

Good afternoon, everyone! I have to say, after reading the 18 billion articles Fred sent over the last few days, I'm really quite surprised to see you all here! To hear the media tell it, by this point the building should have been demolished to its foundation, the websites all offline, the tweets silenced, the vines disappeared, the faxes stopped ringing, the signs shredded, our social security numbers zero'd out, and, depending on which version of the story you read, every last man jack of us either moving to varied and separate parts of the world while all sucking our thumbs in the fetal position, all of us buried in a mass grave by our own hands, we should all be sitting on the front lawn drinking spiked Kool-Aid eating laced apple sauce waiting for a UFO to come get us, or probably worst of all, we should all have joined a Catholic church and applied to be priests, to find "true religion". Yikes. The good old media. Gotta love 'em. Or not. Thank God though that every article said God Hates Fags! They can say whatever they want as long as they say that!

Here is the Shibboleth they cannot pronounce, my dear friends. This is the big "aha" moment they cannot have, the conclusion they cannot draw. This isn't about us. When we say that, we really mean it, strangely enough.

We are but vessels for God to use as He sees fit, as we are His creation. They cannot grasp that because their pride consumes them every minute of every day. The mercy our God has shown to us is in **allowing us to see that, understand that, and embrace that as fact**. What a beautiful mercy it is, too! Imagine the despair that must come into their lives every time they think a thing is going to go their way and it goes the exact opposite because their free will left them high and dry again. Or imagine the utter and complete despair they must feel when death strikes close to them and they have no hope for their own soul, leaving them no choice but to make a great clamor and throw a giant pep rally and drunken party so

that they can drown out the misery they feel. It is a stark, sobering thing to me.

BUT, at the same time, it is an AMAZING thing that we do not live in a state of hypocrisy! That we genuinely say, “Thank God for the death of Fred W. Phelps, Sr.”, because we truly do thank God for it! These words aren’t ours, it’s only our message to deliver, and deliver we endeavor to do! That’s the beauty of our position as vessels, friends, we just carry the message forward, and we don’t get bogged down trying to change it because of who or what we’re talking about.

Thank God for this reminder of our hope! Thank God for the cords of kindness that he has drawn us together with! Thank God for not allowing us to wallow in hypocrisy and idolatry! To that I say a double Thank God and more!

I say thank God that your butts are in the seats today! Although, truthfully, even if they weren’t, I was prepared to preach to an empty house, because this is the other big thing they don’t get and from which I draw so much hope. There were 8 souls on the ark, at least one of them was a heathen sot, and Noah still taught them the ways of God. This isn’t about numbers, it’s about our duty to God, and therefore our duty to God’s people. Wherever His people are, I want to do my duty to them, as I know you do too. Thank God for that!

I have said several times from this pulpit that it’s about simplicity. God makes these things simple to understand if you have the eyes to see them, the ears to hear them, and the heart to understand them. Thank God He has given us all three!

Thank God for all of you! Truly I do thank God for you. And I thank you for the honor you do me by entrusting me to say something today that

might be useful. May the Lord let right words come forth and they help even one of you today as we turn to the sermon outline for today.

***“...for the child shall be a Nazarite to God from the womb to the day of his death”*** Judges 13:7.

What an exciting week this has been. Any time the Lord our God opens wide some door of utterance which makes our worst enemies spread our message as their own, it is cause for great rejoicing and thankfulness to Him, no matter the genesis of that door opening or the spin that our enemies put on it. It is also a great reminder that we do not control when these doors will open or how, and that we must take advantage of them when they open, giving all glory to God for counting us worthy to be his vessels. And of course, that is all we are, His vessels.

Before all this broke this week, I had been working on a sermon regarding our lexicon and our need to not compromise in our use and definitions of certain words that I hope to get back to at a later date. Today instead, I want to speak about something I hit upon while Rachel and I were reading with our children that seems particularly relevant to this week’s events. While reading through Judges we came to the most interesting tale of Samson, and how he was consecrated a Nazarite from birth at the direction and explicit instruction from God. We went looking at what a Nazarite is and what it means to be one, and I noticed something I had not before that I’d like to share and connect to our experiences this week via the words of Christ.

So let’s turn to Numbers 6, which contains the definition of a Nazarite.

*“And the Lord spake unto Moses, saying, 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: 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. All the days of his separation shall he eat nothing that is made of the vine tree, from the kernels even to the husk. 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. All the days that he separateth himself unto the Lord he shall come at no dead body. 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. All the days of his separation he is holy unto the Lord” Numbers 6:1-8.*

The law of the Nazarite goes on to lay out the sacrifice required at the end of their vow, which was to be brought to the tabernacle and offered up. There are many instructive things about that sacrifice in and of itself, and much (if not all) of the elements of Nazarite vows are types and indicia of Christ, His sacrifice and the role He plays in our redemption. Today, however, I’m going to focus on the elements or tenets of the vow.

We have five basic tenets of the Nazarite:

1. This is a voluntary sacrifice of a person’s time, to devote themselves unto the Lord for whatever period of time they choose to dedicate it. The Jews have all manner of rules about how few days it can be and how many days it shouldn’t go past, but you see from the text these restrictions do not exist, and indeed Samson was to be a Nazarite “to the day of his death”. You chose, whether a man or a woman, to dedicate yourself for some specific period of time to doing nothing but serving God and meditating on His holiness. There was no compulsion to vow this vow, and no requirement that it be done for any reason other than a person wanted to do it. How that devotion looked or why you did it was a personal choice. Some

commentaries say that it was common to perform this vow when the Lord delivered you from some great illness or you had a child late in life or some great victory over an enemy was provided. Whatever the case or reason, it was voluntary.

2. There is a separation expected of the individual who vows this vow. The word Nazarite comes from a primitive root which means “separate”. When the Nazarite separated themselves, they were doing so unto the Lord, to worship Him, study and meditate upon Him and His ways, His statutes, and how better to know them, speak to them, and live within them. This separation was a physical separation from the comforts of life if not a physical separation from other people, though that is not enumerated as a requirement. I’ll note here that the word Nazarite does not have a linguistic or etymological connection to Nazareth that I could find, and some commentators explicitly say there isn’t one.
3. The Nazarite does not cut their hair during the time of their vow. This includes the beard for men as well as the hair of the head. This is an outward indicator to all the Nazarite comes into contact with of the vow they have made. They don’t need to make a big deal of it because those who see them will immediately know that they have separated themselves out to the Lord.
4. There is the abstinence from anything associated with alcohol (or “strong drink”) or the fruit of the vine being consumed, including the kernels and the husk of the plant. This meant no grapes, no raisins, no wine, no vinegar of wine whether cooked into some food (no oatmeal raisin cookies), wine directly consumed with a meal (as was very common) or any other strong drink (no corn whiskey); nothing of the fruit of the vine was to be consumed by a Nazarite during his or her vow in any way shape or form.

5. There is to be no defilement of oneself with the dead. The Jews were given very strict rules about how to approach dealing with the dead, but this goes beyond that here, as the Nazarite is instructed to have no defilement by the dead whatsoever, regardless of who has died, with no exceptions.

All of these tenets are about separation of oneself from the normal daily life that competes with service to God, and are all visible embodiments of 1 Corinthians 6:17 ***“Wherefore come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing; and I will receive you”***.

I offer up a few points to consider about these tenets:

- The voluntary nature of this vow means few people will participate in such a self-sacrificing event and separates you immediately from the masses if you do this.
- Separation from normal daily activities in order to immerse yourself in the devoted worship of God and a complete focus on humbling yourself to His ways and His words makes you stand out as separate from everyone else during the period of your vow just as a practical matter.
- Not cutting your hair and letting it grow is a visual separation, much like the leper practiced what I’ll call an auditory separation, yelling unclean, unclean wherever they went. The long hair of a Nazarite is visible in a crowd, visible and remarkable from some distance. To grasp this visually think about how remarkable our women are in a crowd these days, a bright spot in a sea of whorish looking crop-headed women, and you get an idea of what separation that long hair generates.
- Separation from strong drink and the fruit of the vine, which can lead to partaking in any manner of vile sins, especially when done in

excess, and separating oneself from it entirely is a sacrifice made to God in order to show devotion to Him and a reviling of sin. Think of it like this, you don't even want to sniff a grape because it might make you think of drinking wine, and drunkenness caused by wine is a sin which leads to more sin, which leads to destruction and is an affront to God. A Nazarite doesn't partake of that to be super safe about not introducing sinfulness into a thing that is all about God and glorifying Him. It is an attempt to set a great gulf between themselves and the road to destruction. Consumption of wine being very common at most meals especially, and as a refreshment offered to those who came into your home, to refuse that drink would certainly separate you from the masses.

- A Nazarite separated themselves from the dead, so much so, that even if their closest relative died during the time of their vow, they couldn't arrange or attend the funeral of that loved one. They were to separate themselves from all uncleanness, as are all followers of God, and the Mosaic code had, as I said before, strictures and rules about the uncleanness of the dead and required separation for those who came in contact with a dead person. But these rules went beyond the general restrictions.

The rules were there already, so why this special additional and specific requirement for the Nazarite, who is focusing on holiness and glorifying God during their vow? That's what I'd like to spend a little bit of time on, if you'll indulge me, this separation from the dead.

I'd first point out that failing to separate yourself from the dead, even accidentally, is the only mistake or misstep called out specifically in the rules for which a Nazarite would have to start the clock over on their vow. Now the commentators I consulted on this put a lot of words out there to say that any mistake would require this reset, and point out

that the Jews have lots of rules about how if a hair is accidentally plucked then they have to start again, and all kinds of things like that in their typically legalistic way of addressing the Mosaic code. That doesn't really hold much water as far as I'm concerned. If the words don't say it, I'm not sure what value the Jews adding to the words brings.

Let's look quickly at this reset of the timetable:

*“And if any man die very suddenly by him, and he hath defiled the head of his consecration; then he shall shave his head in the day of his cleansing, on the seventh day shall he shave it. And on the eighth day he shall bring two turtles, or two young pigeons, to the priest, to the door of the tabernacle of the congregation: And the priest shall offer the one for a sin offering, and the other for a burnt offering, and make an atonement for him, for that he sinned by the dead, and shall hallow his head that same day. And he shall consecrate unto the LORD the days of his separation, and shall bring a lamb of the first year for a trespass offering: but the days that were before shall be lost, because his separation was defiled” “Numbers 6:9-12.*

This is not an academic thing; it's too specific in how it is called out and in what is required to atone for the mistake. Assuming for the sake of argument that any mistake in the tenets required the same atonement and the same clock reset, the Holy Ghost has chosen to call out the approaching of the dead specifically for a reason. As I've said many times, don't think great thoughts, just read the words.

There is something very distinct about this contact with the dead that makes you unclean and unholy. The dead obviously sharply remind us that *“the wages of sin is death”* (Romans 6:23); they remind us of the fall of Adam and our shortcomings when approaching the Throne of Grace.

Coming into close proximity with that death, like the effects of the fruit of the vine, negatively affect you. When you are supposed to be thinking on God's holiness and His mercy, on His complete perfection, you ought not be thinking about the stinking corpse sitting there. The several laws in the Mosaic code relating to the handling of dead bodies, the uncleanness that comes from death and the required cleansing for those who approach the dead all lay out how to reconcile yourself to God when you engage with death. Engaging with the dead was not forbidden, but, when you defile yourself, you must atone and cleanse. Very simple.

There are two exceptions to this – those who have taken a Nazarite vow and the High Priest. While in the office of High Priest, a man was forbidden to oversee funerals, burials, anything having to do with the dead, even those of his closest and dearest relatives, whether they be children, wives, parents, etc. Here are the words:

***“And he that is the high priest among his brethren, upon whose head the anointing oil was poured, and that is consecrated to put on the garments, shall not uncover his head, nor rend his clothes; neither shall he go in to any dead body, nor defile himself for his father, or for his mother; neither shall he go out of the sanctuary nor profane the sanctuary of his God; for the crown of the anointing oil of his God is upon him: I am the LORD”*** (Leviticus 21:10).

Of course we see the same thing for the Nazarite in Numbers 6:7 where the order is given that not for father, mother, brother or sister is a Nazarite to defile themselves. No exceptions. It is here, for these two individuals, forbidden. As we saw earlier, a Nazarite can make atonement, but the time of their vow must be started over, so it was basically the same as the situation for the High Priest – forbidden territory. Stay away from the dead at all costs.

Death is the ultimate symbol of the affront on God that Man committed in the garden of Eden. It is the constant reminder of our parents' disobedience to His simple commandment not to even touch the fruit of that one tree, and our ongoing inability to forgo sinning. Focusing on death and the dead is the exact opposite of focusing on the holiness and righteousness of God, especially when that focus on the dead is to do anything but acknowledge them for the sinner they were and try to talk them into heaven or celebrate them. The High Priest was to be the physical representative on earth of that righteousness and holiness of our God, the only human allowed to approach the mercy seat in the holy of holies. The uncleanness of death could not be washed off of him, and therefore the High Priest cannot bring even the smallest semblance of that decay and uncleanness into that holiest of places. He must not defile that place with the embodiment of man's pride and selfishness, but must be able to devote himself entirely to the focused worship of God when he comes before His throne and when he executes His duties in the sacrifice. He therefore must not bring the stink of foul death before the nostrils of God. We should all be so focused to not offend our God.

The Nazarite and the High Priest are Old Testament symbols of this absolute, 100% need to separate ourselves from uncleanness and sin. The focus on death and the folly mankind commits around the event of death are outward tokens of whether you will focus on God or focus on the flesh.

Let us look to the New Testament for Christ's discussion on this matter.

***"But Jesus said unto him, Follow me; and let the dead bury their dead"*** (Matthew 8:22).

And also

***“Jesus said unto him, Let the dead bury their dead: but go thou and preach the kingdom of God”*** (Luke 9:60).

Jesus is making the point very plainly and directly. If you are going to call yourself His follower, you have an obligation to look to Him, not to the flesh. Not to delay lifting your cross and following Him to dig a hole and put the dead, lifeless shell of one of His creatures into it. Not to consume yourself with the most offensive element of human nature, thereby delaying your obedience and the following of your God.

He speaks here to letting the spiritually dead deal with the physically dead. And to just briefly answer some of the silly comments I’ve seen online this week, Jesus doesn’t say not to bury the dead. He says not to get consumed and caught up in it as His follower.

In this situation, you have a young man, whose father has just passed away; some of the commentators say this is Philip, but who it is ultimately isn’t relevant – we have a man called to be a disciple and serve the Lord. This is clearly an emotional time for the young man. His father is dead, and here he has Christ calling him to service, which necessitates leaving his family at this time of grief and *in extremis*. He comes with all humility to his new Master and asks for leave to “find closure” to put it in the modern parlance. To fulfill this human ritual of putting the dead body of a loved one into the ground and thereby affording him some sense of finality to his father’s days, knowing he will never interact with him, be able to draw wisdom from him, laugh with him, etc., all the things our human existence is consumed with in relation to our familial ties. He will never do those things with this man again and is in all likelihood consumed with that emotional reality. I say he approached Christ with respect and humility even while his heart ached with that emotional pain, entreating him with the words “suffer me” not “I’ll be right there after I do this thing”. He asked leave, he didn’t tell.

The burial of the dead is one of those places where the Jews went off the rails, by my reckoning. It was, and still is, considered by them a great religious requirement to pay “proper respect” to the dead, to fulfill the funeral rights and is a great religious offense if you do not do it, especially for one of your parents. That context is all at play here. The disciple sees this task as his reasonable service not only to his recently dead father and his family, but to Jehovah Himself, since after all God buried the body of Moses. That context of familial emotion and service to God are all at play here in the little heart of this disciple, I have absolutely no doubt.

These are not things with which we are unfamiliar, my friends. These same emotions arise for us, these same seemingly competing interests. Thankfully though, our God has left for us clear instruction and help on the matter. We are not left to our own devices or the strength of our own hand to understand what we ought to do.

Let us examine what it is our God requires of us.

***“Follow me; and let the dead bury their dead”*** (Matthew 8:22).

I find the most comfort in the Matthew account, and the most clarity and detail of instruction in that of Luke. Looking at Matthew’s account, Christ does two things here. First, he prioritizes things for the disciple. First, “Follow me”. Take a moment to ponder that. He could have just as easily said, “Let the dead bury their dead, and follow me”. Instead, He reminds him of the calling he has just received and acknowledged, to follow after God, minister unto His son, and serve Him faithfully, immediately, and with all diligence. Everything else in life is utterly and completely secondary. Everything. Look at the priority Christ has established here.

Second, He puts the disciple’s mind at ease by casting away the traditions and follies of men with the commandment “let the dead bury their

dead". That is, let the spiritually dead, who have no interest in the service of God and the following of His son, tend to those purely logistical details of putting a dead body in the ground. Dissolve in your mind the importance that you have placed upon the act of burial, the so-called respect for the dead that is not found in Scripture, and focus on the things that must be done by those who are alive, who are spiritually regenerated and reborn into the family of God. Don't bring the thoughts of death and decay into the presence of the Living God to cloud your mind and cripple your ability to learn of His glory and His righteousness, His grace and His mercy. Don't soil the glorification of God in your service to Him by injecting your obsession with whether a dead man is buried. Break free of that and understand there are no Scriptural necessities or requirements placed upon God's people to partake in these man-made rituals about the dead.

He is helping the disciple to see the need to separate himself from the spiritual uncleanness that surrounds him and be separate, as a Nazarite was separate. He establishes here, with few words, but great effect for His followers, where the focus of their lives should plainly be – not on the temporal business of this life, but on the preaching of His word, the spreading of His Gospel, and the following of His commandments.

He thereby focuses us. We stand before the whole world, friends, as a spectacle, with them looking at how we conduct ourselves in the matter of death. We have preached it for many years that their approach to the matter is pagan, idolatrous and wrong. It is obvious that the world has been watching and waiting for this moment, as we knew they were, even though the outpouring of vulgar hatred has really surpassed what even I thought would come. While we have preached this with words for many years now, we now preach it by example, and my prayer is that we glorify God in the thing, that we do not forget ourselves and think ourselves

greater than those about us because we have been given an ability to see this death ritual as a statement of pride and refusal to submit to God. And in my mind, that is what these rituals are. A brazen statement by man that God will NOT have the last word. He will NOT make it a thing of finality that this soul has been taken, this body dead. They scream “we will have the last word, we will celebrate the life of this dead carcass, and we will render closure to the matter on our terms”. Brazen, stark, rebellious pride. We in contrast must submit ourselves to His mighty hand, thank Him for all He has done, does in this moment, and will do in the next. Humbly thankful for all He has given us, knowing none of these things in this life are permanent.

We are unique in the world only by the grace that God has bestowed upon us. Let us remember that with all humility and not be afraid to call it out. Let us stand as Ezekiel, Jeremiah, Isaiah and the other prophets stood when called to be a standing symbol of a thing as the messengers of the Living God, and let us do it properly, with humility and with an eye to glorifying God always.

Thank you all. Amen.