

“Quality, Not Quantity”
Judges 7:1-9

I don't know about you, but when Jerrie and I decide to purchase something for our home we generally look for quality. We would like the best we can afford. Certainly we want it to look nice. We want it to complement the other items in our home. Because we want to be good stewards of our finances, we want it to last a long time.

When God has a task or challenge for His people to meet, the quality and depth of their faith is vital to Him! This is more important than the quantity or number of His people involved in the endeavor.

The call of Gideon by God to raise up an army of just 300 worthy men out of a total number of 32,000 exemplifies this truth for us as this church faces the challenges of the future. In this account of the call of Gideon to lead God's people against the Midianites, we see what qualities we are to possess as God's church, His people today, if we are to be used by Him to further His Kingdom for His honor and glory.

I have been richly blessed to have had the opportunity between 1993 and 1994 to be your Interim Pastor prior to your calling Dr. Jeremiah. I see this as another opportunity, after being with you as an Assistant Pastor for the past nine years, to share God's Word with you as you move into a similar transition period.

The era of the Judges was a dynamic and tumultuous period in the history of God's covenant people, the time between the Israelites' entrance into the Promised Land under the leadership of Joshua and the beginning of the establishment of the kingdom under the series of kings, starting with Saul and David.

In that interim of 300 years, God raised up judges who oversaw His people as they began to settle in the new land: Samson, Deborah, Jephthah, Othneil, Ehud, Shamgar, and Gideon. During those intervening years God's people began to drift from their trust in God and their obedience to His Holy Laws: a lapse in worship of the true God and focus on worship of the god, Baal, and building of pagan asherahs. God would then bring foreign oppression upon them, and in their distress they would cry out and plead with God to deliver them. God would then raise up prophets or judges to lead the people back to true worship, allegiance, and obedience.

Gideon was one of those judges that God raised up when a large and experienced army of the Midianites crossed into Israel and for seven years ransacked, murdered, and pillaged the land and people. God's people had to flee into the surrounding mountains and caves to survive. The scriptures say that the Midianites were like a gigantic swarm of locusts, devouring and destroying everything in their path. The people cried out to God for deliverance, so the Angel of the Lord appeared to Gideon saying: “The Lord is with you, Mighty Warrior!” Gideon's response is in Judges 6: 13-17.

As a Christian and as one called to be a minister of the gospel, I can relate to this response Gideon made to God. It is an awesome thing to be called to lead God's people and to know God is really calling one to such a position! Know for sure that the man who will be called to serve you as the next Senior Pastor will at some point in the process be in deep, agonizing, and searching prayer to know for sure he is to be God's man in this pulpit, leading and teaching you in the years ahead. Be sure and heed the request of Dr. Jeremiah in one of his last sermons, to be in consistent and sincere prayer for the man God is preparing for you.

Gideon really sought diligently for clarification of God's call: he saw a food offering consumed dramatically, instantly, and supernaturally as an angel struck the rock with a staff. He put out a fleece of wool, not once but twice. One morning dew was on the fleece only, the next morning only the fleece was dry! Throughout this process Gideon was being affirmed that he was the man, the one to lead an army against the invading Midianites.

He gathers an army of 32,000 strong from the tribes of Asher, Zebulun, and Naphtali. Based on what the Scriptures described, that number of Israelites was exceedingly small compared to the huge multitude (over

120,000) of Midianite fighters. But in God's sight, 32,000 Israelites is still too large a number so He has Gideon pare it down even more.

I have two thoughts on this: First: God wants to underscore the fact that He does look at our hearts and attitudes as to the depth of commitment we have to His Son Jesus and to our level of trust in Him as the Almighty, sovereign God. Secondly: He wants us to see that the leader, or a pastor or pastors, cannot do the works of ministry alone. It takes brothers and sisters in Christ in the congregation who have the spiritual qualities of fearlessness, dedication, commitment, and also humility to come alongside the pastor to engage together in the spiritual battles and challenges facing the church of the 21st century. I, therefore, propose to you this morning that in God's sight the measure of a church's effectiveness in fulfilling all that God has for it to accomplish lies not in the quantity of numbers attending, but in the spiritual quality of their faith and trust in Him.

Not that such faith and trust in God is personally and humanly conjured up, but that it is a faith that is supernaturally given by Jesus Christ Himself in the person of the Holy Spirit to each one and must not be resisted but acted on consistently and courageously in daily living and service for Him.

What qualities did God want to see operative in Gideon's men that pleased Him and affirmed their qualifications to be actively involved in God's mighty army and the work of Kingdom building? We see in this text today these key qualities: fearlessness, dedication, commitment, and humility. There is as much need today, in Christ's church for God's people, to evidence these qualities as there was in Gideon's day as they battled the Midianites.

First of all, we see that it is vital that **God's people must be fearless** (verse 3). God had assured Gideon that He would be with him: "The Lord is with you, mighty warrior" (Judges 6:12) and "I will be with you and you will strike down all the Midianites together" (Judges 6:16). They had God's word that they would be victorious, but God knew many had much fear and lacked trust in Him and His promise to be with them and give total victory. When challenged by Gideon, 22,000 of the 32,000 dropped their weapons and left the mountain because of their lack of faith and subsequent terrifying fear. Certainly, to gaze upon that massive Midianite army would be challenging and disconcerting for any one, but they rested in their own circumstances, their own human assessment of the situation. They failed to evidence **trust in God**. They did not **believe God and His Word**.

We must be cautious not to be too judgmental regarding their lack of faith. How do we respond and react to the commands of God and His Word when it comes to the challenges we face as Christians in the world? Today the world is engulfed in fears of all types. Certainly we are to be vigilant, but we need not and must not be so captivated by fear that we become useless as witnesses in the world to God's love, mercy, joy, and peace that are centered in the finished work of Jesus Christ on the cross for us. Remember the words of Jesus in Matthew 28: "Be not afraid, be not fearful, for I will be with you always even to the end of the age." In Luke 18 at the end of the parable of the persistent widow Jesus asks the question: "When the Son of man comes will he find faith on the earth?" Do not be fearful during this transition period. Do not fear the spiritual principalities and powers. Do not be anxious for anything. Jesus said to the synagogue official as his daughter lay dying, "Do not be afraid, **only believe.**"

The prime quality that God demands in His people, in His church, is faith and trust in Him and His Word. God only uses fearless men and women, young people, boys, and girls for the great tasks He has for His church to accomplish on this earth. May many such worthy men and women be found in abundance at First EPC now and in the years ahead.

Being fearless is not all that is necessary. These verses in Judges also point to another quality that God seeks in his people and his church: **God's people must be dedicated and committed** (verses 4-7). Being dedicated in this context means being committed to a cause, devoted to a principle; to be zealous for an idea or a truth; not being distracted from the objective/goal; persevering with focused energy /perspective.

Of those 10,000 fearless men who remained 9,700 of them failed the test that would have qualified them to use their gifts for God. What test did they fail? They were on a mission for the Lord God and they relaxed their vigilance and alertness as to the presence of the enemy and focused on quenching their physical thirst. They became vulnerable to attack as they bent over the water and lapped it up like a dog, whereas the valiant 300 very cautiously knelt down and with very focused vigilance and alertness to their surroundings slowly cupped the water in their hands and drank.

I believe the Apostle Paul's admonition to "always be alert as the devil and the demonic forces are ever prowling around seeking to devour" is instructive at this point. Please know this as well: The 31,700 men who were sent home were God's covenant people and God loved them. Their salvation was not jeopardized by their fear or their lack of commitment in that situation. They just were unable to be of service to God and participate with Him in the work He was calling His people to, in defeating the enemy.

There are those Christians who attend church faithfully Sunday after Sunday, who may even be involved in Bible studies, but never really become dedicated and committed to serving their Lord and King, Jesus Christ. They are not focused on the work that God and His Word calls them to do. Too many other things in the world distract and divert them from the spiritual battles being fought: witnessing boldly the gospel to the world; being willing to sacrifice personal pleasure to serve; and ministering to others in Christ's name, using the gifts God has given them. I believe each of us must periodically take an inventory as to where our allegiance lies to see if we would have been in the company of the 31,700 whom God did not use or if we would be and hopefully are amongst the band of 300 worthy men whom He did use!

This of course raises another very important issue. All Christians, but particularly those who find they are in that band of 300 worthy men category, must never forget that **God's people must be humble** (verse 2). It is **always** God who brings the victory in our lives and in the fulfilling of His will. God doesn't need even one worthy person to help Him. Oh, yes, God could have decimated the Midianites without any of His people's involvement. He was the One who truly brought the victory. "I will be with you and you will strike down all the Midianites together" (verse 6:16) and "Get up, go down against the camp, because I am going to give it into your hands" (verse 7:9). So in a marvelously mysterious way and for His divine purposes to be fulfilled, God allows and enables us, His covenant children, to partner with Him in the defeating of His enemies and the building of His Kingdom! Hallelujah!

Therefore, no matter how much we sincerely and faithfully give and do and say and serve on this earth as one of His worthy men, the work is always being accomplished in His timing and in the power of the Holy Spirit working in and through us. **It is always God who is accomplishing His perfect will in everything.** Therefore, no matter how much we may contribute, we must always do it with the greatest of humility! We must never boast about our gifts or our accomplishments! It is all of us working together. Philippians 2:13: "It is God who works in you to will and to act according to His good pleasure."

I want to leave you with this thought: Just as Gideon, the leader, was called to lead God's people into battle for the Lord, so, too, your future Senior Pastor is being called to lead you. But Gideon could not do it alone—God knew he needed 300 worthy men. Your pastor will not be able to accomplish God's call alone! He also needs 300 worthy men to serve with him! I challenge each of you: Be one of those men!