

## 6. Seeing the unseen victory

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I love the story of the private who ran after and caught the runaway horse of Napoleon. When he brought the animal back to the emperor, Napoleon thanked him by saying, "Thank you, Captain."

With one word the private was promoted to captain. When the emperor said it, the private believed it. He went to the quartermaster, selected a new uniform, and put it on. He went to the officers' quarters and selected a bunk. He went to the officers' mess and had a meal. Because the emperor said it, he believed it.

Last week we saw the God's might whiner Gideon tested God's promise after promise. With His grace God didn't fry him extra crispy for his distrust. If I were God, I would backhand him all the way across. But then again, that is why I am not God.

God is using this whiner Gideon to do a mighty thing. Nobody thought Gideon and his small band of fighters could pull this off. Like the Rose Bowl drama last night, Texas Longhorn stopped the number one offense in the country, USC Trojan and pulled off the most incredible 15 point upset in last six minutes in the Rose Bowl history. That was nothing more than a football game. But for Gideon's case, it was a matter of survival of a nation. God made it happen for His people.

Gideon started as a coward in chapter 6. Now he is going to step into the area of his life as a conqueror in chapter 7.

### A. ISRAEL'S SMALL ARMY IS TOO BIG FOR GOD TO USE

*Judges 7:1-3 Then Jerubbaal (that is, Gideon) and all the people who were with him rose early and encamped beside the well of Harod, so that the camp of the Midianites was on the north side of them by the hill of Moreh in the valley. 2 And the Lord said to Gideon, "The people who are with you are too many for Me to give the Midianites into their hands, lest Israel claim glory for itself against Me, saying, 'My own hand has saved me.' 3 Now therefore, proclaim in the hearing of the people, saying, 'Whoever is fearful and afraid, let him turn and depart at once from Mount Gilead.'" And twenty-two thousand of the people returned, and ten thousand remained.*

Anyone who can do the math would know that 32,000 vs 135,000 is not very good odd for a combat. But to God, this is a way too many people to go in combat against the Midianites.

Gideon was probably surprised at the number of men who were afraid to fight, and hoped that only a few hundred would leave. I wonder why Gideon did not go home. When he said, "All of you who are fearful and afraid," he could have said, "Follow me, because I am going home, I am more afraid than anyone here." He had to stay, however. God had commissioned him.

Now Gideon has only ten thousand men and that is enough to make anyone afraid.

Faith doesn't depend on how we feel, what we see, or what may happen. A faith that can't be tested can't be trusted. Too often, what people think is faith is really only a "warm fuzzy feeling" about faith or perhaps just "faith in faith."

Faith is like a toothbrush: Everybody should have one and use it regularly, but it isn't safe to use somebody else's.

God tests our faith for at least two reasons:

1) **To show us whether our faith is real or counterfeit.**

2) **To strengthen our faith for the tasks He's set before us.**

I've noticed in my own life and ministry that God has often put us through the valley of testing before allowing us to reach the mountain peak of victory.

We must remember that God will not share His glory with anyone else. It is not because He is a glory hog. It is because if we take His glory unto ourselves, guess who gets to step on the throne in our hearts? Ourselves, not God. That results in a backsliding and a great trouble in our relationship with Him.

## **B. STILL TOO MANY**

*Judges 7:4-8 But the Lord said to Gideon, "The people are still too many; bring them down to the water, and I will test them for you there. Then it will be, that of whom I say to you, 'This one shall go with you,' the same shall go with you; and of whomever I say to you, 'This one shall not go with you,' the same shall not go." 5 So he brought the people down to the water. And the Lord said to Gideon, "Everyone who laps from the water with his tongue, as a dog laps, you shall set apart by himself; likewise everyone who gets down on his knees to drink." 6 And the number of those who lapped, putting their hand to their mouth, was three hundred men; but all the rest of the people got down on their knees to drink water. 7 Then the Lord said to Gideon, "By the three hundred men who lapped I will save you, and deliver the Midianites into your hand. Let all the other people go, every man to his place." 8 So the people took provisions and their trumpets in their hands. And he sent away all the rest of Israel, every man to his tent, and retained those three hundred men. Now the camp of Midian was below him in the valley.*

We rarely think that bigness can be a hindrance to the work of God. Yet it is harder to truly rely on God when we have many wonderful resources at hand.

God put Gideon's 10,000 men through a second test by asking them all to take a drink down at the spring. We never know when God is testing us in some ordinary experience of life.

What significance was there in the two different ways the men drank from the river? Since the Scriptures don't tell us, it is best not to read into the text for some weighty spiritual lesson that God never put there. Most expositors say the men who bowed down to drink were making themselves vulnerable to the enemy, while the 300 who lapped water from their hands stayed alert. But there is one problem with that theory: the enemy was four miles away according to v1. After all these ten thousands were not supposed to be afraid of fighting against the Midianite 135,000 soldiers.

My assumption is that God chose this method of sifting the army because it was simple, unassuming and easy to apply. No soldier knew he was being tested. Now Gideon has only 300 soldier. 300 vs 135,000. Now that is a good odd God can use.

## **C. A GRACIOUS GOD AND HIS MIGHTY WARRIOR GIDEON**

*Judges 7:9-15 It happened on the same night that the Lord said to him, "Arise, go down against the camp, for I have delivered it into your hand. 10*

*But if you are afraid to go down, go down to the camp with Purah your servant, 11 and you shall hear what they say; and afterward your hands shall be strengthened to go down against the camp.” Then he went down with Purah his servant to the outpost of the armed men who were in the camp. 12 Now the Midianites and Amalekites, all the people of the East, were lying in the valley as numerous as locusts; and their camels were without number, as the sand by the seashore in multitude. 13 And when Gideon had come, there was a man telling a dream to his companion. He said, “I have had a dream: To my surprise, a loaf of barley bread tumbled into the camp of Midian; it came to a tent and struck it so that it fell and overturned, and the tent collapsed.” 14 Then his companion answered and said, “This is nothing else but the sword of Gideon the son of Joash, a man of Israel! Into his hand God has delivered Midian and the whole camp.” 15 And so it was, when Gideon heard the telling of the dream and its interpretation, that he worshiped. He returned to the camp of Israel, and said, “Arise, for the Lord has delivered the camp of Midian into your hand.”*

The Lord wanted Gideon and his 300 men to attack the camp of Midian that night, but first He had to deal with the fear that still persisted in Gideon’s heart. God had already told Gideon three times that He would give Israel victory, and He had reassured him by giving him three special signs: fire from the rock, the wet fleece, and the dry fleece. After all this divine help, Gideon should have been strong in his faith, but such was not the case.

This is the tender mercy of God. He dealt with the doubts and fears of Gideon, and wanted to assure him. Let’s not look down on Gideon for his lack of faith. Because we often do far worse than what he did here.

How grateful we should be that God understands us and doesn’t condemn us because we have doubts and fears! He keeps giving us wisdom and doesn’t scold us when we keep asking. Our great High Priest Jesus in heaven sympathizes with our weaknesses and keeps giving us more grace. God remembers that we’re only dust.

*Hebrews 4:14-16 Seeing then that we have a great High Priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession. For we do not have a High Priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but was in all points tempted as we are, yet without sin. Let us therefore come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need.*

It took a tremendous courage for Gideon and his servant to move into enemy territory and get close enough to the Midianite camp to overhear the conversation of two soldiers. The Lord had already told Gideon this fact, but now Gideon heard it from the lips of the enemy!

When we obey the Lord in faith, there is a wonderful reward from the Lord like this assurance.

It’s significant that Gideon paused to worship the Lord before he did anything else. He was so overwhelmed by the Lord’s goodness and mercy that he fell on his face in submission and gratitude. Joshua did the same thing before attacking Jericho. It’s a good practice for us to follow today. Before we can be successful warriors of God, we must first become sincere worshipers of Him.

## **D. THE MOST UNLIKELY SOLDIERS, THE MOST UNUSUAL WEAPONS AND THE MOST UNPREDICTABLE VICTORY**

*Judges 7:16-22 Then he divided the three hundred men into three companies, and he put a trumpet into every man's hand, with empty pitchers, and torches inside the pitchers. 17 And he said to them, "Look at me and do likewise; watch, and when I come to the edge of the camp you shall do as I do: 18 When I blow the trumpet, I and all who are with me, then you also blow the trumpets on every side of the whole camp, and say, 'The sword of the Lord and of Gideon!'" 19 So Gideon and the hundred men who were with him came to the outpost of the camp at the beginning of the middle watch, just as they had posted the watch; and they blew the trumpets and broke the pitchers that were in their hands. 20 Then the three companies blew the trumpets and broke the pitchers--they held the torches in their left hands and the trumpets in their right hands for blowing--and they cried, "The sword of the Lord and of Gideon!" 21 And every man stood in his place all around the camp; and the whole army ran and cried out and fled. 22 When the three hundred blew the trumpets, the Lord set every man's sword against his companion throughout the whole camp; and the army fled to Beth Acacia, toward Zererah, as far as the border of Abel Meholah, by Tabbath.*

When God goes to war, He usually chooses the most unlikely soldiers, hands them the most unusual weapons, and accomplishes through them the most unpredictable results.

Faith sees the invisible and does the impossible. In this case, Gideon's army already had their victory before they went to the battle with the most unusual weapons. Only God can pull that off.

## **E. THE FINAL MOB UP**

*Judges 7:23-25 And the men of Israel gathered together from Naphtali, Asher, and all Manasseh, and pursued the Midianites. 24 Then Gideon sent messengers throughout all the mountains of Ephraim, saying, "Come down against the Midianites, and seize from them the watering places as far as Beth Barah and the Jordan." Then all the men of Ephraim gathered together and seized the watering places as far as Beth Barah and the Jordan. 25 And they captured two princes of the Midianites, Oreb and Zeeb. They killed Oreb at the rock of Oreb, and Zeeb they killed at the winepress of Zeeb. They pursued Midian and brought the heads of Oreb and Zeeb to Gideon on the other side of the Jordan.*

The story of Gideon began with a man hiding in a winepress, but it ended with the enemy prince being slain at a winepress.

Gideon's great victory over the Midianites became a landmark event in the history of Israel.

God doesn't need large numbers to accomplish His purposes, nor does He need especially gifted leaders. Gideon and his 300 'Average Joes' were available for God to use, and He enabled them to conquer the enemy and bring peace to the land.

When the church starts to depend on "big things" of their own – big buildings, big congregation, big budgets – then faith becomes misplaced, and God can't give His blessing. When leaders depend on their education, skill, and experience rather than in God, then God abandons them and looks for a Gideon.

The important thing is for us to be available for God to use just as He sees fit. We may not fully understand His plans, but we can fully trust His promises. And it's faith in Him that gives us the victory.

## **F. APPLICATIONS**

**1) We must remember that God doesn't need large numbers to accomplish His purposes, nor does He need especially gifted leaders. But He is looking for those whose hearts are loyal to Him.**

*2 Chronicles 16:9a For the eyes of the Lord run to and fro throughout the whole earth, to show Himself strong on behalf of those whose heart is loyal to Him.*

**2) Faith means more than simply trusting God. It also means seeking God and wanting to please Him.**

We don't trust God just to get Him to do things for us. We trust Him because it brings joy to His heart when His children rely on Him, seek Him, and please Him.

When God says we're forgiven, let's unload the guilt.

When God says we're valuable, let's believe Him.

When God says we're eternal, let's bury our fear.

When God says we're provided for, let's stop worrying.

When God says, "Stand up," let's do it.

**3) Before we can be successful warriors of God, we must first become sincere worshipers of Him.**

Once we get to know who our God is, it is a natural thing for us to worship Him and becoming His soldier for the Cross.