

Numbers 15:32–41

³²Now while the children of Israel were in the wilderness, they found a man gathering sticks on the Sabbath day. ³³And those who found him gathering sticks brought him to Moses and Aaron, and to all the congregation. ³⁴They put him under guard, because it had not been explained what should be done to him.

³⁵Then the Lord said to Moses, “The man must surely be put to death; all the congregation shall stone him with stones outside the camp.” ³⁶So, as the Lord commanded Moses, all the congregation brought him outside the camp and stoned him with stones, and he died.

³⁷Again 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. ³⁹And 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, ⁴⁰and that you may remember and do all My commandments, and be holy for your God. ⁴¹I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, to be your God: I am the Lord your God.”

Sanctified Sanctifiers of the Sabbath

Main idea: God’s holy day is especially for His holy people to rejoice in the holiness of their God.

Introduction: What does high-handed sin look like? In one of its extreme forms, it looks like Sabbath-breaking.

1. **Sanctifiers of the Sabbath**, v32–36

1. Their sense that this was a special case, v32–33 (something far removed from the common thinking of our churches today, which puts us to shame even before rebellious Israel)
2. Moses and Aaron’s sense that this was a special case, v34
3. YHWH’s confirmation that this was a special case.
 1. Not just excommunication but execution
 2. Corporate responsibility
 3. Corporate instruction

2. **Sanctified by God Himself**, v37–41

1. Tassels with blue threads
 1. Fashion statements are often faith statements, identity statements
 2. They can be a message to ourselves (or, in this case, to themselves but really from God)
2. The need for the tassels
 1. Not to distinguish members from outsiders/foreigners
 2. To reject the harlotry to which their own heart is inclined. We must live according to the desires of God’s heart, not according to the dictates of our own evil hearts.

3. To reject the harlotry to which their own eyes are inclined. We must live according to what is right in God's eyes, not according to what is right in our own idolatrous and adulterous eyes.
3. The message of the tassels
 1. Do according to God's commandments. Living according to His desires and His standards is not nebulous but clearly defined in His Scriptures.
 2. Be holy unto your God
 3. Live as those who were saved to belong to Him, to be joined to Him in covenant

Conclusion: the “blue thread” of the Lord's Day. The day for remembering—by rejoicing in—Whose you are.

(The following is a machine-generated transcription. Please be aware of—and patient with—transcribing errors. If there is something confusing or obviously erroneous, you are invited to listen to the audio recording via hopewellarp.org)

Numbers. 15 verses 32-41. These are God's words. Now, while the children of Israel were in the wilderness, they found a man Gathering sticks on the Sabbath day. And those who found him Gathering sticks. Brought him to Moses and Aaron and to all the congregation.

And they put him under guard because it had not been explained. What should be done to him? Then Yahweh said to Moses. The man must surely be put to death. All the congregations shall Stone him with stones outside the camp. So as Yahweh commanded Moses all the congregation Brought him outside the camp.

And stoned him with stones. And he died. Again, Yahweh spoke to Moses saying. 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. And you shall have the tassel that you may look upon it and remember all the Commandments of Yahweh and do them.

That you may not follow the harlotry. To which your own heart. And your own eyes are inclined. That you may remember and do all my Commandments. And be holy. For your God. I am Yahweh, your God. Who brought you out of the land of Egypt to be your God?

I am Yahweh.

So far the reading of gods inspired and And Aaron twerk. So we're still here just as Uh, the Lord has pronounced this Uh, really Dreadful sentence upon the people of Israel. The Those who are numbered from 20 years old and upward who had come out of the land. Report from the spies came back and Uh, they in unbelief and the Lord, in the Lord's own words, despising of the Lord, and rejecting him.

Had wished that they would. Go back to Egypt or die in the wilderness or die back in Egypt. Uh and indeed the Lord has pronounced, the death sentence upon them. They will fall in the

wilderness but Uh, their children. Whom they said would be pray in the wilderness. Their children will inherit the land.

And, Israel is about to set out now on the rest of the 40 years. What is now going to be 40 years? Of wandering. But before they do, God has given these merciful instructions, that started this way, at the beginning of chapter 15, when you have come into the land, What which you, um, you are into inhabit, which I am giving to you and so forth.

And now he adds to some of the Sacrifices that have been given in the Book of Leviticus. He adds a drink offering, which of course they don't have here. Because they don't have wine and they don't have Vines and they're unable to do it. But when they come into the land, you see how the instruction is, assuring them.

That the Next Generation will, indeed come into the land. And one of the ways we know that they'll come into the land is, there's instruction for how the offerings are to be made. When you get there, when you come into this place that already has these cultivated Vines that are going to be producing for you, you will have such an overflow of the wine that you are able to pour some out at every sacrifice, how great is the generosity of God and really the patience and forgiveness that even was in that instruction.

Well, we heard about that Two weeks ago and then last week. Again, God's great mercy and Highlighting to them. The The sin offering and the trespass offering that he has provided in the context of unintentional sin, even providing what was really a small expenditure just one bull and one goat.

Could atone for the unintentional sin of the whole congregation together. And, of course, we Uh, we remembered And we're reminded in the preaching last week that it's because it's not the blood of that bull or that goat. That God is able to extend such forgiveness. On the merits of the blood of his son, our Lord Jesus Christ and so there was atonement for unintentional, sin of the congregation and unintentional sin of individuals.

And then, There was this butt in verse. But the person, Who does high-handedly with a high hand? And this. The one who sins high-handedly sins in a way that is asserting himself against the Lord sins because it is sinful sins, because it is a choosing of self. Over God.

Such a person has despised has blasphemed, the Lord blasphemed Yahweh verse 30 and despised. The word of Yahweh verse 31 and that person was to be excommunicated. The person shall be completely cut off. And not only excommunicated, but as the scripture repeatedly teaches, Excommunication on Earth is an Earthly indication of something much more Dreadful, and that is sin and guilt being upon us before God from Heaven.

So the last exhortation had ended that person shall be completely cut off his guilt shall be, Upon him. But how do you get excommunicated when the nation is in the wilderness? How can you be expelled? From the people. Well, our passage immediately treats then one of these situations of high-handed sin, you say, well, what does a high-handed sin look like?

And we tend, when we ask that question, we tend to name those sins that feel especially high-handed to us. And there's an intentional. There's an entire month of high-handed sin that is concluding in our culture and indeed it is high-ended sin. But we are much slower. To Define as high-handed.

Those sins that are high-handed against God. Those sins that take something that he has consecrated to himself. And assert ourselves over against him. And take it for ourselves. And for our purposes. And so the first example, given here of the high-handed sin are, the only

example given here. Uh, the immediate example, given here of the high-handed sin is the man Gathering sticks on the Sabbath.

One of the extreme forms of high-handed sin is Sabbath breaking. That's hard for us to imagine because that just isn't believed in the churches anymore. Um, if you'll allow me an autobiographical illustration. It's been. 24, 25 years. Uh, since The Lord being merciful to me and through all sorts of other reasons, bringing me to a reformed Seminary.

Uh, where that Faith once delivered to all the saints had been preserved and was being taught from the scriptures with. With the help of Largely four and 5. Uh, your old men and some younger than that, as young as 20. Years old. Um, And of course, In in others, and I thank God for the the men who are there on campus at the time that he gave me to learn from.

Well, one of the things That I discovered. Was how important to God? The Sabbathus. And how important to God the Lord's Day is, And, Central place, it has, and the life of the Christian and in the law of God and the Commandments of God. And I Quite grieved at how often I had profaned it and how easily and and how I would rationalize it and even then After all those years, what felt like all those years at the time is just a kid at the time.

22. 23 years old. Um, But after a couple Decades of living, the one way, even after being theologically convinced, I would find myself every Lord's day with inclinations of the heart. Wishing to excuse this or that thing that I wanted to do. Um, And even kind of looking forward to when the Lord's day would be over and I could resume.

Whatever it was. I asked one of my professors. Why don't we teach this and why don't we discipline for this? And I probably, I don't remember if I use this passage there, there are other passages. That speak as seriously of it and I said, if it's if the Bible talks like this, why wasn't there discipline?

So that I would know. So that I wouldn't get to this point having grown up in church, been in church, my whole life and discover that I had been doing something so horrible to myself and so offensive to God. Uh, and his answer was something along the lines of Urging me to study hard.

And prepare for the ministry and pray. Uh, because we needed Reformation. Because we were in an age in the church in which you could hardly discipline for fornication, Let alone for discipline. Uh, for filing. The Sabbath. And so, it's instructive here. Uh, that this is selected as Uh, the example of high-handed sin in numbers 15, But it's instructive.

Similarly to What we know that at the Lord's table this morning when we read out of First Corinthians 11, And we said, do you see how Grievous the penalty is? Well, that's because of how glorious. The gift is that is being profaned, if you eat and drink without thinking, about the Lord, Jesus Christ at his table and that's how This passage is presented because verse 32 and verse 36.

Don't just flow out of verses 30 and 31. They also flow into verses 37 through 41. Uh, the Lord's day or the Sabbath, in this case, it was not yet called Uh, the Lord's day with reference. To Christ. This was our great privilege this morning to hear much of our how our creator himself is our Redeemer.

But the the Sabbath is as it were a tassel on the clothing of the nation of Israel with a blue thread in it. A reminder that we were created not for the creation but for the Creator, And that we're redeemed, not for ourselves, it's certainly not for the creation.

But for The Redeemer. Uh, and so We see that Israel. Not just individually but congregationally in the first place are to be sanctifiers of the Sabbath. And so that's the first heading under which we'll consider this passage this evening verses 32-36. Sanctifiers of the Sabbath not only personally but congregationally.

As they have been Sanctified, consecrated set apart as holy by God himself. That's the point of this interesting fashion statement. Uh, verses 37 through 41. I'd be interested to know don't raise your hand or tell me. No, but maybe tell me after, if any of you have ever seen someone with tassels on the corners of all their clothing in a blue thread in it, it occurred to me.

And age in which things are sometimes taken, ultra, literally, and out of place in the history of redemption there, there's got to be a sect somewhere. A small section of Christianity somewhere where they do the tassels and the blue threads. God helping us. We will see that. We too have been Sanctified by God to himself in Christ that he has taken us as holy unto himself and he gives us something.

He hasn't given us tassels with blue threads, so don't hear me. Certainly don't hear me saying that we should. Establish a fashion policy at Hopewell. Um, But he has certainly given us the Lord's day. As something that comes continually in our life, as a reminder, something to look down and say, I am God's, I am not my own.

I am holy unto him, I must live his way and so that's the second heading under which we'll This passage this evening Sanctified by God himself. So first, sanctifiers of the Sabbath. Starts. Now while the children of Israel were in the wilderness. Okay. So they're not yet. Uh in a place where they can completely cut off the people without actually the the person dying.

Uh and you have this excommunication that is required for high-handed sin and they recognize that this is a high-handed sin and they seem to recognize they sense that this is a special case. Uh, the they find the man Gathering the sticks on the Sabbath day. And you can imagine for yourself or, or to yourself.

You could probably understand. Uh, why this man would do this. Perhaps he was one of the poorer men or didn't have as many sons or was it some sort of disadvantage. I mean, there are somewhere between two and six million people in this camp in the wilderness and so the day on which nobody else is gathering wood, Seem to you, they're really opportune day to gather wood.

And perhaps that factors into how easily. This provoked, the indignation of those who caught him doing it because it wasn't just that he was, Playing some game or doing some. Non-Worship activity, he was gathering sticks which meant on the day after the Sabbath. Those sticks wouldn't be there for them.

We are much more easily offended. When we have skin in the game as it were but however, it was that they sensed that this was Um, A special case, we see that in verse 33. Because those who find him Gathering sticks, bring him to Moses and Aaron and to all the congregation.

And so, He's brought. As it were to the, the heart of the government of Israel at the time. They sense that this is a special case and Moses and Aaron themselves. Uh there, it's implied in verse 34, they too Uh, this breaking this profaning. Of the Sabbath. Uh, they sense that it's a special case.

They put him under guard. Because it had not been explained what should be done to him. And when the explanation, then, That had not yet. Come in verse 34. When it does come in

verse 35, it confirms That this is a special case, indeed. Then Yahweh said to Moses the man must surely.

Be put to death. Dying.

This is the same penalty that was originally threatened for eating from the Tree of the knowledge of Good and Evil. This is saying that the same sin has been committed, the sin of rejecting having God as your own God. Now, you may be in a place similar to first second year.

Seminary student me was Where you don't realize. That these inclinations of our hearts to take that, which is consecrated as a day of fellowship with the Lord, in worshiping him. A day that has been set apart as holy from these other things. Um, That when our hearts are bent against.

That not not just like when we gather sticks, But when our hearts are set against that we are, Entering into the, the danger zone of The opening verses of Genesis 3. So Yahweh says to Moses. Uh, dying. This man shall be put to death. Dying, he shall die. It's not just excommunication.

That is given here. But execution. And this is not just for his offense against the man or not, just for the man's offense, rather against God. But also for what this has done to the congregation Uh, in two different ways. So the Lord can commands, not just execution but the manner and who to be involved All the congregations shall Stone him with stones outside the camp.

And then verse 36. So, as Yahweh, Commanded Moses. All the congregation brought him outside the camp. And stoned him with stones. And he died and there's at least these two things. That are involved here. One is corporate responsibility. And the other one is corporate warning or corporate instruction. Corporate responsibility if the man has committed a sin.

That is so high-handed as this that God determines that because of its offense to God. Uh, it requires execution. Then Israel may not be a congregation that tolerates that sin, that Winks at it and treats it as nothing and pretends it doesn't see it and doesn't say anything. So it's it's not left to just a couple of executioners it's not left to just a couple officers.

Moses or Aaron are not. Do not take this man out privately. But it's publicly done and probably two million people did not throw stones that day, has probably representatively done by heads of the households. Of Israel as we have seen, representatively, several, things representedly done. And yet there's a reminder that the Toleration of sin and not just this particular sin, but any sort of sin Being tolerant of sin as a church makes the entire church offensive to God.

It is a denial of the Lord. Who is head of the church and who has bought us for himself, but there's also corporate instruction here. For as I'm sure every one of you would conclude if you take the time to think about it. There wasn't a man there that day, who threw a stone, whose heart had not grumbled on account of the Sabbath.

Or who hadn't half-heartedly participated in the worship of God on on the Sabbath, or whose heart and mind had not gone after other things or perhaps privately in his intent with his own family. Um had defiled the the Sabbath and just not in a public way that had gotten caught.

But participating in what God gave to show the offensiveness of the sin against him would have been a reminder to them. Even as preaching. A sermon on the passage is a reminder to the preacher. And of course I hope hearing a servant on the passage is a reminder to hear us that God.

Uh, was being merciful to Israel. By giving them this really Dreadful grave. Um, experience. Of participating in the stoning, the execution of this man. Who had broken the Sabbath. And so, the Lord here is merciful to his church. And that's the great takeaway from verses 32-36. So why is it that Um, in our hearts and Minds.

There is almost an immediate inclination. When we get to verse 34, 35, the man must surely be put to death. Why is it that our hearts and Minds so quickly and easily say, whoa. That's an overreaction. What's because? Our hearts and minds are not aligned with gods. Heart and mind.

Whenever we respond to something that God says, or does By thinking that it's an overreaction, we may be sure that the problem is that Response has been the under reaction. And that here God is instructing us and being merciful to us, praise God by way of preaching. Not, by way of public National execution.

As he was merciful to Israel in that day. So indeed, they were to be sanctifiers of the Sabbath and the first place, because in the second place they had been Sanctified by God himself. Um, we always spoke to Moses again, verse 37, saying, 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 corn. Um, Bible commentators. Make make lots of silly suggestions. And here's one of them. Uh, that this was In order that Israelites could tell one another apart, as those who had been devoted to God by the tassels and the blue threads Um, Uh, possibly if Israel actually ever did this, we we don't necessarily have any evidence that they ever obeyed this command.

Uh but when God gives you the reason for it in the text, then the reason for it is the reason that's in the text. And so, this is This is not merely a Covenantal or national identity. Fashion statement, this fashion statement is a faith statement, an identity statement, it's a statement that.

Why not to follow my own heart or my own eyes? You know, you don't do according to the desires of your heart, you do the desire according to the desires of God's heart. You don't do what's right in your own eyes. You do what's right in God's eyes. And that I belong to God.

So it's a a fair statement, an identity statement. This is generally true of clothing. Fashion statements are often Faith statements, and identity statements. Yeah, there are the people whose identity and desire is wanting to fit in. There are the people whose identity and desire is to draw attention to themselves.

Uh, they're the people whose identity and desire is to assert their right to dress as insanely differently as possible. Not even necessarily drawing attention to themselves just to kind of Express that they are going to be themselves, it's their kind of Nietzsche and Superman. Exercise is the, the way that they The way that they dress.

Um, but for believers and we see this, don't we in first Timothy 2 with The way Godly women address themselves, they Adorn themselves with modesty. It doesn't mean it's not doesn't, it's not only that they dress modestly. It's that the modesty itself is what adorns them. In addition, to other things that Adorn Godly women And so and so forth.

So fashion statements are often Faith statements, and identity statements. And, and Our fashion can often be, even a message to ourselves, there was Season of my own life in which I was convicted. That I was not taking. Uh, studying seriously enough in seminary. And so I

started showing up to class every day in shirt and tie, go to church clothing and at the Seminary that I was at, it wasn't Greenville.

I would have fit right in at Greenville, praise God. For, for that school. But that was very unusual but it wasn't for anyone else. The way you dress, Affects, you know how you live and what you're going to do, you know during covet when all the nonsense and people not going into work, one of the things that uh that some employers counseled their employees for getting more work done at home.

Was don't work in your pajamas, get up and get dressed. Well here is the dress for an Israelite in numbers 15. And Out their generations, it was supposed to be these tassels with the thread and the blue corners. Why? Well, not as a message to themselves from themselves but a message to themselves for God from God.

To remind them. That the Holiness that God had called them to. Was something that they had to battle for. Because there was still inside them something that resisted the Holiness of God. The Lord comes to you. This this afternoon, this evening and he tells you the same thing. The Holiness that God has called you to, is something that you have to battle for.

So it's not just that you may look upon it and remember, all the Commandments of Yahweh and do them, praise God. That's the holy obedient living to which you are called But here's the battle. And that you may not follow the harlotry. Bent upon prostituting. In other words, you're Covenanted to God.

But now you give that which is exclusively God's by Covenant. To another. They not follow the harlotry to which your own heart and your own eyes are inclined. So, the idea was they would look at the tassel on their clothing, they would see the blue thread in it. They would remember I my heart is still inclined to harlotry.

My eyes are still inclined to harlotry. I need by the grace of God to do Mighty battle against that, which my heart is inclined to. If I am going to remember all the Commandments of Yahweh to do them. And so they were to do against their own heart, not live, according to the desires of my own heart.

Why? Because my heart is inclined to harlotry. To live according to the desires of God's heart, not follow the, dictates of my own evil heart, not doing according to what is right in my eyes. Why Because my eyes are inclined. To harlotry. And so, I must do. What is right?

In God's eyes and not in this, in my own idolatrous. And adulterous eyes. So, we are to live, according to God's Commandments, according to his desires and according to his standards and praise God. That's not some nebulous things. That nebulous thing, that's According to all that he has written, he has given us specific Commandments.

He's filled the word with it. But especially Because it's not about the doing, and it's not even so much about Resisting our own heart and our own eyes. It's about whose we are. Notice the triple possessive or Possessive Clauses really in verse 41, I am Yahweh. Your God first one.

Who brought you out of the land of Egypt to be your God? Second one, I am Yahweh, your God. Third one. And so, the call to be holy Was a call to be his. The tassels were for reminding them whose they were. Who he is in and of himself.

He is the Creator. The Creator is their God. Whom he is in his actions towards them. He is the Redeemer. Who brought you out of the land of Egypt to be your God? And who he is in his ongoing relationship with them, their Covenant relationship to him. I am Yahweh, your God.

So those three things in verse 41, creation, and Redemption, and Covenant relation, In all those three ways, the Lord says you belong to me. Now, he hasn't given you. An instruction to put tassels on our clothing with a blue thread in it. We could. Employ dear Miss Thelma. Very well, if we all needed to tassel, all of our clothings, In fact, we probably need her to train some of our daughters to to do the tassels with the blue threads.

That's not what the Lord has given us. But he has given us family worship when you rock, when you lie down and when you rise up, And he has given you the Lord's day. Week by week. And the public worship on the Lord's day. This is In many respects today and the public worship on this day and the keeping of the whole day is that blue thread that we look at.

And we remember My heart and my eyes are inclined to harlotry, but the Lord by whose Grace I live. Has called me to himself and has given me this day to remind me that I am his and holy to him. Let's pray. Our gracious. God and our heavenly father.

Have mercy on. Just, Uh, by your grace we hope that were there were many. Uh, that day who were even doing the stoning, Who are crying out for the same Mercy. And give us to see that you have created us for yourself. And you have redeemed us for yourself and indeed.

We are yours in Jesus Christ. And make us to love that. And especially make us to love your day and Delight in your day. As that which you have given us. So strongly to communicate this to us for, we ask it in Jesus name. Amen.