

The Pledge

Part II of Starting Over

Teaching on Parashah Nasso

by Kevin Phipps

In my last lesson, I talked about our ability and necessity to start over, with a new life, no matter what we have done, through the redemption we have available to us through Yeshua the Messiah. I remember exactly when I did just that as a twelve-year old boy, growing up in the beautiful state of New Jersey. I was on a winter retreat with my youth group, and went forward for an altar call to dedicate my life to Yeshua, or Christ as I called Him then. I admit I didn't have much to repent from, but I do remember the unexplainable joy that filled my heart for the rest of the evening after I did it. Most if not all of you have similar experiences. This event is described in different ways in the church. "Getting saved", "accepting Jesus in your heart", and "receiving salvation", are just some of them. What exactly are you doing though? Is saying a simple prayer to ask God to save you from your sins all there is to it? What if you said the prayer when you were five and didn't really understand what you said? Naso talks about the vows of the Nazir, and I believe there are insights, which can be gleaned to answer these questions.

"Then Moshe spoke to the heads of the tribes of the people of Isra'el. He said, 'Here is what ADONAI has ordered: when a man makes a vow to ADONAI or formally obligates himself by swearing an oath, he is not to break his word but is to do everything he said he would do.'"[B'midbar/Numbers 30:1-2]

Vows are a serious matter to God. A vow is a type of covenant one enters into with God, usually in the presence of witnesses. A vow was made for a particular type of service to God, with particular expectations placed on both God and the one making the vow. Sacrifices were often a part of the deal, as we see with the Nazarite vows. We see with Shimson (Samson) that he was a Nazarite, and the result was special gifting by God of extraordinary strength and the ability to speak in riddles. Both he was intended to use to help Isra'el in protection from their enemies. There are other types of vows too. I don't think it is any accident that the passage immediately before the Nazarite vows deals with a woman suspected of adultery, and what her jealous husband is able to do about it. Marriage vows are more a covenant with God, than the one you are marrying. Unfaithfulness is more a betrayal to God than your spouse. Regardless of the nature or purpose of the vow, making a vow to God is a life changing experience, and one not to enter into lightly.

"If you make a vow to God, don't delay in discharging it. For God takes no pleasure in fools, so discharge your vow! Better not to make a vow than to make a vow and not discharge it. Don't let your words make you guilty, and don't tell the temple official that you made the vow by mistake. Why give God reason to be angry at what you say and destroy what you have accomplished? For [this is what happens when there are too] many dreams, aimless activities and words. Instead, just fear God!" [Qohelet/Ecclesiastes 5:4-7]

One of the most heart-wrenching stories of the Bible is found in Judges 11. It tells of a man named Jephthah who makes a vow to God that if God delivers his enemies into his hands he will offer as a burnt offering the first thing to come out the door of his house when

he gets home. It was his daughter who was a virgin and his only child. After two months of mourning in the mountains, she was sacrificed to carry out the vow her father made to God. This is how serious God is about vows.

When we ask God into our heart and ask him to save us, He is not a spiritual housekeeper that then comes to your house once in awhile to clean up, then leaves, with you still in charge of the house. What actually happens is that you sign the deed of your house over to Him, He becomes owner, and you become a tenant. You put yourself in the service of the King for the rest of your life. In service to the King, there are rules of the Kingdom that you must follow. There may also be specific duties the King wants you to perform for His special purpose for your life. The result of this is protection from the King and salvation of your life. The Greek word for saved is "sozo", which means, "to deliver, save, or protect." Thus salvation is a two way street. Like I said in Starting Over, we are saved by grace and not by works, but by following the ways of Torah, we are brought to the Living Torah, which is Yeshua, who saves us from our sin.

Salvation is not about saying a magical prayer and continuing with life as usual. You are pledging your life to God, as His servant. He requires you to be holy as He is holy. He requires you to walk in His ways. Grace is not about living for yourself, and expecting God to get rid of your sins. Holiness may not be possible on our own, but it is still a path we are expected to walk down. Where we fail, grace takes over, but we must do our part. Through his vows and sacrifices, the Nazir became a different person. The Hebrew word for Nazir comes from the root word "nazar", which means to separate. The first time this word is used is in Vayikra 15:31.

“In this way you will separate the people of Isra'el from their uncleanness, so that they will not die in a state of uncleanness for defiling my tabernacle which is there with them.”

Some people mistakenly think that separation has to do with separation from the world physically. Perhaps there are situations which call for this, but generally, this is not what Scripture is telling us to do. Separation is about separation from sin and the way of the world, not the world itself.

“Now I am no longer in the world. They are in the world, but I am coming to you. Holy Father, guard them by the power of your name, which you have given to me, so that they may be one, just as we are. When I was with them, I guarded them by the power of your name, which you have given to me; yes, I kept watch over them; and not one of them was destroyed (except the one meant for destruction, so that the Tanakh might be fulfilled). But now, I am coming to you; and I say these things while I am still in the world so that they may have my joy made complete in themselves. "I have given them your word, and the world hated them, because they do not belong to the world -- just as I myself do not belong to the world. I don't ask you to take them out of the world, but to protect them from the Evil One. They do not belong to the world, just as I do not belong to the world. Set them apart for holiness by means of the truth -- your word is truth. Just as you sent me into the world, I have sent them into the world. On their behalf I am setting myself apart for holiness, so that they too may be set apart for holiness by means of the truth. "I pray not only for these, but also for those who will trust in me because of their word, 21 that they may all be one.” [Yochanan/John 17:11-20]

As the servants of God, we are called to be lights to the world, as Yeshua is the Light of the World (Jn.9:5). How can we be a light if we live no differently than the world? If we are to live differently, what is to define the ways in which we live? Should it be standards coming from the Roman Empire and emperors like Constantine or people of the church like Martin Luther, Charles Wesley, Charles Spurgeon, or Billy Graham? Or should it be laws given to Moshe by God and passed down to us through the people of God? Which do you think is a greater reflection of the truth of God? I don't know about you, but I'm putting my trust in Torah.

In the easy gospel of the church, the Laws of God are summed up as loving God and neighbor. However, the concept of love is so twisted and diluted in our culture that we usually do not end up with Torah by simply loving God and man. Love itself is defined by Torah. Thus the easy Gospel is not as easy as some like to think.

"Struggle to get in through the narrow door, because -- I'm telling you! -- many will be demanding to get in and won't be able to, once the owner of the house has gotten up and shut the door. You will stand outside, knocking at the door and saying, 'Lord! Open up for us!' But he will answer, 'I don't know you or where you come from!' Then you will say, 'We ate and drank with you! you taught in our streets!' and he will tell you, 'I don't know where you're from. Get away from me, all you workers of wickedness!' You will cry and grind your teeth when you see Avraham, Yitz'chak, Ya`akov and all the prophets inside the Kingdom of God, but yourselves thrown outside. Moreover, people will come from the east, the west, the north and the south to sit at table in the Kingdom of God. [Luke 13:24-30]

Not only can we not be a light to the world if we do not follow Torah, but we cannot have a meaningful, intimate relationship with God without Torah. The world knows we belong to God through our love, likewise God knows we belong to Him through Torah, both our living out Torah in our lives and the blood of the Living Torah covering our sin to make us holy.

The way to the Kingdom is narrow, and there is only one door to the Kingdom. As we look at the various uses of doors in Scripture, we see the doorway to a house as being the place where the blood of the Passover lamb was placed in Shmot/Exodus 12. It is also the place where a servant pledged himself to his master (Shmot 21), where sacrifices, offerings, and cleansing was conducted at the tabernacle and thus where the Nazarite performed his sacrifice and vows unto God in this week's Parashah. In D'varim/Deuteronomy 11:20 we are told to affix the commands of God on the doorpost of our homes and on our gates. Finally, Yeshua declared Himself to be the gate and the way to the Kingdom in Yochanan/John. All this is the narrow door we must pass through as God's servant to enter the Kingdom.

“ So, my dear friends, just as you have always obeyed when I was with you, it is even more important that you obey now when I am away from you: keep working out your deliverance with fear and trembling, for God is the one working among you both the willing and the working for what what pleases him. Do everything without kvetching or arguing, so that you may be blameless and pure children of God, without defect in the midst of a twisted and perverted generation, among whom you shine like stars in the sky, as you hold on to the Word of Life. [Philippians 2:12-16]

As we learn more and more how to live in the footsteps of Torah, we become more and more the person God has called and created us to be, and who we have vowed ourselves to become. Whatever decisions you have made for God and concerning Yeshua the Messiah in the past are certainly not invalid, but it is important to recognize that there is more to those decisions than what you may have thought. It does little good to follow the Living Torah, and ignore the Written Torah.

The Written Torah teaches us values and principles which carry over into other areas of life. If you don't care what food you eat, what else do you not care about? How about the forms of entertainment you watch? How about the places you go and the people you spend time with? You may not bring sacrifices to the temple, but you are to live as a living sacrifice according to Romans 12. How do you know how to do that if you know nothing of the sacrificial system of the temple and the office of the priesthood? Your neighbor may not have an ox to covet, but how about a BMW, or a beautiful wife? If you don't care enough about your neighbor's stuff to protect it and not steal it, how much do you really care about your neighbor? If you do not care enough about God to rest on the one day He prescribed for you to rest, as a favor to you by the way, how much do you really love God? If you don't love your neighbor enough to not lie to him, not steal from him, or not sleep with his wife, how are you going to be a light to him and tell him the Gospel so he repents of his own sin and doesn't spend eternity in hell? If you don't care enough about God to keep His Sabbath and have no other gods but Him, how can you expect Him to care enough about you to let you into His Kingdom and apply the atonement from the blood of His own Son to you?

We are faced with many decisions and trials every day. How we make those decisions and how we react to the situations we face come from values and Kingdom principles we learn as a servant of God following His Torah. In the same way a Nazir entered into a special way of life to fulfill a special purpose for God, we enter into a life of separation from sin and the ways of the world, while still being part of the world, to be a light to the world and a servant to God. This is not something that happens all at once. It is a process, which continues for the rest of our life. The decisions for God we have made or can make today are vows, which God will hold us to. Such decisions put us on the road to sanctification, and we must walk that road, never getting complacent to keep to our side of the vows. The reward is the riches of the Kingdom, life with God, and realization of the person God has made us to be.

“ the One who began a good work among you will keep it growing until it is completed on the Day of the Messiah Yeshua. ” [Philippians 1:6]