

Title: GIDEON

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GIDEON

Will you turn to Judges, Chapter 6, in the Old Testament? It's page 344 in my Bible. Now look at this Bible—that Bible is seven years beat up. I'm going to retire this Bible today. Seven years is enough to beat a Bible to death and I'm moving to this one in my eighth year. But thank God this one held together till the end of the seventh year.

The sixth chapter of Judges. "The children of Israel did evil in the sight of the Lord: and the Lord delivered them into the hands of the Midianites seven years." Now this message reaches to every individual who listens, as well as to this church and to me. I believe in putting flesh and blood on the Bible, and I want you to ask yourself in this time of recession..., is your circumstance any worse than this: "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 strongholds,"—living there. "So it was, when Israel had sown, that the Midianites came up, and the Amalekites, and the children of the east, even they came up against them; They encamped against them, and destroyed the increase of the earth, till you come to Gaza, left no sustenance for Israel, neither sheep, nor ox, nor ass. For they came up with their cattle and their tents, and they came as grasshoppers for multitude; for both they and their camels were without number: and they entered into the land to destroy it."

Now I can't add much to that Biblical description, living in caves. Every time they would get a little increase, like grasshoppers, the enemy would come and swallow it up. "And Israel was greatly impoverished because of the Midianites; and the children of Israel cried unto the Lord. It came to pass, when the children of Israel cried unto the Lord because of the Midianites, That the Lord sent a prophet unto the children of Israel, which said unto them, Thus saith the Lord God of Israel, I brought you up from Egypt, and brought you forth out of the house of bondage." And without reading further, all he did is what this preacher has done for seven years—remind the people who were crying. Now some people think, "Well they cried unto the Lord; and the Lord gave them an answer."

Not quite! He didn't send a bolt of lightning and kill all the Midianites. He didn't just wipe them out in a day and send a bunch of angels in scotch plaids piping or blowing trumpets like blue-clad deliverance cavalry over the hill to a poor band hemmed in by Indians. Too many people look for their miracles the wrong way. A prophet is one who speaks forth the Word of the Lord, and all the prophet did was tell them what they should have known already—the record of God's past performance.

God has written this Book to teach a simple truth: God is Faithful. Faith is hanging your body on God's Word. This may seem like a ludicrous statement but God hangs His body, whatever that may mean, on His Word once it is said: "For ever, O Lord, thy word is settled in heaven"; "God is not a man to lie; neither the son of man to repent." When He speaks, He is going to do it.

Now a prophet was sent. I'm sure that a lot of people that cried unto the Lord would rather have had those angels come marching or a bolt of lightning wipe out the Midianites. Seven years is a long time. Believe me, I know it now. He sent a prophet. "Thus saith the LORD God of Israel, I brought you up from Egypt, and brought you forth out of the house of bondage." What's new? How many times in these seven years have you heard me say, "We don't need any new truths. We just need to rediscover the old ones"?

"Tell them" is what God said to the prophet. "Tell them... tell them the record."

At the same time God went to work. "There came an angel of the Lord," not a troop of angels—one angel. (The Midianites were like grasshoppers.) "There came an angel of the Lord." Boy, it's nice to know what one angel can do! I've said to you a few times these last years we need to get our eyes open to what the Bible says.

There's some of the stupidest ideas running loose. Don't ever tell little Johnny, "Now why don't you be like an angel?" He may wipe the whole town out.

"There came an angel of the Lord, and sat under an oak which was in Ophrah, that pertained unto Joash, the Abiezrite: and his son Gideon threshed wheat by the winepress, to hide it from the Midianites." What a place to thresh wheat. How many of you know wheat doesn't grow in a winepress? In those days they made wine by putting the grapes in the dug-out cavity in the ground and taking their sandals off and squishing it between their toes. Good wine had toe-jam mixed in. Where do you think the habit of letting wine age a while came from?

Of course my good ol' self-righteous, clerical friends wouldn't know. You know, water had to be awful bad if Paul would say, "Take toe-jam wine for your stomach's sake"! They threshed or rather crushed the grapes and pressed the wine in a cavity in the ground in a vineyard. Gideon was there—not during the grape harvest—threshing a little wheat hidden in a vineyard in the lowest place he could get. His highest hopes was: Enough grain for enough bread for one day.

Now we go nowhere today unless everybody can put himself in Gideon's place: low-down, hopeless, crushed by circumstances seven years long, trying to get enough bread, hiding in fear for one day. "An angel of the Lord appeared unto him, and said unto him, The Lord is with thee, thou mighty man of valour."

If I didn't think this old Bible would fall apart, I would just slam it down. The *King James* may be good enough for Paul in some people's minds, not mine. I say get yourself a *King James* and then correct it with me. That's not what the angel said. He never said, "The Lord is with thee, thou mighty man of valour." Who ever heard of a mighty man of valor hiding in a winepress to thresh wheat? Locked in a house, covered up, piling pillows on your head, afraid to face the day—that's not a mighty man of valor. And the original doesn't say that. What the original says is: "The Lord is with thee, the one who is mighty in valour." The reference is not to Gideon but to the One who is with him. The valor attaches not to Gideon but to the valorous One that's with him—the Lord, almighty!

"The mighty one of valour, the Lord Himself, is with thee." Your circumstance is unchanged, but, "Hey, I'm here." Most people in trouble pray themselves into a praying mantis condition to get out of their position. That's not God's way.

The world is full of preachers today who will tell you that you can take some kind of spiritual pill and your problems will dissolve. Gideon's circumstances hadn't changed a quarter turn. He was still in

the winepress; the Midians still numbered like grasshoppers. Nothing had changed a quarter turn except that the Lord Himself, who was mighty in valor, was with him. And Gideon said unto him, “Oh my Lord, if the Lord be with us, why then is all this befallen us? and where be all his miracles which our fathers told us of, saying, Did not the Lord bring us up from Egypt? now the Lord hath forsaken us, and delivered us into the hands of the Midianites.”

I think as I retire this Bible I’m going to scratch out Gideon and write in ol’ Gene. And ol’ Gene said unto him, “Oh my Lord...”, “if...”, “why...”, “where...”, “forsaken...” Does that sound like a man of valor? The whole point of this message starts right here. I listen to some people preach God’s Word and the way they lay it out. Man!..., I might as well not have come to listen. There ain’t no way I can get from where I am to where they are talking about. You know, I can flip a little gear in my head and fantasize “woo-woo-woo!”—and a spiritual reality is a-floating 40 feet above trouble. I can’t get there!

I have preached here seven years. I had preached a few years before I came here. I am still not delivered. As recent as this morning I said, “Oh my Lord!” You ought to ask my parents. I said it to them on the phone: “Oh my Lord...”, “if...”, “why then...”, “where be...!” Come on, now! Get with it with me this morning. How many have ever talked like that about your circumstance? We’re going to need room next Sunday for you that haven’t. Don’t come—I mean, you’re all ready for heaven; so don’t even take up space here tomorrow or next Sunday. Just make room for somebody else. This is my kind of people. And you know what I like about it? The Lord was there while he was like that. The Lord saw him in the winepress.

I call this the “vocabulary of doubt”: “Oh, my Lord...”, “if...”, “why...”, “where be...”, “forsaken”. And the Lord looked upon him, and said, “You silly nut”! Do you know what some people would’ve done if I had come to them? Fall on your face and say “Hallelujah” or “Whoopee”, but don’t give Me this garbage. I don’t associate with “if-ers” and “oh mys” and “why-ers” and “where be-ers” and “forsaken us-ers”. I know a TV channel somewhere else I can go where they whoop and holler and are happy! “Don’t give Me this kind of stuff. I’m here! I’m the Lord! Don’t you know who I am? Nobody talks this way to Me.” Is that what He said?

Fourteenth verse. After Gideon’s speech “Oh my Lord,” the Lord did not do what I just characterized. “The Lord looked upon him, and said, Go in this thy might, and thou shalt save Israel from the hand of the Midianites.”

One man! When he finally confronts them there will be a quarter of a million of them on one hill. That sounds like a bureaucratic agency—a quarter of a million on one hill. That’s what our economic recession is about. No wonder Israel was impoverished—one man! “And the Lord looked upon him—“Oh, my Lord...”, “if...”, “why...”, “where...”, “forsaken...” saying, “Go in this thy might, thou shalt save Israel from the hand of the Midianites.” Which means this is the secret of his might that will let him save Israel—“Have not I sent thee?”

Now if there is any one thing I know; I may be a complainer, but I ain’t dumb. These seven years have taught me only God could keep me here. I know He sent me and I think a lot of you, if there’s any one thing you know, God sent you to be a part of this work.

“The Lord looked upon him, and says, Go”—move forward now—“in this thy might...have not I sent thee?” You say, “I don’t know if God sent me.” What are you a Christian for if you don’t believe the Bible? The Bible says, “The steps of a good man are ordered of the Lord.” The Bible says, “If you acknowledge Him in all your ways, he will direct your paths.”

A lot of people think holiness is “spit and polish” change of appearance. Holiness is a commitment. I know and I’m sure you know—nobody else is the judge of that; only the Lord who knows the heart can judge it—you know whether or not you said “Yes” to God. You know whether or not you have committed your life to God.

The problem is there are a lot of funny voices running around with super-spiritual messages that God’s got to speak to you and tell you what brand of paper towels to buy when you go to the drugstore. I think you better get a voice from the Lord before you buy pills today. Make sure they are sealed good and steer clear of capsules, with the idiocy going on in today’s world. But there has been an exaggerated need of God to speak openly. God has already spoken. He says, “You put your life in My hands, I’m going to lead it.” The problem is because it doesn’t look like His path, I want to dig a hole a little deeper in the winepress and hide out. God says, “Get out of here. This is your might: I’m sending you out now into the arena of challenge!”

Now most people would think if the angel says that to him, he’d say, “Yes Sir!” “And he said unto him” —now Gideon’s turn, “Oh my Lord, wherewith shall I save Israel? behold, my family’s poor, and I am the least.” And God said, “Enough’s enough! Twice I’ve said to you! THWAK! Give him what he wants! Make him poor! I agree, you bone-head ally-oo! Stay here and I’ll find somebody that won’t talk doubt to Me.”

That’s verse 16. Is that what the Lord said? You need to get a Bible and read because, see you don’t know till you check. The Lord said unto him, “You big mouth complaining idiot!” NO! The Lord said unto him—the third time now, “Surely I will be with thee.” Well, that’s enough for Gideon. Three times the Lord spoke. “Doc, that’s enough!” “Okay, where do you want me to go?” Am I right or no?

Hey, all I want.... You know the introduction of this message is long: I’m going to get up and go in a minute. I want you to see that God is used to dealing with people like you and me. All Gideon has done is bellyache out the language of doubt—“Oh my...”, “if...”. Circle those words: “Oh my...”, “if...”, “why”, “where be”, “forsaken”, “Oh my...”, “wherewith...”, “poor...”, “the least”.

And the Lord said unto him, “You said it. Stay that way.” Thank God, He didn’t. “The Lord said, Surely I will be with thee.” Nothing changed; from the start of the conversation, nothing changed. Circumstance is still the same; Gideon is still the same; the Lord is still the same. Nothing changed. The Lord: “I will be with thee.”

Gideon should have shut up, but he didn’t. “He said unto him, If now I have found grace in thy sight, then show me a sign.” “Show me a sign!” And God said, “I’ll show you a sign all right!” Aren’t you glad I’m not God? I mean, if I were God and not Gideon—but I’m like Gideon, so I’m sympathetic with you. I mean, if I were God.... like I say, if you want somebody to be hard on a thief get a thief to sit on the panel that judges one. I’m so much like Gideon I would have killed him. When he said show me a sign, I would have given him one punch—one he’d never forget! He would wake up somewhere in eternity and say, “I got a sign! Come to think of it, that’s the last thing I remember!”

“Show me a sign that thou talkest to me.” How is that for an insult? I mean the Lord has been talking to him for an hour, and he says, “Show me a sign that thou talkest to me.” “Don’t you go away God.” You know, if you’ll just pause a minute—Isn’t this a funny conversation? I mean, he’s down there in a winepress. He doesn’t say, “Oh my God, you are an angel!” He just carries on the conversation, bellyaching. Finally, the Lord is stuck with it. And Gideon says, “Show me a sign.”

Now don't go; stay right here. Hey God, wait on me! I'll be right back. "Depart not hence, I pray thee, until I come unto thee." God is going to wait now. "Depart not hence, I pray thee, until I come unto thee, and bring forth my present, and set it before thee. And He said, I'll tarry until thou come again."

"Gideon went, and made ready a kid, and unleavened cakes of an ephah of flour: the flesh he put in a basket, and he put the broth in a pot, and brought it out unto him under the oak, and presented it." Now this was an Old Testament worship offering called the Meat Offering. It's in your margin of your Bible, the alternative to the word "present".

He suddenly got religious. Now You wait on me, God...while I get religious. I mean, there can't be any communion between us till I get religious. Wait right here, God! That's.... I like that too! You know, he wasn't ready to worship on the spot. He had to get ready. I could do something with that.

"Gideon went, and made ready a kid"—and all the things it said. "And the angel of God said unto him, Take the flesh and the unleavened cakes, and lay them upon this rock, and pour out the broth. And he did so."—Now God is getting a little fed up. "And the angel of the Lord put forth the end of the staff that was in his hand, and touched the flesh and the unleavened cakes; and there rose up fire out of the rock, and consumed the flesh and the unleavened cakes. Then the angel of the Lord departed out of his sight. And when Gideon perceived that he was an angel of the Lord, Gideon said, Alas."

I mean, that has to be the biggest spiritual imbecile thus far ever to encounter in the Bible. There is nobody that can't identify with this fluke. I mean, there is nobody in front of me—television, radio, or here—whose starting point with God is any worse than that one. "Alas, O Lord God! I have seen an angel of the Lord face to face. And the Lord said unto him, "That's right, you imbecile, and you ain't going to see me again. I got better than you to play with." No. "The Lord said unto him, Peace be unto you; fear not: thou shalt not die."

You know what this verse tells you? In the theology of the day, to see the Lord face-to-face was to mean certain death. After all this, "When Gideon perceived that he was an angel of the Lord," when Gideon said, "Alas, O Lord God!" he wasn't worshipping. I think that's funny. When he finally decided there is a chance it was the Lord, he said, "Wait here. I got to get ready to worship." Then when he worshipped and realized it was, the Lord scared the liver out of him; he was sure he is going to die. That means his worship was not in faith either... because if he was sure if he saw the Lord, he would die; when he said, "Lord you wait here", it would have been like "hide and seek". He would have ran all the way to Jordan Rift not wanting to see the Lord.

You see the raw material? Doubter, fake worshiper, crushed by his circumstances, filled with the "vocabulary of doubt". "But the Lord said unto him, Peace be unto thee; fear not: thou shalt not die. Then Gideon built an altar there." Will you circle the word "there" in the 24th verse? "Then Gideon built an altar there." Where? In the winepress area, in the vineyard where he had been threshing, in the place where his doubts had covered him like an envelope—he built an altar there.

Now to a modern mind, an altar is like this area here in front of the pulpit. Now I grew up in the church where you got saved by coming to an altar. The whole meaning of an altar in the Old Testament is lost. An altar was a place where something died, where claims were readjusted; an altar was a place where you confronted God and you recognized in the dying sacrifice His right and your lack of any rights; an altar was a place where you readjusted the life's direction. And in this case, as

always, the name of the altar tells the kind of adjustment that had to be made. “Gideon built an altar there, and called it Jehovah-shalom.” Peace, “The Lord Peace.”

Now “peace” is another one of those super-spiritual words. Some people think you can pray till you get peace. Peace in ordinary flesh and blood language means “cessation of against-ness”. Hostility stops, argument ceases, war ends, surrender occurs! Somebody has to surrender to have peace. Because the word “Jehovah” is attached on: “I am that I am”—unchanging, “The Lord”, it had to be unconditional surrender—the only thing that has changed to this point. Gideon hadn’t changed. He was full of doubt, fear, and phony worship. The circumstance hadn’t changed. If there was a census taken in the land there would be just as many Midianites as before. Not a thing had changed in his circumstance. Gideon hadn’t changed up to this point—he was still the same. And God hadn’t changed.

Now Gideon changes. Having finally exhausted his complaints, he takes a positive step. He builds the altar, he readjusts himself and against-ness ceases. Now the only thing that had to cease was his arguing with God. God had said, “The Lord is with thee. Have not I sent thee? Surely I will be with thee.” Gideon had to make his peace where he was in the circumstance unchanged, quit arguing with it, and reattach his life to that promise of God: “I’m with thee; I’m sending thee; Surely I will be with thee.” That hasn’t changed a quarter turn.

If you want to be a man of faith, and that is what Faith Center is about..., if you want to be a hero of faith, you got to quit expecting your circumstance to change; you got to quit expecting the miracle to come and deliver you. The Miracle Worker is already there. Now you may say, “Well I don’t have these promises.”—This may sound very un-preachy: “The heck you don’t! You got 66 Books of them.”

Gideon lived on the fringe of heathenism. He lived in the day of the Judges when twice in the Book it says there was no open voice in the land, and people had to do what was right in their own eyes. I could stand here until this time next year and not recite as many times that God has said the same thing to the Christian. The whole purpose of Christianity—Ephesians 1 and 2 declares in the New Testament, is to break the barrier that our sins created, that God by His own initiative might break the wall and come to be with us.

God has promised.... the Great Commission sends the church. This church exists to do what God has sent us to do: proclaim His Word. We have been sent, every individual participant. You become like that great father of Missions who was a shoemaker who said, “I make shoes that I might do this other work.” You no longer live just to get enough sustenance for another day. You accept the claim of God on your life. That’s what water baptism on Anniversary night will say. As we go down into that water and come up to symbolize newness of life: “I accept the claim of the Lord.” That is why I come against these humanistic preachments of today that make God a bellhop, a waiter, a servant of man.

Gideon had to accept the fact that when God says something, don’t argue with it. God has said—and Jesus said it over and over again—“I will never leave thee nor forsake thee.” No Christian has ever been promised he won’t have trouble. Indeed Jesus said, “In the world you’ll have tribulation,” and is the Latin word or cognate of the Latin word, *tribulum*—the rod that you beat wheat to get it separated from chaff. He said, “You are not better than the Master. They will treat you like they treated Me.” But He said, “I’ve overcome the world”; and “I will never leave you nor forsake you.” We have the same promise Gideon had, but it isn’t worth anything to us until we make that peace.

I don't do a lot of "altar calling" like some preachers. I think shallow commitments are as meaningless as they are shallow. You can make a decision as you hear the Word. Nobody is in any worse condition than Gideon, and this preacher after seven years of pastoring this church has to face up this last Sunday of my seventh year: "Is the Lord with me?" He is with each of us. "Has He sent me?" He sure has. I am His to command.

You say, "Well I don't know where I'm being sent." Neither did Gideon. You can't find a line, just "I have sent thee." That will be your strength: "I'll send you." He didn't give him a clue as to where he would go or what the sending would entail. Translated, it means: I'm the Boss, and when I give the order—that is your strength. You are carrying out My order. End of speech.

Nothing changed until Gideon changed. At this altar he said "Yes." He stopped arguing. There was no command. In essence, Christianity begins with sealed orders; but the one who carries the sealed orders knows when they're opened, he will do it. You know too. Others may not know you know, but you know. "It came to pass the same night...."

Some people wonder why they never get any direction from God. That's because you are still sitting there saying, "Give me the directions and then I'll decide." That isn't the way God works. Build your altar of peace—Jehovah-shalom; and say, "I only have to look around to know I ain't been doing so hot piloting my own ship. I'm in the same mess that Gideon's in. I'm going to say 'Yes.'"

You know how long it took me to say "Yes" when I came to Faith Center? I came in November, seven years ago. In February of the following year, when I was ready to leave one afternoon because the difficulty of the task that I was facing...that week was such I didn't want to do it, I decided I would just leave. I and the Lord fought it out that February afternoon, and inside I finally said "Yes." And that is why I've known from the day I came here, nothing would move me until God moved me. Nothing else would. Anybody can make that commitment.

I'm so tired of people—I don't mind them being like Gideon when they start—but I'm so tired of people bragging about how God sent them; then the first little hurdle they come to, they figure out some strange way for God to change His mind. God waits for 100% commitment.

...Then, "Came to pass the same night"—expect some orders when you say "Yes"—"the Lord said unto him, Take thy father's young bullock, even the second bullock of seven years." Now this isn't going to.... I don't want anybody to think—because you say "Yes" in today's Service—to go out to some farm and try to find a cow now. This had a special meaning in the worship of the day. God does it different now.

"Came to pass the same night, the Lord said unto him, Take thy father's bullock, even the second bullock of seven years, and throw down the altar of Baal that your father built, and cut down the grove that's by it: And build an altar unto the Lord thy God upon the top of the rock, in the ordered place, and take the second bullock, and offer a burnt sacrifice with the wood in the grove which thou shalt cut down."

"Another altar? I just made one. When do I get my rewards for the first one? I just made an altar." That's what Christianity is. That's why some people never understand it. They finally get saved and then they look at the rest of the world as a freak show—who got to get saved along with them. And they always look back—"I got saved back there somewhere, you worthless hunk of whatever." They haven't done anything for God since they got saved, except stand in the way of some people.

Salvation is a progressive, ever-onward remaking of the commitment with intensified pressure. There are no retirements in Christianity. When Paul died he was getting started. That's what he said to Timothy: "I'm just boarding the ship that's laden now for its journey. I just finally stepped on board."

Christianity is training for eternity. After seven years, what I can count on is not seven years of rest now. New beginning, new battles, different new battles. The seven years have strengthened us. Gideon is right on the frame of proper Christianity. "Suck in your breath. You said "Yes." Now get out of the vineyard; get out there and build another altar."

Now this is the altar of dedication: Commitment to doing something. I'm not going to take the time to explain it to you. Read the Book! But the Burnt Offering is the symbol of dedication. The Burnt Offering symbolized what Christ did for us to obtain our righteousness. He died for us; He poured out His life in obedience. It became the symbol of activating in dedication what he had said at the altar of peace: "Okay, God. I recognize you've sent me. Now I'm ready to do what you want me to do!"

Action is added to the attitude. You know what he had to do? Take his stand for God, which involved some separation. I increasingly lose my respect for what are called "closet watchers"—"closet Christianity". God did not come and build a spiritual monastery, and a honey tree in the winepress. He came and delivered His message, stated His claim, and Gideon said "Yes." Now He says "Get out!"

And your first step is going to mark you. "Go cut down all those bullocks—I mean, go kill a bullock and cut down those groves and let that act declare to the world your separation from what was. Go do something that declares to the world you are on God's side." So Gideon took ten men of his servants, and did as the Lord said unto him. And so it was, because he had so much certainty in his faith, and that God had spoken to him; he got people beating drums, and when the sun came up and everybody was ready to see what he was doing, he pounded the drums and marched out in the daylight, and showed off his commitments to God. Is that what it says?

No! It says, "...because he feared his father's household, and the men of the city, he couldn't do it by day, he did it by night." Don't you like that? Now look, if you're relying on God to help you, does God sleep at night or day? I mean, what Gideon is really saying is, "I've made my peace and God said He sent me, but this is my first trip so I better hedge my bets." He followed God like some people play blackjack—insurance! Uh-uh-uh...I lost some more on that one. You don't have to play the game to be smart enough to figure it out. Hedging my bets: just in case this has all been an illusion and God doesn't help me when I start making my commitments, I'm going to do it at night.

Now if God.... he really believed Him. Was God any less able to deliver him in the daytime? I like this! There is not a sharp cleavage; that's what I'm trying to tell you. You don't wake up on some Sunday and say, "I'm going for God today. I finally decided and I bless God. If I ever become a Christian, I'm going to live it! And I'm going with God today, and the whole world is going to know it! Goliaths will fall! Nations will tremble! I'm going to make it!" There are people waiting for that kind of whatever...and never come to God.

Gideon had been talked to by God and made his peace, and made his commitment, and got out of his vineyard; but because he's scared, he did it at night. I like that. That to me is realistic Christianity. Criticize him for being afraid; say he should have done it in the broad daylight—he still did it! He got moving.

I got them by the thousands watching me, hunkering in a closet-watching position—too much; too much price of identity with Scott. I mean, you know I can go to churches where it doesn't even cause a ripple in my life. Nobody even cares whether I go or don't go; and I'm not missed whether I'm there or not either. You get involved with Scott, and the kind of religion he preaches causes ripples. So I got to figure out a way to go and not let anybody know it. So I make sure nobody is in the house, and I shut the door, and I turn it on—the channel—and I get surprised.

Somebody comes visiting, and they say, "Who's that?" "Wha...I dunno! Oh!" And the person who comes says, "I watch him!" "Oh, do you?" "Well I watch him all the time!" Had one of our people in a hospital—one of our people was in the hospital. Somebody came in to fix his bed..."crawling around under the bed" was the report. Found out he was watching me—the guy "worked on the bed" everyday. He was a secret King's House, under the bed. It's all right. He did it; just keep watching. I'll get you in the daylight. How many of you were once in the dark? Come on, chickens! You are out in the daylight now. He did it as God trained him, and he did it!

The next morning, "When the men of the city arose early in the morning, behold, the altar of Baal was cast down, and the grove was cut down that was by it." He had taken his stand. That is all this means. Everybody knew somebody had come out of the vineyard and come out of hiding. They said one to another, "Who hath done this thing?" And when they inquired and asked, they said, "Gideon the son of Joash hath done this thing."

"Then the men of the city said unto Joash, Bring out thy son, that he may die" because of what he had done. Now the old man had never had any sand in his craw. He had never done anything. But when Gideon made his move, even though he did it in the night; and the people then rose up to destroy Gideon because of the stand he took, the old man suddenly got some courage. "Joash said unto all of them, Will ye plead for Baal? will you save him?" That heathen god, "if he be a god, let him plead for himself because somebody cast him down." And in essence he said, "If anybody goes on Gideon you are going to go through me." You'd be surprised how many people are waiting for you to take your step. When somebody moves, inevitably somebody else will find in that display of first action the courage to follow.

Then comes the big battle. It never gets easier; it gets worse. "Then all the Midianites and Amalekites and the children of the east were gathered together, and went over, and pitched in the valley of Jezreel." Now as you drive out of the Plain of Meggido—Mount Tabor towers on the left, the hill of Nazareth roars up, you move on around to the east and up a little to the north and east—there's a little hill called "Little Herman." It's the mountain on which the battle of Gideon was fought. A quarter of a million of these Amalekites and Midianites that had terrorized the land for seven years camped there.

Now that God is going to call upon Gideon to do the big task, the Scripture says, "The Spirit of the Lord came upon Gideon." The literal is: "God clothed himself with Gideon." He clothed himself with Gideon—put him on like a garment to wear. "And Gideon said to God," after the Spirit of the Lord came on him—that's the point I make.

I'm seven years into this church preaching this message. Thank God, from Gideon I can see the Spirit of the Lord and obedience. None of those things changes the basic man totally.

Gideon has come out of his winepress. Gideon, though afraid at night, has done the job. Gideon has inspired others to follow him. Gideon now has the Spirit of the Lord on him because God is always there to give you the strength when the big task comes, if you have taken the first steps that He calls you to do.

But Gideon is still Gideon. “Gideon said unto God, If thou wilt save Israel by mine hand, as thou hast said, Behold, I will put a fleece of wool in the floor; and in the morning if dew be on the fleece only, and it be dry upon all the earth beside, then I’ll know You’re going to save Israel by my hand.”

What would you do if you were God? I’m coming right to the end so hang tight. After all that God has done, Gideon is saying, “Okay, God. The Spirit of the Lord is on me, and You sent me, and You promised to be with me; but if You’re really going to save by my hand—if the victory that You’ve promised is going to come—give me another sign. I’m going to put some sheep wool here, and in the morning when I get up... if the sheep wool is wet and the ground is dry, I’ll know You sent me.” He asked the impossible.

“And it was so: he rose up early in the morning, thrust the fleece together, and wringed the dew out of the fleece, a bowlful of water.” Now God was able to stand there and say, “He’s going to be satisfied now—I mean I only put the dew on the fleece and kept everything else dry.”

And Gideon said unto God, “Now don’t You get mad at me now....” “Let not thine anger be hot against me, and I will speak but this one time: let me prove, I pray thee, but this once with the fleece.”

“Do it the other way now, God—this time let it be dry on the fleece. You know, You may not have understood what I asked You the other times. Let’s invert it. This time keep the fleece dry—make all the ground wet.” GRRRR! I would have killed him! God didn’t even talk back this time. I mean, it’s a lost cause; he is going to have to wait till he gets to heaven to be perfect. God is going to work with him. Thank God! Doesn’t that make you happy? Nobody’s worse than this bird.

“God did so that night: for it was dry on the fleece only, and there was dew all on the ground.” “Hot dog! Now God’s going to work the victory through me! I’m going to get myself a big crowd and go win!” Thirty-two thousand people came with Gideon. The big battle is on, and the Spirit of the Lord is on Gideon. I’m sure he had a rally at the Shrine Auditorium and told people about the wet fleece and the dry fleece. Thirty-two thousand people gathered. I can see them in Los Angeles: “We’re going to battle now with the fleecer!”

God said, “There are too many people with you, Gideon.” God got His revenge! God got His revenge! I mean He has put up with this guy with all his doubts. “Now you’re going to go fight a quarter of a million Midianites and Amalekites.” Amalekite means “war-like”—not a “marshmallow taffy-pull”.

“Too many people, Gideon—I mean, you’ve just had the fleece treatment. You know I’m going to save you. Why do you need all these for?” Well, I need amicus briefs, I need support. “Too many! Thirty-two thousand’s too many. If they all go with you they’ll think they won the battle. Tell them, everybody that is afraid, go home.” Twenty-two thousand left! What it says: twenty-two thousand left! Sixty-eight percent plus—gone! Ten thousand is all I got now.

“And the Lord said,” (verse 4)—third verse says, “There returned of the people twenty-two thousand; remain ten thousand.” “And the Lord said unto Gideon” you had your fleece—“The Lord said unto Gideon, the people are yet too many.” Too many? “Too many!” Ten thousand? Hey God, do you know how many are on the hill? A quarter of a million!

“Too many!” Go down here to the brook and make them drink. I’m going to sort them out. I mean, I want to figure out what you got with you. You know, you can get a crowd with miracles any day of

the week. They'll come because of the fleece. Watch them drink, those that just go down there and lay their weapons aside and dive in, bury their head in the hot water and say, "Glory be hallelujah!" Kick them out!

The ones that act non-spiritual—you know, they can't even shout about the water; they, they lap. You know, they keep their weapons and they're watching every minute and they take their water without even pausing. That's fighting material! Put them over here!

9700 shouted and hollered in the water; 9700 have a spiritual drink of revival—it revived them! They're having a whoopie fit—backslapping, drinking. Isn't this wonderful? Best water I ever drunk! "Get over there!"

300... they're not spiritual. They won't even turn loose of their weapon long enough to get a blessing. "Put them over there!" Those 9700 that were the spiritual drinkers, they knew they were going to win the battle—and when those 300 were over there, thank God we got rid of those cold turkeys! God says, "You go; they stay!" And Gideon says 300? 300?! There's a quarter of a million over there!

"And the Lord said unto Gideon"—7th chapter, 7th verse—"By the three hundred men will I save you." How would you like being in Gideon's place? God got His revenge. I mean it's a long way from the winepress; it's a long way from taking ten men in the dark and cutting some things down. Almost 300,000 people; and I got 300.

Now what I like about God, He knew Gideon—and God wasn't about to go through it second time around; He wasn't going to go through another bunch of "if...", "why...", "oh...". He knew Gideon to be scared, so the Lord said to him, "It came to pass" (9th verse, 7th chapter) "same night, the Lord said, Rise, and go down to the host". Go over there where the quarter of a million enemies are... "for I have delivered it into thine hand." Past tense—notice that! The victory is already done. He said, "Go over there, but if you fear"—as if he wouldn't... "if you are scared"—you miserable little bellyaching scaredy cat..., "if you're scared, take your servant, take a witness with you, and go over there to the camp."

Now there's almost 300,000 warriors camped on a hill. I drove up that hill in a Fiat and looked it over and tried to figure out what I would have done that night. Almost 300,000 warriors camped in tents. The Lord says, "Go with your servant and listen to what you hear, and afterwards your hands are going to be strengthened. So he went with his servant, Phurah"—Oh! what a name, Phurah... "to the outside of the armed men that were in the host. The Midianites and Amalekites and the children of the east lay along the valley like grasshoppers for multitudes."

"When Gideon was come...." Now figure it out! At least 150,000 tents, maybe 200,000. Figure the statistical probability. Gideon and Phurah going by God because God is going to.... (No sense waiting for Gideon to say show me a sign—already done.) God is working with this guy. Send him over there. Out of 200,000 tents maximum, Gideon just happened to be outside this one and there was a man talking to another soldier saying, "You know I had the strangest dream last night. I dreamed a cake of barley bread tumbled into the host of Midian, and came unto a tent, and smote it that it fell, and overturned it, and the tent lay along. And his fellow answered and said, This is nothing else save the sword of Gideon the son of Joash, a man of Israel: for into his hand hath God delivered Midian, and all the host."

Out of 150,000 tents, Gideon happened to be there and he heard this guy telling his fellow warrior a dream: "Big barley cake comes down and crushes everything." And his friend said, "You know what

that is? I'm going to interpret your dream. That's Gideon wiping us out." Then Gideon knew that the Lord was going to deliver him.

He took his 300 men and said, "Put a candle in a pitcher so the light is enclosed. Get a trumpet, and position yourself... 300 men around the camp of the enemy—and at a given signal you are to break the pitcher. The light will shine that was enclosed inside the pitcher. Blow a trumpet and shout, 'The sword of the Lord and of Gideon!'"

Now put flesh and blood on it. The 300 men did not go with Gideon and Phurah. The 300 men did not hear the miracle sign of the dream. The 300 men had to be willing to follow God's servant and take the risk. Put yourself in one of those 300 men's flesh-and-blood body for a moment. You are in the middle of the night... you got a pitcher... a trumpet.... You're going to break the pitcher so light will shine; you're going to blow the trumpet; you're going to shout, "The sword of the Lord and Gideon!"

Now, if they had those 9700 that were super-spiritual, they would have stopped and had a committee meeting whether or not it would be humble or not to say: "Gideon". I mean, really spiritual people just say, "The sword of the Lord." God wanted Gideon's name in there. God has always worked through men and women who lead, and others who will follow. You don't have to be unintelligent to do that; it's God's way.

Now be one of those 300. What's going to happen when you break your pitcher and blow your trumpet? You don't know what the other 299 will do it. And what if you're the only one? A quarter of a million... BREAK... toot-a-toot-toot... "The sword of the Lord and Gideon"; and here I am, one light.

I have said for seven years what a chaplain said to me when I was 16. I heard a chaplain preach in Santalina, California, and don't know what he preached on. I just remember the illustration; it changed my life as a 16-year-old kid. He said, "Wars are won with one soldier getting the message moved. He doesn't ask: will the others move? Or, will the shells be on target, or the planes on time? He has to move as though the whole war depends upon him."

That is what had to happen here. If any one of the 300, or all of the 300 had said, "What can I do? What can the 300 do?" And at the given time.... Just imagine this scene because everybody did it. You are sleeping; be a Midianite. I mean you are half drunk, you're boozed off, and there you are in your tent. I mean, you are really out of it! And at a given time in the darkest hour of the night... all around the place 300... 300 men break the pitcher, so there's a blaze of light all the way around—because everybody did it. 300 men... toot-toot-toot—and blow their horn; and 300 men shout, "The sword of the Lord and of Gideon." Huh?! They came out; they ripped the tent pegs up getting out! They started going every direction; so confused, they started killing each other. You know what happened? When they got done with them, they had driven them all the way out of the country, and more than a 100,000 of them had been slain as God gave victory to Gideon and his men. And 40 years peace ushered in.

The message is very simple. God didn't come and do the work. He came and asked a man in his circumstance to start believing Him and hang his body on it; and God would do the rest. He got 300 that were willing to believe the voice of the servant of the Lord and hang their body on it; and God did the rest. I have used that picture over and over as a symbol of sacrifice, the act of sacrifice that exposes you. You have no faith until you put yourself on the vantage point of exposure, the act of sacrifice that puts you vulnerable. As they broke that pitcher, that commitment bathed them in light to

release the light. And they were committed; but as they obeyed the Word of the Lord through His servant and hung their body on it, God did the rest.

I have no new formulas for the new beginning of the eighth year. Same message I came here preaching seven years ago: If you quit arguing with God's Word, make your commitment, and hang your body on it; God will keep doing the rest as He has been the last seven years. We have been counted out more times than I can count today. Remember, we're still here and "The sword of the Lord" which is His Word in the New Testament "is victorious".

Everybody stand and I want you to say, "We made it through the next seven years"—either here or up there. Let me hear your testimony! "We made it through the next seven years". That's right!

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