

Numbers 6:1-27

Because of Christ you can give your life away.

Q: What are things worth living for?

I think of these things all the time. Navigating whether I am giving them appropriate attention or if they are really that important in the grand scheme of things. Are they rightly ordered in my life?

Then I hear stories of other Christians that have gone before and I am struck by what they saw as most important.

Eric Liddell, Chariots of Fire, Olympic runner who said when he ran he felt the pleasure of God. Also gave his life away to share Jesus with others. Missionary to China (30's). When it was clear that Japan would invade he sent his family to Canada to be safe, but he remained and would die in an internment camp, still preaching Jesus.

He had a vision of the Glory of God. Seeing God as not only supremely important, but exceedingly beautiful. Worth living for. Worth giving his life for.

When new believers would express faith in Jesus, he had discipleship questions he would ask them.

- Are you ready to obey God even if it means loss of face?
- Will you follow God even if it means personal financial loss or being laughed at or some other hardship?
- Will all this sacrifice really be glad joyful sacrifice?
- Are you willing to obey all that the Bible teaches whether you like it or not?
- Are you willing to trust God in anything he sends into your life whether you understand it or not?

We find ourselves increasingly in a culture where these questions apply to those choosing to follow Jesus.

In Numbers 6 we have a picture of what living for God (to honor him) in the camp looks like. And a prayer that, if we have eyes to see it, points to a better vow.

The story of Israel in the wilderness is an invitation to whole-hearted commitment to the Lord. It's where blessing and peace are found.

Because of Christ, you can give your life away.

Wilderness Vow

Context: in the text, following the danger of unfaithfulness, we have a new picture of faithfulness to God on display.

All of Israel in the wild. Out of Egypt, on the way to the Promised Land. God has given them instructions on how to live as his people, how to be different from everyone who doesn't know and worship the one true God.

At the center of the camp there was a tent where the presence of God would dwell. God is spirit and is too big to be in one place, but he chose to be with these people.

There were priests in the camp that kept the tent clean and safe. And Moses and Aaron were chosen by God to lead the people and represent them in his presence.

The priests had a special role in the camp, their whole lives were devoted, dedicated to worshiping God.

And while all of Israel was to worship this God alone, there was opportunity for others, both men and women, to "separate themselves to the LORD." To be committed, give all their attention to God. Living with no distractions.

Some would make this a life-long commitment. Samson, Samuel, John the Baptist. But for most this type of devotion was temporary, for a set period of time. As long as they determined.

The Nazarite Vow.

Had to commit to three key things.

Separate from wine/beer (strong drink). To stay more than sober. No drink with alcohol in it, which for them was primarily wine. The fruit of the vine. Just had to cut grapes out of their diets. No vinegar made from wine. They were to have nothing from the vine for as long as their vow. No grapes, no raisins, no leaves.

Inward - To be in the right mind, conscious and clear about their commitment to God.

Separate from cutting their hair. Do you like haircuts?! Ewen hates them!

No razor shall touch his head. Not so bad for the ladies but clearly making a statement for the men. The whole time of their vow they had to let their hair grow out. Remember Samson and how he had strength from God - cutting his hair made him vulnerable.

Would be cut in the tabernacles as part of the sacrifice to mark the end of their vow.

Outward - Appearance letting others know. Like the song "This little light of mine"

Both the priestly crown and the Nazirite's uncut hair reminded other people of their dedication to God's service. In this way the dedication of the Nazirites was a challenge to every Israelite to follow the Lord wholeheartedly.

Separate from dead bodies. Easiest one! Who wants to be around death?! Even so, it was a more regular experience then. During their vow they could not touch or be around the dead because it was something that made them ceremonially unclean. Because God is holy and pure, those that were in his presence had to reflect that and death was something that would require getting clean again if you were around it. But Nazirites were to be pure before God.

If family died, they couldn't go to the funeral, because if they did their vow would be broken. If someone died next to them, the vow was defiled. They would have to make an offering to get clean and start over.

Upward - to God because he is holy and perfect, devoted to him untainted by death.

When the time of separation was complete - they would get a haircut, make sacrifices with the help of a priest, all as an act of worship to God.

And if you were rich, you could do more! **Numbers 6:21** “This is the law of the Nazirite. But if he vows an offering to the LORD above his Nazirite vow, as he can afford, in exact accordance with the vow that he takes, then he shall do in addition to the law of the Nazirite.” (ESV)

These are people devoted to God. Honoring him, glorifying him, with a life lived for him.

Who are today's Nazarites?

- Missionaries
- Celibate Christians
- Financially generous
- Time generous

Those that give their life away to God. That inspire us to do the same.

Here's the thing. Nazarites then (and likely these types now) didn't do this to earn anything.

There is no indication that they became famous, that they had more favor with God, that there was a prize after their vow was finished.

They did it because that is what Israel was supposed to look like. A kingdom of priests set apart for God. Where not everyone in the camp wanted to live this way, they were willing to give it their best.

They committed themselves to God because he is so good. So glorious. They made their vow in response to his grace.

Because they understood the gift they had in relationship to God and realized the hope of a wonderful vow.

Wonderful Vow

God also instructed Aaron to pray over all the people of Israel, to “bless” them.

Cambridge Dictionary: “to ask for God's help and protection for someone or something, or to call or make someone or something holy.”

Numbers 6:24–26 “The LORD bless you and keep you;
[25] the LORD make his face to shine upon you and be gracious to you;
[26] the LORD lift up his countenance upon you and give you peace.”
(ESV)

Bless; God blesses by giving good harvests, peace, children, and his own presence.
Keep; to guard and protect.
Face shine; Shining face is a smiling face, Like sunshine on your face, favor.
Countenance; See you and give you peace, total wellbeing.

Benediction as a reminder and a starting point. Proof of their life to that point and what was to come in the future.

This is where God made his vow. His wonderful vow.

Numbers 6:27 “So shall they put my name upon the people of Israel, and I will bless them.” (ESV)

“I will bless them.” This is a sure thing. It can be trusted.

Like when one of your parents, the one that gives you more sugar, when they say “I will give you ice cream.” Now if you just met this parent, you might not trust them, but if you have learned to trust, when they say you are getting ice cream, you know it is coming.

It is proven.

- He freed them from slavery.
- Gave them food for every day in the wilderness.
- Promised a home and given his presence along the way, fire and smoke (they could see it).

A vow to hold onto. That would carry you through the wilderness.

On our journey, some of us could use something to hold onto right now. Maybe even someone to hold onto.

Not our ability to take a vow - to give up something or make significant sacrifices.

This prayer was crucial for Israel. In fact the oldest evidence of Yahweh's name was from this prayer engraved on an amulet in a Judean tomb from 700 BC.

Here is what I hope we see. As vital as Aaron's blessing is for Israel, as the center of their existence. I think it points to the wonderful vow's completion.

To Jesus, the Messiah.

He who came to bless. Provision, his own presence.

Who keeps us. Secure in his finished work for us on the cross.

Whose face has shined upon us. In the flesh, he took on our experience.

Gracious to us. Given what we could never earn or deserve.

The One who sees you and gives you peace.

Given blessing not because we make a vow or live up to what is required to stand before a holy God, but because Jesus did. Taking on the curse of sin for us. The ultimate expression of God's desire to bless us - Jesus as the perfect Nazarite in our place.

Galatians 3:13–14 “Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us—for it is written, “Cursed is everyone who is hanged on a tree”—[14] so that in Christ Jesus the blessing of Abraham might come to the Gentiles, so that we might receive the promised Spirit through faith. (ESV)

A blessing no longer only for Israel, but for all who would believe. To be made his people. To be where real peace is found.

Ephesians 2:13–22 “But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ. [14] For he himself is our peace, who has made us both one and has broken down in his flesh the dividing wall of

hostility [15] by abolishing the law of commandments expressed in ordinances, that he might create in himself one new man in place of the two, so making peace, [16] and might reconcile us both to God in one body through the cross, thereby killing the hostility. [17] And he came and preached peace to you who were far off and peace to those who were near. [18] For through him we both have access in one Spirit to the Father. [19] So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, [20] built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone, [21] in whom the whole structure, being joined together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord. [22] In him you also are being built together into a dwelling place for God by the Spirit. (ESV)

Reconciled to God. Brought near to him.

“He needed no sin offering or guilt offering made on his behalf in order to enter the presence of his heavenly Father... Jesus himself was the spotless atonement offering whose blood enables you and me to draw near to the presence of the holy God and experience his blessing. He gave his life to enable you to share in God’s feast.” ID

To Aaron’s blessing, in Christ, we can say “yes and amen!”

Jesus our Lord. It is finished. We are his.

Worth giving your life to.

Romans 12:1–2 “I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. [2] Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect.” (ESV)

Even when we are imperfect - we are his - he has put his name upon us. He will bless us.

“But he himself is our peace. In Jesus we now receive God’s blessing. Now my sin and faithlessness has been fully paid for. Now Jesus has been raised up from the dead and exalted to the right hand of the Father. He has returned once again to

the Father's favor and has been given the name above every name, never again to be separated from his blessing. What is more, where he is, there shall I also be."

- Are you ready to obey God even if it means loss of face?
- Will you follow God even if it means personal financial loss or being laughed at or some other hardship?
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Lord, may our answer be yes, come what may on this journey with you.

Because of Christ, you can give your life away.

Experience the wonderful vow - Know Jesus is for you - wants you to have peace and he makes a way for you. Repent of your disregard of God, your sinful de-emphasizing, receive his grace for you. His name is upon you, he will bless you.

Express your own wilderness vow - Surrender to him in new ways, commit your life to him. Jesus has you. Go for it - for his glory!

May we see his glory. May we see his beauty. May we be forever changed.

What is worth living for? JESUS!

Let's live.