

June 27, 76 P. M. W.A.I.
(publish main outline)

THE FIGHTING FARMER

Judges 6-7

INTRODUCTION:

We are indebted for the book of Judges about the story of a powerfully built middle-aged man of Manasseh, who is busy on his farm beating out some wheat in secret by the wine press. He beats very softly - less the sound of his staff should tell the Midianites where the wheat is. You can imagine that he stops his work to dry his face, to wet his lips from the water of the well. And in his heart is rising up to Heaven - somehow a prayer against the oppressors of his people.

this supports your

I. THE FARMERS FRONTIER

It is a time of oppression - Israel was in trouble because of the defection of paganism. Gideon's father had an altar to baal in his front yard and God was going to instruct this young farmer to destroy it. It took a great deal of courage of this farmer to obey the command of God. But he could never have been effective as leader had he not gotten rid of these places of evil worship.

6:11

v. 25

The reason some people are doing only fair, or are absolutely failing in God's service, they have not gotten rid of the things that are holding them back. Some people are doing a poor job of serving God because they have so many hobbies and outside interests. They just don't have much time to spare the Lord. The effectiveness of others is being limited because of some bad habit that they should have gotten rid of years ago.

Here was this farmer - he had not meal enough for his children to eat.

He was a mighty man of valor. But he was afraid to thrash out a few stocks of wheat on the thrashing floor - but he must hide himself in this hidden wine press.

He is a modest, humble individual. But the story of unrelieved depression upon the children of Israel is because of sin. They are over run by some of the tribes that lived around about them. They served as slaves for a period of time. And then God raises up a judge who brings them out of captivity. For a time things go well. And as always, is true with sin, slavery once again takes hold. They had been a long time in the hands of Midian - the oppression was extreme. The cruelty was hard. No one made any crops because of them. In fact, this farmer had a few stocks of wheat - and the thrashing of the wheat was to be done in secret. They would let them plant some crops and then sweep down and gather off the harvest.

So this farmer was working on a frontier - oppression.

V. (12) - A (call) came to him - the Lord is with thee, thou mighty man of valor.

I wonder (how) Gideon took this. Here he was in secret.

And yet he was being challenged to go and save Israel. The dust was thick and his doubts were thick also. And the depression was discouraging. The people were robbed and cheated by the enemies as they carried away their harvest year by year. But now the Lord comes and speaks to him - and gives him a call.

V. (13) - The most mysterious question of all life appears in this text. (Why then is all of this befallen us?)

Many righteous souls who believe in God have even asked this question. Mothers have asked this. And this farmer has spoke this question. He said where be all the miracles which thy fathers told us about. Did not he bring us up out of Egypt. And here we are delivered into the hands of the enemy. There was weakness and distress on every side. The past of Israel was wonderful. But the present was difference. Why is the absence of power so pronounced. What can you say - is Jehovah with us when all of this is happening to us. When a person has homesickness, he will ask this question - why? When there are people who are lonesome for companionship and they have a hard time making friends - they will ask the question why. When a person comes down to old age - he will ask the question why. Quite often little children ask their grandparents questions and they ask why, why?

Why did Simon Peter follow afar off?

Why did Judas go out into a night for a handful of silver?

The Psalmist asked why art thou cast down oh my soul and why art thou disquieted within me.

Life deals with us bitter disappointments, over and over again. Even Elisha asked the question why. And his servant came to him and said to him why - why call this problem ours. And the prophet told him to look around on the mountain. That he might see - and he saw that the hills were filled with the horses and the chariots of God. That God was ready to help. And quite often we are discouraged and we ask the question why. This farmer asked the question - these Midanites rule over us every summer they come and raid our country. Below the Jordan to take off the harvest which the people have gathered. None dare to thrash his grain openly - he invites trouble. And this farmer has to secretly do this. He was not thrashing with an oxen. He was doing it

without much noise - beating it out (by hand). It was hard, hot, heavy work. He was in a secret place. And he was beating out this grain and yet the Lord said you are a mighty man of Valor. This was an amazing thing when he replied, oh Lord, why then has all of this befallen us.

And there were the false worshippers that had invaded the land. There was a grove of Baal, even in the front of his father's house. Now he heard his father, and the grandfather tell about the mighty works of God in the (past), how the waters opened and the (pillar of fire) led them. Why now has all of this befallen them.

It seems to me that as he asked this question, God was talking to him about the (lowering of standards). The (heresay) and the (sins) that had crept in which were the history of his people. And that's the thing that happens in the church. When the church is far from ideal, they lack brotherness, winsomeness, and love and power. And yet the church is intended to be the glorious church without spot and blemish by any such thing.

When this farmer looked - he was actually grieved - he was disappointed. And God must have been grieved about it. So he asked this question -

V. 29 He took courage on the frontier and went into (action) in (V. 29). There is the story that tells us that this farmer, perhaps asked his mother to sing the song about Deborah. He wetted his sword, he sharpened his axe. And the stars were in the Heavens. And night fell. And at midnight, behold this man went forth with his axe. And there at the altar of Baal, in the grove which had been built and planted in Joash's place, his son thinking of this unclean altar and those unclean trees beside his father's house. Every blow of this farmer's axe brought new strength into his arms. And every tree that fell, before his axe, his courage rose up. It seemed that every star was shining and opened up the

space in the grove of Baal.

And he thinks of how he has had to work to get something to eat for his family.

V. 28
The worshippers of Baal get up - they would not neglect their morning devotions and early they come out to seek their God. And there before Joash, was up in the morning, the men of the city were gathering around. Shouting and demanding - bring out thy son, Gideon - that he may die. He had cast down the altar of Baal. He has cut down the grove of Baal. Many of the man who have not the courage to do a righteous deed themselves, are glad when other men do it. But not the courage and the strength to cut down that evil place of worship.

V. 30
V. 31
V. (30) For shame says Joash - stand back, and go home. "Let Baal take care of his own wrongs. And you are only my everyday neighbors. Let Baal arise, but go you home. And Joash brought out his son Gideon and baptized him Jerubball. Before them all. Saying, let Baal settle his own score, with this son.

Gideon was wise to know that the altar must go, the groves of Baal must be cut down, and there must be the (altar of God) put in its place. So he stepped forth on the frontier. To get a hand.

II. THE FARMERS FLEECE - V. 37-39

V. 37
This is a favorite story of Gideon as he takes a fleece. He gets ahold of your imagination. Gideon was a humble minded man. And he was thinking all the time, oh Lord, where with shall I save Israel. How is this job to be done that you called me too.

He begins to say my family is poor in Manasseh - I am the least in my father's house.

God could have gone elsewhere for a leader to deliver Israel. And this is always the way of the Lord with men who are to do great work for him and for his people. The Lord looks at him even though he is poor and of a contrite spirit and trembleth at his word.

And God said to Gideon - what do you want me to do to show you that you will be able to deliver Israel. Then follows the story that God gave him. And he asked for a sign and the Lord gave it to him. Judges 12:21.

Now as someone has said - I don't think we ought to make God jump through a hoop to reveal his will to us. But let God reveal himself to us in his own way.

Dr. Warren Hultgreen, when he was pastor of a small church, received the call to a large church. With tremendous numbers - and he sent back this answer to the committee. (Everything about the invitation is appealing, the challenge is great, the people are gracious, the salary is generous, but one thing is missing - the leadership of God.)

When the (Nominating Committee) goes to work in a church, I believe that God has a whole slate of leaders in the church already worked out in his mind. It is going to be the responsibility of the committee to try and find the mind of God, in the matter of leadership in the church.

V, 38 Then, this story of the fleece being put out. One morning it was wet. And all around it was dry. The next morning it was dry and all around it was wet.

Gideon's way and sometimes our way in this day is saying, oh Lord, tell us the truth - let us know that you are leading us. So God sent him this information that Gideon might know the will of God. It was a wonderful fleece - that the farmer was full of despair and he needed to know that God was in it all.

III. THE FARMER'S FORCE 7

7:3 There was no selective service at that time. And God sent him out to gather an army. There was no ready-made profession army. There were no groups that he could call upon - but he sent out to the land in the amazing simple way in which he gathered his force. V. 3 - 7th Chapter. It tells us that there were 32,000 ready to fight the oppressor.

Did you ever hear of anybody having too many helpers. Well, Gideon did. And he started off with an army of 32,000 men. God said, this is too many. And therefore Gideon told all the men who wanted to go home that they could leave. As the Scripture tells us here. 22,000 went home. This is enough to shake the confidence of a leader, isn't it.

What Gideon said (if) I can keep this army that I have, these 10,000 men, I'll try to over throw Midian.

But the Lord said, Gideon, you've got too many men. How many of them really want to fight. Let's see how many of them are conscious of the need. Therefore, let us put them to the test.

Numbers should not be the first consideration to the Christian Church.

Somehow we need to be delivered from this. We make comparative tables and statistics - it may be possible for the church to lose in numbers and to gain in strength. It may be depressing to see a decrease in membership and yet we recognize the absence of many things today that our eyes have seen in other days. We recognize today the many things that our fathers have spoken about. In times past. There is indifference among multitudes of people, concerning spiritual things. The lack of enthusiasm in the church of God.

God may be sifting our ranks, revealing our weaknesses, and our lack of spiritual consciousness. The idea of decrease itself is a sign of the absence of the working of God. That we are to be less careful concerning the matters of this kingdom - that really we are to interpret the signs of the times and understand the Lord's activities. The old story of Gideon is one that the land had had rest for 40 years and now for 7 years it had had oppression. And the people of God were oppressed so severe, cruelly treated, that multitudes of them have left their homes and gone into dens and caves of the earth.

God had in his own set time and hour sent a visitation of chastisement and judgement upon them.

But in God's (providential hour) God called the farmer, discovered him. He was discovered not by Israel - but by God.

I think God today discovers the man of the hour. Where no one else is looking for him - he found Gideon. And there were (two) great qualifications that he had. First, faith in God. He was faithful to his own business. He worked. And had faith to go on though many criticised him.

He sent his call through the tribes. 32,000 men gathered. He watched them gather. From the different tribes.

Two things surface at this point, first, it was a wonderful response seeing the terrible condition of the people. Second, it was an utterly inadequate response in the face of the vast host of Midian that he had to engage in battle. Because he had watched their movements and now as a leader, he cries to help. 32,000 come forth - only 32,000.

If you could put yourself back at that moment in imagination in the place of Gideon, and look at the host of Midian encamp among the valley, in good position - surrounding the people of God, and you had only an army of 32,000 which was going against an unnumbered host. You would say, hopeless. Gideon was trained - disciplined. And here you are, 32,000 oppressed - broken and down-hearted people.

V. 2

V. 2 - The voice of God speaks to the soul of the man and he declares the people were too many.

A very simple test is going to be given - he is to proclaim all that are marked with fearful and trembling, may return to their tents.

V. 3

V. 3 - We see 22,000 passing back because they are fearful and trembling. Now Gideon has 10,000 left. And the voice of God comes again, and declares - the number is too great. And a new test is going to be put to them.

V. 4

Now in the physical life, water is a necessity. This will be the test. And this procedure which he goes through, many of them he says, will not be conscious of their need. So they are thirsty. Now all of those who throw themselves down on their knees, and duck their heads down to drink water, put them in one group. Those that are conscious of the main thing and keep their eyes open and reach down to take water while they have their eyes open and walk - put them in another group.

There were 9,700. That were more interested in taking care of their thirst than looking for the enemy.

That left (300 men.) Taking necessary things - but not taking unnecessary time to do it. And God said to him by these 300 men, I will save you - V. 7.

That is a story of decrease. It is a story of God's method of sifting people.

There is one thing and one point that I would like to bring out about this farmer's force - and that is, with this fraction of an army, it proved beyond any doubt that it was God that was giving the victory into the hands of Israel. We win no battles really. It is God who gives every victory. Remembering this is one of the secrets to continuing to receive victories. That we know that the Lord gives the victory.

As we look over the actual story, we see the whole nation is conscious of oppression. Under which it suffers.

Secondly, the (whole nation) desires deliverance. But when the call is given, 32,000 rise a little higher than the nation. They are prepared to take some sort of venture. But 22,000 are not quite sure - and they feel fear and trembling in their hearts. And they go back home. 10,000 are left to move up to a high level. And 9,700 take unnecessary time for the supplies of necessary life. The necessities of life. And therefore, 300 were left, in the fighting force.

There is no greater revelation of God's method of sifting his people in the whole Bible. The fact is, God's (quality) is infinitely more than (quantity.) It is an estimation of the Old Testament.

This is the reason for the terms of Jesus in the New Testament. There was a constant habit of our Lord as often he surprised and startled people. And scattered the crowds with his terms.

If today I should read to this congregation what Jesus had to say, men would shrink from them - as from the touching of fire. Due to the fact that there is always quality that counts with God more than quantity. God cares nothing about your business but he is interested in what you are. God must have men upon whom he can depend.

There are two lines of thought that come out - first, the story is as it reveals. The men which God cannot move to victory. The story on the positive side reveals the force with which God is able to win his triumphs.

Now God is able to give personal salvation to any person. What this story really focuses upon is the matter of service. There is no weak, faltering and failing coward but what God can save him and give him salvation.

There are two classes of people that God cannot proceed to victory - the fearful and the trembling. Who are the men who are fearful. They are the men who have a vision of the foe. And say that the enemy is bigger than God.

There is always a cause of fear in the perfectly natural thing. I can see those great hosts of millions encamped in all the valléys. It would be natural for me looking upon them as a man to begin to count them and then to be filled with fear. The natural outlook in the great conflict of right and wrong is really depressing as you look at it.

It is possible for us to count the forces against us and to gaze upon them until our hearts are filled with fear. 22,000 men who were fearful were men who

looked at the foes.

Now there is a deeper reason why they were fearful. And I think that word trembling is another. They thought more of their own safety than of the great cause. They looked at the host and they said at this man's battle we shall be slain. And we cannot win. And there was the inspiration of panic. They were not prepared to suffer death.

They were fearful because they looked at the foe. They were trembling because they looked at their own safety.

Why is it that God declines to move with such men.

There is because such men create panic in a crisis. Fear is a contagious thing. You have 32,000 men come out to fight - and 22,000 of them are fearful, they are afraid of the conflict and battle. What is going to happen.

You think about your own church. Are you afraid of the issues. God cannot work with us then. Are we so busy these days looking at the foe and counting the forces against the Lord - that in our hearts there is fear and tremor. Then we are not the men that God can depend upon. In the day of battle, our fear will spread and we will be contagious. You let some few people in a church get fearful, and it paralyzes the whole arm of the church and it unnerves the heart. That is the story of the Bible. And the trouble today is that the fearful and the trembling men insist upon remaining in the army. And there can be no gracious and glorious gains.

Now the second type of man in this fighting force were those who took unnecessary time over necessary things.

I wish I could make this so practical that you could really catch the drift of this. There is a team mission at hand but there is a lack of urgency of that mission. This is one of the causes of the weaknesses and the failures today. It is true that many men have no fear of the ultimate issue of victory about the church. That God does not have the ability - but in the name of Christ they take unnecessary time over necessary things.

Now there are things that are necessary in the physical life. I am talking about these people that he took down to the water and they stopped down on their knees, and they took all their time with that necessary drink of water. Now there are necessary things in life. In the physical life. We could take eating, sleeping, dressing, and a vast amount of time is wasted by men and women who name the name of Christ on these things. Think about the unnecessary time that people spend reading a newspaper. Or think about the time that people spend somethings in the preparation of life and they never do anything about it. They never strike a blow, they never lay a brick, they never do any serious work. Now this can become a real application for teaching.

You think about the unnecessary time that is taken over by recreation today. Now I need not say one single word here to defend myself from misunderstanding because I believe - I believe that the necessity for recreation is something that is necessary. But how much time we are wasting - I think unnecessary time, is given to these matters.

Let me approach it from another angle. What I am saying is - there is no sense of urgency that the idea of Christianity with too many. Even the opportunity to worship.

And there is always the feeling that - well, if I have something else that is necessary and needs to be done. Then a lot of time is taken up with that and I

won't go to worship. There is a great battle on. And that God is seeking for warriors and that he does! He is going to hold them accountable.

There is no instant in all of history in which God acts entirely upon his own. God must work through men. We who name the name of the Lord Jesus - we who sing the songs of the redeemed, we who wear the uniform of the Christian, we must not take unnecessary time for necessary things to the exclusion of the urgent business of Jesus Christ.

This is a battle against evil and we need to have a passion for the kingdom of God. We will say to you that God is sifting, and he is sifting, to take out the fearful, the trembling, and those that are afraid - that use their time in an unnecessary way. God's Word tells us that I can save this nation by 300. They may not be saved by you.

Who makes up this fighting force - who constitutes God's fighting force in the world. They are courageous men - they have seen a vision of God. That God is prepared to move and every man must be true to the laws of God. Of course, health, interest, work, business and recreation - all these things, they are great. But some of them breed easiness and softness. And unfits a man for the kingdom of God.

God wants men today who have a clear vision of him. Such men who would inspire confidence. Who will do exploits for him. He has to have those upon whom he can depend upon. Men of courage, born of vision, under his cause.

Apply some of those tests to your own heart. Are you fearful. Are you trembling. How shall we cure this feeling of fear in our hearts. What does a vision of God do for a man. This farmer, named Gideon - he saw his own absolute unworthiness. And secondly, he saw God's infinite ability and he offered himself

to be useful.

Let me ask you tonight, are you kneeling down to some stream of water of personal satisfaction - that you have no time for worship. Have you put some business or some other interests ahead of his. Are you placing all of your resources at his disposal.

God wants men that never waver, never take, never halt, unnecessary time for necessary things. But if you lack a vision, lack consecration, God is going to sift the ranks.

IV. THE FARMERS FAME

V. 16
We talked about him being on the frontier - putting out his fleece and gathering his force. Now we want to develop finally his fame. In this we see that he sent a 100 men to one hill. 100 to another. And 100 to another. He left an opening so that the Midianites could run. That was important. Then Gideon said take these weapons - a pitcher, a little oil in the lamp, and a wick for the oil and a trumpet in your hand. We are going to break the pitcher, blow the trumpet, and do it all at once. And shout out - the sword of the Lord and of Gideon. We read that every man stood in his own place around the camp.

V. 21.

The very idea that his going out to meet 100,000 men with pitchers and lanterns - how many people would have said, the man has gone clean mad.

If we lean upon ourselves we will have failure. But if we lean upon the arm of God, we will see a swift victory. God wants the glory. And no flesh shall

go instead.

300 men, like Gideon, will move any city. It will move this city.
If we could just get 300 that would be as consecrated as this farmer.

V. 16 - He tells about dividing them up - and in V. 18 - he tells us about the plan and how it works. And the children of Midian fell upon each other with their swords and they started running until they had gotten back to their own country.

There are two or three things that we should never forget.

First, these men were men of unquestioning courage. They were not afraid. They were willing, if God would go with them, to go anywhere. Why should church members be so fearful today about going out visiting for God, inviting people to Christ, and urging them to come to church. They had unquestioning faith. When the trumpet calls us to battle, we ought to answer. Without waiting to see what somebody else is going to do, in this kind of day.

We ought to lead the way, we ought to stand up and be counted, for that which is right. We ought to have courage enough to do it.

Courage was not all they had. In the 2nd place, they co-operated together. If we, today, a part of Gideons band heard him say, now 100 of you here, 100 there, and 100 over there - we would have to put off the battle two or three weeks. We would have to stand around and argue. About which hill we are going to stand on. Or either, we would complain that we had never done it this way before. And so we want to do it our way. And somebody else would say, don't you think we ought to have a meeting or two and decide about this. Maybe we ought to divide up into groups of 25 instead of 100. Perhaps, we ought to just

hit the camp from one side.

Yes, God called this farmer, Gideon - and these people co-operated with him.

In the third place, there was unhesitating obedience. And that is tremendous as we watch this group as they move and each man filled his own place.

There have been several thousand years since time has passed, and this story happened. What does it have to say to us? It has something to say to our church as we battle against the evils of our time.

It is too much to say that we ought to love the church too. Christ gave himself for it. Is it too much to ask you to love the church. Is it necessary that we have to beat you over the head to tell you that you ought to be present in your church in worship.

You ought to do the best you can with where you are and what you have for Jesus. As one man had as his motto.

If you don't, you embarrass the whole church of the Lord Jesus. Because you say, let others do it. God's church is going on and I want you to know - make no mistake about that. You may (not have the satisfaction of being a part of it) but, the church is going on. And it is going to do God's work.

There is a legend that Jesus went back to Heaven and met the angel Gabriel - Gabriel said we are glad to have you back. How did things go. Alright, I lived 33 years, preached 3 years with them, was crucified, died, and was buried. I

have delivered the Gospel - the good news of his interest and carried to my Disciples. Now I have come back to my Father. Gabriel said, that is all very well, but people are going to find out about it. Jesus said, well, Simon knows and James, and John knows. And Matthew knows. And all the rest know. They will tell somebody else. And somebody else will tell somebody else. And the whole world will be girdled with the Gospel. Gabriel is supposed to have said, suppose they fail. What is the plan then. If Jesus replied, if they fail, there is no other plan.

What is my part, what is your part, what is our part. I think it is expressed in V. 21. And every man stood in his place round about the camp. We never are asked to do what we cannot do. We are only asked to do what we can do.

We can never stand in somebody else's place. But our own place. We are never asked to do what somebody else does. But we are asked to do what we can do.

The big question comes - will you join with your courage, your co-operation, your obedience and follow Jesus.