

Gideon's Band

Sermon #0818

Study by W. D. Frazee—August 15, 1980

In various places inspiration links the messages of the Old Testament with the message of the New Testament.

"For whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning, that we through patience and comfort of the scriptures might have hope" Romans 15:4.

When we think of the millions of things that have happened in this world, and think of the hundreds and thousands of revelations that God has given to His people, we must appreciate the fact that God has selected from that vast number of experiences and messages a few and put them in the Bible. Why? For our learning. God selected those stories that would be of interest to us, and full of lessons.

Notice that the message of the Scriptures is a message of comfort and hope. And the story we are going to study tonight is full of courage and cheer. It shows us that God is willing to use the weak and small, and that He is not dependent upon large numbers. He can do things through a few.

"And Jonathan said to the young man that bare his armour, Come, and let us go over unto the garrison of these uncircumcised: it may be that the LORD will work for us: for there is no restraint to the LORD to save by many or by few" 1 Samuel 14:6.

This is an interesting story of Jonathan and his armour. Israel was in a hard place. They decided they would venture out on what God would do for them. They had a prayer band, and the Lord impressed them with a plan of attack which resulted in a great victory for Israel. And notice that there is no restraint to the Lord to save by many or by few.

Men tend to measure the probability of success according to numbers, but God can work just as easily and successfully when He only has a few. As Elder Haskell used to say, "When God's time comes to do something, God and one man can do it." Oh, what a God we serve.

Are any of you facing any problems? Courage, my brother and sister and friend. We serve an omnipotent God. We serve One who could do it without us, but has chosen to do it with us that we might get the joy of sharing in an experience with Him. But remember that our numbers and strength are not the measure of success. There is no restraint to the Lord to save by many or by few.

"A few converted souls, uniting for one grand purpose under one head, will achieve victories in every encounter"
Testimonies for the Church, vol. 6, page 139.

That is wonderful. God can use a few people if He can get them fully lined up with Him. So our weakness need not be a barrier to progress. Our difficulties and problems and lack of facilities, time, and money need not hinder the working out of God's purpose, if He can get us to give up our way and take His way.

God led the children of Israel out of Egypt under Moses. After forty years they finally crossed the Jordan under Joshua, and took the land of Canaan. They took enough of Canaan to get it divided up and each tribe of Israel had its inheritance. But God left enough problems so they would have something to pray about and work at. There were still some of the tribes of the heathen that had to be dispossessed.

Sorry to say, after Joshua's death the children of Israel began to settle back into a complacent mood instead of following up the work that had been done in the conquest of Canaan. They made peace with their enemies and began to adopt their ways, follow their customs, and serve their gods. So God allowed the heathen nations that Israel had compromised with to become a scourge to them. These heathen nations robbed them and pillaged their cities. They confiscated their crops, and in many ways made life miserable for them.

Spurred by pain and sorrow they turned to the Lord. The Lord raised up a judge to deliver them, but when the judge was dead they again turned back to compromise and difficulty, and then sought the Lord. This happened again and again.

Gideon is introduced as a man the Lord wanted to use to deliver Israel from the Medianites. They had come in from the east and south and were purging the country from time to time. They would come in harvest time like a plague of locust. They would drive the cattle away and take everything they could, but they were careful to leave the houses of the Israelites to encourage them to come back and plant again. This went on for seven years.

Israel began to seek the Lord, so God raised up Gideon from the tribe of Manasseh (Judges 6). Finally encouraged by evidence of divine call, Gideon blew the trumpet and started a program to get ready to attack the Midianites. Israel gathered at the well of Herod near Gilboa in northern Palestine.

"And the LORD said unto Gideon, The people that are with thee are too many for Me to give the Midianites into their hands, lest Israel vaunt themselves against Me, saying, Mine own hand hath saved me" Judges 7:2.

Gideon was wondering if he could do anything with as few men as he had. He only had 32,000 men to go against nearly a 150,000 of the enemy. Now God told Gideon, You think you don't have enough. I tell you that you have too many.

What was the problem? Human works can get in between God and His people. Again and again God has told us that those who honor Him, He will honor. The message for today is, Fear God and give glory to Him. So God was about to work some mighty miracles. He said, Gideon, if I should let you take these thirty-two thousand men and give you victory, even though you think there are not enough, those few people would turn around and say, We did it.

As we read the Scriptures to get comfort and hope that God can use little people when there are only a few, we learn the lesson of giving God the glory.

God said to Gideon, I want you to tell the people that if any of them are fearful, they should go home. Well, who wouldn't be afraid? That's what most of them thought, so over two thirds went home, and Gideon only had ten thousand left.

There is an interesting sidelight on this. The proclamation God told Gideon to give was one that God revealed to Moses that should always be proclaimed whenever there was to be a battle.

"When thou goest out to battle against thine enemies, and seest horses, and chariots, and a people more than thou, be not afraid of them: for the LORD thy God is with thee, which brought thee up out of the land of Egypt"
Deuteronomy 20:1.

So the message that came to Israel was not to be afraid even if the enemy was more than they were. But having given them that assurance, notice that God also gave them a way out:

"And it shall be, when ye are come nigh unto the battle, that the priest shall approach and speak unto the people, And shall say unto them, Hear, O Israel, ye approach this day unto battle against your enemies: let not your hearts faint, fear not, and do not tremble, neither be ye terrified because of them; For the LORD your God is He that goeth with you, to fight for you against your enemies, to save you. And the officers shall speak unto the people, saying, What man is there that hath built a new house, and hath not dedicated it? let him go and return to his house, lest he die in the battle, and another man dedicate it. And what man is he that hath planted a vineyard, and hath not yet eaten of it? let him also go and return unto his house, lest he die in the battle, and another man eat of it. And what man is there that hath betrothed a wife, and hath not taken her? let him go and return unto his house, lest he die in the battle, and another man take her" Deuteronomy 20:2-7.

God gave them opportunities for release. If you have built a house and hadn't dedicated it yet, you can go home. If you have planted a vineyard and haven't eaten

of it yet, you can go home. If you are engaged to a wife, but haven't taken her yet, you can go home. What an interesting thing.

But Gideon hadn't given this proclamation. He had so few people he didn't dare. So God checked up on him and said, Remember the proclamation I told Moses to always be given? I want you to give it.

"And 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

You would think they would all leave. That's what Gideon was afraid of. And when he finally gave the proclamation God told him to give, he lost over two thirds of his army.

"And it shall be, when the officers have made an end of speaking unto the people that they shall make captains of the armies to lead the people" Deuteronomy 20:9.

The officers were selected after the sifting. To be a leader means to be able to face any one of these opportunities for release, and stick with the cause.

So twenty-two thousand went home, and ten thousand stayed. The enemy now had over ten times as many.

"And the LORD said unto Gideon, The people are yet too many; bring them down unto the water, and I will try them for thee there: and it shall be, that of whom I say unto thee, This shall go with thee, the same shall go with thee; and of whomsoever I say unto thee, This shall not go with thee, the same shall not go" Judges 7:4.

Isn't God's mathematics interesting? What a strange way to number. The people are yet too many. Bring them to the water and I will test them for you. The people didn't know they were being tested. As they came to go into battle, any of them that pick up a little water in their hands, and lap it up like a dog, put them on one side. All the men who get down upon their knees and take a big drink, put them on the other side.

There were only three hundred men who didn't get down on their knees and take a big drink. The Lord told Gideon to send all the rest home. Keep the three hundred who were more intent in getting into battle than they were in having a good drink.

By little things character is revealed. We might say, That wasn't fair. But who are we to say that God is not fair? God knew the test that would reveal the selfishness of the heart. And keep in mind that these men had already had enough interest in God and His work to stay when they had a chance to go home. But God

knew that in their hearts there was a selfishness which would betray itself in the battle, so He sifted them out. Notice this comment:

"A few hastily took a little water in the hand and sucked it up as they went on; but nearly all bowed upon their knees, and leisurely drank from the surface of the stream...

"By the simplest means character is often tested. Those who in time of peril were intent upon supplying their own wants were not the men to be trusted in an emergency. The Lord has no place in His work for the indolent and self-indulgent" *Patriarchs and Prophets*, page 549.

Those men wanted to fight for God, but they wanted things as convenient and comfortable as possible. Why not? If we are working for self, that adds up.

Meanwhile the three hundred had gotten a little drink as they went to meet the enemy. The fundamental thing is this—Is the work of God for my benefit or am I for the benefit of the work of God? Whether in the home or institution, out in the community or on the campus, wherever I am as a soldier in Christ' army, do I look upon the activities in which I am engaged as a way of supplying my desires, or do I look upon myself as expendable? The great thing is to get the job done, however much it costs.

Battles are dangerous places to be, aren't they? Yes. They didn't have any bulletproof glass back there.

Somebody says, Brother Frazee, they didn't have any bullets either.

No, but they had plenty of swords and spears. Warfare was dangerous then. And here were men who, while willing to go to battle, were thinking about themselves and their wants and desires and needs. And God took three hundred out of those ten thousand, and by this simple means He found out who were more interested in getting the battle won than in supplying their creature comforts. He said:

"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.

God will not have any draftees in His army. He not only will not draft people, He subjects the volunteers to test after test.

Are you a volunteer for Jesus? Are you working for Jesus. Listen: God will test you to see how much you want His name to be glorified and His cause to be advanced. He is testing you to see how anxious you are to get the work done, to get the victory won. And by simple means character is being developed.

With these three hundred God gave Gideon a very simple plan. He said, Take the three hundred men and divide them into three companies. In the night post

them all around the camp of the enemy. Give each one of them in one hand an earthen pot, and in the earthen vessel put a lamp. In the other hand put a trumpet. So Gideon organized his men in three companies. They surrounded the camp of the Medianites. Then at the appointed signal every man blew his trumpet. Every man broke his earthen pot. Every man swung his lamp and charged upon the enemy with a terrible war cry, The sword of the Lord and Gideon. The hosts of the Mideanites woke from their slumbers, and were thrown into terror and panic. The Spirit of God was working with Gideon's little band. And as the army of Midean saw those torches and heard the war cry, they thought that a vast army was suddenly bursting upon them. They began to run, and turning to see who was chasing them, they killed their own soldiers. So it resulted in a complete defeat for the army of the enemy. Gideon and his three hundred won the victory under God.

God is seeking to encourage us that little people can accomplish great things for God, if they will just let God do it His way, and be simple-minded enough to do what He says.

I suppose if a committee had met and studied the plan that Gideon was led by the Holy Spirit to suggest, there would have been much discussion as to the reasonableness. But God had spoken. The Spirit of prophecy was revealing the plan of battle. And those who listened and obeyed won a marvelous victory.

So it has been in all ages. Those who have listened to what God has said, and did it, found victory. And in the remnant church today, as we face the last great battle, God will have a Gideon's band who will listen to what God says, and do it. Notice this interesting statement:

"And the three companies blew the trumpets, and brake the pitchers, and held the lamps in their left hands, and the trumpets in their right hands to blow withal: and they cried, The sword of the LORD, and of Gideon. And they stood every man in his place round about the camp; and all the host ran, and cried, and fled" Judges 7:20-21.

"They stood every man in his place." The fewer the workers for God the more important it is for each man to be in his place, because the enemy seeks to divert us. I was impressed with this statement:

"When you do your appointed work without contention or criticism of others, a freedom, a light, and a power will attend it that will give character and influence to the institutions and enterprises with which you are connected" *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 9, page 184.

Where do I belong? I belong in my place. I have a place, thank God. And if I will fill that appointed place like those three hundred did, victory will attend the work of God. But if I spend my time in pointing out the weaknesses and faults of others, then I have weakened things. I don't help others that way, and in the meantime my own work is getting neglected.

Do you want to see some miracles? Oh, this is the recipe. I know we must have some mighty miracles in our individual lives in our homes, on this campus, and out in the community. My soul is longing to see the greatest miracles in forty years. They are coming, provided we will meet the conditions.

"Remember that you are never on vantage ground when you are ruffled and when you carry the burden of setting right every soul who comes near you. If you yield to the temptation to criticize others, to point out their faults, to tear down what they are doing, you may be sure that you will fail to act your own part nobly and well" *Ibid*.

"They stood every man in his place." And not more surely is the place prepared for us in the heavenly mansions than is the special place designated on earth where we are to work for God. I want to be in my place. I want to be one of Gideon's three hundred. I don't want to take the release that is offered to those who are fearful and faint-hearted, or who have things at home that they want to be sure to look after lest they die in battle. I don't want to take that release, do you? I want to be with this army when it triumphs, and I don't want to take the release which comes as I advance looking after my own interest first. If we will make God's work first, God will see that whatever we need to get our job done will be ours.

"But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and His righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you" Matthew 6:33.

Battles are dangerous. Warfare is risky. But the Captain of our salvation not only risked His life, He gave it. Jesus has never asked us to do anything but that He has already done more than He ever will ask us to do. He suffered far more than we will ever have to suffer. He endured far more than we will ever be called upon to endure. So looking unto Jesus, we can gather the courage and comfort and assurance that will make it possible for us to attempt great things for Him. If we are willing to listen to the same God who called Gideon, He will call us to sacrificial service. There will be those today who, looking to Jesus, will let Him have His way, and triumph in their own experience, in their homes, and in every enterprise that He calls them to.

Heavenly Father, we thank Thee for these wonderful stories of Thy power manifested through Thy children in ancient times. We pray that Thou will fill every heart here with the spirit of courage and cheer that we through patience and comfort of the Scriptures may have hope. May we be expendable, and may our hearts rise in triumphant praise that the Lord God of Israel reigns, and His army will triumph. We ask it in Jesus' name, Amen.

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W.D. Frazee Sermons
PO Box 129, Wildwood, GA 30757
1-800-WDF-1840 / 706-820-9755
www.WDFsermons.org
support@WDFsermons.org