

## “Trumpets & Torches” Judges 7:16-22

### I. INTRODUCTION

#### A. 9/11

1. Next Sunday is the anniversary of 9/11 which launched us into the current War on Terror that has dominated so much of the news for the last 4 years.
2. And as much as the War on Terror factors into the daily life of our nation, there's an even greater war being waged, not in the streets of Baghdad, or the mountains of Afghanistan, but right here in Ventura County.
  - a. It's raging on the streets we drive every day.
  - b. It takes place in the stores where we shop, the schools we attend, & jobs where we work.
  - c. It's battles are fought even within our homes.
3. It's been going on, not for years, not even decades – it's been raging for centuries.
4. It's the war between God & satan that takes place 24/7/365 in the spiritual realm.
5. It's a battle in which men & women are *both* combatants & the prize.

#### B. Lessons From Judges

1. The Book of Judges tells some interesting stories about how this spiritual battle often spills over into the history of nations & the everyday lives of people like you & me.
2. In the story of Gideon, we see an interesting picture of the part God has called *us* to play in winning the battle for othe.
3. Let's begin with a little background . . .
  - a. Gideon lived at a time of spiritual darkness in Israel.
  - b. Though he was loyal to God, precious few of the rest of his fellow Israelites were.
  - c. His own father was an idol-worshipper; a rich man who'd built an altar to a pagan god.
  - d. But God appeared to Gideon & told him he was to lead in a revival that would deliver his people from the harsh hand of the Midianites who covered the land like a plague of locusts.
  - e. Gideon was slow to take to his calling, but eventually embraced

- it & became an effective leader.
- f. At his summons, 32,000 men flocked to his banner.
  - g. The Midianites had 135,000; a 4 to 1 ratio in favor of the enemy.
  - h. But God told Gideon he had *too many!*
  - i. When the inevitable victory came, Israel would claim it was because they were so brave & skilled in battle.
  - j. So Gideon told the assembled men that any who were chicken could bail – 22,000, 2/3's of the force went home.
  - l. Looking at the remaining 10,000, a 13:1 ratio, Gideon had to be thinking – “No way!”
  - m. But God said, “Gideon, there are **STILL** too many!”
  - n. After another screening, Gideon was left with just 300.
  - o. So now that the ratio is 450 Midianites to every Israelite, Gideon spells out his plan for how they're going to attack.

## II. TEXT

### A. Vs. 16-18

**<sup>16</sup>Then he divided the 300 men into 3 companies, and he put a trumpet into every man's hand, with empty pitchers, and torches inside the pitchers. <sup>17</sup>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: <sup>18</sup> 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!’ ”**

1. Gideon divided his force into 3 equal groups of a hundred.
2. Each man was given a shofar, a ram's horn that served as a trumpet, a large empty clay vessel, and a torch.
3. No where does it say the men had weapons because at this time there were almost none left in Israel.
4. The Canaanites, Amorites, Ammonites, Philistines & others had so dominated them over the previous decades that the bronze weapons they'd had under Joshua were long gone.
5. And Israel had not yet learned the art of iron-working.
6. So Gideon equipped his men with these very un-war-like tools; a trumpet, a pitcher & a torch.
7. Once equipped & instructed, they were to take up positions around

an outpost of the Midianite camp.

8. At the word from Gideon, they were to break the pitchers & blow their trumpets.
9. The light & noise would create confusion among the suddenly woken Midianites, sending them into a panic.
10. From a quick reconnaissance mission Gideon had staged earlier that evening he knew God had been softening up the enemy with a little psychological warfare.
  - a. Gideon's reputation as a mighty warrior was spreading through the enemy camp.
  - b. So by shouting his name, along with the covenant name of Israel's God, it would strike terror.

### **B. Vs. 19-22**

**<sup>19</sup>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. <sup>20</sup>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!”**

**<sup>21</sup>And every man stood in his place all around the camp; and the whole army ran and cried out and fled. <sup>22</sup>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.**

1. When Gideon gave the signal, all the men in his group broke their pitchers, sending the light of their torches flaring brightly into the camp.
2. Then they blew the battle charge on their horns.
3. When the 2 other groups saw the torches flare up, they immediately broke their pitchers & blew their horns.
4. 300 men in all, 300 torches, 300 shofars all sounding the urgent call of attack.
  - a. This completely freaked out the Midianites who were roused from a dead sleep.

- b. The middle watch began at 10 p.m., so the men would have been asleep for a couple hours, in a deep slumber.
  - c. Waking rapidly, with all that light & noise would have been terribly disorienting.
  - d. All they knew was that there was battle at hand. So they grabbed the nearest weapon & started stabbing.
  - e. Problem was, they were stabbing each other.
  - f. Gideon's men just started the whole thing then stepped back to watch as they continued to shout the battle cry that was terrorizing the Midianites and adding to their confusion.
5. It didn't take long before the whole camp was caught up in the frenzy, & retreat sounded like the best way out, so they fled in mass back toward their homes in the East.

### **C. *Spiritual Warfare***

1. While the historical narrative of Gideon's deliverance of Israel is straight-forward, his choice of instruments to bring deliverance suggests an important *spiritual lesson*.
2. All of this is a picture of *spiritual warfare*.
3. Make no mistake, it was satan & his demons who stirred up the Midianites to oppress Israel.
  - a. It's ever the devil's aim to harass & oppose the people of God.
  - b. Those enemies, stirred by greed, envy, lust, & a desire to commit violence, came rushing in.
  - c. While it was the devil's desire to *destroy Israel*, God turned the oppression into a *tool of correction* that broke Israel of her rebellion & drove her to her knees in repentance.
  - d. Then God raised up a deliverer who came to bring relief from the oppression & return Israel to the worship of God.
4. God's people still have an adversary.
  - a. The Midianites are long gone, but the spiritual influences that incited them are alive & well on Planet Earth.
  - b. And they're hard at work stirring up trouble against believers today.
5. Listen to the words of Ephesians 6:10-13 . . .

**<sup>10</sup>Finally, my brethren, be strong in the Lord and in the power of His might. <sup>11</sup>Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil.**

**<sup>12</sup>For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual *hosts* of wickedness in the heavenly *places*. <sup>13</sup>Therefore take up the whole armor of God, that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand.**

- a. Our real struggle is not with human beings –
  - b. It's with the demonic agents that incite & use them.
  - c. As the Apostle Paul describes here, they're an organized hierarchy of spiritual beings with a determined agenda.
  - d. But God has provided the spiritual equipment we need to make sure when all is said & done,
    - 1) When the last echo of battle sinks into the distance,
    - 2) It's **WE** who are found standing, while the enemy lies vanquished at our feet.
6. Gideon's victory over Midian provides us some great insights into *how we* can prevail in *our* spiritual battle.
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7. **FIRST**: The victory was won that night, not by human strength, but by *faith in God*.
- a. God whittled the army of Israel from 32,000 down to only 300.
    - 1) 300 against 135,000! **Impossible** odds – from *man's* perspective.
    - 2) When it was 10,000 against 135,000, Israel was overmatched, but the odds were not impossible.
    - 3) 10,000 **desperate men** might just be able to pull off a rout.
    - 4) But not 300! No way – no how!
    - 5) God pared down Gideon's force so he would be sure to keep his dependence on God's presence & power, **not** the strength of his troops.
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- 6) **Question**: Why did God leave Gideon *any troops* at all?
- a) If God was keen to deliver Israel, why didn't He just send the Midianites packing?
  - b) He could have easily created some plague or pestilence that would drive the enemy from the land.
  - c) But he didn't; He raised up someone, a man of faith, to take a bold stand against the enemy & defeat them.
  - d) Even still, it was **God's power**, not human strength that

brought deliverance.

- 7) Here's the point – God could easily end the devil's schemes & opposition this instant.
- a) But He allows it to go on because He's using it to good purpose;
  - b) To increase our faith & to bring us into a *personal experience* of God's faithfulness & power.
  - c) Faith isn't real until it's put to the test.
  - d) I can *believe* this chair will hold me – but I will not *benefit* from that belief until I act on it.
  - e) Acting on faith is called *trust* – it's moving to *apply* our faith to a specific situation.
  - f) God is not interested in filling heaven with *a bunch of theologians* whose whole experience of truth has been *purely academic*.
  - g) He wants tested & proven men & women who've come to *know by personal experience* that He is good & faithful.
  - h) He wants people who've *learned firsthand* what it means to engage the enemy & have discovered that because of the Cross he's a defeated foe, a lying cheat who has no real power.
  - i) I know I've used this illustration before but please bear with me because it fits so well here –
    - If you want to get physically stronger, there's only one way to do it.
    - It doesn't come by reading books, or watching an instructional video.
    - It doesn't come by hanging out with a bunch of weight-lifters.
    - Your muscles aren't going to grow by taking a pill.
    - You get stronger by working out, by exercise.
    - The muscle *has to be pushed past the point of its current comfort*.
    - That's what signals the body *that* muscle needs more growth, when it's taxed and pushed *beyond* its current state of comfort.

- Now, such exercise is a bit painful – but the pain is what produces the added strength; when the muscle heals, it heals stronger than it was before.
- In some ways, faith is like a spiritual muscle – it only grows & gets stronger when it's pushed past the point of it's current experience.

j) God allows the enemy to put up resistance to us, only so that our faith can grow, and our experience of His faithfulness can deepen.

8) Why is this important to God? Why does He want to strengthen our faith & give us the experience of Victory in battle?

a) Because we are His *eternal companion* –

b) And *Christ deserves* a bride with some strength & character.

c) The Church, the Bride of Christ, is a Warrior Princess.

9) But as we stand our spiritual ground, battling the enemy, God wants us to realize that our strength does not come from ourselves – it's *His* power, *His* life, *His* victory flowing through us.

10) This is why in Eph. 6 Paul says,

**Finally, my brethren, be strong in the Lord and in the power of His might. Put on the whole armor of God . . .**

11) This is what Gideon's 300 teaches us.

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- b. Next we might ask, why 300? Why not just Gideon alone?
- 1) Since it was never about numbers, why not just 1 – that would have *even more* proven it was a miracle.
  - 2) No – if God had sent **ONLY** Gideon, then instead of God being praised as the glory of Israel, **GIDEON** would have been the focal point of glory.
  - 3) The 300 reminds us that when it comes to spiritual warfare, *we need each other*.
  - 4) God never intended that we fight alone, in isolation from one another.
  - 5) On the contrary, the Christian life is no solitary pursuit of God; it is a *community* life.
  - 6) Even the best soldiers, the most effective warriors, can grow weary of battle.

- 7) It's then they need their buddies to *cover them*.
  - 8) Interviews with foot-soldiers from WWII yield an interesting insight:
    - a) They said that when it comes to actual battle,
    - b) lying in a foxhole with artillery shells exploding nearby, & bullets whipping overhead,
    - c) all the lofty ideas about fighting against fascism & the armchair arguments about war go right out the window.
    - d) The *only thing that matters* is your buddies, the guys in your squad & platoon.
  - 9) Veterans will tell you, their most cherished memories of battle are not about the **REASONS** for war – there're about the guys they served with;
    - a) The ones they fought alongside,
    - b) the men they defended a bridge with, or took some pillbox with.
  - 10) This is something we better get grab hold of – As Christians who are engaged in spiritual warfare, we **NEED ONE ANOTHER!**
  - 11) There are no Rambos in the Kingdom of God.
  - 12) It was Gideon's 300!
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8. **SECOND:** - The victory came, not through conventional weapons, but through *God's ways*.
- a. Gideon put some torches in clay pots & handed his men ram's horn trumpets.
  - b. These weren't weapons at all, but they became the means of Israel's deliverance.
  - c. And they stand as powerful symbols of how God will give us victory in our spiritual battles.
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- d. **The torches** in the clay pots are a wonderful picture of the power of a Spirit-filled life.
- 1) The clay vessel speaks of our physical bodies & earth-bound lives.
  - 2) These bodies are fashioned from the dust of the earth.
  - 3) But inside us is a new life given by the Spirit of God when we're born again.
  - 4) That new life can shine into the darkness of this world *only* when the flesh-dominated life is broken.



5) In 2 Corinthians 4:6-7 we read -

**6 The God who commanded light to shine out of darkness, has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ. 7 But we have this treasure in earthen vessels, that the excellence of the power may be of God and not of us.**

- 6) Paul says we're all like a bunch of clay pots with the brilliant torches of God's life & glory in them.
  - 7) The only time that light can shine is when the vessel is broken; when we do as Christ said we must → die to self.
  - 8) The devil is not at all worried about Christians who live in the flesh.
  - 9) On the contrary, he loves & encourages that. The carnal Christian presents no threat to him.
  - 10) But when you & I die to self, allowing the life of Christ who has defeated the devil to live *through us*, he panics because he knows he can't stand.
  - 11) Here's the lesson – Victory in spiritual warfare comes through living in the Spirit, not the flesh.
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- e. **The rams' horn trumpets**, or shofar, as they are called in Hebrew, represent spiritual unity.
- 1) The trumpet was sounded to call for God's people to assemble.
    - a) One call was the summons to corporate prayer.
    - b) Another was the summons to a joyous assembly of praise & worship
    - c) Yet another sounded the call to united attack against the enemy.
  - 2) The point is, when the trumpet sounded, it was the signal to *rally together* for some united cause.
  - 3) As a symbol for spiritual warfare, the trumpet speaks of our need to be one in Christ.
  - 4) When God's people unite in the Spirit, it multiplies their spiritual authority *exponentially!*
  - 5) This is why in Lev. 26:8 we read that 5 shall chase a hundred while a hundred shall chase 10,000!
  - 6) Jesus said when 2 or 3 are gathered in His name, He is there with them so that they can extend the influence of His

authority & power.

- 7) In John 17, Jesus prayed for the unity of His followers, linking the success of their mission to that unity.
  - 8) Spiritual unity *exponentially multiplies* the effectiveness of the Body of Christ.
  - 9) This is why the devil resists it so desperately.
    - a) This is the root of all envy & gossip.
    - b) This is the cause of most problems between people in the Church –
    - c) The devil is at work to divide the Body of Christ and keep it weak and ineffective.
  - 10) The lesson for us is this – In Spiritual warfare, we must stand shoulder to shoulder with our brothers & sisters in Christ.
    - a) Our petty differences don't count for a hill of beans compared to what's at stake in those who are perishing without Christ.
    - b) How dare we divide over the timing of the Rapture or tongues when our neighbors are passing into a Christless eternity?
    - c) We Christians are far too often like people arguing over wallpaper in the parlor of the Titanic.
    - d) Why waste time getting angry with each other over things that make no real difference when we could be using our united voice to call the Lost to Christ?
    - e) Or could be joining hands and hearts and voices as we join in prayer to plead with God that He send repentance & mercy to this sin-sick world.
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- f. Finally, Gideon's band shouted out – **“The sword of the Lord & Gideon.”**
- a. The symbolism here is obvious, for as the scriptures so amply reveal, the sword of God is His Word.
  - b. Curious that the *shout* referred to a sword, when they had no swords.
  - c. That's the point, the lesson we're to glean from this – the sword of God is not a physical weapon – it's His Word which is sharper than any sword.
  - d. The shout the 300 made WAS THE SWORD OF THE

LORD – the spoken word, the declaration of His truth.

- e. The Truth does far more than any physical weapon ever could.
- f. But they didn't just refer to the sword of the Lord; it was *also* the sword of Gideon.
- g. And it was *one* sword, *not two* because Gideon's sword was the Lord's sword.
- h. Here's the lesson for us – In spiritual battle, we must never treat the Word of God as some kind of magic talisman, an incantation we intone.
- i. The devil is not worried about how many Bible verses we have memorized if all they are, are a sequence of sounds.
- j. Mouthing them doesn't bother him in the least.
- k. It's the *truth* the words are *present* that spells His defeat.
- l. God's Promise had become Gideon's life & hope.
- m. In the same way, your success in defeating the enemy is only going to come when God's Word becomes your bread & butter, the very stuff your spirit and soul are nourished by.

### III. CONCLUSION

#### A. Lessons

1. Let's review – . . .
2. Gideon's 300 teaches us that spiritual victory comes through faith in God, not human strength, & that God *wants us* to experience that victory *firsthand*.
3. The torches in the clay pots teaches us that spiritual victory comes through *living in the Spirit*, not the flesh.
4. The trumpets teach us that *spiritual unity* is essential to overcoming the enemy.
5. And the shout of Gideon's men teaches us that it's a *personal application* of God's Word that will secure our victory over the devil.

#### B. The Enemy's End

1. When Gideon put all these together, the demons that had stirred up the Midianites against the people of God were thrown into confusion.
2. Panic broke out and they ended up slaying each other.
3. Gideon and his men just stood back and watched, continuing to

hold high their torches, blowing their horns and shouting their message.

4. When we combine all 4 of these things in *our* lives, the result will be the same.
  - a. When we refuse to trust in human wisdom and strength and instead look only to God,
  - b. When we walk in the Spirit and die to self,
  - c. When we keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace, and
  - d. When we learn, then live the Word of God,
  - e. It throws the demonic realm into confusion; it thwarts their long-laid plans & strategies for our ruin.
  - f. And as the Midianites fled in full-scale retreat, leaving behind their plunder, we'll find many men & women who've been indifferent to spiritual things & hard toward God, ready for salvation.

### **C. A Concern**

1. As we end this morning, I want to issue a word of caution.
2. This text is quite clear in teaching us that if we are to be victorious on the spiritual battlefield, we cannot wage war against the enemy in our own wisdom & strength.
3. If Gideon had equipped his men with the weapons of earthly warfare & attacked the camp of Midian, it would have been a very short battle.
  - a. The Midianites would have lost a few men,
  - b. But would have rallied & wiped out Gideon's band.
4. Gideon's battle plan teaches us that victory in spiritual warfare doesn't go to the smartest, or strongest, or the most clever.
5. It goes to those who look to the Lord.
6. Zechariah 4:6 tells us that victory comes . . .  
**Not by might, nor by power, but by My Spirit says the Lord.**
7. Psalm 20:7 says,  
**Some trust in chariots, and some in horses; but we will remember the name of the Lord of God.**
8. Gideon didn't forge a bunch of *bronze swords* for his 300.
9. He didn't go to the Philistines to learn the cutting-edge technology of *iron-working* so he could forge superior weapons.
10. My concern is that church leaders & pastors today are *looking to the world* for the latest technology & the greatest ideas on how

- to accomplish the ageless mission of the Church.
- a. I get the mailings, I see the titles of the messages in the national seminars.
  - b. I've read the promo material for how to do ministry in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century.
  - c. The techniques come from Madison Avenue not The Holy Spirit.
  - d. The philosophies come from high powered management experts not The Word of God.
  - e. Many church leaders want to run the local church like a Fortune 500 corporation instead of a community of men & women who comprise a spiritual family whose structure & mission has been ordained by God.
11. It's all a lot of bronze & iron swords – and while it may look all nice & shiny today, it can't last because it's built on the passing wisdom of this world.
  12. The devil sure isn't worried about it, it's what he's hoping for.
  13. We must wage war the way Gideon did.
    - Trust God
    - Walk in the Spirit
    - Keep unity
    - Learn & live God's Word
  14. Even now the demons tremble.