

The Challenge of Complete Commitment Numbers 6:1-8

Slide 1

Today we are going to look at the Nazarite Vow and the challenge of complete commitment.

Numbers 6:1-8, *“The LORD said to Moses, “Speak to the Israelites and say to them: ‘If a man or woman wants to make a special vow, a vow of dedication to the LORD as a Nazirite, they must abstain from wine and other fermented drink and must not drink vinegar made from wine or other fermented drink. They must not drink grape juice or eat grapes or raisins. As long as they remain under their Nazirite vow, they must not eat anything that comes from the grapevine, not even the seeds or skins. “During the entire period of their Nazirite vow, no razor may be used on their head. They must be holy until the period of their dedication to the LORD is over; they must let their hair grow long. “Throughout the period of their dedication to the LORD, the Nazirite must not go near a dead body. Even if their own father or mother or brother or sister dies, they must not make themselves ceremonially unclean on account of them, because the symbol of their dedication to God is on their head. Throughout the period of their dedication, they are consecrated to the LORD.””*

Taking a Nazarite vow was a "temporary" separation from normal life to be devoted to God in a special way.

It was a mirror for Israel to look into and be reminded of what she was permanently called to be -- a "holy nation.”

The Nazarite was a person who was consecrated to the Lord, just as the nation Israel was called to be consecrated and committed to the Lord.

The commitments of the "Nazarite Vow" were the same commitments that were required of a priest. Again, the Nazarite was a picture of what Israel was intended to be.

According to Exodus 19:6, they were to become "*a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.*" Of ALL the nations of the world, God had chosen THEM to be His people and to dwell in their midst.

So, when a person took a Nazarite vow, it was a reminder of what they were called to be -- different and holy. Set apart for God's purpose.

This morning we going to look at commitments because making commitments strengthens your life, while breaking commitments weakens your life of which Samson is a perfect example.

Samson was an exceedingly gifted man of great potential, a man who rocketed to the top of the Israeli nation, even becoming a judge yet, he was brought down hard because he broke every commitment he ever made.

Here was the strongest man who ever lived but spiritually and emotionally he was a wimp! You couldn't find a less committed Nazarite than Samson.

Instead of being a mirror to Israel of who she OUGHT to be, he was a perfect example of what they SHOULDN'T be! He broke every vow he ever made to God.

Do you make commitments and stick with them? Or are you afraid to make commitments because you're always breaking them?

So, from the Nazarite Vow, let's look at three commitments that will strengthen your life. The first is the commitment of self-control.

Slide 2 - The Commitment of SELF-CONTROL

The commitment for an individual who has taken a Nazarite vow to refrain from wine wasn't just refraining from wine, but also the grapes that made them.

Even the seeds and skins from grapes were off limits according to verse 4, *"As long as they remain under their Nazirite vow, they must not eat anything that comes from the grapevine, not even the seeds or skins."*

Now, none of that makes much sense until you understand that wine was the primary "symbol of joy" in the ancient world.

So, when you swore off grapes and all its by-products, you were in effect saying, *"I am voluntarily turning away from all of life's normal pleasures."*

Have you ever denied yourself something that you really wanted or are your only boundaries the lack of available financing?

If a lack of money is the only thing that keeps you from going 'hog wild' with your appetites, then you're headed for a life of pain. In fact, anything left uncontrolled in your life will eventually weaken you.

It could be the way you spend money, food, alcohol, your emotions, the way you manage your time. If it's out of control, it's a ticking time bomb.

Every one of us has a "pet" indulgence, for Samson it was a weakness for women. Samson was a sensuous play-boy. In three different chapters, we find him with 3 different women.

A number of years ago a news headline told of 300 whales which had accidentally beached themselves and died.

They had been pursuing a school of sardines when they found themselves marooned in a bay at low tide. The small fish had lured these awesome sea giants to their death.

The reporter concluded the article by saying: *"The whales came to their violent demise by chasing small ends, by prostituting vast powers for insignificant goals."* How many lives would that describe?

When we allow our uncontrolled desires to lead us to pursue insignificant little goals, we'll eventually come to the same end as those whales.

God has given every one of us great strengths, talents and abilities but, like Samson, we'll never achieve our goals if we allow our "self-indulgences" to control us.

Dr. J.D. Unwin of Cambridge University made a study of 80 civilizations, ranging over a period of 4,000 years, and concluded that a society either chooses sexual promiscuity and decline or sexual discipline and creative energy.

Dr. Unwin writes: *"Human society is free to choose either to display great energy or to enjoy sexual promiscuity; the evidence is that they cannot do both for more than one generation."*

What do you think our society has chosen? What have you personally chosen? Of 21 notable civilizations, 19 perished NOT from conquest from without but from decay within.

Unrestrained self-indulgence in any area, shopping, spending, pleasure, sex, drugs, alcohol, etc... will always lead to defeat, whether country or individual. Nobody has ever become great doing as he pleased.

Uncontrolled, undisciplined appetites will de-rail us from accomplishing our goals quicker than anything. The Bible even tells us in Proverbs 21:17, "*He who loves pleasure, will become poor!*"

Don't give yourself the luxury of a '*pet sin.*' Just like one seed of crabgrass can ruin a beautiful lawn. A little seed of sin will spread and eventually destroy your life!

Do you want to know what the key to gaining self-control in your life is? It's called, "discipline." Know what discipline is? It's nothing more than talking back to your feelings!

When emotions say...

- I don't feel like exercising
- I don't feel like praying
- I don't feel like reading my bible
- I don't feel like going to church
- I don't feel like playing with the kids

Simply respond, "Suck it up! You're doing it anyway!" If you only come to church when you feel like it, the devil will make sure you never feel like it.

So instead of being a slave to your feelings, make your feelings a slave to you! How? Through Christ, YOU can be the master of your moods!

I guarantee that if you sit around and allow yourself to get into a debate with your feelings, you'll lose every time! Talk back to them! Decide in advance what you are going to do!

Deciding in advance is the heart of self-control. Don't leave it open to debate. Proverbs 13:16, "*A wise man, thinks ahead!*"

Do what's right, no matter what your feelings say. Don't let your emotions talk you out of it! According to the bible, it's the grace of God working in our lives that gives us the power to do that.

Titus 2:11-12, *"For the grace of God has appeared that offers salvation to all people. It teaches us to say "No" to ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright and godly lives in this present age."*

Now the second commitment that a Nazarite made was the commitment of self-denial.

Slide 3 - The Commitment of SELF-DENIAL

A commitment to self-denial is a commitment that each one of us needs to make if we're going to strengthen our lives.

To take the Nazarite vow meant that you would agree to never cut your hair. What does that have to do with self-denial?

Letting your hair grow, without any restrictions, represented giving your life over completely to God's control. It was a symbol that you had given God the reins of your life.

Are you willing to give up control of your life? If you think about, we really don't have control of our lives to begin with! We can't even make our hair grow, yet we like to think we're in control of our lives.

So, when God tries to direct our lives in a direction we don't want to go, what do we do? We dig in our heels and say, *"No! I don't want to do that! You can be my Savior, but I don't want you to be my LORD!"*

The problem is that people want to be close enough to Jesus to get in on all the benefits, like heaven, but not so close that it requires anything from them!

LISTEN!!! Making Jesus the "LORD" of your life means you lose control! You lose control of what you do with your time, your time is HIS!

You lose control of your treasure. Your money isn't yours anymore, it's His, and so you do with it what He tells you to do.

You lose control of your talents. Whatever gifts that he's given you, you use for His purposes.

There's a big difference between being a believer, and just being a follower. Anybody can be a believer. That's easy! But being a follower is totally different!

The commitment of self-abandonment will literally save your life. Jesus said, "*Whoever loses his life for My sake, will gain it, but whoever gains his life, will lose it!*" If you want to strengthen your life then take the vow to lose it!

Now, there's a third commitment that every true Nazarite would make; it's the commitment of self-separation.

Slide 4 - SELF-SEPARATION

Nazarites made a vow to stay away from dead bodies. Corpses had a defiling power, and so the people of the living God were forbidden to touch them. But the Nazarite went even further.

The duty of preparing the bodies of the dead for burial, would usually fall to a close relative. However, if you had taken a Nazarite vow, you couldn't come near the body, even if it was your own parent!

This was a symbol of an extreme separation from the realm of the dead to serve the living God. That's what Jesus has called us to do.

Are you willing to be separated from the realm of death and sin? Did you know that that's what the Bible tells us to do?

Romans 8:5-8, "Those who live according to the flesh have their minds set on what the flesh desires; but those who live in accordance with the Spirit have their minds set on what the Spirit desires. The mind governed by the flesh is death, but the mind governed by the Spirit is life and peace. The mind governed by the flesh is hostile to God; it does not submit to God's law, nor can it do so. Those who are in the realm of the flesh cannot please God."

In effect, as a follower of Jesus, we're being called to take a Nazarite vow. As a Christian we're called to be separate from this world! Why? To be different.

In fact, that's what 'holiness' means: *"to be set-apart for God's purposes."* That's a foreign concept to us. We want to be like everybody else, not different.

In fact, the greatest curse in our lives would be to be different! We want to talk the same, look the same, listen to the same music, watch the same TV shows, have the same things.

The world tells us that "different is bad!" But as a follower of Christ, we're called to be separate, different.

Not because we want to be odd or novel, but because Jesus gave us different values, different goals, different priorities. Even different DESIRES!

We're different from the world because the God we follow is different. We don't try and get revenge like Samson did over and over again with the Philistines.

We don't pursue the same selfish, self-serving goals that the world does.

We ask God to help us control our desires, so that we can focus on serving Him. God doesn't want us to lock ourselves away in some monastery like some kind of a monk.

He told us to be, "*In the world, but not OF the world.*" In other words, don't take on the world's attitudes and habits.

We're called to have an extreme separation from the realm of the dead to serve the living God. And believe it or not, far from being shameful, or embarrassing, it's amazingly freeing!

Slide 5

Conclusion

Now, as New Testament followers, we should have at least the same level of commitment and devotion that the Nazarenes did.

Because of what Christ did for us, we should be totally devoted to Him. But the reality is, we're more like Samson than we want to admit.

We can't even keep a simple New Year's Resolution; let alone the ones we make in church on Sunday mornings.

What we need is someone who will perfectly fulfill the role of the Nazarene and help us do the same. Someone who gave up the joy and control that was rightfully His and kept Himself separate for God's use.

That person wasn't Samson! Our "perfect Nazarite" is Jesus Christ! He was separated to God's service at birth. He gave up the joys and comforts of this life that were legitimately His, leaving the glory of heaven so He could be with us.

Jesus gave complete control of His life into the hands of God. He separated Himself from sin and death to live a life of perfection. He had no sin, deliberate or involuntary, for which payment needed to be made.

In fact, He WAS the offering whose death makes it possible for you and me to draw near to God. Surely, if He did ALL of that for us, so that we could be free from sin and death, we can do the same for Him.

If we'll just make the decision to do that, He'll be there to help us follow through. Today is the day to vow:

1. To give up control and let Jesus take control of your life.
2. To give up your addiction to self and decide to live for Jesus only.
3. To live a life of separation from worldly ways and appetites.