he is. But there on the road to Damascus, the light brightens his eyes and he's blinded. He hears a voice speaking to him but what's interesting is on the day of and in the chapter of the Apostle Paul's salvation, in verse 3 of chapter 9, he makes this statement, that he is on his way to inflict punishment on those, listen to this quote, "of the Way." Do you realize that's what believers in Jesus Christ were first called? If you were to go back to those early days of Christianity, those are people of "the Way." Not just the fact that in John 14, Jesus said he was the way, the truth and the life, but the fact that their lives looked different, they were distinct. It was easy to know who they were because they were distinguished. "Oh, those are people of the Way."

Two chapters later in chapter 11, we're in the city of Antioch, we're in what we know as modern-day Syria. We're not down in Jerusalem and the believers are gathered together and they're worshiping and they're serving and just being the body of Christ, when they're in Antioch, it says in verse 26 of chapter 11, they were first called Christians. Isn't that interesting? A word that today, to be quite honest with you, has become so watered down. In fact, I have been in places where you'll see a sign where somebody is soliciting work and says call this number for a certain trade, "good Christian man." What does that mean here in the South? It means he supposedly won't rip you off, that's what it means. We've taken that word and we have placed it upon so many different ideals and constructs but it was 18 months since the empty tomb and here's the thing I want you to notice, the term of "the Way" means a distinct way, the term "Christian" means like Christ or imitator of Christ. Here's what's significant about the comparison: we, the people of Jesus Christ, the believers in Jesus Christ, we didn't call ourselves this, we didn't show up and have a business meeting and say, "Hm, what should we call ourselves?" Who was it that called us people of the Way? Who was it that called us "imitators of Christ"? The lost world, the ones who were on the outside, the ones who were not believers, the ones who were questioning, the ones who were suspect. The ones who were trying to end our lives said, "There's something different about them."

So when we go back into Numbers 6, this isn't detached from our lives, this isn't something that we can remove from the context of our lives because as a believer in Jesus Christ, we get the idea here that to be separate, to be distinct is just as relevant for us today as it was for those of a Nazarite vow in days past. Now that being said, let's think about who's a candidate to be a Nazarite because oftentimes in today's context we think to be separate, to be distinct, to have a lifestyle that is so different from, we like to put titles, we like to name positions whether they're pastors or elders or deacons, whatever it may be. We love to talk about, "Oh, the missionaries." We love to put titles on it, in fact, in the Old Testament you see the same thing happening. In fact, you go to the Temple Mount not only then but today, you'll notice that those that are female have to pray and worship on one side and those that are male on the other side. There's a court for the women, a court for the men, a court for the Gentiles. There's all kinds of separation there but I want you to notice what it said in verse 2. Who was a qualified candidate to be a Nazarite? Any man and any woman. That's critical. We're not talking about a position of authority here, we're not talking about some type of relegated hierarchy. It says any man and any woman who desires to be a "Nazarite" can be so, hear me clearly, that means that anybody listening to my voice today who says, "I want my life to emulate the Lord Jesus Christ, I want to be different, I want to be distinct, I want to be separate from, I want to be holy, I want to be righteous," listen, if you're one of the two genders, and, yes, I said the two genders, you're qualified. It says if you're female, if you're male, it doesn't matter, all who desire.

What's interesting about the candidates is not just the respective gender that anybody who so desired, but the length of service by which they were to serve. We read just the basic qualifications, in fact, we're going to deal with those more specifically in a moment, but if you were to read the entirety of Numbers 6, it talks about all the occasions, all the means by which somebody would "break the vow." Here's the thing I want you to understand about a Nazarite vow: it wasn't a one-and-done, and to be honest with you, it wasn't at one's birth.

You see, I mentioned earlier this guy Samson we know so well, right? Samson is one of three individuals that we claim in the Bible had a "Nazarite vow" from their birth. Whom we know as Samuel, remember his mom dedicating him to the Lord before he was even conceived. There are many who would claim that John the Baptist in the gospel was very Nazarite in his mannerisms and behaviors. But Samson rises to the top, this is that one, it would say he was a Nazarite because in Judges 13, the Lord comes to his mother and his father and declares these vows upon his life from the very beginning. Apart from that, you can't find anybody in your Bible that was born a Nazarite. A Nazarite was a man or a woman who for a season of their life said, "I'm going to separate myself." A man or a woman for a time period in their life, whatever it may be, said, "I'm going to dedicate myself to the Lord." You'll notice and we'll talk about this more in just a moment, there were times where you would renounce the vow such as to bury the dead of your family because you couldn't touch a dead thing, and then you might return unto that vow. It might last three weeks. It might last three years. It might last 30 years.

Why is that important? Because when we talk about living a distinct life, it is not only available to each and every one of us but the reality is that we go through seasons of life and maybe today, you'd be one of those individuals saying, "You know what? I've been through kind of a dry season. I've been kinda through a lull. I've been through one of those time periods that hasn't been real consecrated unto the Lord." I've got news for you, today could be one of those Nazarite days where you say, "Okay, from this point forward, it's going to be different. From this point forward, it's going to be separate."

Now you need to know what you're getting into, right? So what is this calling? Notice here there were three very distinct things that a Nazarite was to do. Now I'm not going to go necessarily in the order that's listed here in the book of Numbers 6 but just in the order that I most easily remember them. The thing that we most know about Nazarites, particularly Samson, is that you're not allowed to cut your hair. Now by the way, remember this is a modern-day Nazarite. Don't be thinking literal here. We'll talk this out, I promise. But think about that, if you were not to cut your hair for the entirety of your life, like Samson, according to the experts your hair could get up to about seven feet long. Can we all agree that's just nappy? I mean, seriously. I mean, that's nasty because it doesn't matter how tall you are, it's dragging behind you, right? So there was to be no cutting of the hair, there was to be no touching of anything that was dead. A dead animal, a dead relative, a dead stranger, nothing that was dead was to be touched. Then finally, not only was a Nazarite not to consume alcoholic beverages, they weren't even to touch a dried up grape.

Now think about Samson, the famous one who walked through the vineyard to find a wife from the Philistines. He most assuredly touched the dried grapes, did he not? The same Samson came back through and he ate the honey of the dead carcass of the lion. Two vows up, two vows down. And the last one was with Delilah when his famous hair was cut. So the question is how do we apply chapter 6 of Numbers? How do we apply this comparison of the book of Acts unto our lives? Let's walk through these vows and talk about what does that mean for us today.

What does it mean to be a modern-day Nazarite, saying, "I'm not going to cut my hair." Now I want you to think about what that would look like. There's always debates about how long hair should be, hair shouldn't be, but it doesn't matter how long your hair may or may not be, or how long you desire it to be, you would at least admit that in its length you're going to have it trimmed, cut, styled, highlighted, whatever you may do, so that its presentable. Notice it says here no razor on your head. That means you just let her go and it just does what it does. Can we all agree that none of us are going to be looking good after that? I mean, none of us. I mean, it just goes. Why is that important? Because when a Nazarite walked in the room, everybody knew who they were. Nobody had to question it. I know you think, "Oh, they had long hair." There's a lot of people that had long hair and had it trimmed and nice and pretty, but when a Nazarite walks in, notice it's not just the back of the hair, guys, it's all of it. You just let her go.

So when somebody walks in and they have vowed a Nazarite vow, everybody, it doesn't matter what they know or don't know goes, "That's somebody different." Can I ask you

an honest question? When you walk in a room, do people notice you're different? Is your speech different? Is your mannerism different? Is your behavior different? Is your countenance different? Is your attitude different? You see, what do we like to do? We like to fit in with the world. We like to be the great chameleon, so to speak, and look like and act like and talk like. Listen, if you want to be a modern-day Nazarite, that means when you walk into the office, when you walk into school, when you walk wherever you go, you're going to be different because you don't act like or sound like anybody else.

What about the touching of a dead item? Now again, by the way, they're suspecting in John 6 when Jesus made this statement when the man said, "Hey, I want to follow you, but I need to go and bury my father." He said, "Let the dead bury the dead." One of the great theological debates was, was that somebody who had taken a Nazarite vow and the Lord was saying, "Hey, as long as you're avowed, you can't do," and all that great discussion. Does that mean that we can't attend the funerals of our loved ones, those we care about? No. Here's why this is important, in Exodus 3 when Moses is about to go in to Pharaoh, he asked the Lord, "When they ask your name, what do I say?" Remember what he said? "I Am that I Am." You see, not only should our countenance be different, not only should our disposition be different when we walk in a room, but we ought to be ministers of life and not death. We've got enough folks ministering death in our culture, do we not? But we ought to be ministers of life.

A Nazarite, here's the beauty, when a Nazarite walked in the room, nobody was dead. Everybody was alive. It was a place of life because death could not be present. Listen to me, when you open your mouth, you've got two choices: you either speak life or you speak death. When you do actions or deeds, there's only two choices: you either bring life to a situation or you bring death to a situation. And so the question is are we willing today to say, "You know what? I'm gonna be that person that when I walk into wherever I go, they know immediately that I'm different because of Jesus Christ, so much so that I refuse to bring death to the situation. I will only bring life."

Last but not least, what's the deal with the grapes? I mean, we know the famous vow of Samson wasn't to consume alcohol, we get that, but notice what this says, it says don't even touch the grape, don't even touch a dried up, shriveled up grape. It just seems a little too much, does it not? Until you go into 1 Thessalonians 5:22 where it says have no appearance of evil. You see, the beauty of the Nazarite vow is you could get in a big discussion, here you are at a gathering, "Oh, don't worry about it, it's non-alcoholic. I'm still sticking to my vows." But if you didn't drink anything or touch anything or even come close to anything that looked like a grape, then nobody could claim that somehow, someway, you were violating your vow.

So not only do we as ones who separate ourselves unto the Lord, not only do they live a distinct life that everybody can see the moment we walk in the room, we minister life versus death, and we don't ask the question how far is too far, how close can I get, how can I justify or rationalize just playing with it a little bit. Have no appearance of evil. You see, you didn't have to worry back then who a Nazarite was, and yet the sad reality today is it's hard to tell the Christians from the non-believers. And I'm not just talking about the

way we do or don't dress, I'm talking about the words we speak, the things we do, the places we go, that which we advocate, support, celebrate, whatever it may be. The first group of believers, they were called people of the Way, they were called Christ-like. Can the same be said for us?

Last but not least, there is this famous prayer. Now the reason that it must be taken in context is because if I asked each and every one of you, "Do you want the Lord to bless you?" "You got that right, pastor." You want the Lord to keep you? "Amen." I mean, some of you, do you want the Lord's face to be upon you? You might go Baptistical on us, you might get excited. The problem is this: you cannot have the prayer and the blessing of God apart from what we just read. Can I make it real simple for you? God does not and will not bless a rebellious life. He won't do it, and yet so many times we're craving the blessings of God, we're desiring the blessings of God, and we forget it's not going to happen unless we're a modern-day Nazarite, distinct and different, breathing life not death.

Notice what it says in verse 24, "The LORD bless thee, and keep thee: The LORD make his face shine upon thee, and be gracious unto thee: The LORD lift up his countenance upon thee, and give thee peace. And they shall put my name upon the children of Israel; and I will bless them." What are the consequences? What's going to take place in your life? What's going to take place in your family's life? What's going to take place in our community's life if we say, "You know what? 2 Corinthians was right, come out among them and be separate." What's going to happen? First thing is this: the Lord's going to bless you. Now let me define what a blessing is. It's not the prosperity gospel, folks. The prosperity gospel says the blessing of God is that if you need a new car, you go to your driveway and you put an X in the driveway and you tell him what model, what color, and it just drops there. That's the prosperity gospel. Let me tell you what the blessing gospel is: more of the Lord's blessing isn't what you receive but what he protects you from. In other words, when the Lord blesses you, it's not that he necessarily gives unto you as much as you are blessed by not walking through some of the things in life that you'd rather not walk through. I didn't say heartache and hardships and all that, but I will tell you the greatest blessings in my life is not what God has given me, it's what God has kept from me.

Ladies and gentlemen, the hand of God on your life, his blessing, his protection, I'm not worried about his hand being on me, I'm concerned if it ever comes off of me. The blessing of God is when we are consecrated, when we are separate, even though we may walk through difficult times, he is blessing us, he is protecting us, and here's the final thing, it says he'll bring you peace. Isn't that interesting, that since the last time we met in this setting, the world has gone aflame again. It shouldn't be any shock to us, particularly where it's happening today. But it happens all the time. It happens in the Middle East. It happens in the streets. It happens public. It happens private. Do you know what Romans 5:1 says? It says that you and I receive peace through the Lord Jesus Christ. That's how. We live in a world today that wants to legislate peace. We live in a world today that wants to negotiate peace, broker peace, peace accord this, peace accord that. Listen, until Jesus Christ and his name is on that document and on their hearts, there's not going to be

peace over there and there's not going to be peace here. There's not going to be peace in your family, in your community, your business, whatever it may be. When we talk about the blessing of God, he not only protects us but he brings us peace the world can't bring us.

Now I don't know about you but I'm interested in both of those things. I want the protection of God and I want the peace of God but it cannot come apart from Jesus Christ and as a believer, it will never take place until I'm distinct and separate and surrendered to him. You know, maybe today is that day where all the things that you've desired of God, that you've wanted but never been able to grasp, you realized it will never happen apart from Jesus Christ and as a believer, it will never occur apart from a distinct separated life.