

And the Lord said unto Gideon, By the three hundred men that lapped will I save you, and deliver the Midianites into thine hand: and let all the other people go every man unto his place” (Judges 7:7).

The story of Gideon and his army thrilled me the first time I read it. That’s one of the benefits of not being raised in a Christian home. Kids raised in Christian families usually hear these Bible stories told the wrong way. They are generally taught as children’s stories, like “Mother Goose” or “Hans Christian Andersen.” But they were not written for children. These stories were given in the Bible as a stark reminder that there is a Devil, that there are wicked people in the world, that we are in a real conflict, in a life or death struggle between the forces of evil and the forces of God! That’s the way these stories are meant to be taught – and I think it is a sin to teach them any other way!

Since I did not come from a Christian home, I read the story of Gideon as it was meant to be read – as a life or death struggle between good and evil!

The Midianites personified all that is dark, and sinful, and horrible in the world. They moved across the land as a nomadic tribe of raiders. They would pitch their tents as they moved along. They were a hellishly savage people – like a huge army of Hell’s Angels, or half-crazed Muslim terrorists! The Midianites stole and raped and murdered their way into the land of Israel. By their huge numbers they overwhelmed God’s people. The Bible says,

“The children of Israel did evil in the sight of the Lord: and the Lord delivered them into the hand of Midian seven years. And the hand of Midian prevailed against Israel: and because of the Midianites the children of Israel made them the dens which are in the mountains, and caves, and strong holds” (Judges 6:1-2).

Yes, you heard it right! The people of Israel were so terrified of these Midianites, that they fled from their homes and lived in caves and dens in the mountains. Archaeologists have discovered many of those places. The people of Israel sinned and God judged them by sending these terrorists to kill them and enslave them. And the people of Israel cried out to God for deliverance.

Now there was a Hebrew man named Gideon. He was hiding by a winepress threshing wheat there, so the Midianites would not see him. An angel of the Lord appeared to him and said, “The Lord is with thee...and thou shalt save Israel from the hand of the Midianites.” But Gideon did not believe that angel. He wiped the sweat off of his brow and said, “How can I save Israel? My family is poor, and I am the least of them.” God answered, “I will be with you, and will strike down the Midianites.”

So Gideon gathered together an army to fight the Midianites. But the Lord said to him, “You have too many men. If I deliver the Midianites to you, the men of Israel will think they saved themselves!” Then God said, “Tell those who are fearful and afraid to go home.” Twenty-two thousand men left. Only ten thousand men remained with Gideon.

He had thirty-two thousand men, but now he only had ten thousand. Then God told Gideon that there were still far too many.

Then God told him to take his army down to a river. And God told him that the soldiers who scooped up water in their hands, as a dog uses its tongue, should be chosen, while those who fell to their knees to drink should be rejected. Only three hundred men (out of ten thousand) passed that test. The first test was the test of courage. The second test was the test of alertness. They were all very thirsty. But those who stuck their heads in the water were rejected. But those who scooped up the water could look around and still be alert. Only three hundred men were alert and watchful enough to be chosen as Gideon's Army!

What a strange army this was! The Midianites had taken all their weapons and swords, so Gideon's men had no weapons of warfare. All they were given was a trumpet, an empty pitcher, and a lamp. That was it! Three hundred men, armed only with trumpets, pitchers and lamps, were to overcome the huge army of Midianites, with countless thousands of men. It seemed impossible – but with God all things are possible!

Now Gideon divided his three hundred men into three groups. They were each given a pitcher, a lamp, and a trumpet. The lamps were put inside of the pitchers so the light could not be seen. They held those in one hand, and the trumpets in the other hand.

Gideon put his three hundred men, in three different groups of one hundred each, around the camp of the Midianites. It was very late that night. Most of the Midianites were asleep in the camp. There were only a few guards on duty, and they were dozing off and on.

Suddenly Gideon blew his trumpet! All the other men blew their trumpets. Then they broke their pitchers on the ground in a great clash on every side. And Gideon's men shouted, "The sword of the Lord, and of Gideon!!!" When Gideon's men shouted, the Lord caused the Midianites to turn on each other with their swords. There in the darkness of midnight, the Midianites rioted against each other. Then they fled in terror!

All the men of Israel rose up and went after the Midianites. They took two of the Midianite princes and cut off their heads, and brought their heads to Gideon. And Gideon said, "God hath delivered into your hands the princes of Midian." This gave Gideon and the Israelites a tremendous victory! We can learn several lessons from it.

I. First, we see the doctrine of the remnant.

The doctrine of the remnant is found throughout the Bible. The "remnant" is always a small group of people that God uses in a dark and sinful world. In the Book of the prophet Isaiah we read,

"Except the Lord of hosts had left unto us a very small remnant, we should have been as Sodom, and we should have been like unto Gomorrah" (Isaiah 1:9).

The Greek Septuagint translated “remnant” in that verse as “sperma” – a sperm or seed. “If the Lord had not left unto us a little seed,” just a little group of faithful followers of God – we would have been utterly destroyed, as were Sodom and Gomorrah!

We also see the doctrine of the faithful band, the bold remnant of God, in the Book of Romans,

“Though the number of the children of Israel be as the sand of the sea, a remnant shall be saved” (Romans 9:27).

However the earth may be judged and destroyed, and however the nation may be lost in despair, yet God has a faithful remnant. They are purged and renovated, and they become the foundation of a new society, a new culture, a new government, and a new kingdom.

God’s method through the ages is that His work will be carried out through a small minority, a remnant of faithful people.

In Matthew 24:22 we read, “And except those days should be shortened, there should no flesh be saved: but for the elect’s sake those days shall be shortened.” It will be the remnant of the elect that hold back the complete destruction of the human race.

We have seen the doctrine of the remnant when Gideon and his small band of only 300 men, out of thousands who were rejected, saved Israel from the Midianites.

In the days of the Great Flood, only Noah and his family were spared as God’s remnant. Abraham was the only one in God’s remnant during the time of universal idolatry. In the time of Elijah, only 7,000 men in all the world made up God’s remnant. When the Jews were carried away into Babylonian captivity, a small remnant returned to build Jerusalem. In Acts 1:15 a small remnant of only 120 disciples brought the message of salvation to the sin-darkened world.

And so it has been throughout history. In the darkest hour of England’s spiritual history, God raised up Whitefield, Wesley and a small remnant of despised Methodists to change the course of history and save the English-speaking world. When hyper-Calvinists tried to stop world-wide missions, God raised up the Baptist forefather William Carey, and a small remnant of his followers, to spread the Gospel throughout the pagan world!

And so it has been, even in our own church.

I ask you tonight to join with us in this church of ours. Come with us! We have great things to do! God has called us to challenge “decisionism” and proclaim real conversion to multitudes that are lost in the darkness of this evil hour!

Encamped along the hills of light, Ye Christian soldiers, rise,

And press the battle ere the night Shall veil the glowing skies.

Against the foe in vales below, Let all our strength be hurled;

Faith is the victory, we know, That overcomes the world.

Faith is the victory! Faith is the victory!

Oh, glorious victory, That overcomes the world

II. Second, we see who is not qualified to be part of the remnant.

The text says,

“The Lord said unto Gideon, By the three hundred men that lapped will I save you, and deliver the Midianites into thine hand: and let all the other people go every man unto his place” (Judges 7:7).

“Let all the other people go every man unto his place.” Those who were not qualified to be part of the remnant were “let go” by Gideon at God’s command. Who were those that were not qualified?

They were those who were “fearful and afraid” (Judges 7:3). That was the first group of 22 thousand. Those who were fearful and afraid were sent home by the Lord. They were just too fearful and afraid to be part of the remnant. They were not just afraid. Gideon himself had some fear (Judges 7:10). But the 22 thousand were “fearful and trembling” (literal). They were overcome with fear. The Bible tells us, in Revelation 21:8, that fear is the first quality that sends people to Hell. It says, “But the fearful... shall have their part in the lake which burneth with fire and brimstone” (Revelation 21:8). The word “fearful” can be translated “cowardly” (NKJV). Cowardly people can’t even be saved, much less be part of God’s remnant. I have found that fearful, cowardly people stumble when they are called to salvation. They are afraid of what it might cost them to become a real Christian.

The Parable of the Great Supper shows how fear keeps people from becoming real Christians. “They all with one consent began to make excuse” (Luke 14:18).

The first was a man who had bought a piece of ground and said he had to go see it. Obviously he had already seen it. Nobody buys a piece of land sight unseen! So he excused himself simply because he was afraid of losing some leisure time for himself. That’s the kind of person who is afraid that he will have to spend too much time in church if he becomes a true Christian. He wants all his time for himself – and he is afraid of losing the pleasure of spending all his free time on himself.

The second man said, “I have bought five yoke of oxen, and I go to prove them: I pray thee have me excused” (Luke 14:19). He was afraid that if he became a real Christian it

would interfere with his job, or his career as a farmer. That's the kind of person who is afraid that becoming a Christian will hurt his career, or his school work, or something else connected with making money. The Rich Young Ruler turned away from Christ because he was afraid of losing money if he became a disciple. So he lost his soul and went to Hell.

The third man said, "I have married a wife, and therefore I cannot come" (Luke 14:20). That is the kind of person who is afraid of what his wife or some other family member will think if he becomes a true Christian. Many young people have turned away from Christ because they are afraid of what their mother will think, or what some other friend or relative may say. Jesus said,

"He that loveth father or mother more than me is not worthy of me: and he that loveth son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me. And he that taketh not his cross, and followeth after me, is not worthy of me. He that findeth his life shall lose it: and he that loseth his life for my sake shall find it" (Matthew 10:37-39).

When you put all these fears together, it is clear that virtually everyone who refuses to trust Jesus does so out of fear. I almost said, "Most people." But after I thought about it I realized that fear of some kind is what stops just about everyone from becoming a true Christian, and part of God's remnant. It is going to change your life to become a real Christian. If you are cowardly, you will reject Jesus out of fear! Face it. That's what it is! It's fear of what may change in your life if you surrender to Christ!

It is very interesting to read "The law of warfare," given in the twentieth chapter of Deuteronomy. It's verse 8, and it says,

"The officers shall speak further unto the people, and they shall say, What man is there that is fearful and fainthearted? let him go and return unto his house, lest his brethren's heart faint as well as his heart" (Deuteronomy 20:8).

This applies to a church as well. If you let fearful people join the church they will frighten others. That is why a wise church checks everyone's testimony very carefully before admitting them to church membership. Cowardly, unconverted people get scared, and they cause others to be scared. In some form or other, this is what is back of most church splits.

Pastor at the Chinese church was [Dr. Timothy Lin](#). He often said, "Less is better than more." He meant that it is better to have less people, who are fully consecrated to Christ, than to have more people who are afraid to be true disciples! Dr. Lin said, "How can we expect God's presence in a church that is full of unbelievers?" (Timothy Lin, Ph.D., *The Secret of Church Growth*, FCBC, 1992, p. 41).

"Less is better than more." That was God's way with Gideon – and that has always been God's way. Down through history God has always worked His will through a remnant, a small group of people who are wholly dedicated to His cause.

But there is one more quality necessary for those who want to be part of God's remnant. Those who do not have this quality are also disqualified from being part of the remnant. Listen to the text one more time.

"The Lord said unto Gideon, By the three hundred men that lapped will I save you, and deliver the Midianites into thine hand: and let all the other people go every man unto his place" (Judges 7:7).

"By the three hundred men that lapped will I save you."

God first had Gideon reduce his army by sending 22,000 of them, who were fearful and afraid, back home, leaving only 10,000 to face the 135,000 Midianites (cf. Judges 8:10). Then God told Gideon to send away all those who "bowed down upon their knees to drink water" (Judges 7:6). Only three hundred of them took the water up in their hands and lapped it. These men drank from their cupped hands, rather than putting their heads down to the water. The three hundred took up the water in their hands so they could be on the alert, able to look around for any approaching danger. Dr. Henry M. Morris said that the choice of the 300 "was based on alertness, just as the first was based on courage" (Henry M. Morris, Ph.D., *The Defender's Study Bible*, World Publishing, 1995, p. 293; note on Judges 7:7).

Dr. J. Vernon McGee said,

God told Gideon that he still had too many men. How were they separated? They came to a stream and [most] of the men got down on all fours to drink. There were [three hundred] others who lapped up the water [from their hands] and were all ready to go. They were eager to get to the enemy and get the job done. They wanted to free and save the nation. So they were the ones who went to battle, and the others were sent home (J. Vernon McGee, Th.D., *Thru the Bible*, Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1981, vol. I, p. 583; note on Deuteronomy 20:8).

To be part of God's remnant you must have those two qualities – (1) you must be courageous enough to follow Christ as His disciple; (2) you must be alert to the dangers about you, and steadfast in your desire to see the name of Christ glorified in the church militant!

You must be alert. The Bible says,

"Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour" (I Peter 5:8).

You must also be steadfast in your desire to see Christ glorified. The Bible says,

"Be ye steadfast, unmoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord" (I Corinthians 15:58).

“And the Lord said unto Gideon, By the three hundred men that lapped will I save you, and deliver the Midianites into thine hand: and let all the other people go every man unto his place” (Judges 7:7).

Now here is one last thought. The text says, “By the three hundred men that lapped will I save you.” A remnant of godly people in our church brought you here, in one way or another. You did not come to this church by yourself. They brought you, either by giving birth to you, or by bringing you in from the world. They are our Gideon’s Army. They brought you here to church, but they cannot save you. Listen again, “By the three hundred men that lapped will I save you.” “Will I save you.” Only God in Christ can save you! We can bring you in. We can take care of you, and we can encourage you, and preach to you. But only God in Christ can save you! “By the three hundred men...will I save you.”