

## **"With Few Resources, Gideon Is Victorious!"**

(Judges 7:2-21; Philippians 2:12-15; John 14:12-17)

The name *Gideon* is familiar to most of us, for we've grown up hearing about *Gideon's Bibles*. We've heard songs about *Gideon's Bibles*--songs by such singers as Jimmy Buffet, George Strait, Steve Goodman, Jethro Tull, Frank Zappa, and the Beatles. Remember the Beatles' song *Rocky Raccoon*? "*Rocky Raccoon checked into his room, only to find Gideon's Bible.*" In the 1953 movie *Gentlemen Prefer Blondes*, Marilyn Monroe sang about "that book by Mr. Gideon." In the 1996 movie *Mission Impossible*, Tom Cruise found a major clue when he discovered a *Gideon's Bible*. In the adventure game *Overseer*, the main character, Tex Murphy, finds a *Gideon's Bible*. In the novel *A Tree Grows In Brooklyn*, Francie's aunt Sissy got her a copy of a *Gideon's Bible* from a hotel room.

*Gideon's Bibles* are distributed by the organization *Gideon's International*. It's an evangelical Protestant organization that exists to distribute copies of the Bible in over 80 languages and 190 countries, primarily in hotel and motel rooms. The organization was founded in 1899 in Wisconsin. Nearly 76.9 million *Gideon's Bibles* were given out in 2007 alone. Approximately 1.5 billion have been distributed since 1908. The organization describes its link to the story of *Gideon* this way: *Gideon was a man who was willing to do exactly what God wanted him to do, regardless of his own judgment as to the plans or results. Humility, faith, and obedience were his great elements of character. This is the standard that The Gideons International is trying to establish in all its members, each person to be ready to do God's will at any time, at any place, and in any way that the Holy Spirit leads. In keeping with this symbolism, the symbol of the Gideons is a two-handled pitcher and torch, recalling Gideon's victory over the Midianites as described in chapter 7 of Judges* (Wikipedia). Let's look more closely at this man and his story that this long-lasting and powerful organization is based on.

After the Israelites escaped from Egypt, wandered for 40 years in the wilderness, and finally entered the Promised Land, they were ruled by judges. These judges interpreted the law, but they also often led the Israelites in battle and ruled Israel. There are 13 men and women listed as judges in the Book of Judges. One of them is *Gideon*.

When we first meet *Gideon*, Israel's having a rough time. Scripture says that the Israelites had turned away from God--in other words, they hadn't been living godly lives--they'd been worshiping idols instead of God. As a result, God allowed them, for seven long years, to be harassed by their enemies. Every time the Israelites planted a crop, these enemies came and destroyed it. The poor Israelites didn't have a chance. They were hungry, living in bitter poverty, hiding in caves, terribly afraid of the Midianites who had taken over their land. But finally, they cried to God for help. And it was at this point in the drama, that *Gideon* entered the story of the Bible.

But what an unlikely hero, future judge, Gideon was! He wasn't from a mighty tribe such as Judah. He was from Manasseh. Gideon was beating out wheat in the wine press, to hide it from the Midianites, when the angel of the Lord appeared to him saying, "The Lord is with you, you mighty warrior." Mighty warrior?! God sure has a sense of humor sometimes. Gideon couldn't have been farther from being a mighty warrior. But of course God does not see as we see, right?

Gideon said, "If the Lord is with us, why then has all this happened to us?" The age-old question we humans are always asking, right?

Instead of answering Gideon's question, the angel said, "Go in this might of yours and deliver Israel from the hand of Midian; I hereby commission you."

Gideon replied, "How can I deliver Israel? My clan is the weakest in Manasseh, and I am the least in my family." And the Lord answered him, "But I will be with you..."

Now Gideon must have been a lot like us. He didn't have much confidence in himself...or in God. So Gideon asked for proof. "...Gideon said to God, 'In order to see whether you will deliver Israel by my hand, as you have said, I am going to lay a fleece of wool on the threshing floor; if there is dew on the fleece alone, and it is dry on all the ground, then I shall know that you will deliver Israel by my hand, as you have said.' And it was so. When he rose early next morning and squeezed the fleece, he wrung enough dew from the fleece to fill a bowl with water" (Judges 6:36-38). But, talk about lack of faith, "Then Gideon said to God, 'Do not let your anger burn against me, let me speak one more time; let me, please, make trial with the fleece just once more; let it be dry only on the fleece, and on all the ground let there be dew.' And God did so that night. It was dry on the fleece only, and on all the ground there was dew" (Judges 6:39-40).

So, finally, even though he was from a weak tribe, even though he felt he himself to be the least in his family, far from a mighty warrior, Gideon began gathering some men who would stand with him in confronting the mighty Midianites. Can't you just imagine how hard he worked at getting a huge number to stand with him?

But then, God told him that he'd gathered too many men. With so many men, it would look like they had won the day. It wouldn't be clear that God had won the day. So God told Gideon to send home the men who were afraid. 22,000 men returned home; only 10,000 remained. God said this was still too many. To weed out some more men, God told Gideon to take the remaining men down to the water. God had very specific directions. He said, "All those who lap the water with their tongues, as a dog laps, you shall put to one side; all those who kneel down to drink, putting their hands to their mouths, you shall put to the other side"

(Judges 7:5). Only 300 of the 10,000 lapped like dogs, presumably so that they could keep a watchful eye on whoever might be approaching. So God said, "With the three hundred that lapped I will deliver you, and give the Midianites into your hand. Let all the others go to their homes." (Judges 7:7).

How frightened Gideon must have been, to face the Midianites with a mere 300 men. He probably wanted to put out the fleece again--to be sure that he was following the directions of God and not a demon who was trying to kill him. So, knowing that Gideon's faith was weak, God gave him another sign. God encouraged Gideon to go near enough to the Midianite camp that he could overhear the Midianites speaking. And when he did this, Gideon overheard a Midianite telling of a dream in which God gave the Midianites into the hand of a man named Gideon.

Thus Gideon returned to the Israelite camp and gave each of his 300 men a trumpet and a clay jar with a torch hidden inside. They didn't have cannons or battering rams or bombs. They had trumpets and clay jars with torches hidden inside! 300 men armed with trumpets and torches hidden in jars! Talk about scarce resources! Nonetheless, Gideon told the men to follow his lead. He said, "Look at me...When I blow the trumpet...then you also blow the trumpets around the whole camp, and shout, 'For the Lord and for Gideon!'"...So the three companies blew the trumpets and broke the jars, holding in their left hands the torches, and in their right hands the trumpets to blow; and they cried, "A sword for the Lord and for Gideon!"...and all the Midianites in camp ran; they cried out and fled.

What a great story. It's a story that tells us the good news that little is much in the hands of God. Gideon wasn't a mighty warrior; in fact, just the opposite. He didn't have much faith in himself, his tribe, or in God. He needed not one sign but three to motivate himself to go out and do what needed to be done. But when he got around to obeying God, to placing himself in God's hands, to trusting God, he became the mighty warrior God had said he could become all along. And in addition, Gideon became a great leader, inspiring and leading 300 men to go up against the hordes of Midians! And because of all this, through Gideon, God was able to display his power, using Gideon and 300 men armed with trumpets and torches to drive the Midianites from Israel. Wow! Do you realize all the implications for us?

We may feel as if we're "just" an ordinary person, or perhaps even a loser. You know, a loser is a guy who plays hide-and-seek and nobody goes to look for him. There's a lesson here for all of us who at times feel like losers, or even just ordinary people. There's a lesson here for all of us who feel we're too timid to even be brave, all of us who feel insignificant, all of us who feel powerless, all of us who feel that things will always be as bad as they now are, all of us who feel defeated, all of us who discount ourselves from being able to do anything to

improve our lives or the lives of those around us. God can take us and whatever scarce resources we have and accomplish huge things through us.....if only we will trust him.

You know this wonderful good news isn't found only in this story. It's found throughout our Bibles. Also in the Book of Judges, there's the story of another time when the Israelites did what was evil in the sight of the Lord, and as a result, the Canaanites came to rule over them. The Canaanite commander Sisera had 900 chariots of iron, and he oppressed the Israelites for 20 years before the people finally turned back to God, crying to him for help. And then, again, to show his power, to show that little is much in his hands, God defeated the mighty Sisera with only a woman, named Jael, and a tent peg (Judges 4:21). Little is much in the hands of God.

When Samuel was told to go to Jesse's sons and select the future king of Israel, he discounted the youngest son, who was a mere boy. But God told Samuel to pick the youngest, weakest of the family, and thus the boy David was anointed king. And lest we miss the point in the story of David that little is much in the hands of God, there's the story of him defeating the mighty Philistine giant Goliath, facing him not with trumpet and torch but rather with five smooth stones. David said to the giant, "You come to me with sword and spear and javelin; but I come to you in the name of the Lord of hosts, the God of the armies of Israel....This very day the Lord will deliver you into my hand, and I will strike you down...so that all the earth may know that there is a God in Israel, and that all...may know that the Lord does not save by sword and spear; for the battle is the Lord's and he will give you into our hand." (I Samuel 17:46-47). As it turned out, it only took one smooth stone to fell the giant. Little is much in the hands of God.

This good news is also found in the story of the birth of Jesus, but this time, God didn't use a woman or a boy or the least of the tribe of Manasseh to show his power, to show that little is much in his powerful hands. He went even farther to be sure we didn't miss the message. God sent a baby to save the world. And when the baby grew to be a man, he chose very ordinary people to work with and through--uneducated fishermen; a tax collector; and a man with some kind of infirmity or physical weakness to take the good news to the Gentiles.

Yes, throughout his Holy Word, God has consistently, persistently sent us the message that he's with us, his power is unlimited, and thus, if we will but trust him and place ourselves and whatever resources we have in his hands, we'll lead victorious lives--lives that bring goodness and blessing--lives that build up God's kingdom of light and love.

Do we sometimes as individuals hide out in our caves, waiting for God to do something? Do we sometimes as a church hide out in a cave waiting for God to do something? When we find

ourselves doing this, we need to step out of our dark caves into the light, where we'll find God waiting to use us to do something marvelous in our lives, in our church, in the world.

Let's hear again how Gideons International describes its link to the story of Gideon: *Gideon was a man who was willing to do exactly what God wanted him to do, regardless of his own judgment as to the plans or results. Humility, faith, and obedience were his great elements of character. This is the standard that Gideons International is trying to establish in all its members, each person to be ready to do God's will at any time, at any place, and in any way that the Holy Spirit leads.*

May we also be ready to do God's will at any time, at any place, and in any way that the Holy Spirit leads. And let us do this, setting our fear aside and trusting not in our limited resources but in our mighty God for the final outcome. Amen.

-- Terry Chamberlain Diehl; Hickman Mills Community Christian Church; March 21, 2010