

Pentecost 14
Judges 7:1-8
August 29, 2010

Dear People of God,

By the way, in accord with the promise of God that He would save Israel from the Midianites through Gideon and the three hundred men, God did just that. The huge Midianite alliance was totally defeated, practically annihilated, an army of around 135,000 men.

Certainly one thing God shows us through this event is that

God's Little Flock Is Able to Have Great Effect.

The enemy of Israel at the time was very great in number. The Midianites, a people from the east of Israel and allied themselves with a number of other eastern peoples and with the Amelekites, apparently almost always particularly hateful toward Israel. Adding up figures from chapter 8, we learn the army numbered at least 135,000 strong. They invaded Israel in hordes. They plundered everything. The people of Israel tied to hide and live in caves and holes. They suffered like this for seven years. The Israelites ended up having nothing.

And this was a blessing from the Lord, a blessing. Blessings don't always seem like blessings at the time. Surely this attack and cruelty from a foreign people seemed only like a calamity. It was a calamity, but a blessing, too.

You see, Israel had fallen into a nasty pattern of ignoring God's Word and substituting doing their own thing. They quickly replaced worship of the one true God with idols. The most popular idols at the time were Baal and Asherah, a super-sized idol couple promoting immorality.

This is the way of all mankind. Exactly the opposite of what unbelieving Bible scholars now teach. At the beginning, mankind knew only the one true God, the LORD. After sin ruined them, they began adding gods and goddesses, perhaps still naming one of them the top god. Eventually some of them went so far as to teach that everything is god. And so sinners changed a very personal God into many gods or into the god who is impersonal creation.

So, God allowed or even sent the Midianites to overrun Israel. And Israel was helpless. It could do nothing to help itself. In this way, some of the people, God managed to wake up spiritually. Those people turned to the LORD, the Savior, for help.

That's when God called Gideon to be His servant to save Israel from the Midianites and all their allies.

From a human point of view Gideon was an unlikely choice for God to make. In chapter six, we met him. Gideon had no dreams of freeing Israel from her enemies. He doesn't appear to have had any self-confidence at all. When God revealed Himself to Gideon and formally called Gideon to be that savior, Gideon was sure he could not do it and told the LORD so.

Gideon didn't see Manasseh (his tribe) as very influential (mostly a bunch of shepherds and herdsmen). His clan, the Abiezrites, he called weakest of all the clans of Manasseh and himself, the most insignificant of his father's family. His father's name was Joash.

Actually, we ought to be able to relate to Gideon. We are a diverse group of people with different talents and abilities, strengths and weaknesses. Yet probably few of us see ourselves as great. It is very likely that within a couple generations after we die that our names will never be mentioned by anyone. We probably come to realize after a while that we aren't the most gifted or most powerful people on the planet.

So, if God came to us and said to do something really great, wouldn't we feel the way Gideon did? I think so.

But God, patiently and with great wisdom and love, worked with Gideon. He reminded Gideon that the LORD Himself was calling Gideon to do this. He promised Gideon that the LORD would be with him through it all. And He further promised that Midian would indeed be defeated through Gideon's leadership.

God further encouraged Gideon and assured Gideon that he was not hallucinating or imagining all of this by means of the two fleece signs and also allowed Gideon to overhear a Midianite soldier tell another soldier that Gideon was going to defeat the Midianite army entirely.

God has made very similar efforts on our behalf. We know Satan and his armies are powerful, far outpowering us. But our Lord has sent us out to do battle with those enemies. We just recently saw in Ephesians 6 how our Savior has equipped us for the battle, for victory, in fact. He's given us His truth, His righteousness, His Good News of Peace, His salvation has worked faith in all of us and given us His Word. God assures us of the victory, for actually Jesus has already won it, as His coming back to life on the third day proves. Jesus also promises to be with us all the way.

When Gideon called for a volunteer army, 32,000 men showed up – 32,000 versus 135,000. God surprised a still somewhat fearful Gideon, who probably did not think 32,000 could do it. God said, "That's way too many." God wanted Israel to understand that God was defeating the enemy. 22,000 of the men were pretty scared so Gideon (God really) said they could go home. So, there were 10,000. God said, "Still too many." By the 'drinking style method,' God pared it down to 300. Now that's small! God gave each of the 301 (including Gideon) men a trumpet, clay pot with a lit torch inside and a

battle cry. How were they to win a battle armed like that? And only 300 of them?!

At the sight of the lights, at the sound of the trumpets and battle cry "A sword for the LORD and for Gideon," the entire enemy army went into a total panic and destroyed itself. After a brief mop-up operation, there was no longer an enemy army!

God's people are, in the eyes of the world, even in our own eyes, always going to look small and weak. But with God the Father, Jesus Christ and the Spirit working with us and through us, He defeats sin, death and hell.

Through His little flock, our Savior/God still does the miracle of changing unbelievers into His Christian people. What a wonderful way that is to defeat those enemies; he changes them into His family forever. Let's put away our fears and doubts as we believe God's Word and promises.

God's Little Flock Is Able to Have Great Effect.
(even one little sheep)

Amen.