

## Note To Self: Be Holy! – Numbers 15:37-41

### I. INTRODUCTION

#### A. Reality Shows

1. As you're well aware – reality shows are the current rage on TV.
2. The networks are planning a new crop of them for this Summer and next Fall.
3. One of the most popular types in the reality genre are the *make-over* shows.
  - a. in one version of the make-over show, they find someone who's in special need,
    - 1) and they *either* give them plastic surgery and redo their wardrobe,
    - 2) or they remodel their house and turn it from a dump into a mansion.
  - b. the other version of the make-over show is the *competition* where a whole group of contestants vie for who can go from *least* to *most attractive*.
4. Personally, such reality shows are not my cup of tea. I've never really watched them.
  - a. I may catch a few minutes here or there but typically I'm not into them.
  - b. many people are, as the ratings make clear.
  - c. and while I'm not interested in watching any of the make-over shows,
  - d. the concept intrigues me—because *in reality* as you and I follow Christ, *we're* being “made over.”
  - e. the great drama that's unfolding by God's sovereign hand in history is His preparation of a Glorious Bride for His Beloved Son.
  - f. before we came to faith in Christ, we were the ugly duckling, scarred & twisted by sin.
  - g. but we've become new creatures who are learning to put aside the dark & doubtful habits of the past to become who we truly are in Christ –
  - h. as it says in Ephesians 5:27 – God is making us into a glorious people, having no defects, blemishes, or anything that would detract from a beauty worthy of Jesus.
5. The Gospel of Jesus Christ is the storyline of the *real Extreme Makeover*.

#### B. Broadcast

1. Now-here's the deal: Just as the networks broadcast the makeover stories of dozens of people *to the world* –
2. God wants the world to witness the *transformation* that takes place in *His* people.
  - a. He wants the lost and needy of this world to *see* that He is at work in the lives of His own, changing them from ugly ducklings into glorious swans.
  - b. lifting Cinderella out of her soot & sin-stained rags & adorning her in a gorgeous garment of grace & holiness.
3. There ought to be a *noticeable difference* between the people of God and the world of fallen mankind.
4. This is what our text today makes clear.

### II. TEXT

#### A. Vs. 37-41

**37** Again the LORD spoke to Moses, saying, **38**“Speak to the children of Israel: Tell them to make tassels on the corners of their garments throughout their generations, and to put a blue thread in the tassels of the corners. **39**And you shall have the tassel, that you may look upon it and remember all the commandments of the LORD and do them, and that you *may* not follow the harlotry to which your own heart and your own eyes are inclined, **40**and that you may remember and do all My commandments, and be holy for your God. **41**I *am* the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, to be your God: I *am* the LORD your God.”

1. Okay, let's get our bearings – what's the context for this?
2. God spoke this to Moses just after Israel had refused to go up and take possession of the Promised Land.
3. The sentence of God's judgment had been pronounced upon them – the entire adult generation would die off in the wilderness over the next 38 years.
4. It was their *children* who would go up and conquer Canaan.
5. These words were directed at that *new generation*.
6. Over the next 4 decades God would fashion them into a mighty army with the grit and mettle to face what their parents had been too timid & fearful to do, take on the Canaanites in battle.
7. Part of that training would be their learning to *identify themselves*, not as *Slaves of Egypt* but as the *Soldiers of Israel*.
8. This is why their parents failed. Though God had delivered them from bondage, they kept *thinking* of themselves as slaves.
9. They failed to *appropriate* their *new identity* as *freemen*.
10. All those who thought that way would have to die off before the nation would be ready to enter in to all that God had planned for them.
11. The children, all those under 20, were liberated from a slave-mentality during the 40 years of wandering in the wilderness.
  - a. a new generation was born and grew up who were toughened by the harsh conditions of the desert.
  - b. but more importantly, they were free and *saw themselves* as freemen.
12. God gave them this command to make distinctive signs in their clothing as a reminder that they were *His people* – in covenant with Him, and that the most important thing about them was that they were His!
13. Let's look at it –

#### **B. Vs. 37-38**

**37** Again the LORD spoke to Moses, saying, **38**“Speak to the children of Israel: Tell them to make tassels on the corners of their garments throughout their generations, and to put a blue thread in the tassels of the corners.

1. If you have a version of the Bible other than the NKJ the word *tassels* might be something else, like *fringe* or *border*.

2. The word is ancient and a bit obscure so the translators didn't know exactly how to render it.
  3. The King James translators simply looked to see how it was understood by orthodox Jews and realized the word meant "tassel."
  4. The outer cloak the people of that day wore was rectangular with a hole in the center for the head.
    - a. it was worn over the tunic, and was gathered at the waist with a belt.
    - b. the four corners of the cloak would come somewhere about knee-high.
    - c. from these corners, God told the people to hang a bunch of ornamental threads.
    - d. there was no *functional* purpose to them other than to *remind* them they were in covenant with Him.
  5. One of the threads in the tassels was to be *blue*.
    - a. blue dye was difficult to make so blue cloth was rare and not found in common clothing.
    - b. blue is the color associated with heaven in scripture.
    - c. the curtains of the holy of holies were blue because it was a model of the throne room of heaven.
    - d. the high priest wore blue as a symbol of his spiritual service before the God of heaven.
  6. When God told the people of Israel to put a blue thread in their tassels, it was to *connect* them to the tabernacle, to the high priest, and to the fact that though they *lived* on earth, they were *a heavenly people*.
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7. On my finger is a ring. It's a symbol of the covenant my lovely bride and I entered into on May 17<sup>th</sup>, 1980.
    - a. every time I see it, I remember that day and the vows made.
    - b. I think of Lynn and the wonderful covenant of companionship we enjoy.
    - c. and in that memory, my heart is moved *to* her, to love and serve her.
  8. That's what God intended the tassels to be.
    - a. just as the *Sabbath day* was Israel's "wedding ring" her memorial of the covenant she had entered into with God,
    - b. so the tassels were to be *even more obvious* and daily reminders of how they were in covenant with the God of Heaven.
    - c. that memory would then stir them to move *toward* the Lord to serve Him with joy and diligence.

### C. Vs. 39-40

**<sup>39</sup>And you shall have the tassel, that you may look upon it and remember all the commandments of the LORD and do them, and that you may not follow the harlotry to which your own heart and your own eyes are inclined, <sup>40</sup>and that you may remember and do all My commandments, and be holy for your God.**

1. God is well aware of the struggle we face as we live in this fallen world.
  - a. He knows how appealing its *seductive influences* are, how *insidious the temptations*.
  - b. and He knows that the human heart, left to itself, will set up all sorts of

- devious rivals* to Him.
2. This is why He told the people to wear the tassels – they were to be *abiding* reminders of their *calling and identity* as People of Heaven, *not* people of the world.

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  3. Tom & Bill worked together at the same firm.
    - a. when they found out they would both be attending the same out of town seminar, they decided to share a room to cut costs.
    - b. both men were married and while Bill was devoted to his wife, Tom was less loyal.
    - c. at the resort where the conference was held that same weekend was a singles convention with lots of attractive young women.
    - d. as Tom & Bill left the evening session of their seminar and headed for the restaurant,
      - 1) Tom pulled off his wedding ring and stuck it in his pocket.
      - 2) Bill watched him do this, then looked down at his own hand.
        - a) he noticed that his ring had shifted around so that the single diamond was facing his palm.
        - b) he thoughtfully twisted the ring so that the diamond was out front.
        - c) and as he did, an urgent longing for his wife flooded his heart.
      - 3) he turned to Tom and said, “I think I’ll grab something to eat somewhere else, later. Right now, I really want to call my wife.”
      - 4) then he turned *away* and went to his room.

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  4. The Bible describes this world as much like a battlefield that has been heavily mined by the enemy.
    - a. Satan is called the god of this age & the prince of the power of the air – meaning he’s the influence behind the world’s opposition to God. (2 Cor. 4:4 Eph. 2:2)
    - b. the devil offered to give Jesus the kingdoms of the Earth if He would bow down and worship him.
      - 1) the temptation was real because dominion of earth had been turned over to the devil in Adam’s Fall.
      - 2) now he works his will and opposition to God through the world system.
      - 3) he’s laid moral mines and dug spiritual traps all around us.
    - c. lust, envy, greed, anger, dissension, perversion – the temptations are everywhere.
    - d. in fashion, in the media, at school, at work, in the mall, at the beach, in the mountains –
    - e. no matter where you go, you’ll find subtle voices calling to you to define yourself by the *world’s* rather than *God’s standard*.
  5. Since we live in such an environment which *constantly pressures* us to conform and fit in to its rebellious system, God calls His own to take to themselves *reminders* that *we don’t belong to this world*.
  6. His covenant with us has given us a new life, a new identity, and a new standard.
  7. Because our eyes and ears face a daily barrage of tempting sights and sounds, we need reminders of who we really are so we can resist temptation and walk

in holiness.

8. Tom took *off* his wedding ring because he didn't *want* to be reminded of his marriage covenant. He walked into temptation – and into ruin!
9. Bill adjusted his ring so that it would *remind* him who he was – the husband of his wife. And being reminded, he fled the place of temptation to spend time with his bride.

### III. CONCLUSION

#### A. A String On The Finger

1. To this day, orthodox Jews wear these tassels on their clothes.
2. Often times they're nothing more than a few strings, but they're a reminder of the covenant God made with them.
3. As Christians, we believe *that* covenant has been taken up and fulfilled in the new covenant God offers to all those who put their faith in Christ.
4. The command and call God gave the Jews to walk before Him in holiness is no less in force and play for us *today* as it was for them.
5. And the world hasn't changed from that day to this!
  - a. it's *still* a battlefield, still covered with moral mines and spiritual traps cleverly laid by Satan.
  - b. if the children of Israel *needed* tassels to remind them who they were,
  - c. then how important we take to ourselves reminders of who we are!
6. These reminders ought to be *distinctive*, just as the tassels Israel wore were unique and distinctive.
  - a. they weren't aped or copied from the world –
  - b. they were a unique and simple reminder of their covenant with God.
7. In Lev. 18 God said this to the people

**<sup>3</sup>According to the doings of the land of Egypt, where you dwelt, you shall not do; and according to the doings of the land of Canaan, where I am bringing you, you shall not do; nor shall you walk in their ordinances. <sup>4</sup>You shall observe My judgments and keep My ordinances, to walk in them: I am the LORD your God. <sup>5</sup>You shall therefore keep My statutes and My judgments, which if a man does, he shall live by them: I am the LORD.**

8. Their call to be a *holy* people meant the children of Israel needed a *different* symbol, not something that would send the wrong message to the world or to one another about what it means to live a holy, a *separated* life.
9. Because God's covenant is a call to the beauty of holiness, they needed a unique, different ornament – the tassel with a blue thread.
  - a. this was their “string on the finger”
  - b. to remind them that while they *walked* on Earth, they *lived* before the face of a holy God.
10. Such reminders are an excellent idea for you and I as we follow the Lord.
  - a. but we ought not follow the *world's marks of distinction* or the fashion industry's ideas of conformity.
  - b. we need something *unique & distinctive*, something lovely, an *ornament* that is simple yet obvious so that we might see it often and be reminded of

- who we are.
- c. so that we do not fall into the trap that is all too common of turning something precious and powerful into just a dead religious tradition, as happened with the tassels on Israel's clothes --
  - d. we won't be setting one thing as the emblem of our covenant with God.
  - e. we're not going to use this now as a means of selling you some trinket!
  - f. God spoke to Israel to make tassels –
  - g. I trust that as the Lord speaks about the importance of this to your heart, He'll give you some modern day tassel to employ,
    - 1) some contemporary “string on the finger” –
    - 2) a *note to self*: “**Be Holy!**”
11. When there's something I need to remember to do, I write myself a note and put it in a place I'm sure to see it when I need to: on the front door, the bathroom mirror, my computer monitor, the dashboard.
  12. What you and I *always* need to remember is – “Be holy!”
  13. Devise a reminder, a *note to self* that you will see constantly and remember who you are - the holy child of God.
  14. As I said, as tempting as it is now to roll out some common symbol we could all use – we're not going to do that.
    - a. while it would be a great way to get started,
    - b. it would also be too easy a thing for people to adopt with no real intent to comply.
    - c. this has to be a heart issue – a consecration of our lives to holiness.
    - d. it's just too easy for us to fall into the trap of empty rituals & meaningless symbols.
    - e. in Matthew 23:5, Jesus rebuked the Pharisees because they had made their tassels into massive bundles of thread.
    - f. it was like they were saying, “I am so holy! You *wish* you could be as holy as me.”
    - g. that's the risk we run if we were to all settle on the *same* symbol for our consecration to the Lord.
  15. So simply seek the Lord on the ornament, the symbol you can employ that will remind you who you are and how to walk.

### **B. Ella Gunderson**

1. Let me tell you about 11 year old Ella Gunderson and her desire to walk in holiness before God.
2. She wrote a letter to Nordstrom's department store that made it all the way to the President of the company.
3. After a recent shopping trip for school clothes revealed there wasn't a single modest piece of clothing available, she wrote –

I am an eleven-year-old girl who has tried shopping at your store for clothes (in particular jeans), but all of them ride way under my hips, and the next size up is too big and falls down. I see all of these girls who walk around with pants that show their belly button and underwear. Your clerks suggest that there is only one look. If that is true, then girls are

supposed to walk around half naked. I think that you should change that. <sup>[1]</sup>

4. The Board of Nordstrom's agreed and made the decision to make sure their Fall fashions would hold several lines of modest apparel for women and girls.
5. Many other stores have caught on and the outlook for the Fall is a move away from the trend toward immodesty.
6. When Ella wrote her letter, she had no idea she was setting off a new fashion trend – that wasn't her desire.
7. She simply desired to walk in holiness before her Lord and to wear clothing that would stand in *distinction* to the immodesty of the world.
8. A knee-length skirt and shoulder-covering tops were her blue-threaded tassel.

### **C. Not Weird – Better**

1. In following the Lord, God doesn't want us to be *weird* or *bizarre*.
2. *True* holiness is attractive & lovely. It's *different* but it's the difference of *beauty*.
3. God wants our lives to be a winsome testimony to the world of His goodness and power.
4. One day, as Jesus was walking through Capernaum, a woman who'd been troubled by a serious illness for many years crept up behind him, intent on reaching out and touching the tassels that hung from His cloak.
  - a. like many of that day, she believed when Messiah came, He would be *so holy*, his tassels would hold healing power.
  - b. you now what happened! – she touched them, and instantly was made whole.
  - c. what the doctors had been unable to do for her for 12 years, Jesus did at a touch!
5. Jesus' holiness and power healed a sick and hopeless woman.
6. As we walk in holiness before the eyes of the lost and needy, God wants us and our witness to bring hope and healing to those who've found no hope in the things of this world.
7. May He speak to each of us now about *how* we can live in remembrance of who we are and what we're called to.

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<sup>[1]</sup> Kristen Gelineau Associated Press , *The Star*. Thursday, June 3,2004 pg. 3 “*Girl's modest proposal may signal a trend*”