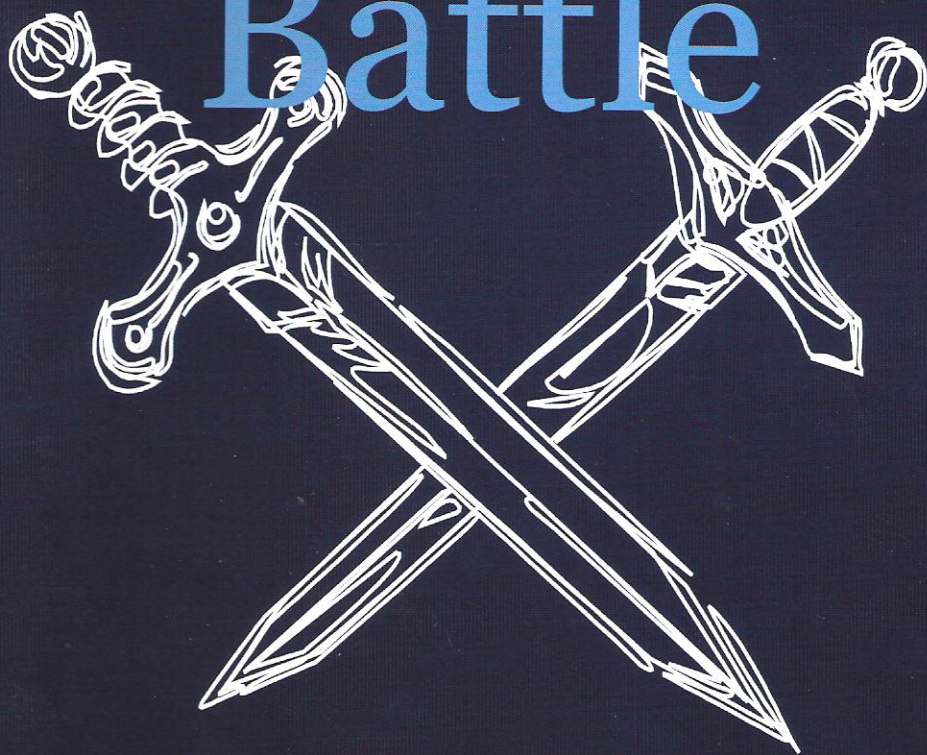


# Winning The Battle



Jerry D. Ousley

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# **WINNING THE BATTLE**

*By Jerry D. Ousley*

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All Bible passages are quoted from the New King James Version unless otherwise noted.

# ONE

## “DO YOU CARE?”

*“Now the Angel of the LORD came and sat under the terebinth tree which was in Ophrah, which belonged to Joash the Abiezrite, while his son Gideon threshed wheat in the winepress, in order to hide it from the Midianites. And the Angel of the LORD appeared to him, and said to him, “The LORD is with you, you mighty man of valor!”*”

*Gideon said to Him, “O my lord, if the LORD is with us, why then has all this happened to us? And where are all His miracles which our fathers told us about, saying, ‘Did not the LORD bring us up from Egypt?’ But now the LORD has forsaken us and delivered us into the hands of the Midianites.”*

*Then the LORD turned to him and said, “Go in this might of yours, and you shall save Israel from the hand of the Midianites. Have I not sent you?”*

*Judges 6:11-14*

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The day found a bright blue sky that extended to the horizon with only dots of white puffy clouds here and there. The warmth of the sun would pleasantly kiss the skin unless you were hard at work. A man suddenly stood erect in a pit that had been dug into solid rock. It was normally used as a winepress but the grapes had yet to come into season. The man wiped sweat from his brow and took a quick look around before stooping over once again and painstakingly began beating the grain of wheat with a staff. Normally wheat was thrashed on an open floor or in the field using carts, oxen or special thrashing shoes. Sometimes when there was a big crop all three methods were utilized. But for the last few years every time the Israelis began thrashing just when they were close to finishing the job the Midianites would come from nowhere and take it all for themselves. So Gideon had decided he was going to beat his crop out secretly this year. He had carefully brought his crop to the winepress where he intended to harvest it for his own household. It was extremely difficult work but it was the only way he was going to keep it for his near starving family.

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He worked for what seemed an endless time and the ache in his back forced him to stand up again and take a quick break. As he looked around once again making sure he was alone he noticed a man or what seemed to be a man sitting under a tree nearby. He was alone and seemed to be minding his own business. He didn't look to be the least interested in what was going on in the winepress. But when Gideon continued looking in his direction he stood and walked closer. The man looked him in the eye and Gideon could tell that this was no ordinary man. He began to speak and the sound of his voice commanded attention as he said, "The Lord is with you, you mighty man of valor." His words caused Gideon to look sheepishly down at the grain he had been beating while in hiding. He thought in his heart, "These are hardly the works of a man of valor."

Gideon thought about what had happened over the past years. The Israeli people had come into the land following God. By His help they had conquered the land driving out most of the inhabitants. But some of the people had taken interest in the gods of these people they had driven out. They began flirting with the idea at first. But after a few years they were out and out worshipping these idols. Because of it God all but disappeared. Soon neighboring nations began to raid their country until they

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found themselves paying tribute in order to save themselves. All the while this was going on some who had refused to turn away from God began crying out for deliverance. But it was as if God had left them. They had heard their fathers tell the stories of the mighty miracles God had used to help them in one difficult situation after another from the miraculous deliverance from Egypt to the parting of the Red Sea and the destruction of the vast army of Egypt. Gideon answered by saying, “Sir, if God is really with us where are all the miracles and mighty works our ancestors have told us about? We have become servants of the Midianites. If God is with us why has He allowed this to happen?”

The strange man didn’t offer an answer to Gideon’s posing question but simply told him, “You go in your might and strength and you will save your people from the Midianites. Don’t you know that I have sent you?”

This was not what Gideon was prepared to hear. His immediate response was something like this: “How can I save Israel? My family is the smallest in the tribe of Manasseh and I am the weakest member of my family!”

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The man immediately retorted with, “Certainly I will be with you and you and those with you will defeat the Midianites like a single man.”

These words were strange from a mere man. Gideon was now very suspicious and somewhat afraid. This could be no mere man. Could it be that he was being visited by a Divine Being? So he asked the man to show him a sign that these words were coming from a reliable source. He said, “Please don’t go away. Stay here until I can prepare an offering for you.” The man agreed and Gideon left, prepared a goat and some other food and returned a few hours later with his offering. The man strangely asked Gideon to place the meat and bread on a rock and pour the broth over it. Gideon obeyed and the man extended his staff touching the food and immediately fire arose from it. With that remarkable act he simply disappeared.

Surely Gideon had been visited by a Heavenly Messenger. Perhaps the miracles they had heard about from the ancestors were true after all. He had forgotten all about his grain back in the winepress. This was much more important.

But before any delivering could take place Gideon had to care of a few things. He could have dismissed the whole idea

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saying something like, “Why should I care? Why should I get involved? This is a decision our leaders need to make. It’s none of my business.” Had he done this nothing further would have happened, at least not to Gideon. But he did care. Though this was the first miracle he had ever witnessed he wanted the God of the past to return to their nation and deliver them from their oppression. But why him? It was because he cared.

### **DO WE CARE?**

In the work place one can constantly hear complaints. “The supervisor doesn’t know what he/she is doing!” “That person expects too much from me.” How about how we react at home watching the news? Most often the news leaves me feeling angry and frustrated because the reports they give of our political leaders make them seem stupid and always pointing the finger but never resolving anything. I catch myself saying things like, “Why can’t they see what’s going on? This isn’t rocket science you know!” I use those two statements the most when they report on the price of gasoline. But when the news is over even though I may still be fuming inside, I go on about my business. I feel that I can’t do anything about it and so I shrug it off, pay the higher price for fuel (while maybe wincing inside) and get on with the day. But the

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question arises, “Do I really care? Do I care enough to do something more than complain?” Most often the answer to those questions is “no.”

Gideon, like most people in Israel at that time, did his share of complaining. But at least he wasn't thrashing his wheat in plain open so the Midianites could come and take it from him like they had done in previous years. Why do all that work for nothing? His actions, though done in secret and hiding, did speak of the fact that he was fed up with the situation and was going to do something about it even if it was wrong. I suppose most others in Israel complained about the bondage they were in to the Midianites but went right on doing things as they had always done them and when their wheat was thrashed and ready to be stored the Midianites showed up and took it from them.

Doesn't that sound like most people? Most of us complain and belly-ache but when it comes to doing something about it, well, we'd just rather submit and get through the day rather than be different and take the bull by the horns. It requires us to change. It means that we've got to put action behind our words. It means we get out of the comfort zone that allows us to throw in our “two cents” about the matter, get up out of our chairs and change the

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situation. Most people aren't willing to do that but feel justified in their complaint.

When Debbie and I ran the Youth Center we constantly had adults (some were Christians and some weren't) who would come in to visit. Of course we had always welcomed that but what really got under our skins was that most of those adults were full of suggestions to make the program better. It was frustrating to us because we were there every time the Center was open and we fought in the heat of the battle. Then here comes an individual who has invested nothing as far as elbow grease or dedication, and suddenly they thought they could change things with a suggestion or two. But when those people were confronted about helping and putting their suggestions into action they wanted nothing to do with it and frankly became offended that we wouldn't leave them out of it and just do it their way.

If we really care about something we are willing to put our heart and soul into it. We don't just talk about it but we get up and put some action into motion. We do something besides complain and suggest. Words are cheap. Action costs something.

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### **GIDEON HAD TO CARE**

Even though Gideon was thrashing his wheat in hiding and he asked the “why has God forsaken us” question, he had to care. He hadn’t given up. He was still fighting although weakly. On the surface his frustration may have made it seem like he didn’t care and perhaps he had even said those words but deep down in the depths of his soul he did care.

Often this world seems unfair. We look at situations around us and those things that directly affect us and we also ask, “God, where did You go? Why have You forsaken us?” At times it may make us question His reality. Is He really there? Does He really have our best interest in mind? Where is God when I need Him most? We ask all these questions and we feel justified for doing so. We’ve all done it. We’ve all been where Gideon was, perhaps not under the rule of evil and hard dictators but certainly we’ve been in situations that make us feel like we have to “thrash our wheat in hiding” if we’re going to accomplish anything. I saw a news report just last evening that told of a woman in Louisville, Kentucky who was fed up. A very large sign hung in her front yard that read something like this: “PLEASE STOP STEALING FROM US. WE DON’T HAVE ANYTHING LEFT.” Apparently a group of thieves had broken in several times. She complained

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that they could have nothing new because these thieves somehow knew it and broke in and took it. Her insurance company was in the process of dropping their coverage and all the police could do was file reports.

Don't we all feel like that sometimes? "Enough is enough!" It seems we just can't take any more. We have problems with co-workers, with our grown children, with our teenage children, with our parents and with our marriages. Where does it all end? How can we hope to see light at the end of the tunnel when it is so full of twists and turns?

But deep down inside we do care. We want to see the end. We need to hang on to our hope if only by a bare thread. Victory must come. We want to live a victorious life in Christ but how can we have victory with all these problems to solve? I submit to you this question, "How do we know if we have victory if we don't have anything to measure it by?" Our problems measure our victory. Our successes can only be compared to adverse situations. How else would we even recognize victory? If we never fight a battle then we have never experienced victory.

Just the fact that you have read this far tells me that you do care. Life may have thrown everything it has at you but still you

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hang on. That tells me that you care. You care if you experience victory. You're tired of all the mess and the worry. You are ready for it to end.

Most people seem satisfied with being able to vent and complain. They spew their disapproval of the world and the hand they have been dealt but then do nothing about it. Some may question, "What can I do about it?" We can go to God. That sounds simple doesn't it? But first we must be settled that He is there to go to. We must care that He is there to go to. But be prepared because when we go to God He will be brutally honest with us. He may require something more from us. He may prod our hearts to change how we are living. He may tell us to stop thrashing our wheat in secret and become a mighty warrior. That's what He told Gideon. When the angel called him a "mighty man of valor," I believe Gideon felt ashamed because he was hiding. But the angel looked past Gideon's secrecy. He saw beyond the surface of what Gideon was doing. He looked right into his heart and saw that he cared.

As we shall see later on Gideon really was a man of valor. He was brave and courageous. He simply needed some prodding along. So do we. God may not send an angel to call you a person of valor but just the same He sees what is really going on in your

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heart. He knows if we really care or not. He looks past the words and the circumstances that surround us and seem to control us. He looks right into our hearts and knows if we are made from the right stuff. When we are at our lowest point he calls us “a person of valor.” He sees what can come from what is really inside of us and He concentrates on what we can become and not just what He sees on the surface.

When He addresses us as a person of valor then we’ve got to be willing to do something about it. Gideon did even though he was reluctant at first. He asked for a sign. We have to be careful in asking for signs because God has already given most of them to us. But there can come a time when we are so confused that we must know that God is really speaking to us in our hearts. We’ve got to know. When that time comes we can ask and God will reveal it to us. Gideon asked that the angel wait a little longer while he went to prepare a meal. When he brought it back the angel asked him to dump the gravy all over the food Gideon had prepared. This was certainly a strange request but he obeyed. Afterward the angel touched the food with his staff and even though it was thoroughly soaked in the gravy still it caught fire and blazed. Then the angel simply disappeared. That was Gideon’s sign. Now he knew that the time had come to turn his defeats into

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victory. But it wouldn't be easy. It required him to put his very life into danger.

When we care we may find ourselves in the middle of a dangerous situation. It may seem that God has taken us out of the frying pan and thrown us directly into the fire. But I tell you to hold on because it will get better. If we are where God has placed us and we know it then things will get better. We've got to make a choice and it may not be an easy one. But it will be the inevitable path to victory. But we've got to decide if the price is worth it or not. Do we really want victory? Do we really care?

### **DO YOU CARE?**

Gideon had to care about what God wanted before he could do anything. Had he not really cared – cared enough to put his life on the line – then we'd probably know nothing about his life. His name and story would never have been printed in the Bible. He had to care and he had to be willing to pay the price. It wasn't cheap. He had to purge Israel of their sin. They had been worshipping false gods – his own family included. They had even planted groves in honor of these gods. Under the cloak of night he put together a small band of men and they went out, cut down the

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groves and pulled down the idols. It was much more than vandalism. It was renouncing those gods and putting away those things that hindered worship of the true God. This was the reason they were under the thumb of the Midianites to begin with. The root of the problem had to be cut before the tree of circumstances died.

The next morning found the people of the city ready to put Gideon to death for his treacherous acts. But his father stepped in telling the people that Gideon had acted in a purer manner than all the rest of them had. He had been willing to come clean with God and do something about the situation. No one could argue with that and so Gideon was spared.

Obedience to God will win us the victory in our lives if we really care. If we are concerned to the point that we are willing to cut the root of the tree of our problems and come clean with God then we give Him the tools to begin the repair work that will certainly bring victory to the circumstances of defeat in our lives. It will never happen unless we are first willing to give up that which has caused us our grief.

We will be considered “weird.” We will stand out in the crowd and we will be different. It may make us feel

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uncomfortable and embarrassed. But let me tell you we will never win the victory going along complacently as we have always gone. It will require us to stand out. It may require us to stand alone. It may be dangerous and could cost our very lives depending on our situation. But let me ask you this: “Is victory worth it?” You see if we are obedient to what God is telling us in our hearts and we stand for Him even death will become victory. It did for Christ. His death brought victory to the Kingdom of God and offers the possibility of victory to each and every life that comes to Him.

I say it is better to die in victory than to live in slavery and defeat. Do we really care? Have we got what it takes to win the battle and proclaim defeat of the enemy even when the enemy is ourselves? What about it? Do we care?

***Praise the Lord!***

## TWO

### “ARE YOU WITH THOSE WHO CAN HELP?”

*Then Jerubbaal (that is, Gideon) and all the people who were with him rose early and encamped beside the well of Harod, so that the camp of the Midianites was on the north side of them by the hill of Moreh in the valley.*

*And the LORD said to Gideon, “The people who are with you are too many for Me to give the Midianites into their hands, lest Israel claim glory for itself against Me, saying, ‘My own hand has saved me.’ Now therefore, proclaim in the hearing of the people, saying, ‘Whoever is fearful and afraid, let him turn and depart at once from Mount Gilead.’” And twenty-two thousand of the people returned, and ten thousand remained.*

*But the LORD said to Gideon, “The people are still too many; bring them down to the water, and I will test them for you there. Then it will be, that of whom I say to you, ‘This one shall go with you,’ the same shall go with you; and of whomever I say to you, ‘This one shall not go with you,’ the same shall not go.” So he brought the people down to the water. And the LORD said to Gideon, “Everyone who laps from the water with his tongue, as a dog laps, you shall set apart by himself; likewise everyone who gets down on his knees to drink.” And the number of those who lapped, putting their hand to their mouth, was three hundred men; but all the rest of the people got down on their knees to drink*

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*water. Then the LORD said to Gideon, “By the three hundred men who lapped I will save you, and deliver the Midianites into your hand. Let all the other people go, every man to his place.” So the people took provisions and their trumpets in their hands. And he sent away all the rest of Israel, every man to his tent, and retained those three hundred men. Now the camp of Midian was below him in the valley.*

*Judges 7:1-8*

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The darkness of the early morning was somewhat awkward as thirty-two thousand men tried to move quietly. The air was damp with dew and the grass left one's feet wet. The army of men stopped at the well of Harod. The men had bravely volunteered but now some of them wished they weren't there even though in their minds they reasoned that they couldn't let Gideon down now.

Just to their north beside the hill of Moreh in the valley below it the vast army of the Midianites lay. Even though thirty-two thousand men is by no means a small group they paled beside the flashy army of the Midianites. They stood in ranks and columns with shining armor and shields. Their swords were of the finest quality and they were in uniform.

On the other hand the thirty-two thousand men with Gideon wore their normal every day garb carrying what they could make a weapon out of from their farms. It was more than enough to make one feel they cowered in the shadow of a towering giant. What chance did they have against this well trained army? All they

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really had was the word of Gideon who told them God – the very God from whom no one had heard from for some time – was with them. Needless to say many of those well meaning men were scared.

As these things went on Gideon was trying to ignore the negativity and listen to God. But he could hardly believe what he was hearing. Just to their north in the valley was a vast trained army. What he was hearing was “You have too many men.” I believe I would be saying, “God, did I hear you correctly? You really meant not enough men, right?” God told Gideon that He wanted the glory and didn’t want to leave any room for Israel to be able to say that **THEY DEFEATED THE ENEMY**. He wanted Israel to know that they couldn’t have done it on their own. So God told Gideon to tell the men that any who were afraid could just go home. It wasn’t a challenge questioning their courage. It wasn’t to make them feel like cowards or to make them feel guilty for not standing up to the enemy. It was just that God didn’t need their negativity. Twenty-two thousand men left dwindling their already insufficient army down to only ten thousand. I’m sure they almost felt naked to the enemy as more than two thirds of their army walked away.

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But God wasn't finished yet. He had the nerve to tell Gideon that his army was still too big. A trip to the water's edge would tell the tale. God told Gideon to keep only the men who knelt down and lapped the water like a dog. All those who scooped the water up in their hands were to be sent home. We have made doctrines from that incident stating that it was because the men who lapped the water like a dog would be more alert and more reliable. But we tend to forget that God didn't need alert and reliable men because He was going to get the glory for this victory. I believe God made that choice because He knew how many men He wanted and He knew how many of those ten thousand men would bend down and drink like a dog. When the choices were made another nine thousand seven hundred men went home leaving an army of only three hundred against the vast well-trained army of the Midianites. It was now impossible odds. It was now to the point that the small army, if you could call it that, of Israel would be annihilated instantly and consumed by the thousands of Midian and there would be no doubt that any victory would be miraculous.

Those nine thousand seven hundred men walked away leaving a group that couldn't help but feel betrayed and cast out to the wolves. And there they stood in the hills above the Midianites. Their city-like camp lay in the valley below them as a rag-tag team

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of only three hundred prepared to do what was to come next. The important part of this story is not that God left them with only three hundred men but that God had left Gideon with those who were really on his side and those who could be completely trusted. Even though God had instructed Gideon to give the thirty-two thousand the choice of leaving if they were afraid, and he sent the nine thousand seven hundred home because they didn't drink right the fact is that if those men hadn't have wanted to leave they wouldn't have. God left Gideon with only three hundred men but He left him with those whose hearts were right, ready, and committed. Gideon could know that he was in good company and that he could rely on these men.

### **ARE WE WITH THOSE WHO CAN REALLY HELP?**

God does no less today. We must surround ourselves with those who have a kindred heart. Any victory we may experience in our lives, in our ministries, and in our battle for God will only come through obedience to Him and by being with those God knows will be like-minded. It is better to be in the company of a few on whom we can rely than in the midst of a vast majority who will let us down and turn tail when the battle gets tough.

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Make no mistake the battle will get tough. There will be times of victory but there will also be times when we will feel helpless and naked before the enemy. In those times it is better to be in the company of those who can really help. God has always done great things with few numbers. He can do great things with large numbers if He so desires but first of all regardless the cost He will get the glory. The glory does not belong to us – the servants – but only to God the all-powerful. He will see to that. If the glory goes to a great crowd it won't be for long, mark my word.

Neither can we do it alone. No man is an army. Very few ministries if any that are doing great things for God have been built to stand by only one person. Moses could not build the tabernacle like God had instructed if it weren't for those who could contribute financially and those who knew how to do the work. Moses was a shepherd not an artist. Much of the work required individuals who knew what they were doing. If Moses would have had to do it all himself even if he could have lived long enough he would still be working on that tabernacle. He needed others to get the job done.

Very seldom does God call for just one individual to do a job. It may start with one. He will plant a seed in the heart of one. The vision will come to one. But ultimately to do the job right it will require others. However just others is not good enough.

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That's where many make their mistake. We think like the old adage says: "There's safety in numbers." But the fact of the matter is that if we aren't with the numbers God intends us to be with we are actually in danger. Many have suffered tremendous heartache and hurt because they haven't surrounded themselves with the right people. We work hard to increase our congregations to the maximum size. There is nothing wrong with a large congregation. But it only works and lasts when we have surrounded ourselves with those who share the vision given by God.

Jesus had twelve disciples. He had hand chosen each one of them but even amongst the twelve the Bible indicates that there were three He confided in the most. It was Peter, James and John who accompanied Him to the mount of transfiguration. Jesus knew the importance of having those close individuals in which He could confide. We must follow His example.

### **ARE YOU WITH THOSE WHO CAN HELP?**

The challenge that lies before us is to examine our relationships. Have we surrounded ourselves with those who can help? Let me clarify something here. I am in no way suggesting

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that we don't spread the Gospel. We must be out there telling people about Jesus. When we are called it is our job to instruct those who are new in Christ and to teach other believers in God's way. I am not saying that we must isolate ourselves from others. Jesus said that we are in the world but not of it. Our primary mandate from our Lord is to tell every creature the Good News.

We need to have those relationships with people we can trust. We must have those in whom we can confide. It is imperative that we have those who are on our team and share in the calling into which God has placed us.

Those who can help may include individuals we have never met. It can be made of Christian authors who have dedicated themselves to bringing the written word. It can be ministers we have only seen from a distance or perhaps on television. It can be pastors of other congregations or Christian friends. God knows who those people are. The key is for us to be willing to recognize when God is putting us together.

Are we with those who can help? Have we surrounded ourselves with those who share our vision, who can advise us when we need it and will stand with us regardless what happens? That is the dedication we need. When we have really been called to a

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ministry we don't give up at the first sign of trouble or resistance. Neither do those who are called to be with us. Many fail because those who have said they are willing to help haven't really been called.

Here in the United States one of the biggest plagues that has befallen the Church comes not in the form of persecution but from within – from those who say they have committed but run when the slightest incident happens that they don't approve of. We had a man make a statement in the congregation we used to pastor. He stood one Sunday to testify and said that he was so committed to our congregation that if the work closed he would show up at the street corner each Sunday because that was where he was supposed to be. A few short months later it was revealed to Debbie that he needed to be more committed. When she spoke to him about it he got mad, left and never returned. Had he really been called to that ministry as he had said that incident would have led to more discussion with the thought of leaving never entering the picture.

The problem is that very few are that committed. If they get mad they just pack up their things and flee to the congregation down the road or in the next town. This is not commitment but just being spoiled and wanting to have our way. People who are

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committed to a work may get mad at each other once in a while but they work out their problems.

That is commitment. That is what God wants. Those are the individuals with whom God wants us to associate. When we do we will be strong in ministry. We cannot make the mistake of marking our success by numbers. The numbers that the Lord wants will come but that is not the goal. The goal – the ministry is to witness for Christ. Are you with those who can help?

***Praise the Lord!***

## THREE

### “DO YOU RECOGNIZE THE CAPTAIN?”

*“And so it was, when Gideon heard the telling of the dream and its interpretation, that he worshipped. He returned to the camp of Israel, and said, "Arise, for the LORD has delivered the camp of Midian into your hand. Then he divided the three hundred men [into] three companies, and he put a trumpet into every man's hand, with empty pitchers, and torches inside the pitchers. And he said to them, "Look at me and do likewise; watch, and when I come to the edge of the camp you shall do as I do: When I blow the trumpet, I and all who [are] with me, then you also blow the trumpets on every side of the whole camp, and say, '[The sword of] the LORD and of Gideon!'"*

*Judges 7:15-18*

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Under the cloak of darkness Gideon along with his servant Phurah had slipped down the mountain to the edge of the valley where the enemy army had encamped. He was following instructions from God. This more than likely seemed to complicate the situation even more but at least he followed what he had been told to do. Back up on the mountain three hundred men waited to find out what was going to happen next.

At the valley's edge Gideon and his servant hid. Even though this vast army was settling down for a good night's rest before attacking Israel the next day, because there were so many of them it almost sounded like a bustling city. They could see the camels of the enemy and could not even count them there were so many. Fear gripped Gideon's heart. He had to know that he was doing what God had told him to do or it would be utter suicide. How could he and three hundred men stand against such a vast army?

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A couple of enemy soldiers happened by as Gideon and his servant hid from view. As they were standing almost in front of Gideon he could hear what they were talking about. One of them was telling a dream to the other that went something like this: “While I was asleep I had the strangest dream. I saw a round loaf of barley bread rolling down the hill. No big deal, that is until it ran into a tent – a pegged down tent mind you – and when it came against it the whole tent fell down flat!” It was a strange dream indeed. The other soldier did not hesitate with an interpretation however. He immediately answered, “This could only represent the sword of Gideon. It means that tomorrow Gideon and his army will defeat us.”

Those were the words God wanted Gideon to hear. It removed the fear in his heart. The dryness of his mouth left and he fell to his face and worshipped God. With this new-found faith came a revelation for their offensive strategy. It was suddenly very clear to Gideon and he knew exactly what needed to be done. This new surge of faith along with the knowledge that he was exactly in the will of God put boldness in his heart. No longer would they await the first move of the enemy. Armed with the knowledge that God was going to give them the victory and the enemy knew it they would launch the most strategic attack scam ever recorded in the history of war.

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Gideon couldn't wait to get back and tell his small army of three hundred men the battle plan. His instructions were simple: "Do what I do, then sound out with these words: The sword of the Lord and of Gideon!" It was pretty simple. It didn't require maps or memorization of an elaborate plan during which anything happening out of sequence could spin the whole idea reeling out of control. Simply to watch Gideon, do what he did at the signaled time and to sound out. These three hundred men had to be some of the most dedicated soldiers any army had ever produced. What would we have done if placed in their circumstances? Three hundred against uncountable thousands! Common sense would tell us that the best they could hope for would be to sneak around the edges of the enemy's army and pick off unsuspecting passers-by. A full frontal attack from the enemy would obliterate this rag-tag handful of men in mere minutes.

### **GIDEON WAS CAPTAIN AND THEY OBEYED HIS ORDERS**

I admire these three hundred men. From the reading of the scripture there is no indication of a single complaint or questioning

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of Gideon's orders. They just did it. Many of us today would have slipped away and disappeared into the night. When Gideon returned from his scouting trip he would have been lucky if there was even a trace of an army left - But not these men. Gideon gave his God-inspired instructions and they followed orders without exception.

Gideon was their captain and they obeyed without question. This is the type of trust and obedience we as believers in Christ Jesus need to learn. Their lives depended on their captain and they knew it. They were in no position to make mistakes. They had to know God's will and so they had to listen to their leader because it seemed he was the only one God was talking to.

Today we all have equal opportunity to hear from God for ourselves. He speaks to us in our hearts but just as importantly He speaks to us through His Word, both that found in the Bible and that given by those called to minister. I realize that in this age of charlatans, cheats, and money-hungry opportunists we've got to be careful who we listen to and check out what we hear. That's one of the main reasons God allowed us to have the Bible. It is a measuring stick for what other's claim God has told them to do or what they claim He has told them to tell you. Without it we'd have to know we were hearing from God for ourselves or we'd be at

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their mercy. But we do have the Bible and we need to realize just how precious it is. As we read it and come to know it's instructions we can begin to know who is really speaking from God and who is out for what they can get from us.

There's something else about these three-hundred men that we need to remember. God hand picked them. They were what were left after dismissing those with a fearful heart and those who drank differently at the river. God always – ALWAYS knows what He is doing. He doesn't go by guesswork or by hunches because He knows what is in our hearts. We can be confident in God because He has hand-picked us as well.

Now wait a minute. If we are all given the choice and opportunity of salvation how can we be hand-picked? Simply because in the foreknowledge of God He already knows who is going to be saved and who is going to be lost. We must be careful at this point because many would want to believe that since God possess this knowledge that there is no reason to attempt to win others for Christ. On the surface that may seem so but in reality God does have this knowledge - we don't. Therefore it is up to us to bear our witness and tell as many as we can. We don't know who's coming to God and who isn't. In God's foreknowledge He has in His possession who of those we witness to will yield and

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come to Jesus Christ and who will laugh and scoff it away. But we don't have that knowledge and God has chosen not to give it to us because He knows we'd get lazy and only witness to those we know would come to Him. But God gives every human being on the face of this planet a chance either through word or by faith. So it is our job to witness. It is not our job to know who will accept Him or not but just to witness.

Jesus painted a picture of this for us in the parable of the sower. It wasn't the sower's job to only put the seed in areas he knew would yield fruit. It was his job to walk the field, grab handfuls of seed from his bag and scatter it. He wasn't to stop to examine the seed to see if it landed where he knew it would grow. He just kept on spreading the seed wherever he walked. Some of the seed landed in thorns and was soon choked out when it began to grow. More seed fell in the rocks and couldn't take deep enough root to survive. Still more landed in the path and while lying on top of the hard-traveled roadway was eaten by the birds. But some of the seed fell in good, rich, fertile soil. It took root and sprang up into wholesome healthy plants. The sower wasn't really responsible for this because he was just doing his job. He was simply casting the seed wherever it would fall. But he did his job and because of it the field soon was fruitful and brought forth bountifully. But the sower couldn't really take credit for this

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because much of the seed he sowed was wasted in areas of the field that didn't yield. It was not his place to take credit for either that which was lost or that which was good. He just sowed.

That is a picture of us who are believers in Christ. We are sowers of the word. We witness with our lives, our actions and our mouths each and every day. We are sowing the word. Much of it will fall by the way side but some of it will take root and grow. We can't take credit for either because all we've done was to be obedient to the command of Christ to go everywhere in the world and preach the Gospel. We are sowing the Good News. God gets the increase not us. We just sow.

The three hundred men of Gideon weren't to second guess what God instructed their leader to do. They just carried out the orders. That was their job. They were up against what seemed to be impossible odds but they had learned to recognize the captain. They knew that Gideon was hearing from God and their hearts witnessed to them that they were to follow and obey what God instructed Gideon to tell them to do. Oh that we would catch hold of this today! What great things we could accomplish for the Kingdom if we'd quit trying to make names for ourselves and pin souls won to Christ on our belts. If we would only recognize the Captain and be obedient to His bidding and calling; if we would

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only sow the seed and let God yield the increase how many more people would be drawn to the Gospel like a bug is to a light! We must learn to recognize the Captain and bow to His bidding. We need to realize who is really in charge here!

By human reason it made sense to stage a sneak attack and take the enemy down one by one. But God had instructed Gideon to do just the opposite. Instead of sneaking around they were going to become very noisy people. They were going to let the Midianites know that they were there. It made them vulnerable by human standards. It exposed them to certain destruction. It could well have cost their lives in what should have been a slaughter. But they were going to follow their captain.

Sometimes we may feel like we are overwhelmed and surrounded by evil. Panic strikes our hearts as we realize what we may be up against. It requires faith but first it requires us to know the Captain. It requires that we fully trust our Captain no matter how strange the orders may be. We may feel smothered by the world around us and the work He has given us to do may seem overwhelming and impossible. But He is the Captain and if He gives us a job to do, He will also give us the means and ability to do it. It will require us to have faith. Our obedience will be prerequisite. It may seem that we will certainly perish in the

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process. But we must go forward anyway. When we do God will yield the increase and His will becomes accomplished in us.

### **DO WE RECOGNIZE OUR CAPTAIN?**

We go to our houses of worship each Sunday or Sabbath Day and we go through the motions singing our songs and giving our offerings. We faithfully listen to the pastor as he or she brings forth a message. Then we go our way thinking that we have fulfilled our duty to God. But we have not. Our part is more than sitting in a service many times wishing we were really home in bed or watching the big game on TV. We feel like we have done great sacrifice in giving some of our money to the work of God. But we have really done nothing. If our worship regardless the form that it takes, and the messages we hear do not inspire us to seek the Captain and know Him then it is vanity.

Before we can do anything for God we have to know who the Captain is. It is not our pastor though he or she may be an ordained individual for Jesus Christ. They may have sacrificed for years to bring us the word of God. But they are not our Captain.

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We may think it is in our denomination. After all, it has provided a covering for our congregation. The denomination has provided the curriculum for us to study and leads us down the path that will reveal the truths of God's Word. But our denomination is not the Captain.

God ordains men and women into His service. He has given us pastors, teachers, evangelists and prophets to bring His word. But other than the individual call on our lives none of us regardless what title we may hold can claim the right to be captain. There is only one Captain and He is none other than the Lord Jesus Christ. He has given us the battle plan in His Word. He has appointed those who can direct us to His Word. But ultimately we must recognize who the Captain really is. We must seek Him and know that we can take Him at His Word. We must know that there are no exceptions. He is the Captain. What He says goes. It is not for us to question His will or plot and plan a better way. It is none of our business. It is our business to obey the orders of the Captain.

Letting Jesus Christ have His way in our lives is something that most of us who have been Christians for years have tried to do. We pray "Lord have Your way," then turn around and try to interpret what His way is. If we really want Him to have His way

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then we commit to Him in our hearts. We bow our knee to Him and whether we agree with the orders or not we fulfill them. He is the Captain.

It isn't easy. Sometimes it is downright hard to give up our will and follow the orders of the Captain. But when we do we will find in the end that His orders are not only the best for the Kingdom but they are also the best for us. Our Captain not only wants to fulfill the mission but He wants that mission to fulfill us. His plan is always successful. His way is always profitable. His path is always the safest. It may not seem that way when we first hear His plan, go His way and follow Him. It may seem like physical if not spiritual suicide. It may mean that we stand out away from the crowd. It could mean that we go it alone for awhile. But let me tell you this: His way is the only way that will work long term. We may devise plans that seem to succeed but they will ultimately fail. But God's true plan will not fail. It will always bring results and it will always give us the most fulfillment in our lives.

Do you want to succeed in life? Know the Captain.

Do you want the best for your family? Know the Captain.

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Do you want to live the longest and happiest life possible for you? Know the Captain.

Regardless how the situation may seem, how long our physical lives may be or what others may think of us, knowing Who the Captain is and serving Him without regard for ourselves will always be the right thing to do. Put your trust in Jesus Christ and you will not fail.

You see, for the Israeli people the real barrier was not the army of the Midianites. Though they were strong in number and by all odds should have defeated Israel, the real barrier was themselves. Without the Captain they were doomed to failure. But with the Captain success was immanent. So it is with us. The devil is our enemy but he is limited to what we allow him to inflict upon us. He is bound by our own fears and how we yield to his temptations. Our real worst enemy is ourselves. We must learn to recognize the Captain.

We can only do this by giving ourselves completely 100%, 24/7 to Him. That will assure us of eternal life, a home in Heaven, and success that we can only know through Him. He is the Captain. Do we recognize Him? Do we trust Him? Are we

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confident that He will lead us in to victory? We and God are the only ones who really know the answers to those questions.

***Praise the Lord!***

## FOUR

### “WILL YOU FOLLOW THROUGH TO VICTORY?”

*“So Gideon and the hundred men who [were] with him came to the outpost of the camp at the beginning of the middle watch, just as they had posted the watch; and they blew the trumpets and broke the pitchers that [were] in their hands. Then the three companies blew the trumpets and broke the pitchers -- they held the torches in their left hands and the trumpets in their right hands for blowing -- and they cried, ‘The sword of the LORD and of Gideon!’ And every man stood in his place all around the camp; and the whole army ran and cried out and fled. When the three hundred blew the trumpets, the LORD set every man's sword against his companion throughout the whole camp; and the army fled to Beth Acacia, toward Zererah, as far as the border of Abel Meholah, by Tabbath.”*

*Judges 7:19-22*

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History records many battles throughout the centuries. Some have been quite brilliant while others were completely ridiculous. I've never really understood why the British, for instance, went into battle lined up like they did. Perhaps it stemmed from the days of swords and spears but to line up completely exposed in the open and shoot guns at each other is simply asking for annihilation. Books have been written on the strategies and arts of war. But I haven't read about a battle yet more brilliant than this one. God had given a plan to Gideon that absolutely fooled the Midianites and also took them by surprise.

Remember that as it stood at this point Gideon's army had been reduced to only three hundred men. This was God's doing. He had told Gideon that He refused to let anyone but Him take the credit for this battle. Now that they were only three hundred in number against an army that went on for miles, they further divided into three companies of one hundred men. The soldiers had their weapons, their swords and shields, but now they were given new and unusual weapons in this remarkable plan. I'm sure

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they wondered what was going on as Gideon passed out trumpets and pitchers with lamps or candles inside them. What were they supposed to do? Blast them silly with the trumpets and hit them over the head with a pitcher that had a light in it so they could see what hit them? Of course that's silly. God had a plan that would put the Midianites on the run in a stupor of confusion.

They had very simple orders. Gideon had told them to watch him and do what he did when he did it, after which they were to all cry out, "The sword of the Lord and of Gideon!" These were very simple instructions. There was nothing complicated about their orders. But they required absolute trust in what their commander was telling them to do. These were not ordinary battle tactics.

With the vast army of the Midianites below them each troop of 100 men carefully situated themselves where Gideon told them to go. After they were in place they simply waited for Gideon's command. Armed with the information collected from their little spy maneuver orchestrated by the Great Commander, God Himself, Gideon waited until just the right time. They were changing the guard. Those going off duty were ready for a good night's sleep while those coming on duty were yawning from just

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waking up. They were getting their wits about them so they could take the place of their weary counterparts.

Remember that God had allowed Gideon to over-hear two of the guards just going off duty talking about a dream one of them had dreamed. During the night-vision a barley cake had rolled down the hill and completely knocked over a tent. One of the guards had then commented that this could be none other than Gideon and his army. It revealed their fear. It showed that God had been making preparation in the hearts of the enemy long before Gideon ever attacked.

At just the right moment Gideon ordered the attack. He broke his pitcher revealing the light inside. Each of the three hundred men did the same. Now three hundred lights were being displayed from the top of the hill to the men below. Because they had split up into three companies it gave the appearance that the enemy was surrounded. Then Gideon began to blow his trumpet sounding the attack alarm. Immediately all three hundred men also began to blow the same alarm on their trumpets. It sounded like many troupes were about to descend upon the Midianites. Then they all began to scream, “The sword of the Lord and of Gideon!” Three hundred voices echoed through the hills sounding like a vast army.

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The scared and confused Midianites began defending themselves from each other thinking that Gideon's army had infiltrated the camp. Before they realized it they had killed several of their own. Then they began to run. All in all before the Midianites stopped they ran anywhere from seven to ten miles! God allowed them to be so terrified that they literally fled. Imagine the picture of this vast army running from only three hundred men! That's what happened.

### **UNCONVENTIONAL WEAPONS**

Without doubt their weapons were unconventional and that's putting it mildly. God gave Gideon the wisdom to attack at just the right time with these unconventional weapons in such a way that the Midianites were caught off guard. Now we could reason that anyone could have done this if they had used their heads. It was brilliant military strategy but it could have been suicide if not executed at exactly the right time in exactly the right sequence.

Like the Israeli troops under Gideon's command we too are in a battle against all odds. Look at the enemy we face. He is the

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devil. He is a very powerful foe. Our own strength measured up to his is even more paling than Gideon's three hundred men against the vast army of Midian. The devil is a strong foe. In ourselves we don't stand a chance. In our own power the devil could crush us like we'd crush a bug as we casually go our way without giving it much of a second thought.

In addition to this strong enemy we cower in fear. Sometimes our fear makes us our own worst enemy. But let's face it, there's a lot to be afraid of! We really don't know how long we have on this earth. We make plans way into the future but we don't honestly know if we are going to be alive one minute from now. Our lives are so fragile that we can be instantly stricken with a deadly disease. Our bodies could be full of cancer and unless we go for a regular examination we'd have no idea it was there. We go through our days not really thinking about the fact that a runaway asteroid or comet in outer space could strike our planet and change everything in an instant. Yes we are really a fragile creature. If we allowed our minds to dwell on these things we'd be so paranoid that we'd never get anything accomplished.

There is a lot to be afraid of. Quite frankly I don't know how people who don't know Jesus Christ, or know of Him and refuse to accept Him, live from day to day. Knowing what I know

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about the Word of God and the certain prophecy of our planet would scare me silly if I didn't have Christ in my life to make me certain of the future. But with Jesus Christ in our lives we can face each day, still oblivious to what could or might happen, but with confidence that whatever the day does bring we are safe with Him – either in this life or armed with the hope of the next.

It is in our best interest to know who the enemy is. He is embodied in the devil. But our enemy also lies within our selves. When we know that then half the battle is already won. We know that the devil can only do what we or God allows him to do. He couldn't have touched Job without God's permission. He can only tempt us unless God gives him liberty to do otherwise. Armed with that knowledge we can face him with respect but without fear.

Christ also gives us hope so that we don't have to be afraid of our own fragility. Yes a runaway comet or asteroid could strike this planet dooming us all. But we trust in the programming of God in the universe. He made it and He controls it. I am certain that unless God has it in His plans that neither of these tragic events will ever happen. If it is in His plan then He has made provision for those who have come to Him and bowed to His Lordship. We can reasonably go throughout our days without fear of disease and cancer. That doesn't mean that Christians will

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never contract a deadly disease or cancer, because they have. But even if we die from disease we still have the hope of an eternity with God. That should calm the fear in us. Yes we are fragile creatures but we who have put our trust in God can truly say that there is nothing that will happen to us today that we and God cannot handle. If it's our time to leave this temporary life then we are really blessed because it means we have graduated to our eternal home with God in glory. Under those circumstances and odds there is no way we cannot win. Just as Paul said, we either live this life for Christ or gain our home with Him if we die. Either way we win!

These men under Gideon had the courage to actually use the weapons assigned them. They had swords and shields. But in order to use the weapons ordered by Gideon their swords were at their sides and their shields were probably on their backs. They were armed with a concealed candle in a pitcher in one hand and a trumpet in the other. Had the Midianites heard their noise, seen their lights and decided to begin hurling arrows their way they would be totally exposed and unprotected. It took a great deal of courage to carry out this plan.

We too must be armed with the weapons given us by the Holy Spirit and we must have the courage to use them. As

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believers in Jesus Christ we have been armed with a lamp. That light is the Holy Spirit in our lives. Jesus told us in Matthew 5:16 to let our lights shine in front of men so they can see the good in us and glorify God for it. That good is not us but God in us. Our good works in themselves will only bring envy and strife but the good works of God coming through us will slay the evil one and win souls into the Kingdom of God.

But there is a problem. Our lamps are inside us. Gideon's men had to break the pitchers containing their lights before the enemy could see them. Brokenness must be a part of the process. So the light of the Holy Spirit is contained within us. We must be put out of the way. We must be broken so that the light of God's Spirit can shine through. That means we must be yielded vessels. We must allow God to use us as He chooses in order for His light to be seen. It could mean great sacrifice on our part. How often have we heard of missionaries who have given their very lives with seemingly no reward or result for their effort? But later on others were able to reap a great harvest because of the ground work laid by these other men and women. Only when we have given complete control of our lives to God will He use us to win men to Christ. He could choose to give His light another way. He is God and He can do whatever He chooses. But He has designed that His light be shone through the lives of men and women consecrated to

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the Message of the Gospel. It is how He wants the mission accomplished.

The war is raging all around us and seems to worsen as the days go by. Persecution has risen to new heights all over the world. Some of it is physical as the devil arouses hatred for those who want only to tell others of Jesus Christ. Some of it comes under the guise of fairness to others and results in accusations and revilement. But still it comes. In the face of this persecution we must continue to stand with our selves broken and our lights shining. It takes great courage. To be a witnessing believer in Jesus Christ takes a brave individual and it will continue to be so.

Then the men of Gideon blew their trumpets. The sound of the trumpet signaled the attack. Trumpets were used to signal for different things in war. Trumpets sounded an attack, a retreat and so on. Gideon's men sounded the attack. They would not be able to sound a retreat because once they began their attack their swords took the place of the trumpet. Retreat was no option and was not even allowed for in the plan of God.

Today the attack is on. We are not to complacently wait for the enemy to attack us. We are not just on the defensive but we are on the offensive. We must go forward. We sound the trumpet

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of the Spirit within us as we go forward with the Gospel. Though there are many things going out today in the name of the Gospel only the Good News from God is the real thing. We must sound out the attack! We must let the enemy of our souls know that we are going forward for God Almighty. This is a war that we will win. God's people win no matter the outcome of the battle. The Church that belongs to Jesus Christ will flourish. Though many things are happening in the name of Jesus Christ today not all those things are from Him. But we can know what is real because He has told us in His Word. If it doesn't measure up to His Word then it is not real. Salvation by His grace is real. Victory in His Name is real. But seeking for blessings and what we can get from God is not necessarily real. If we prosper it is only a byproduct of the Good News. The harvest of souls is the real crop.

Then they shouted: "The sword of the Lord and of Gideon!" The cry came from three sides surrounding the army of the Midianites. Fear ran rampant throughout the camp of the Midianites as all three hundred of Gideon's men cried out. They were so startled that when they saw each other they feared it was their attackers and began killing each other. Then they ran. The cry is still valid today: "The sword of the Lord and of \_\_\_\_\_!" Fill in your name. You are the soldier. As long as we are on the Lord's side we can associate ourselves with Him. Isn't that a

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marvelous privilege? We can associate ourselves with God Almighty! He is our Captain. We are under His command and we are sure to win. Nothing that the enemy of our souls can do will ultimately kill us. We are on the right side. We can confidently cry out: “The sword of the Lord and of \_\_\_\_\_!” It isn’t difficult.

All it really takes is obedience to the Captain and the courage to carry out His orders. But then it isn’t difficult sounding but can be a great conflict within us. It requires us to surrender control to Him. After that is done it is simple. But getting to that point can be a tremendous battle inside us. It means we give up our human reasoning, our past teaching, our rights, privileges and knowledge to follow Him.

In the United States Army I was told not to think. Our leaders would think for us. I was taught to obey orders without question. I was to not worry about how the mission was going to get done but just do what I was told and allow myself to be a pawn under the command of someone else and everything would go okay. Humans do make bad decisions. The success of the United States Armed Forces speaks for itself. But it is flawed because those giving the commands are flawed. But our Captain is not flawed. When we follow His plan and His orders we will

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accomplish the mission. The orders may seem unreasonable to us but as we obey and take courage with the assurance that God really does know what He is doing we will see success.

### **THEY WON THE VICTORY**

By their obedience three hundred men saved the entire nation of Israel. If they had become discouraged and given up returning home they would never have won that victory. They would have continued to be used and enslaved by the Midianites. But when they obeyed God then He gave them what they needed. God defeated this vast army with only three hundred men. Of course as you read the story you'll see that more men joined their ranks as they chased the Midianites. Victory is infectious. It's easy to jump on the band wagon with the victors after the hard part is done. But that's okay because the obedience of a few will inspire many.

It's that way as a Christian too. Sometimes you may feel like the only duck in the middle of the Atlantic Ocean. The mission really seems impossible. The odds are stacked against you. It feels like defeat is but a couple of waves away. But as you listen to the Captain, obey His commands and attack with the

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weapons strange though they may seem, victory is eminent. It will inspire others to follow you. Before you know it a great army has gathered with you to chase the enemy.

We must decide that we do care. We must surround ourselves with those who can help. We must recognize the Captain. Then we must follow through to Victory. It's up to us. The bottom line is that victory is coming to the Church with or without us. It would be nice if it happened with us but that's our choice. Are we up for it? Are we willing? Are we able? If Christ is in us then the answer to all of these questions should be "yes." Follow through to victory.

***Praise the Lord!***

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