

GIDEON'S 300

People love stories of courage. Recently there was a movie called 300. It was a retelling of the historic account by Herodotus of the Battle of Thermopylae which took place around 480 BC. King Leonides and his 300 Spartan warriors made a last stand against the 400,000 strong Persian army of King Xerxes. When Xerxes ordered Leonides to surrender his weapons he gave the famous reply that has been repeated through the centuries "*You want them? - Come and get them!*". Though they faced an overwhelming enemy Greek morale was high. Herodotus writes that when one Spartan soldier was informed that the Persian arrows would be so numerous as "*to blot out the sun*", he responded "*So much the better, we shall fight in the shade.*" It is estimated that over 20,000 Persians were killed before Leonides was betrayed and killed.

This story has been told in many different ways over the years, in paintings, books and movies. There is something compelling about it. Bravery in the face of hopelessness. Like Custer's last stand or "remember the Alamo" we picture ourselves standing strong in the face of an unbeatable foe. The only thing I don't like about this story is the ending. What if, in true Hollywood style, instead of being defeated and dying they had won! What if the 300 had beaten the 400,000?

Centuries before the Battle of Thermopylae there was a similar battle that also involved 300 brave soldiers against an unbeatable foe. However, this time there was a very different outcome. The outcome was different because God was on their side.

Judges 7:1 Early in the morning, Jerub-Baal (that is, Gideon) and all his men camped at the spring of Harod. The camp of Midian was north of them in the valley near the hill of Moreh. 2 The LORD said to Gideon , "You have too many men for me to deliver Midian into their hands. In order that Israel may not boast against me that her own strength has saved her, 3 announce now to the people, `Anyone who trembles with fear may turn back and leave Mount Gilead.'" So twenty-two thousand men left, while ten thousand remained. 4 But the LORD said to Gideon , "There are still too many men. Take them down to the water, and I will sift them for you there. If I say, `This one shall go with you,' he shall go; but if I say, `This one shall not go with you,' he shall not go." 5 So Gideon took the men down to the water. There the LORD told him, "Separate those who lap the water with their tongues like a dog from those who kneel down to drink." 6 Three hundred men lapped with their hands to their mouths. All the rest got down on their knees to drink. 7 The LORD said to Gideon , "With the three hundred men that lapped I will save you and give the Midianites into your hands. Let all the other men go, each to his own place." 8 So Gideon sent the rest of the Israelites to their tents but kept the three hundred, who took over the provisions and trumpets of the others.

Today we are starting a new series called Live It Loud. We have been talking understanding God's will, we through a month talking about missions and last week was Easter. You have heard the challenge. The question I want to ask you this morning is "what you are going to do about it?"

There is an old saying that goes: "When you were born, you cried, and the world rejoiced. Live your life in such a manner that when you die, the world cries, and you rejoice." You have been given one life to live. The question I would like to ask you is "How will you live it?" The church today is facing a great enemy and soldiers are needed to join the battle. The kind of soldiers that God is looking for can be summed up in two words; WILLING and ABLE.

There are 4 types of Christians when it comes to serving:

1. Not Willing or Able

Several nations that lived around Israel to the North in what is present day Syria came together to march out and destroy it. The army that came against them was massive:

Judges 7:12 The Midianites, the Amalekites and all the other eastern peoples had settled in the valley, thick as locusts. Their camels could no more be counted than the sand on the seashore.

To come against this vast army Gideon blew the trumpet and called all the Northern tribes of the Israelites to come together to fight:

Judges 6:34 Then the Spirit of the LORD came upon Gideon, and he blew a trumpet, summoning the Abiezrites to follow him. 35 He sent messengers throughout Manasseh, calling them to arms, and also into Asher, Zebulun and Naphtali, so that they too went up to meet them.

There were 32,000 that responded to the call and came together to face the enemy. Certainly this did not represent all the men of fighting age that were available. Many heard the trumpet but did not respond to the call. They were part of the Jewish nation and like those who responded to the call they had everything to lose but they chose to stay home and let someone else fight their battle for them. They just did not show up.

It is interesting that in the Herodotus account of the Battle of Thermopylae, after Leonidas was defeated Xerxes asked why a larger army had not been sent. The answer given was that most of the Greek men were participating in the Olympic games. They were more interested in games than battle.

Likewise the church today is facing a great enemy. Just turn on the news and look at the world around you. Marriages are under attack. The liberal media is dragging the name of Jesus through the mud. There is a very real and clear agenda to destroy the church. The host of hell have gathered and God is sounding the trumpet and calling us to fight. Unfortunately, there are many who will just never show up. All around us we see this. Christians who just stay at home. They are part of the family of God. They have everything to lose by what is happening around them and yet they stay home with no interest or experience in worship or service.

Too many believers today see their faith as a purely personal experience. They see involvement in the church as an optional part of their life. I sometimes hear this attitude expressed; "If I have nothing better to do – I'll go to church". As long as worship does not interfere with my rest and recreation or challenge my convictions or cause me discomfort then I will participate.

I found this letter from a church member to a pastor:

Dear Pastor, You often stress attendance at worship as being very important for a Christian. I totally agree with you, but I think a person has a right to miss a service now and then. I have looked at our own attendance over the last year and I think that every year a person ought to be excused from church for the following reasons and the number of times indicated.

Christmas Holidays (the Sunday before & after are so busy) 2
New Years (sorry but the party just lasted too long) 1
Easter (we get away for the holidays) 2
July 4th (we spend the weekend with family) 1
Labor Day (I really needed a break) 1
Memorial Day (we visit hometown folk) 1
School closing (the kids needed a break) 1
School reopens (the kids want one last fling) 1
Family reunions (mine & wife's) 2
Sleep late (sorry but we stayed up too long on Saturday night) 5
Deaths in family 2
Anniversary (we went on a second honeymoon) 1
Sickness (there were two per family member-when one is sick, no one can come) 8
Business trip (what can I do – my work expects it) 1
Vacation (two weeks every year) 2
Bad weather (ice, snow, rain, drizzle, clouds) 4
Hockey games (we need to keep up with sports) 6
Races (don't judge me) 2
Unexpected company (we couldn't just leave them) 2
Time changes (Daylight saving in spring & fall) 2
Special on TV (the Super Bowl, etc) 3

Pastor, that leaves two Sundays per year. So, you can count on us to be in church on the 4th Sunday in February and the 1st Sunday in August unless we are providentially hindered.

Sincerely, a Faithful Member

And one more thing, if you are going to show up, please show up on time. I hear people say to me “Well, I’m just a late person, that is just my culture.” If you show up late to school you get a late slip. If you show up late all the time you get fired. If you show up late to the airport you miss your flight. If you show up late to see the doctor you will lose your appointment. How much more important is it that you are on time for church. If you are always 15 min late then leave 30 min early!

2. Able but not Willing

The 32,000 that came to fight were no match for the huge army they faced but God wanted to make it very clear that it was in HIS strength and not the armies strength that Israel would be saved. When given the choice to stay or leave 22,000 (about 70% of the army) left for home immediately. Even though they had been summoned and had shown up for battle, their hearts were not in it. They were not really committed to what they had been called to. They had things to do, other priorities.

Can you imagine that! What if the marines on D-day had been given a choice not to get out of the landing boats? Within this group of 22,000 men there were many warriors. There were those who had been in other battles and knew combat well. They did not stay and fight because their minds and hearts were somewhere else. Perhaps they had things to do. Maybe they were hurt in the past and did not want to be hurt again.

Today in the church there are many experienced and talented people that are just sitting around and wasting their gifts. They show up, but they don't show up. They are just not interested in serving. Many have been trained and equipped for service and have the skills and gifts needed to teach and lead etc. but they are not interested. E.g. meeting people from the church who were deacons and elders at their old church.

E.g. getting teachers for Sunday School. Sometimes people can be guilted and forced into doing things which they do not want to do. However, their attitude will always show – especially with youth. You cannot NOT communicate. It is better not to serve than to serve because you feel you have to. People need to find areas of ministry they are excited about.

What these soldiers desperately needed was greater vision. Perhaps these soldiers left because all they had seen in the past was defeat. Have you ever felt defeated in an area of service? I know of many pastors in churches today that have seen nothing but defeat in ministry. I know of so many who have left ministry forever because of this. If these soldiers had only known what was about to happen I am sure they would have stayed. In fact, wild horses could not have dragged them away. If they had only known the miracle that was about to take place (a small group of soldiers would defeat and pursue a huge army running for it's life) there is no way they would have left. E.g. deciding not to go to an event and then hearing afterward that it was amazing.

Maybe you are here today and you have been burned by serving in the past. You know that you are able to serve (you know your gifts) but you are not using them anywhere. Perhaps you just feel that you have too many other things happening in your life. God wants to give you a fresh vision of service. God wants to use you to defeat the enemy. Find a local ministry and get involved! You will never know the thrill of waking on water until you get out of the boat.

One of the other ways that people show up but do not really show up is in the area of giving tithes and offerings. They come and enjoy the benefits of the church but are not obedient to God in terms of their giving. I have heard people say to me that tithing is an Old Testament thing. It was part of the law, but we as Christians are not under the law but we are under grace.

Tithing is based on the principle of trust and generosity. God promises us that if we will do our part (give 10 percent of what we make to him) then He will bless us. The Bible says that God does not lie and that God does not change so that promise applies to us today.

People say that Jesus did not teach tithing so today we do not need to do it. After all, we are not under the law we are under grace. OK, but all through the Bible we see that grace always demands more of us, not less of us. The New Testament model is sacrificial giving. Everything belongs to God. That means that you give 20 or 30 or 40 percent of what you make. That is why we talk about tithes AND OFFERINGS in the church. There may be people here that are giving their tithe and God wants them to go beyond that to give even more. If you struggle with the idea of giving 40 percent of your income then no problem, just start 10 percent. Start with your tithe and when God blesses you then you can give more. You need to show up when it comes to your tithe!

Maybe you are not seeing victory over your finances because you are not showing up when it comes to tithing?

3. Willing but not Able

There were 9,700 who chose to stay fight but still did not experience battle. Much has been written about why God would have separated out the men that put their face down to the water to drink from the men that brought the water to their mouths to drink. I don't think that this choice was arbitrary. I think that God was intentionally selecting the trained soldiers from the group. An experienced soldier is always on the lookout and keeps the battlefield in sight at all times. The 300 who brought the water to their mouths were the veterans and most experienced soldiers in the group.

Willingness is an essential element in Christian service but it must be tempered with ability. Training and equipping is essential. The Christian life is not about trying but about training.

For example, say that I was told that a year from now I was told I would be running a 20 km marathon but I did nothing about it. I did zero preparation. When the day came to run I would not finish the race even if I was really motivated and wanted to with all my heart. Likewise a heart for ministry is not enough. Trying and Training are very different things. E.g. me in University - witnessing.

These 9,700 people needed experience and training. Notice that Gideon did not send them back home but he sent them to their tents. They would join in the pursuit of the Midianites as they fled. They would be part of the battle latter on.

Discipleship is the process by which untrained but willing people are transformed into soldiers for Christ. We have a great discipleship training program here at the church. Many have come through it and their lives have been changed. Get in it and grow in Christ and learn to use your gifts.

4. Willing and Able

The few that remained were both willing and available. They had shown this in action and attitude. With this small group God was able to defeat a mighty enemy and win the victory.

The same is true today. The trumpet is sounding throughout our city and nation. A mighty enemy has marched out and declared war upon us. God is looking for a people who are willing to serve and able to be equipped for service. Let us join together in the fight.

In 1722, a small group of 300 Christians from Moravia (which was in what is today the Czech Republic) fled persecution and moved to Berthelsdorf (Germany). They were allowed to settle on land that was owned by Count Zinzendorf. As this small group of believers prayed together the Holy Spirit came upon them and the community was transformed. Out of this revival, several things happened. First, they set up a system of continuous prayer, a system in which people were praying 24 hours a day. This lasted for more than 100 years. Second, this small group of 300 started the modern missionary movement. Within 30 years, the church sent hundreds of Christian missionaries to many parts of the world. Third, it was because of the Moravians that John Wesley had his encounter with God which lead to a great revival that touched the lives of millions of people all around the world.

Wesley himself once said; "Give me one hundred preachers who fear nothing but sin, and desire nothing but God, and I care not a straw whether they be clergymen or laymen; such alone will shake the gates of hell and set up the kingdom of heaven on Earth." – John Wesley