



BELIEVERS CHAPEL

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The Sermons of S. Lewis Johnson

Judges 7:1-25

“Gideon’s Three Hundred”

TRANSCRIPT

[Message] Let’s turn in our Bibles to Judges chapter 7. I want to read this chapter for our Scripture reading as we continue our three part study of the life of Gideon. You’ll remember that God has called Gideon to the ministry of defeating the Midianites who have been plaguing the Isrealites for at least seven years. And now, by a series of events, Gideon has been called to this ministry and he has also sent out a call to some of the other tribes to gather to him. And God has given him the answer to his request for a sign. And now the 7th chapter begins with that as the background. The Midianites have come into the land and several thousand men have been gathered to Gideon. And we read in verse 1.

“Then Jerubbaal, that is, Gideon, and all the people who were with him, rose early and camped beside the spring of Harod; and the camp of Midian was on the north side of them by the hill of Moreh in the valley. And the LORD said to Gideon, “The people who are with you are too many for Me to give Midian into their hands, lest Israel become boastful, saying, ‘My own power has delivered me.’ “Now therefore come, proclaim in the hearing of the people, saying, ‘Whoever is afraid and trembling, let him return and depart from Mount Gilead.’” So 22,000 people returned, but 10,000 remained. Then 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. Therefore it shall be that he of whom I say to you, ‘This one shall go with you,’ he shall go with you; but everyone of whom I say to you, ‘This one shall not go with you,’ he shall not go.” So he brought the people down to the water. And the LORD said to Gideon, “You shall separate everyone who laps the water with his tongue as a dog laps, as well as everyone who kneels to drink.” Now the number of those who lapped, putting their hand to their mouth, were 300 men; but all the rest of the people kneeled to drink water. And the LORD said to Gideon, “I will deliver you with the 300 men who lapped and will give the Midianites into your hands; so let all the other people go, each man to his home.” So the 300 men took the people’s provisions and their trumpets into their hands. And Gideon sent all the other men of Israel, each to his tent, but retained the 300 men; and the camp of Midian was below him in the valley. Now the same night it came about that the LORD said to him, “Arise, go down against the camp, for I have given it into your hands. But if you are afraid to go down, go with Purah your servant down to the camp, and you will hear what they say; and afterward your hands will be strengthened that you may go down against the camp.” So he went with Purah his servant down to the outposts of the army that was in the camp. Now the Midianites and the Amalekites and all the sons of the east were lying on the valley as numerous as locusts (or grasshoppers); and their camels were without number, as numerous as the sand on the seashore. When Gideon came, behold, a man was relating a dream to his friend. And he said, “Behold, I had a dream; a loaf of barley bread was tumbling into the camp of Midian, and it came to the tent (Notice the article, “the tent.” Evidently the tent of the leader) and struck it so that it fell, and turned it upside down so that the tent lay flat.” And his friend answered and said, “This is nothing less than the sword of Gideon the son of Joash, a man of Israel; God has given Midian and all the camp into his hand.” And it came about when Gideon heard the account of the dream and its interpretation that he bowed in worship. He returned to the camp of Israel and

said, “Arise, for the LORD has given the camp of Midian into your hands.” And he divided the 300 men into three companies, and he put trumpets and empty pitchers into the hands of all of them, with torches inside the pitchers. And he said to them, “Look at me and do likewise. And behold, when I come to the outskirts of the camp, do as I do. When I and all who are with me blow the trumpet, then you also blow the trumpets all around the camp and say, ‘For the LORD and for Gideon.’” So Gideon and the hundred men who were with him came to the outskirts of the camp at the beginning of the middle watch, when they had just posted the watch; and they blew the trumpets and smashed the pitchers that were in their hands. When 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 cried, “A sword for the LORD and for Gideon!” And each stood in his place around the camp; and all the army ran, crying out as they fled. And when they blew 300 trumpets, the LORD set the sword of one against another even throughout the whole army; and the army fled as far as Beth-shittah toward Zererah, as far as the edge of Abel-meholah, by Tabbath. And the men of Israel were summoned from Naphtali and Asher and all Manasseh, and they pursued Midian. And Gideon sent messengers throughout all the hill country of Ephraim, saying, “Come down against Midian and take the waters before them, as far as Beth-barah and Jordan.” So the men of Ephraim were summoned and they took the waters as far as Beth-barah and the Jordan. And they captured the two leaders of Midian, Oreb and Zeeb, and they killed Oreb at the rock of Oreb, and they killed Zeeb at the wine press of Zeeb, while they pursued Midian; and they brought the heads of Oreb and Zeeb to Gideon from across the Jordan.”

May the Lord bless this reading of his word.

Our subject for today is “Gideon Learning God’s Mathematics.” The Christian church has carried on a love affair with numbers, numerical additions to the body for a

longtime. It’s the rare assembly that can surmount the stumbling block. How was the crowd at the meeting? That is the invariable question that we hear. That’s the old math of churchianity, to be interested in numbers. If the buildings are large and the crowds are big, then we are sure that God has been blessing us. That’s the reasoning I think it’s true to say of the common professor of the faith.

Now, of course, we don’t want to create the impression that lack of numbers and attendance at the meetings is the sine qua non of the divine presence in the testimony. Nor would we affirm that numbers are of no consequence to the Lord. We’d not use the argument of a friend of mine who once waggishly said, “The Lord must be interested in numbers, for he named a book of the Bible, Numbers.”

On the other hand, I think that the emphasis upon numbers in the Lord’s work is vastly overdone. We’ve not really learned the superiority of quality to quantity. We’ve not really learned that in the accomplishment of the tasks of the Lord it is much better to have order, fervency, dedication, than to have the weakness and apathy of large numbers with neutrality. It’s plain from the instance before us that the church or a believing body may lose in numbers and yet gain in strength.

Israel’s numbers decreased from thirty-two thousand to three hundred. But they gained vastly in strength when they had three hundred. Three hundred fearless, dedicated men can do what thirty-two thousand who are fearful and who have no zest for the work of God can do. Evidently, with the presence of the word of God and the presence of the Holy Spirit the committed are equipped to do exploits for God.

Perhaps we should, as someone has suggested, sing the last line of Luther’s great hymn in this way. “That word above all earthly powers, no thanks to them, abideth; The Spirit and the gifts are ours through Him Who with us sideth: Let goods and kindred go, some membership also; The body they may kill: God’s truth abideth still, His kingdom is forever.” As far as I’m concerned, I do believe that that is so. That we do not necessarily

need numbers, but we need fearless, dedicated, fervent, zestful servants of the Lord. And then his work shall be accomplished.

Judges, which recounts the history from Joshua to Saul, is really a sad book. It’s a sad book because we see this familiar pattern of rebellion on the part of Israel of retribution, of repentance. And then rest as God gives a judge. But then after the judge has been there for some time and has gone, then Israel retrogrades again. And she turns from the Lord. She apostatizes from the faith. She rebels against the word of God. And then God must send judgment. And he sends judgment. And finally there comes repentance and a cry to the Lord and he answers again.

Someone has said that the line that best symbolizes the Book of Judges is, “They did that which was right in their own eyes.” And you know that that expression occurs in that book. Faith was present also in the great Westminster Abbey of faith and Hebrews chapter 11. There are four men and individuals who have come from the times of the judges. And so it was a time of manifestation of faith. And we certainly see that in this very strange person whose name was Jerubbaal, or Gideon. It’s now forty-seven years since Debra sang her song. But Gideon, a man anxious for faith bolstering signs has been called and has been equipped by God for the routing of the Midianites.

Now it should be noted that Gideon was a man who was discovered by God. He was not discovered by Israel. He was discovered by God. But he was just a man. Mr. Spurgeon has said, “The best of men are men at their best. And men of strong faith are often men of strong conflicts.” And that certainly was true of Gideon.

Well everything is ready now for the battle with the Midianites. Gideon has been called by God, has been equipped through the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit has clothed himself with Gideon. Gideon has sent out messengers through several of the tribes and thirty-two thousand men have now gathered with him. The Midianites have come into the land. They’re in the valley of Jezreel. And Gideon and his forces are on one hill. There is a stream down between them and on the other side by one of the hills are the

one hundred and thirty-five thousand Midianites, thirty-two thousand versus one hundred and thirty-five thousand. The Bible says that when Gideon looked down and saw those Midianites they looked like locusts for multitude. And furthermore that their camels were so many that they were like the sand of the sea. The numbers against Gideon were four to one before he began. And I’m sure that General Gideon must have been trembling in his boots at the prospect of thirty-two thousand challenging one hundred and thirty-five thousand. But he receives a rather strange message from the Lord. “The LORD said to Gideon, “The people who are with you are too many for Me to give Midian into their hands, lest Israel would become boastful, saying, ‘My own power has delivered me.’” They thought themselves too few; God thought them too many. It was a shock to a man who had fainting faith.

I read a few weeks ago in our newspapers a brief account of C. Northcote Parkinson. Now, Mr. Parkinson is known for Parkinson’s Law. Any businessman has surely heard about it. Parkinson’s Law holds that people will stretch a given piece of work as far as the time and possibility of making themselves more important by adding underlings will allow. Parkinson’s Law. We’ve all seen it in the bureaucracy. If it is possible for a piece of work to be stretched to include more and more individuals, it will be done. Mr. Parkinson gave an illustration. He said, “You can multiply a bureaucracy best in the army. And there you can see the plant grow and proliferate in just a few days.” He says, “Let’s say that we appoint a private to examine some aerial photos. It won’t be but a day before he comes back and says, ‘The photographs are too many for me. You’re going to have to appoint someone to help me. But if you appoint someone to help me, you’re going to have to promote me to Lance Corporal,’” so Mr. Parkinson said. So that’s done. And he said, “Within a short time there will be a Lieutenant Colonel who is over seventy-five to three hundred men. And the work will be just the same with only this exception. That now, the former Private never even sees the photographs at all because he’s so busy administrating the people that are under him.” Parkinson’s Law.

Well, God doesn’t believe in Parkinson’s Law. That’s evident. Thirty-two thousand, but three hundred are going to do the work.

Now he proposes for Gideon a few simple tests. The first test is the simple test of fearlessness. For we read in verse 3 of chapter 7, ““Now therefore come, proclaim in the hearing of the people, saying, ‘Whoever is afraid and trembling, let him return and depart from Mount Gilead.’” So 22,000 people returned, but 10,000 remained.” All were alike outwardly. They all had arrived at Gideon’s invitation, thirty-two thousand. No difference among them so far as you could tell. But fear is contagious. And fear creates panic in a crisis. Fear paralyzes the arm because it unnerves the heart.

Do you know what the trouble with the church today is? That twenty-two thousand are still with us. They haven’t left. They’re still in the midst of the congregation. That’s the difficulty today. In Gideon’s day, when he said, “Those that are fearful and cowardly go home,” they went home. And there were ten thousand left.

Churchmen prefer today the ministry of love to justice. They prefer the practical topics of love, sex and marriage to the doctrine of the Trinity, the doctrine of justification by faith, the doctrines of the atonement. These other doctrines are popular, but they are not the ones that overthrow the Midianites who are attacking us. They are popular. But it is the unpopular ones that overthrow the Midianites of our world.

Well, I’m sure that Gideon must have been very discouraged on the human level when twenty-two thousand of his thirty-two thousand men went home. And God, after that, came again to Midian. And he said, “Gideon, the people are still too many; bring them down to the water and I will test them for you there.” This test is a most interesting test because it was a simple test. And incidently, they were not told ahead of time when they came down to that little brook. He said, “Bring them down to the brook and have them drink some water.”

Now, water is a very necessary thing. And what we have here is an illustration of people who take unnecessary time with necessary things.

Now, he said,

“I want you to separate the people. And those that come down to the water and get down upon their knees taking their eyes off of the enemy in order to drink that water put them in one group. And then those that come down like a dog and take that water up in their hands and lap it like a dog, put them in another.”

Ninety-seven hundred men got down on their knees and drank the water. Three hundred lapped.

Now this, I say, is interesting because it’s a kind of secret test. It suggests to me that what a person does in private is far more important with God than what he does in public. In other words, the kind of person I am at home is far more important in the service of God than what I do at Believers Chapel on Sunday or Wednesday or in the other meetings of the church. It suggests to me, the things that are important to God are the things that we are when we are before him alone. The things that we do in our business are more important than the things that we do here. It’s when God and the secrets of our hearts are most open to him. Those are the things that really count.

It was a secret test. And wasn’t it a simple test? It’s not what a man can do if he screws up his courage in order to perform some great task. But it’s the simple things that are really important. And then I think it was a significant test because it revealed indifference. It revealed zestlessness. If a person can go down in the presence of the Midianites, and mind you, they were just over this little stream, take his eyes off of the enemy, get down upon his knees and drink water for his own satisfaction, forgetting the struggle that they faced. That man does not have the zest for the battle that the man does who comes and who drinks, but keeps his eyes wearily upon the enemy while he does.

Taking unnecessary time with necessary things. You know it is possible for the church to lose in numbers as Gideon did and to gain in strength because in the work of

God it is quality that counts, not quantity. It is quality because in the final analysis it is God who does the work of God. And he can do the work of God whether there be one or whether there be many. He is not restrained so that he must save by the many, he can save by the few. The Scriptures tell us.

I think this explains our Lord’s strange habit which you notice as you read through the gospels of scattering crowds by the severity of his terms. He will speak about, for example, about eating his flesh and drinking his blood. And the result will be that the disciples will begin to drift away from him. So much so that he turns to the few who are left and says, “Will ye also go?” And Peter, remember, says, “Lord, to whom shall we go? Thou hast the words of eternal life.” And it is through that little band of disciples, maybe five hundred or so, that he accomplishes his great task. In fact, in one sense we can say it is through our Lord and twelve apostles that he accomplishes his great task of which we are the products today. Our Lord also will say, “If you do not hate father and mother and sister and brother and all of the things of this life as well, you cannot be my disciple.” And the crowds scatter. Because he too was an adherent of the principle that it is quality that counts, not quantity in the work of God.

Well, there remain three hundred men. That’s all, three hundred now to face one hundred and thirty-five thousand. I did not figure out the odds. It started at four to one. And they kept increasing. The odds now are great. But these men are faithful. They are faithful and they’re not fearful. They are fearless and they are fervent in order to accomplish the task. And you know as you can see those ninety-seven hundred leaving you can almost hear somebody say, “Let’s sing the doxology.” We have three hundred now who are fearless and who also are full of zest for the conflict. And if we are to do the work of God today we must have individuals who are fearless, who are not disturbed by the enemies of the faith, who do not cower because someone says it’s silly to believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God, or it’s foolish to believe that a person can be saved by the work of Christ only. Surely, God honors those who are performers of good works.

Or it’s foolish to believe the gospel in the light of the fact that the philosophers do not. There is an old Mohammedan proverb which Dr. Chafer at the seminary used to refer to in which it is said that when there are two persons present God makes the third. Well, that’s a typical Mohammedan proverb. It’s not such a good proverb. As a matter of fact, when one is present God makes the second, if you are speaking about the omnipresence of God. But we all know that when God is in something a majority exists there. “The Lord is not restrained to save by many or by few,” so we have said.

Now, with Gideon with his three hundred we come to the strategy of the battle. And this is one of the military marvels of antiquity.

Twelve or thirteen years ago Mr. Howard Prier who is one of our elders as you know was listening to a TV interview in which there was a German general, and General Eisenhower and General Montgomery were discussing military things. In the midst of the interview, Monte, the Englishman with such a magnificent ego, Monte posed the question to the others present, “Who was the greatest general?” And the German, he wouldn’t even guess. If forced, the German, in typical German fashion, would have gone off for ten years and have written a work finally entitled “An Introduction to the Solution of the Problem of the Greatest General.” [Laughter] But Eisenhower suggested Napoleon. And Monte, in typical fashion, said, “You’re all wrong. Moses was. He faced the greatest problem and the greatest obstacles.”

Well, I think perhaps Gideon was just as great a general as we’ve ever had because he certainly faced a tremendous problem. One hundred and thirty-five thousand Midianites and there were certainly great obstacles with three hundred men. And furthermore, his military hardware was not so good either. Gideon, leaning on his sword, looking down in the valley with three hundred men to face one hundred and thirty-five thousand. Well, I think I can understand how God said to him, “Arise, go down against the camp, for I have given it into your hands. But if you are afraid to go down, go with Purah your servant down to the camp.”

Now that’s a very interesting statement because he has already said that the fearful and those that are afraid should leave. But that does not mean that no fear resides in the heart of an individual. Even of those who have zest for the conflict. All who know who’ve ever engaged in athletics knows that you engage in the conflict and you are anxious for the conflict. But nevertheless, there is a little feeling of trepidation. And so God, understanding that with Gideon, says, “If you are afraid to go down, go down with Purah your servant.” This is the means of encouraging Gideon.

And so we read this strange little journey that they took from the top of the hill down the camp of the Midianites. And you can see Purah and Gideon crawling through the bushes, perhaps bellying up finally to one of the tents of the Midianites and startled and astonished to hear the conversation that was taking place. One of the men who was there speaking to another man, the watch has just changed. They’ve just been asleep. Now they’re awoken for their duty. And one of them speaks to the other one and he says, “I had a dream; a loaf of barley bread was tumbling into the camp of Midian, and it came to the tent and struck it so that it fell, and turned it upside down so that the tent lay flat.” And his friend answered, “This is nothing less than the sword of Gideon the son of Joash, a man of Israel; God has given Midian and all the camp into his hand.”

Now think about this for just a moment. It has been said God is just as great in the microscope as he is in the telescope. That is, he is seen to be just as great. Take the telescope and look off into the heavens about us and you cannot help but feel that God who created all of this is a great God. But then take out the microscope and look at some of the creation and you feel the same way. God is truly a great God.

Now, here is a striking providence. Gideon has managed to come down near the camp of the Midianites and he happens to come at a particular camp where a man has been dreaming. And it’s still night time and he’s telling his dream.

Now, I say that that is rather unusual. People talk about their dreams in the morning. They don’t, as a rule, talk about their dreams at night. But here is a man who

is talking about his dream and Gideon is there. And furthermore, out of all of the tents of the Midianites a hundred and thirty-five thousand men we read in the next chapter. Out of the hundred and thirty-five thousand men, Gideon happens to come to the one tent where the man has been dreaming and he’s talking about his dream. And furthermore, he has come at that particular time. It just so happened, that he arrived at the time that this man speaks about his dream. So he is at a particular place at a particular time and he hears this particular dream that has to do with him. He even hears his own name. This is the sword of Gideon, the son of Joash. And God has given us into his hand. You can see that the brain of this Midianite is in the hand of the Lord. And so Gideon listens. It’s astonishing.

You know we often overestimate the enemy. That’s what Gideon had done. He had overestimated the enemy, one hundred and thirty-five thousand Midianites they are as nothing if the Lord is on our side. We overestimate the enemy because the facts are that the enemy deep down within their inmost being are scared to death of the gospel of Jesus Christ. When the word of the cross goes forth, the enemy trembles. It’s just as when the children of Israel came to go in the land. And Rahab, when she received the spy, she said the fear of you has fallen upon us. And here are the Midianites, one hundred and thirty-five thousand strong and a loaf of barley bread striking the tent of the leader and knocking it over in a dream is enough to convince the Midianite that God has given them into the hands of Gideon. Isn’t it an amazing thing? We do overestimate the enemies of the cross of Jesus Christ.

If you were around them you would know. The cross is a terror to them. And the things that terrorize them even more are if those who hold the banner of the cross hold it in Calvinistic fashion. These Calvinistic fellows scare them to death. To think, a person preaches the doctrines of the grace of God. The person who believes in a God who elects, a God who atones, a God who draws men to Christ, a God who saves, a God who sanctifies, a God who takes men to heaven on the basis of the grace of God, a God

who comes ultimately to judge and who punishes eternally. The very thought is enough to terrify the enemies of the cross of Jesus Christ. We overestimate them. We have the gospel, which is the power of God unto salvation and the truth that terrifies the enemies of the cross of Christ. You can be sure of that. “There is no peace, saith my God, to the wicked.” Over and over again we read it in the word of God. Why do we have to apologize for our Lord Jesus Christ? Why do we have to apologize for Christianity? Why do we apologize for the Bible? We fail to realize that we do overestimate the enemy that faces us. And so just as Richard the lionhearted was to the Saracens, so the Christians are to the enemies of the cross of Christ.

A number of years ago here in Believers Chapel we had a man who occasionally would come to our meetings. He was married to one of the young ladies in the congregation. She was a Christian and he was not. This young lady was very much concerned about him. And so I went by to see him. We had a very interesting conversation. And finally at a certain point in the conversation I suggested to him because he had been raised in a professing Christian home, I suggested to him that he give the Lord a chance to prove the things that are found in the word of God and that he receive Jesus Christ as his savior. I’ll never forget his reply. I went home and wrote it down. He said, “I couldn’t do that. I’m afraid to death of that. I’ve been fighting against that for years.”

Now there was a man who had a tremendous faith. In fact, it was so great that he was fighting against it and had fought against it for years. We overestimate the enemy. God works through the spirit and he works constantly with us.

Now what kind of a dream was this? This was not simply a meaningless thing. A loaf of barley bread. Well, now barley bread was the bread of the poor. You wouldn’t have liked barley bread. Barley bread was what you ate when you couldn’t have wheat. So it’s evident that God has indicated in this dream that the Midianite has that he’s going to be overcome by a poor man, if that’s a reference to a man. And furthermore, barley

would be the suggestion of a farmer. He’s going to be overcome by a farmer, and a poor farmer at that.

And so it was not simply divine revelation, but a piece of human insight too guided by the Holy Spirit that made him think of that thresher by the name of Gideon. And so he thought immediately of a poor farmer on account of this barley bread. By the way, the way that it came down, rolling down the hill, a piece of bread ordinarily was made in circular form so that the bread would have rolled down the hill. But the Hebrew word that is used to describe this dream is a word that means that this flat object of a loaf of bread came down turning over this way, turning on its edges. And the word that is used is sometimes used of the brandishing or flashing of a sword. And so there was a connection between the way that the barley bread rolled against the tent. He saw it as it came down the hill and it suggested to him the blade of a sword as it rolled and turned over and finally struck the tent.

But after all is said and done we have to admit that this is certainly a rather unexpected way to win a battle. If you’re going to cannonade an encampment, you don’t bombard it with barley bread loaves. What a strange thing. So it suggests to us the unexpected and it suggests to us the despised. God does take the foolish things of this world and overcome the wise because in this way we can see the greatness of God. Oh paganism. Thy gigantic force and energy shall be overcome by whom? By mighty forces? No, not by mighty forces, but by a carpenter and a group of fisherman from the land of Galilee. Mighty Rome. Wise Greece. You shall ultimately be overcome by this carpenter by the name of Jesus and his twelve apostles.

Well you can just see Gideon because he is a spiritual man you can see him now he’s been dumbfounded as he’s heard this man tell of the dream. He’s even heard his own name mentioned. And it’s the same conclusion that God had said to him. Just above in the 9th verse God had said, “Arise, go down against the camp, for I have given it into your hands.” And now the Midianite interprets the dream and says in the 14th verse,

“God has given Midian and all of the camp into his hand.” In other words, the exegesis of the Midianites agrees with the prophecy that God gave and Gideon’s exegesis of it. They both agree, the Midianites and Gideon. God has given them into his hand. And there is Gideon. He’s lying on the ground behind a bush. And we read in verse 15, “He bowed in worship.” You can see him. I think there must have been some tears streaming down his face as right by the Midianites hearing what God has done in this providential experience.

Now he is worshipping God, clasping his hands, looking to God in thanksgiving for what God is going to do. You can understand that if you had been under the Midianites for seven years. And you can understand it if the Midianites every year had come into your land and had taken all of your work and taken all of your animals away and left. And you had to face the world again with nothing.

So he goes back to the camp. And I guess this is the strangest equipment that an army ever fought with. We read in verse 16 that “Midian, General Gideon now divided the 300 men into three companies (That was wise. That was good strategy), and he put trumpets and empty pitchers into the hands of all of them, with torches inside the pitchers.” No B-52’s, no ICBM’s. No MIRVs. No cruise missiles. But, in fact, not even a sword. What has he got? Well, he has a trumpet and he has a torch inside a vessel. The trumpet in the right hand and the torch and the vessel in the left hand, and this is the equipment.

Now, it’s possible for us to make a great deal over this kind of equipment. Trumpet is a trumpet to sound. And that would suggest to us the word of God. The torch to shine would suggest to us the light of the testimony to the word of God or to Jesus Christ. And the breaking of the vessels in order that the light may shine does suggest to us the fact that when an individual comes to the place of a measure of surrender, it is possible for God to work through that one. And I do notice that these vessels must be broken before they shine. And these words that I’ve suggested to you as

the meaning of these things are suggested to us by Paul’s words in 2 Corinthians chapter 4 when he speaks about the testimony of believers. He says,

“For God, who said the light shall shine out of darkness, is the one who has shown in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ. But we have this treasure in earthen vessels, that the supposing greatness of the power may be of God, and not from ourselves.”

He says,

“We always carry about in the body the dying of Jesus, that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our body. For we who live are constantly delivered over to death for Jesus’ sake, that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our mortal flesh. So death works in us, but life in you.”

I must confess, I look at these things and I find some indication of the fact that it’s possible that that’s what is meant by the trumpet and the torch and the vessel that must be broken. But regardless of whether we see some meaning like that in it, it’s evident that they don’t have anything much to fight with except the Lord. And Gideon does say in the 17th verse, “I want you to look at me and follow me as an example. Do what I do,” he says. Our great example is our Lord Jesus Christ.

Well, the battle is very simple. The battle was no battle at all. At the appointed, time Gideon’s three hundred blow on their trumpet, they break the vessel, the lights shine, the Midianites are awakened from the depths of their sleep. They look out. They hear the tremendous noise. They see the lights everywhere. They each one grab their swords. They rush out and they begin to plunge the sword into their own men. And the

result is that they destroy themselves, until finally, the battle is so much in the hands of Gideon that they begin to flee.

The Scriptures say the name of Jehovah is a great tower; The righteous fleeth to it and is set on high. And that is exactly what happens. It reminds me of Byron’s poem of the destruction of Sennacherib. “Like the leaves of the forest when Summer is green, That host with their banners at sunset were seen: Like the leaves of the forest when Autumn hath blown, The host on the morrow lay withered and strown.” And so God overthrew Midian. I’m sure that when this battle was over Gideon looked about and he said, “You know, we didn’t really do anything. God has done it all. We were simply the instruments.”

Now, let me close by suggesting the points that I think emerge from this incident. In the first place, and I think preeminently, we learn the lesson that in the work of God it is quality, not quantity that counts. God cannot move to victory with the awestruck and the apathetic and the nervous and the neutral. And we’re not talking about salvation. We are talking about the service of God. In salvation, God accepts the weak, God accepts the fearful, God accepts those who do not have the zest for the battle that they may later have. He receives men when they come in repentance and faith in our Lord Jesus Christ. But for the struggles with the enemy, as Christians, you cannot have victory from the awestruck, the apathetic, the nervous, the neutral. Those that are fearful and trembling cannot be of help to us. They only hurt us. Fear spreads like leaven in the faithful who are believers in our Lord Jesus Christ. To take unnecessary time in necessary things is characteristic of the fearful, it’s characteristic of the neutral.

Now, there are many ways in which you can do this. You can take unnecessary time in necessary things even in the physical things like eating and drinking. Some people make it impossible for God to use them, humanly speaking, by the fact that they eat and sleep and dress and carry on their recreation in such a way that the things of God do not have any significant place in their lives. It is possible for us in our mental life to

take unnecessary time in necessary things, even in the reading, the study, the research that we may ought to do. It is possible for us to make ourselves unfit as servants of the Lord. It is possible even in spiritual things. You know it’s possible to study the Bible, even study the Bible so intensively that we never engage the enemy. It is possible to take unnecessary time in necessary things and keep ourselves from being the kind of servants that God can use. There are many men who are guilty of this. There are many women also.

I remember a few years back I was speaking with my son. We were talking about this thing. He’s a very hard worker. He gets up early in the morning and he works all day long, very hard. He’s very disciplined. And he gets a lot of accomplished as a rule. We were talking about what modern business requires of men. And I said, “You know, it seems to me that modern business today requires that a man get up and get at his job at 7:00 and he works until 7:00 or 8:00 every night.” He said, “No, that’s not it.” He said, “In our company we have men who arrive at the office at 2:30 in the morning. 2:30 in the morning they arrive.” I have just fallen asleep at 2:30. [Laughter] They arrive at 2:30 and they work until 7:00 or 8:00, go home and get in the bed and get up in the morning at 2:30 in order to succeed in business. That is taking unnecessary time in necessary things.

It is possible to wreck a person’s life for the testimony of Jesus Christ by taking unnecessary time in necessary things. They kneel at the stream of self satisfaction and then they grow old. It’s a very pitiful thing to see a man who has devoted his whole life to making a lot of money, to accomplishing a lot in business, and when he reaches old age to discover that that’s all he’s accomplished in life. As far as his mind, his spirit, they’re still in infancy.

Now, of course, there are the other lessons which are obvious, the assurance of the presence of God in his providence. Gideon knew about providence, in his provision, in his power, the secret of victorious warfare is the assurance of the presence of God with us. “Lo, I am with you alway.” “I can do all things through Christ who keeps on pouring

his power in me,” the apostle says. And then there’s the necessity of really engaging the enemy.

I many years ago preached on Gideon in Scotland. And when I finished there was a Scottish preacher who was in the audience and he came up to me and he said, “You know Lewis,” he said, “All of those things are necessary in order to win a victory for the Lord.” But he said, “There’s no victory unless the trumpet is sounded and unless the pitchers are broken.” He said, “We must engage the enemy.” And in the final analysis it is necessary that we engage the enemy. And so I invite you to consider the lessons of Gideon’s life and victory. And with the divine enablement engage the enemy. May we stand for the benediction?

[Prayer] We thank Thee, Lord, for these ancient stories which so wonderfully illustrate for us the principles which should guide us in the twentieth century as we seek to make our Lord Jesus Christ known. Oh God, may we learn the lessons of the word of God. And give us, Lord, the strength and the courage and the commitment to put first things first in our lives and not to take unnecessary time over necessary things. May grace, mercy and peace be with us. For Jesus’ sake. Amen.