



WEST VALLEY CHURCH OF CHRIST

9:30 am Bible Class—all ages
10:30 am Sunday Worship
5:00 pm Proverbs study (online)
7:00 pm Wednesday Bible Class

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April 17, 2022

What Gideon Teaches Christian Soldiers (Part 2)

God's army is not for the uncommitted or uncourageous. Gideon's call to arms (Judges 6:34-35) received a decent response; 32,000 Israelites joined his army. As God looked out at this army, He saw two issues: 1) Given its size, it would be easy for the army to attribute any victory it won to itself rather than God (7:2); 2) Though there were 32,000 soldiers, many of them were actually not prepared to fight. To address the latter issue, the Lord told Gideon, "Whoever is fearful and afraid, let him turn and depart at once from Mount Gilead." Sadly, "twenty-two thousand of the people returned" (v. 3).

It's a simple lesson, but an important one: even today, God is not interested in simply making up the numbers in His army. Perhaps the greatest argument of the world against Christianity is the hypocrisy it sees in its adherents: people who wear the name of the commander in chief but have no interest in engaging in the conflict. The "double-minded" will receive nothing good from God (James 1:7-8). Instead, the "cowardly" will "have their part in the lake which burns with fire and brimstone" (Revelation 21:8).

Surprisingly though, God whittles down Gideon's army yet again, this time by testing how they drink water. No stated reason beyond God's initial one (cf. Judges 7:2) is given for this second reduction, and commentators are divided as to whether those kept were those who brought water up to their mouths or lowered their mouths down to the water. If the former, God chose men who demonstrated their awareness; if the latter, God chose men who were fearless enough to trust God to "have their backs." Either way, the lesson on commitment and courageousness stands, as Gideon's 300 were unphased by the fact that less than 1% of their initial army remained. Are we likewise prepared to be the faithful few who stand with the Lord even as others pursue and easier path (Matthew 7:13-14)?

God's army is not for the unbroken and unspoken. God had a unique plan for Gideon's 300-man army to defeat the Midianites. They were to surround the Midianites encampment at night, carrying not swords or spears but pitchers with torches inside of them and trumpets. At the time indicated by Gideon, they were to sound their trumpets, break their pitchers (thus revealing the light of their torches), and cry, "The sword of the LORD and of Gideon!" (Judges 7:16-18). The army obeyed, and the mighty Midianites fled, defeated (vv. 19-22).

Looking at this text somewhat allegorically, we can see a powerful New Testament parallel. As Christians, we carry forth the light of God in our hearts through the Gospel (2 Corinthians 4:6). Yet, as Paul demonstrates by example, it is not until our "earthen vessels" are broken that the glorious, light-giving "life of Jesus" can "be manifested in our body" (vv. 8-10). Intact vessels shine no light, neither in Gideon's case nor in ours.

But why was Paul's vessel broken? It was because he believed and therefore spoke (vv. 13-14), just as Gideon's soldiers shouted their faith and sounded it forth that night with their trumpets. Far too many Christians produce an "uncertain sound" with their trumpets (cf. 1 Corinthians 14:8), failing to cry out for the Lord when it matters, choosing instead to protect their vessels (e.g., 2 Timothy 4:10). As it was that evening with Gideon, so it is with us: no noise, no light, no victory.

Again, Christians are soldiers of Jesus Christ. We commit to warfare when we commit to "the faith" (1 Timothy 1:18-19). As Gideon did, let us reward God's patience by placing our faith in Him. Having found faith as Gideon did, let us commit to standing with the Lord even as others leave. Finally, let us choose to "endure hardship" (2 Timothy 2:3), allowing our vessels to be broken even as we raise our voices for our Lord and allow His light to shine through us.