

**Numbers 30:1-5**

**Followers of Jesus are people of their word.**

As I was studying this week, a couple of scenes from an old movie kept coming to mind. Blue Chips (about a basketball program and the challenge of money and sports). In a key scene the coach is meeting with a prospective player (the priority catch of the recruiting class) and his father. And they reach an agreement that he will play for the team. The father, though doesn't want to sign a letter of intent, instead shakes the coach's hand and says "my word is my bond!"

Of course, later in the story the player gets a better offer and goes elsewhere to play. So much for "my word is my bond!"

I don't remember much else from that movie. And it's dated for sure, but the interaction is still one that is pretty familiar to us.

Humanity struggles to have integrity (being honest and having strong moral principles; moral uprightness.)

A worldview putting self at the center will stop at nothing to get our way, even if it means lying, going back on agreements... we "that's the way things work."

This isn't new. It is an essential theme in humanity's story. In the first century when Jesus called people to live for something beyond themselves; in the wilderness when God establishes patterns for his people that are starkly different from surrounding nations; even from the garden... alternative facts have been the prevailing posture.

There is a better way. An integrity of word and deed that the people of God were, and still today, are to exemplify for a world allergic to keeping your word.

From this rolling set of instructions for a people soon in the land that was promised we hear a call to rigorous honesty.

**Followers of Jesus are people of their word.**

Three movements, application then two pieces of motivation.

### **Keep Your Word:**

What's up here? Following the long list of sacrifices and fest offerings for worship before Yahweh, comes this chapter on vow, pledges that people make before God.

**Numbers 29:39** “These you shall offer to the LORD at your appointed feasts, in addition to your vow offerings and your freewill offerings, for your burnt offerings, and for your grain offerings, and for your drink offerings, and for your peace offerings.” (ESV)

“Throughout the passage, two words are used to describe the promises individuals make. “Vow” translates a Hebrew word meaning a promise to actively do something; “pledge” can include this positive promise but is better read as a promise to avoid something. Taken together, therefore (as this passage does), these two words cover every promise that might be made.”

We don't frequent in vows in our cultural moment, but we still have some key ones that are shared among us.

School starting back up, many will daily make a “pledge of allegiance” to the flag and republic - even if they don't know what it means to do so!

Many of us have made marriage vows - to have and to hold, for richer or poorer, in sickness and health, until death we do part.

A few of us have even sworn an oath to protect and defend the constitution of the United States against all enemies foreign and domestic.

Vows, pledges like these, are solemn opportunities to mark intention and the expectation of commitment to follow through. Obviously, as history indicates, there have been varied results.

We make all of these pledges before God - hand on Bible - because it adds weightiness, significance.

Some of our vows are directly to God (more akin to what our text has in mind). I make vows every week... “I will stop sinning if you give me this...” Transactional.

Sometimes the Lord uses these moments to draw people to himself. One relative of mine, when they were lost on a mountain prayed saying “if you get me back safely, I will follow you.” She has kept her vow.

In the wilderness vows and pledges were much the same. Commitments before God, requiring performance, less on God’s part, more on ours.

**Numbers 30:2** “If a man vows a vow to the LORD, or swears an oath to bind himself by a pledge, he shall not break his word. He shall do according to all that proceeds out of his mouth.” (ESV)

Women likewise, widowed or unmarried, same requirement. The young or married with a caveat of the father or husband being in agreement.

These vows would be economic in nature - to give an offering of a certain amount. Think of the church capital campaign that utilizes “pledge cards” to stir up donations.

The vows could also be physical - abstaining from foods, sex, relationships, as an act of worship.

“Chapter 30 of Numbers gives an elaborate system for determining the validity of promises, oaths, and vows. The basic position, however, is simple: Do what you say you will do.”

That statute makes sense. Even in a world that doesn’t value keeping your word, most everyone would agree you should do it!

More than common sense though, this statute is a protection. A warning against promising what you couldn’t provide, or making rash, reckless commitments.

**Deuteronomy 23:21–23** “If you make a vow to the LORD your God, you shall not delay fulfilling it, for the LORD your God will surely require it of you, and you will be guilty of sin. [22] But if you refrain from vowing, you will not be guilty of sin. [23] You shall be careful to do what has passed your lips, for you have

voluntarily vowed to the LORD your God what you have promised with your mouth.” (ESV)

**Ecclesiastes 5:2–7** “Be not rash with your mouth, nor let your heart be hasty to utter a word before God, for God is in heaven and you are on earth. Therefore let your words be few. [3] For a dream comes with much business, and a fool’s voice with many words.

[4] When you vow a vow to God, do not delay paying it, for he has no pleasure in fools. Pay what you vow. [5] It is better that you should not vow than that you should vow and not pay. [6] Let not your mouth lead you into sin, and do not say before the messenger that it was a mistake. Why should God be angry at your voice and destroy the work of your hands? [7] For when dreams increase and words grow many, there is vanity; but God is the one you must fear.” (ESV)

**Proverbs 20:25** “It is a snare to say rashly, “It is holy,” and to reflect only after making vows.” (ESV)

“Why is it important to God that his people be truth-tellers who are faithful to do what they have promised? The answer is that we are his covenant people who are called to bear his likeness.”

Jesus perpetuates the truth of this and goes beyond it when teaching about vows in his Sermon on the Mount.

**Matthew 5:33–37** “Again you have heard that it was said to those of old, ‘You shall not swear falsely, but shall perform to the Lord what you have sworn.’ [34] But I say to you, Do not take an oath at all, either by heaven, for it is the throne of God, [35] or by the earth, for it is his footstool, or by Jerusalem, for it is the city of the great King. [36] And do not take an oath by your head, for you cannot make one hair white or black. [37] Let what you say be simply ‘Yes’ or ‘No’; anything more than this comes from evil.” (ESV)

Don’t make promises you can’t or won’t keep. Don’t vow what you can’t make happen - by heaven or your own head. But be people of your word.

The point of Jesus’ teaching is not that taking an oath in this manner is wrong. Taking a meaningless oath in order to create a loophole and retain the option of

breaking it is wrong. If an oath is required in the course of civic duty, the Christian should have no problem making it. The proper application of Jesus' principle of "let your yes be yes" is that the Christian must be truthful in all circumstances.

Makes me think of middle-eastern cultures, and the reliance on the phrase Enshallah (God willing). It is the punctuation of every commitment or promise, of calendars and careers. And it is often used as an out - no one gives their word!

But we are prone to this too - think of how convenient it is to suggest circumstances have changed when we think of marriage vows, let alone far less significant commitments.

The kingdom ethic follows this wilderness statue, to be people of our word. To take vows seriously. Let your yes be yes, and no be no.

It will require much of us. In relationships, in our civic engagement, in our vocations.

"Work-related commitments tempt us to pile up elaborations, qualifications, exceptions, and justifications for not doing what we promise. No doubt many of them are reasonable, such as force majeure clauses in contracts, which excuse a party from fulfilling its obligations if prevented by court orders, natural disasters, and the like. It doesn't stop at honoring the letter of the contract. Many agreements are made with a handshake. Sometimes there are loopholes. Can we learn to honor the intent of the agreement and not just the letter of the law? Trust is the ingredient that makes workplaces work, and trust is impossible if we promise more than we can deliver, or deliver less than we promise. This is not only a fact of life, but a command of the Lord." - Theology of Work Bible Commentary (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 2014-2016), 162.

Application up front in this text. Keep your word.

But why? Because He said!

**Because You are Under Authority:**

The large portion of this chapter relays how vows work when made by a woman still at home, or married.

This is a patriarchal society; this statute is not necessarily requiring the same situation but acts more as protection given the societal realities (economic and relational).

Don't make a vow that neglects or harms your other commitments, that you can't accomplish with your spouse. Or that will change the trajectory of your life without careful evaluation.

But what I think we need to see from this is that everyone in this chapter is under authority. [the power or right to give orders, make decisions, and enforce obedience.]

Now, there have certainly been abuses of authority, significantly in the church, in homes, but this truth doesn't negate the good purpose of authority.

“All authority should be exercised for the benefit of those under that authority, namely introducing them to Jesus. Authority is for serving. As soon as you use authority for selfish/sinful purposes you've misused it. Even corrective authority (in this life) is aimed at the good of those being disciplined.” Ben Brophy

Truth is, our humanity is poised against authority. We desire to be the only authority - to assert control over everyone and everything ourselves. But this is a role reserved for God.

This statute is for “the people of Israel.” Clear delineation, this is for God's people, those under his rule and reign. A reign that is exceedingly good. They are given salvation from slavery, provision for their journey, the promise of a home.

For those of us in Christ, we live under his authority like Israel, as a picture of life under God.

**Matthew 5:14–16** “You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden. [15] Nor do people light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a stand, and it gives light to all in the house. [16] In the same way, let your light shine

before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven.” (ESV)

Jesus is Lord. Those that are his, under his lordship submit to his way, to his commands. Not merely when convenient or when we need something but because we’ve confessed with our mouths that Jesus is Lord and believe in our hearts that God raised him from the dead.

**Colossians 1:17–18** “And he is before all things, and in him all things hold together. [18] And he is the head of the body, the church. He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in everything he might be preeminent.” (ESV)

**1 Peter 3:22** “who has gone into heaven and is at the right hand of God, with angels, authorities, and powers having been subjected to him.” (ESV)

**Colossians 2:9–10** “For in him the whole fullness of deity dwells bodily, [10] and you have been filled in him, who is the head of all rule and authority.” (ESV)

As followers of Jesus, living under his authority, we do his word, we keep our word.

Because we are under authority, what a gracious place to be.

### **Because Jesus has kept His Word:**

These in the wilderness can and should keep their vows because Yahweh keeps his. He has brought them out, to the promised land. He is faithful to his own word.

**Joshua 21:45** “Not one word of all the good promises that the LORD had made to the house of Israel had failed; all came to pass.” (ESV)

Because God fulfilled his vow to Abraham to bring his people into the Promised Land, so the Israelites out of gratitude should now dutifully keep their vows as well.

We have seen it over and over again in this study, he is a man of his word.

For us today, this is not only motivation to keep our word but hope.

We fail, we are prone to rash promises, breaking our word. Our only hope of keeping our word is that Jesus keeps his.

His promise to bring his kingdom. To extend forgiveness to all who believe. His declaration of “it is finished” conquering sin and giving salvation, it truly is finished. Once and for all.

**Romans 4:24–25** “but for ours also. It will be counted to us who believe in him who raised from the dead Jesus our Lord, [25] who was delivered up for our trespasses and raised for our justification.” (ESV)

Righteousness is faith to believe these things and to hold onto them in such a way that our minds and hearts are renewed and we are made capable of keeping our word.

“God’s yes means yes, and his no means no. He will surely do whatever he has said he will do. He is a faithful God.”

**2 Corinthians 1:20** “For all the promises of God find their Yes in him. That is why it is through him that we utter our Amen to God for his glory.” (ESV)

Promises of grace and mercy, extended even to those who wandered, who struggle, idolaters, the weary and lost, us. We fail, he keeps us.

“Christ has borne the curse for all of our idolatry and failures, even though he never approved of our wandering desires, nor did he in any way cause our sin. The punishment for our sin was nonetheless laid on his shoulders as our covenant head, so that through his suffering we might find peace. We were the ones who said, “Cross my heart, hope to die” as we committed ourselves to one foolishness after another, but he was the one who had to die to atone for our failures. This is how God keeps his promise to have a people for himself, even though we have been utterly unfaithful. He paid the full price necessary to redeem our souls.” ID

God’s grace lavished upon us does not lead to increasing sinfulness, but rather lovingly compels us to honor him in all our ways.



If we love him we keep his word, empowered by his Spirit to do just that, to keep our word.

When his followers live like this, it creates a citadel of integrity in the midst of the land. A model of life with Jesus for all to see and benefit from. And when we slip, he picks us up, and pushes us onward.

**Followers of Jesus are people of their word.** Because he has kept his word, salvation, sanctification, and eternity with him.

Will you commit to that? Give me your word!

Some of you know that I am suspicious of businesses that put certain attributes in their name, “Integrity Builders, Honest Mufflers, Trustworthy Casino.” Even some ministries include grace or peace in their brand... My experience suggests they often lack what is in their name.

The church, believers, followers of Jesus however are meant to be different. To be people of our word, because he is a man of his word. To have integrity and keep it, for his glory and our good. May it be so in us.