

Gideon - God's Mighty Man of Valour

by John Nelson Darby

The sermon highlights the importance of faith, obedience, and separation from evil, using the story of Gideon as an example of God's power and glory working through weak and insignificant individuals.

Scripture: Judges 6:1

Topics: "God's Deliverance", "Faith and Weakness"

Description

John Nelson Darby emphasizes the significance of Gideon's story as a revival narrative that resonates with the current state of the church. He illustrates how Israel's sin led to their oppression by the Midianites, prompting them to cry out to God, who then raised Gideon, an unlikely hero, to deliver them. Darby highlights that God's choice of Gideon, a humble and fearful man, demonstrates that true strength comes from reliance on God rather than human might. The sermon underscores the importance of recognizing our own weaknesses and the necessity of God's presence in our lives for true victory. Ultimately, Darby warns against the dangers of seeking to secure God's blessings through human efforts, as seen in Gideon's later actions.

Transcript

The history of Gideon is of much practical importance. It is the history of one of those revivals in Judges, so peculiarly applicable to the present circumstances and need of the church.

Every now and again (as we learn in the previous chapters of this book, which will be seen at once to be occupied throughout with the, failure of Israel, when placed in the land into which Joshua had brought them in blessing) Israel had been sold into the hands of their enemies. Groaning under the consequences of their sin, they had cried unto Jehovah; and Jehovah ever faithful, had raised up some one, as a deliverer out of the hands of those that spoiled them. He was grieved with the afflictions of His people. He judged their sin and evil, yet at the same time pitied and saved. But then the persons by whom He wrought were always in themselves insignificant. We do not find revivals beginning from the head. Very generally, when there has been anything of a recovery from the doctrines and traditions of men, it has taken place through the instrumentality of some obscure individual raised up in the energy of the Spirit.

Such a "saviour" was Gideon.

"The children of Israel (we read) did evil in the sight of Jehovah, and Jehovah delivered them into the hand of Midian seven years," chap. 6:1.

The Midianites knew not that it was Jehovah who had delivered Israel into their hands, yet in reality, they were but the rod with which it pleased Him to punish His people. As with the Assyrian (Isa. 10): "O Assyrian, the rod of mine anger, and the staff in thine hand is mine indignation," etc. When He has done with His rod, He can break it or burn it. "Shall the axe boast itself against him that heweth therewith? or shall the saw magnify itself against him that shaketh it? as if the rod should shake itself against them that lift it up, or as if the staff should lift up itself, as if it were no wood." Satan himself is very often the rod used by God for the discipline of His children.

"And the hand of Midian prevailed against Israel." Nothing could have prevailed against them, had they been faithful to Jehovah. "And because of the Midianites, the children of Israel made them the dens which are in the mountains, and caves, and strong-holds. And so it was, when Israel had sown, that the Midianites came up, and the Amalekites, and the children of the east, even they came up against them; and they encamped against them, and destroyed the increase of the earth, till thou come unto Gaza, and left no sustenance for Israel, neither sheep, nor ox, nor ass. For they came up with their cattle and their tents, and they came up as grasshoppers for multitude; for both they and their cattle were without number; and they entered into the land to destroy it. And Israel was greatly impoverished because of the Midianites," v. 2-6.

347 They were in a sad condition. "And the children of Israel cried unto Jehovah."

This is always the first symptom of anything like a revival. When the people of God, instead of saying that they are rich and increased with goods and have need of nothing, feel how really poor and miserable, and blind and naked they are, and that they can only receive that which God is pleased to give, He is about to interfere and raise them up.

The sin of the church has brought it into desolation. Yet little real cry has gone up to the Lord; and wherefore? We are not aware of how far we have departed from our original standing. We have got so much of the world's dignity, and influence, and riches! These things, though they hide us not from God or from Satan, are hiding from ourselves our real poverty. Did we but know our destitution, did we but cry unto the Lord, He, "when he saw that there was none shut up or left," would deliver and raise up. Whether as to Israel, or an individual, or the church, the lesson needed to be learnt is the same, that of its impoverishment and destitution. No matter how poor we are, if sensible of our poverty; for there is all fulness in Christ.

"And it came to pass, when the children of Israel cried unto Jehovah because of the Midianites, that Jehovah sent a prophet unto the children of Israel, which said unto them, Thus saith Jehovah God of Israel, I brought you out of Egypt, and brought you forth out of the house of bondage, and I delivered you out of the hand of the Egyptians, and out of the hand of all that oppressed you, and drave them forth before you, and gave you their land: and I said unto you, I am Jehovah your God; fear not the gods of the Amorites in whose land ye dwell; but ye have not obeyed my voice," v. 7-10.

348 He first of all shews them their sin, as He did when they could not take Ai. There the secret of their impoverishment is found out. 'You are crying unto me now (He, in effect says), because you feel your impoverishment; but the real cause of your impoverishment is this - you have sinned against me.' They had none to blame but themselves. So with the churches in the Apocalypse; and therefore, the word to them is "Repent."

God had been faithful to Israel, but Israel had not been faithful to God. This was the point of the prophet's testimony. He ever vindicates His own conduct, "If we believe not, yet he abideth faithful: he cannot deny himself," Were we walking as He would have us, neither the world, nor the flesh, nor the devil, could prevail against us. Whenever we find ourselves under the power of our enemies, we must be sure to charge the fault on ourselves, and not on God. Does Joshua lie on his face because the people have turned their backs before the men of Ai, Jehovah says to him, "Get thee up; wherefore liest thou on thy face? Israel hath sinned." Joshua ought to have known that sin in Israel, not any changeableness in God, was the cause of their being smitten. Jehovah would not be amongst them any more, until they had put away the accursed thing. Could He go out to bless iniquity? Nothing can weaken our hands but sin; "greater is he that is in you, than he that is in the world."

Whether in the restoration of an individual soul, or of a body of saints, God will have it acknowledged that there is no failure in Him, but that we have suffered because of our own sin and folly.

Having testified of their sin, Jehovah next raises up for them the instrument of their deliverance. "And there came an angel of Jehovah, and sat under an oak which was in Ophrah, that pertained unto Joash the Abi-ezrite; and his son Gideon threshed wheat by the winepress to hide it from the Midianites," v. 11.

Not anything could have been more abject than the condition of Gideon as described here: - stealthily threshing wheat (for fear of the Midianites), to feed his family! But here is one whom the Spirit of God delights to make mention of; whose name, unrecorded of man, is thought worthy to be recorded by Him (Heb. 11:32-34). The Spirit of God writes to magnify the grace of God, not to exalt man. He would have us bear in mind such little incidents as that noticed here, in the history of the soldiers of faith, in order that we may see by what weak and insignificant instruments God works. His mightiest victories have ever been won by such, and not by those who had resources in themselves.

349 "And the angel of Jehovah appeared unto him, and said unto him, Jehovah is with thee, thou mighty man of valour," v. 12.

What a remarkable salutation! Stealthily threshing wheat to hide it from the enemy looked not like valour. To the human eye, there was everything that betrayed depression of spirit. But God's "mighty men" have ever been such as were arrant cowards in themselves, men distrustful of their own strength and wisdom in coping with the enemy - "out of weakness made strong." None are "mighty men of valour," but those to whom it has been said, "Jehovah is with thee," When God calls a person by a name, He makes that person what the name imports. But He takes the most abject man of an abject tribe, to make him His "mighty man of valour." "Ye see your calling, brethren, how that not many wise men after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble are called," 1 Cor. 1:26-29. God works not ordinarily by such: the credit would then be given to our wisdom, our influence, and the like, and it is written, "No flesh shall glory in his presence." He takes "the foolish things of the world to confound the wise, and the weak things of the world to confound the mighty, and base things of the world and things which are despised, yea, and things which are not, to bring to nought things that are.:: Is Timothy exhorted to "fight the good fight of faith? it is as one "strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus." To every Christian it may be said, as Paul writes to those at Corinth, "Watch ye, stand fast in the faith, quit you like men, be strong"; but again, we are told to be "strong in the Lord, and in the power of His might."

"And Gideon said unto him, Oh, my Lord, if Jehovah be with us, why then is all this befallen us? and where be all his miracles which our fathers told us of, saying, Did not Jehovah bring us up from Egypt? but now

Jehovah hath forsaken us, and delivered us into the hands of the Midianites," v. 13.

His heart has been touched, and prepared of the Lord for the work to which he is called. He has a deep sense of the condition of Israel upon his soul, though he is without the power to help them; and he has been comparing that condition with the title and power of Jehovah. This is the way of faith. It is not for us to be comparing ourselves among ourselves, we should compare our condition with the title and will of Jehovah to bless. Is not something of this sort the language of many a saint now? - Can it be possible that the Holy Ghost is in the church, whilst, at the same time, the church is so worldly, so divided? is it at all like what it was in the apostle's days? The answer of the Lord to the cry of Israel discloses the secret of our condition. We have sinned. We have not obeyed His voice. And, if awakened to the sense of what we have lost, oftentimes, there has not been the acknowledgment of our sin in departing from God, and it has, therefore, only led to fretfulness and impatience or to wrong pretensions. Gideon sees the Lord's hand to be upon His people, and that because of sin. But he identifies himself with the people. He might have said, 'Israel has sinned,' or 'Satan has driven us here'; and then, there would have been no hope. He cannot understand Jehovah's presence, without making His people happy; and he at once loses sight of himself in his interest in, and thoughts about, the people of God as God's people, and says, "If Jehovah be with us, why then is all this befallen us? . . . now Jehovah hath forsaken us, and delivered us into the hands of the Midianites."

350 "And Jehovah looked upon Gideon, and said, Go in this thy might, and thou shalt save Israel out of the hand of the Midianites: have not I sent thee?" v. 14.

Jehovah looked upon him. That is the first thing. The man who is really strong and mighty is he who has thus got into the secret of Israel's impoverishment. Jehovah has looked upon him. Jehovah has identified Himself with him, and shewn His heart to be towards him. There is no limit to his might. But does Gideon feel himself to be a strong man? No! never before had he so known his own weakness and insignificance; never had he so felt the poverty of his father's house as now. "And he said unto him, Oh my Lord, wherewith shall I save Israel? behold my family is poor in Manasseh, and I am the least in my father's house," v. 15.

Thus it is always with the soldiers of faith. They have never so felt their own weakness as they feel it when called to be God's mighty men of valour. "Not by might, nor by power, but by my Spirit, saith Jehovah of hosts." People often say, 'I want to feel that I am strong.' What we need is to feel that we are weak; this brings in Omnipotence. We shall have a life of feeling by-and-by in the glory; now we are called upon to lead a life of faith. What saint but knows from the experience of the deceitfulness of his own heart, that, had we power in ourselves instead of in Christ, we should be something. This is what God does not intend.

351 "Wherewith shall I save Israel?" His threshing instrument would have been a poor thing indeed to look to, as that "wherewith" to go against the host of Midian. Never, we repeat, had he felt the poverty of his father's house as now. When God is about to use a man, He makes that man feel in himself most consciously nothing. If He delivers by Gideon's hand, He must have the glory, not Gideon; His must be the strength, not Gideon's. It is always as it should be when we drop down into our nothingness. Strong in the Lord, we are weakest in ourselves. Can we not, almost invariably, trace our failures to self-confidence? When a believer thinks that he is going to do a feat, his failure often becomes ridiculous. God must abase that which is proud and lifted up.

"And Jehovah said unto him, Surely I will be with thee." As with David in another fight of faith, there was no sword in the hand of Gideon, not anything "wherewith" to go against the Midianites. But what matter of that? "If God be for us, who can be against us?" He goes not forth unarmed. "Surely I will be with thee [and as a consequence of that], thou shalt smite the Midianites as one man."

Here, then, is the mighty man of valour, and here is his armour.

Gideon asks a sign: -

"And he said unto him, If now I have found grace in thy sight, then shew me a sign that thou talkest with me. Depart not hence, I pray thee, until I come unto thee, and bring forth my present, and set it before thee."

There is feebleness here doubtless; he ought to have had simple confidence, and not have needed a sign; still all he really cares for is having Jehovah with him.

"And He said, I will tarry until thou come again."

"And Gideon went in, and made ready a kid and unleavened cakes of an ephah of flour: the flesh he put in a basket, and he put the broth in a pot, and brought it out unto him under the oak, and presented it. And the angel of God said unto him, Take the flesh and the unleavened cakes, and lay them upon this rock, and pour out the broth. And he did so. Then the angel of Jehovah departed out of his sight.

352 "And when Gideon perceived that he was an angel of Jehovah, Gideon said, Alas, O Lord Jehovah, for because I have seen an angel of Jehovah face to face."

Another mark of feebleness (we do not see this fear in Abraham, under similar circumstances): but Jehovah will give Gideon confidence to stand before Him.

"And Jehovah said unto him, Peace be unto thee; fear not: thou shalt not die," v. 17-23.

Is there not most important instruction for ourselves in all this? Faith has that to present to God which He can accept. Whatever our own failure, still Jesus is the same, the value of His work is unchanged. There has been of late an awakening to a good deal of busy activity in service; but God never says to a soul, "Peace be unto thee, fear not," because of service. We are in danger of putting service in the place of the burnt-offering. Where this is done, the soul gets weighed down, not being able to find satisfaction in the service, instead of going on in happy liberty of spirit.

Gideon's heart reassured, he builds an altar there unto Jehovah, and calls it JEHOVAH-SHALOM (v. 24).

And now he is prepared for service. He has been under God's tutorage. He has learned where his strength is (he no longer says, "wherewith shall I save Israel?") and Jehovah has given him confidence to stand before Him. But where does He set him to work? - with the Midianites? No, not in the least. He has to begin Jehovah's work at home, with that which is nearest to himself.

"And it came to pass the same night, that Jehovah said unto him, Take thy father's youngest bullock, even the second bullock of seven years old, and throw down the altar of Baal that thy father hath, and cut down the grove that is by it; and build an altar unto Jehovah thy God upon the top of the rock in the ordered place, and take the second bullock, and offer a burnt sacrifice with the wood of the grove which thou shalt cut down," v. 25, 26.

There judgment commences. We must "cease to do evil," before we "learn to do well." The Lord comes to us as "the God of peace"; still it is, 'Down with the idols in your father's house.' We may have been restless in service; but in the midst of much doing, how little have we done this, or ever practically attempted to set up God's altar "in the ordered place." Man's will has not been invaded. It is of the essence of wilfulness to say, 'I have a right to worship God how I like.' Obedience to God is the saint's rule and liberty. Not all the powers in the world have a title to interfere with this. And moreover, if God says, 'Pull down the altar of Baal,' He will give strength to do it.

353 How does Gideon act? His conduct is that of simple faith and obedience.

"Then Gideon took ten men of his servants, and did as Jehovah had said unto him: and so it was, because he feared his father's household and the men of the city, that he could not do it by day, that he did it by night," v. 27.

He acts unhesitatingly. And what is the consequence? Immediate opposition.

"When the men of the city arose early in the morning, behold the altar of Baal was cut down, and the grove was cut down that was by it (the grove might add beauty to the altar of Baal, but God's altar must be set up in its native simplicity), and the second bullock was offered upon the altar that was built. And they said one to another, Who hath done this? And when they enquired and asked, they said, Gideon the son of Joash hath done this thing. Then the men of the city said unto Joash, Bring out thy son, that he may die because he hath cast down the altar of Baal, and because he hath cut down the grove that was by it," v. 28-30.

The action of faith always excites the flesh. Israel knew not where their strength was, they thought it in Baal. Gideon had learned it to be in God. These are sifting times. In the Lord's day everything was apparently in beautiful order; but because He was setting aside men's traditions, all were against Him. So now. How many suppose the strength of Christians to consist in the things they see around them! The soul taught of God knows it is only in Jehovah Jesus.

"And Joash said unto all that stood against him, Will ye plead for Baal? will ye save him? he that will plead for him, let him be put to death whilst it is yet morning: if he be a god, let him plead for himself, because one hath cast down his altar. Therefore on that day he called him Jerubbaal, saying, Let Baal plead against him, because he hath thrown down his altar," v. 31, 32.

354 It was of no use to argue the case, except to shew the people the folly of pleading for Baal. If the things set aside were Baal's, and if Baal was a god, surely he would arise and take their part. It was of no use to debate. And do not let us suppose that all the arguments of all the good men in the world can make that which is evil, good. It is melancholy indeed to see the arguments that are devised by the wit of men in vindication of evil.* The bounden duty of the saint is to separate from evil, however sanctioned by antiquity or anything else.

{*It is a most fearful instance of the want of a sound mind, when we find so much perverse ingenuity, so many subtleties, so many analogies drawn, in order to lull the awakened conscience into contentedness with evil.}

The name "Jerubbaal" was no defence. On the contrary, it brought up the question whether there was power in Satan now that faith was in exercise.

When mixed up with the world, Satan has no occasion to disturb us. Let him be alarmed, and up come Midianites, Amalekites, etc. "Then all the Midianites, and the Amalekites, and the children of the cast were gathered together, and went over and pitched in the valley of Jezreel," v. 33.

Here is Gideon with his own people against him, and the enemies of Israel gathered together and pitching in Jezreel. But he has peace with God, and Jehovah is (so to speak) bound to appear on his side. How does he act? The Spirit of Jehovah comes upon him, and he blows the trumpet, and Abiezer is gathered after him (v. 34). Had Gideon been serving Baal, he could not have blown the trumpet thus. But Baal is down, and the altar of God is set up in the ordered place. He sends messengers throughout all Manasseh, who also are gathered unto him, and to Asher, Zebulun, and Naphtali; and these all are gathered around the man, who is least in his father's house, the poorest of the tribe of Manasseh, but to whom Jehovah has said, "Go in this thy might."

There seems still to have been a measure of distrust in Gideon's mind (v. 36-40). He asks a fresh and double sign that Jehovah will save by his hand, as he had said, proving by the fleece both wet and dry. Jehovah grants his desire; and he is sent forth, with the confirmed assurance of his divine call and mission, to "turn to flight the armies of the aliens."

355 Again let us remark, faithfulness begins not with the Midianites, it begins at home. This is a great principle (whether as to an individual soul, or as to the church of God). Gideon must attack the evil inside his father's house, and in the midst of Israel, before he is used of Jehovah to save Israel out of the hands of the Midianites.

The moment there is a thorough sense of grace, the word is, Go in this thy might."

He is set up as captain of a large army; and now he stands forth to confront the enemies of Israel, and of Jehovah.

"Then Jerubbaal, who is Gideon, and all the people that were with him rose up early, and pitched beside the well of Harod: so that the host of the Midianites were on the north side of them by the hill of Morah, in the valley," chap. 7:1.

This is God's way of acting. He never honours us when we are thinking that we are anything. Great blessing has often been preceded by our deep humbling, by humbling even sometimes in the eyes of others. We were brought low, and the Lord lifted us up.

But Gideon has a still further lesson to learn (one painfully our own). He has known the acceptance of his offering. The youngest of an idolatrous household, he has built an altar to Jehovah, and begun to destroy idolatry. But he has yet to be taught that there is not a bit more courage or prowess really in the men that had gathered after him than in himself

"And Jehovah said unto Gideon, The people that are with thee are too many for me to deliver the Midianites into their hands, lest Israel vaunt themselves against me saying, Mine own hand hath saved me," v. 2.

At once he has to get rid of a great number of them.

This is done first of all by means of an ancient ordinance of Moses. Jehovah tells him, "Now, therefore, go to proclaim in the ears of the people, saying, Whosoever is fearful and faint-hearted, let him return, and

depart early from mount Gilead." (Compare Deut. 20:8.) God's great design in His dealings was to teach Israel to trust in Himself. He wants to find in His people a true heart. A true heart makes a strong hand. Having confidence in the Captain of our salvation and not in ourselves, we faint not at the sight of our enemies, but reckon, with true-hearted Caleb, that "we are well able to overcome them."

356 "And there returned of the people twenty-and-two thousand. And there remained ten thousand," v. 3,

Do we not know what this means? We know that the Lord Jesus sent forth the proclamation. - 'Let those who will follow me count the cost.' "Foxes have holes [told He one, who had said unto Him, 'Lord, I will follow thee whithersoever thou goest'], and the birds of the air have nests, but the Son of man hath not where to lay his head" - and then there was fearfulness and faint-heartedness. When there was nothing but Christ, and everything else was against them, many turned back, and walked no more with Him. Confidence in the flesh must be renounced; God will not use the flesh.

The present is an age when people are coveting to know a little about everything. Were God to employ the learning of learned men, the influence of men of rank, and the like, the church would say, 'We have saved ourselves.' Those who have had what are called "the advantages of a good education," find that He says, 'Set your learning, your wisdom, your influence aside: I cannot save by these.' The use to be made of these things is to say of them with Paul, "What things were gain to me, those I counted loss for Christ." Often are these much coveted things found hindrances in the way of those who possess them, and the great thing to be done in conflict is to keep them under. God will not allow human learning, influence, moral character, or aught else, to come in as any item in our deliverance. He is very jealous of all man's substitutes for, and imitations of, the power of the Holy Ghost. In stripping ourselves of such things, we may seem to others to be throwing away our influence and our usefulness; but what is usefulness? what is "doing good"? The doing of God's will. And God is faith's sufficiency. To all appearance Gideon was weakening his own hands; at the first proclamation, twenty-two thousand left him; but in reality, instead of losing strength, he was gainer by their departure. These fearful and faint-hearted ones would have discouraged the rest had they remained amongst them - "Let him go and return unto his house, lest his brother's heart faint, as well as his heart." The flesh is very bold in word, but when it comes to the point of trial, with Peter, it curses, and swears that it knows not Jesus. There is a great deal of "philosophy and vain deceit" going about now. "Beware lest any man spoil you," says the apostle. Were all the trappings of the flesh laid aside, we should discern how little real spiritual energy there is amongst us. Do you ask, 'What shall I study?' Study well these four words: "the flesh profiteth nothing."

357 "And Jehovah said unto Gideon, The people are yet too many bring them down unto the water, and I will try them for thee there; and it shall be, that of whom I say unto thee, This shall go with thee, the same shall go with thee; and of whomsoever I say unto thee, This shall not go with thee, the same shall not go," v. 4.

There is such a thing as the trial of our faith; and, whilst we very often should be quite unable to test one another, God knows the best way of doing this as to each.

"So he brought down the people unto the water: and Jehovah said unto Gideon, Every one that lappeth of the water with his tongue, as a dog lappeth, him shalt thou set by himself; likewise every one that boweth down upon his knees to drink. And the number of them that lapped, putting their hand to their mouth, were three hundred men but all the rest of the people bowed down upon their knees to drink water. And Jehovah said unto Gideon, By the three hundred men that lapped will I save you, and deliver the

Midianites into thine hand: and let all the other people go every man unto his place. So the people took victuals in their hand, and their trumpets: and he sent all the rest of Israel every man unto his tent, and retained those three hundred men. And the host of Midian was beneath him in the valley," v. 5-8

God's ways are strange to sense: the infidel scoffs at them. These people were really not afraid (as those who departed before) to go to the battle; they were all of them soldiers girded for war - the test was this, whether, in that thirsty day they would lap the water, putting the hand to the mouth, or bow down and drink at their ease. The three hundred chosen ones (those by whom Jehovah was about to work) had not time for halting, their hearts being in the work, and they merely took a draught as they went on their way.

The apostle speaks of being "entangled with the affairs of this life" (2 Tim. 2 : 4); all that we can safely take, would we "please him who has chosen us to be soldiers," is just a draught by the way. There is a very great difference between being in the circumstances of this life, and being entangled with them. When tested by Jehovah, those who bowed down were not fit for His use, any more than (though they were not) the faint-hearted. They must go to their homes.

358 Glory is (for all who believe) God's answer to the work of Christ; grace is followed by glory Whom he justified, them he also glorified." Instead of its being this, the devil seeks to put it before the soul on the ground of our devotedness and zeal. At the same time, beloved, would not you and I that our place should have been with "the three hundred"? Shall we let slip the opportunity of confessing Jesus, because we are saved? In the experience of almost every believer there is a being brought down to the water - some turning-point, when he either goes onward in devotedness to the Lord, or otherwise sinks down into a mere common-place christian. Not one of us is too obscure to be tried whether he will seek God's honour, or present things, first.

Gideon (instructed that the battle is Jehovah's, and that he must get rid of all encumbrances) is next shewn his enemies.

"And it came to pass the same night, that Jehovah said unto him, Arise get thee down unto the host, for I have delivered it into thine hand," v. 9.

It is a blessed thing to be shewn our enemies and told with Gideon, that Jehovah has delivered them into our hands. Our old man is "crucified" (Rom. 6:6), the world "overcome," and its prince "judged," John 16:33, 11. If we are walking by faith, as risen with Christ, Satan, the world, and the flesh are under our feet.

And mark further, how graciously Jehovah anticipates the need of His servant, in adding: -

"But if thou fear to go down, go thou with Phurah thy servant down to the host; and thou shalt hear what they say; and afterward shall thine hands be strengthened to go down unto the host," v. 10, 11.

Not anything could be more alarming than to see the fearful odds that are against the people of faith - the world, the flesh, and the unceasing hostility of Satan! Who would not be faint-hearted, if we saw but this? God is pleased to let Gideon hear what is in the Midianites' hearts. So too is He pleased to let us know, very often, what is in the hearts of our enemies. "Art thou come hither to torment us before the time?" lets out the secret. And as to the men of the world, there is not one in a hundred of them but that has the fullest conviction that Christians are right; yet, because they have numbers on their side, they try to persuade themselves to the contrary. Almost everything he hears bids the intelligent Christian, 'Be strong.'

359 Let us follow Gideon.

"Then went he down with Phurah his servant unto the outside of the armed men that were in the host. And the Midianites, and the Amalekites, and all the children of the east, lay along in the valley like grasshoppers for multitude; their camels were without number, as the sand by the sea-side for multitude. And when Gideon was come, behold, there was a man that told a dream unto his fellow, and said, Behold I dreamed a dream, and lo, a cake of barley bread tumbled into the host of Midian, and came unto a tent and smote it that it fell, and overturned it, that the tent lay along. And his fellow answered and said, This is nothing else save the sword of Gideon the son of Joash, a man of Israel; for into his hand hath God delivered Midian, and all the host," v. 12-14.

Divine encouragement is never to the puffing up of the flesh. Anything of pride and self-importance must have been sorely wounded. When God will shew His favoured servant the things that are coming to pass, and that he shall smite the Midianites as one man, He makes him feel, that (in himself) he is but as a "cake of barley bread."

And is there not instruction for ourselves in this? Were Christians stripped of their worldliness, more really like the cake of barley bread "(the most homely thing possible), the world would stand more in fear of them. We have clothed ourselves with its trappings and desired its respectability, so that it thinks we are obliged to go to it for help. There is an unhealthy kind of zeal, often found amongst us, which makes a person ask himself, How shall I give a testimony? Rather let each saint seek to shew forth "the mind that was in Christ Jesus." A man, always anxious to prove himself an honest man, we should begin to suspect; and if a person is always very anxious to prove that he is a Christian, it is doubtful whether he yet knows much of the mind of Christ. Let us quietly subside into simple God-fearing God-acknowledging Christianity, and though outwardly, as a cake of barley bread, the world would feel about us, as the Midianite speaks of Gideon to his fellow.

360 "And it was so, when Gideon heard the telling of the dream, and the interpretation thereof, that he worshipped."

Before he goes to battle, he worships in the full confidence of victory. The worship of faith is always the worship of confidence. Were we more really, in our own eyes, the "cake of barley bread," there would be more abounding praise.

He worshipped: - "and returned into the host of Israel, and said, Arise; for Jehovah hath delivered into your* hand the host of the Midianites," v. 15.

{*Here again there is the setting aside of self. He does not say, "into my hand," but "into your hand." Jehovah had said, "into thine hand "(v. 9), and the Medianite "into his hand "(v. 14).}

What is this "host of Israel"? Three hundred men! The Midianites are "as grasshoppers for multitude," Jehovah's "host," but a handful of men! It is most important to see the dignity attached to the three hundred. God (as we have before remarked in the history of this mighty man of valour) reckons not according to what we are in ourselves but according to that which He makes us.

And had He actually delivered the Midianites into the hand of Israel? No. Neither as yet is Satan actually under our feet, though faith counts him to be. Had Gideon said, 'I will not believe before I get the spoil,' that would have been unbelief.

And now comes the conflict.

"And he divided the three hundred men into three companies, and put a trumpet in every man's hand, with empty pitchers, and lamps within the pitchers. And he said unto them, Look on me, and do likewise: and behold, when I come to the outside of the camp, it shall be, that as I do, so shall ye do. When I blow with a trumpet, I and all that are with me, then blow ye the trumpets also on every side of all the camp, and say, The sword of Jehovah and of Gideon," v. 16-18.

The weapons of their warfare were the most foolish things imaginable, trumpets, pitchers, and lamps in the pitchers! Faith's weapons must be mighty through God alone.

"So Gideon, and the hundred men that were with him, came unto the outside of the camp, in the beginning of the middle watch; and they had but newly set the watch: and they blew the trumpets, and brake the pitchers that were in their hands. And the three companies blew the trumpets, and brake the pitchers, and held the lamps in their left hands, and the trumpets in their right hands to blow withal; and they cried, The sword of Jehovah and of Gideon! And they stood every man in his place round about the camp; and all the host ran and cried and fled. And the three hundred blew the trumpets, and Jehovah set every man's sword against his fellow, even throughout all the host: and the host fled to Beth-shittah in Zererath, and to the border of Abel-meholah, unto Tabbath. And the men of Israel gathered themselves together out of Naphtali, and out of Asher, and out of all Manasseh, and pursued after the Midianites," v. 19-23.

361 These things shall yet be acted over again. Now the weapons wherewith we have to fight are testimony by word of mouth and our own insignificance. Our power is in giving testimony to Jesus, and never getting out of the place of being but "earthen vessels." We must remember that the vessel only contains the light, let us not pretend that it is the light. The excellency of the power must be of God and not of us.

And Gideon sent messengers throughout all mount Ephraim, saying, Come down against the Midianites."

Impotent in ourselves for blessing (and having found this out), but having proved the blessedness of simple dependence upon God, we can, with Gideon, call upon others to have fellowship with us (v. 24, 25). But let us not be setting up ourselves. Everything depends upon the presence of the Holy Ghost, ungrieved, unhindered. Let this be told, and let us hide ourselves.

The men of Ephraim are seen at the close of chapter 7 slaying Oreb and Zeeb. (They are allowed to come in for blessing in result.) Now they turn and chide with Gideon for not having called them at the first.

"And the men of Ephraim said unto him, Why hast thou served us thus, that thou calledst us not, when thou wentest to fight with the Midianites? and they did chide with him sharply," chap. 8:1.

This is just what the half-hearted Christian does. He is very angry at not being associated with those who are wholehearted. But whose is the fault? Whenever there is any energy of the Spirit of God working in the church, the language of the men of Ephraim is the language of such; 'Why not have taken us with you?' Faith's answer is very simple, 'Because then we must have gone on your ground; what we have to do is to go wherever the Lord leads: we cannot stop to make compacts and agreements.' No one Christian has a right to stop on his way for another; he must go forward himself in individual faithfulness. The effort to drag others along with us is in reality but a device of Satan to keep ourselves back. Note Jehovah's word to Jeremiah, "Let them return unto thee; but return not thou to them," Jer. 15:19. Are any desirous of going

forward, let them not stop to carry along with them "the men of Ephraim." Far better is it to go on with but few to follow, than to get numbers with us who are only half-hearted.

362 "And Gideon said, What have I done now in comparison of you? Is not the gleaning of the grapes of Ephraim better than the vintage of Abi-ezer? God hath delivered into your hands the princes of Midian, Oreb and Zeeb: and what was I able to do in comparison of you? "v. 2, 3.

Let us mark this. Where the power of God is most working, there is always the deepest grace, and the consciousness that all that we are, we are by the grace of God. What a manifestation have we here of the mind that was in Christ! How graciously did the Lord speak of His poor, failing, faithless disciples; "Ye are they," said He, that have continued with me in my temptations," Luke 22:28, Gideon esteems others better than himself. Not any thing so hinders blessing (individual or collective) as a feeling of superiority to others. The exercised soul will judge itself, whilst it sees that which is done by another in the light of grace. Gideon casts himself and his three hundred in the shade and brings into prominence the victory of the men of Ephraim. If honest in self-judgment, have we not at times detected in ourselves something of an inclination to overlook grace in other saints because they "followed not with us? "Grace is able to fasten on that in a brother that is pleasing to God, and seeks to bring it out, passing over in so doing, very much there may be, along with it of failure. Jesus knew, and perfectly, the weakness and failure of His disciples, though He addressed them as He did. It is a blessing when we can sink ourselves, that others may come into prominence. "Let your light," it is said, "so shine before men, that they may see your good works [not, you], and glorify (not you, but) your Father which is in heaven." If any chide with us, let us seek grace to go down, and take the lowest place, and give them credit. - "Then their anger was abated toward him, when he had said that." See Prov. 15:1, "A soft answer turneth away wrath."

363 "And Gideon came to Jordan, and passed over, he, and the three hundred men that were with him, faint yet pursuing them," v. 4.

What three little words could be more blessedly descriptive of the Christian, than these? - not, 'faint and sitting down,' not, 'faint and giving-up,' - but 'faint, yet pursuing.' We have to do with Him who "giveth power to the faint," Isa. 40:29. "To them that have no might he increaseth strength." It is a blessed use to make of our faintness and weariness, that of drawing out of the fulness of the supply of grace and strength in Christ. It is said, "Be strong in the Lord, and in the power of his might"; but to whom? To the one who has no strength in himself, who would give up his course if strength were not supplied to him. One victory achieved, the conflict goes on afresh. Do we find ourselves fainting in spirit? Still let us go on, for our God giveth strength to the weak. We like not this trial of faith. It is very painful doubtless to feel day after day our own weakness. We want to feel that the battle is over; but let us remember that now is our time of war. We are called on to fight "as good soldiers of Jesus Christ," and that in a daily round of conflicts. Today there has been sufficient grace and sufficient evil, and to-morrow there will be sufficient grace and sufficient evil. What we need is to live day by day on God. He is faithful, and will supply strength according to the occasion and need. The church will not be at rest till the Lord comes. But weakness ought to be no hindrance to our going forward - "faint, yet pursuing." It is a sad thing to be a spiritual sluggard, for a saint, like a door on its hinges, never to get off himself. The moment a person has learnt to renounce himself, he goes forward. Were felt weakness a reason for standing still, who so weak as Gideon?

The next thing taught us in this history is that the world is neither able nor willing to supply refreshment to the man of faith. The world never gives, it may concede something to us, if we concede something to it, but it never gives. That which is required by it is, generally, the sacrifice of faithfulness.

"And he said unto the men of Succoth, Give, I pray you, loaves of bread unto the people that follow me: for they be faint, and I am pursuing after Zebah and Zalmunna, kings of Midian. And the princes of Succoth said, Are the hands of Zebah and Zalmunna now in thine hand, that we should give bread unto thine army?" v. 5, 6.

364 If you profess to the world that you are "following after resurrection glory, "pressing toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus "(Phil. 3), you will not meet with anything at its hands but some such taunt as this.

"And Gideon said, Therefore, when Jehovah hath delivered Zebah and Zalmunna into mine hand, then I will tear your flesh with the thorns of the wilderness and with briers. And he went up thence to Penuel, and spake unto them likewise: and the men of Penuel answered him as the men of Succoth had answered him. And he spake also unto the men of Penuel, saying, When I come again in peace, I will break down this tower," v. 7, 9.

In the confidence of victory Gideon was going forward (though consciously faint), and these princes of Succoth and the men of Penuel would not come to the help of Jehovah against the mighty. To them it seemed a foolish thing to be fighting with three hundred men against such enemies. So we seem to be very fools when we speak of certain glory. We must make up our minds to this. There are no resources to be had from the world, to help us on in the conflict in which we are engaged. 'You say you are kings and priests unto God, that you are to have glory,' is the taunt of unbelief, 'but you cannot shew us anything for it: when we see you in the glory, we will believe.'

We have not one thing to shew, not anything of which the natural man can take notice. Our wisdom is foolishness. We must go on feeling our weakness, confident of victory. By-and-by the tables will be turned. The taunts and reproaches of the world will bring down judgment on their own heads. One special thing that the Lord is coming to judge is, we are told, "all their hard speeches which ungodly sinners have spoken against him," Jude 15. There is not any present ridicule of His saints that will not be regarded as against Himself in that day.

"Now Zebah and Zalmunna were in Karkor, and their hosts with them, about fifteen thousand men, all that were left of all the hosts of the children of the east: for there fen an hundred and twenty thousand men that drew sword," v. 10.

365 "And Gideon went up by the way of them that dwelt in tents on the east of Nobah and Jogbehah, and smote the host: for the host was secure. And when Zebah and Zalmunna fled, he pursued after them, and took the two kings of Midian, Zebah and Zalmunna, and discomfited all the host," v. 11, 12.

"And Gideon, the son of Joash, returned from battle before the sun was up, and caught a young man of the men of Succoth, and enquired of him: and he described unto him the princes of Succoth, and the elders thereof, even threescore and seventeen men. And he came unto the men of Succoth, and said, Behold Zebah and Zalmunna, with whom ye did upbraid me saying, Are the hands of Zebah and Zalmunna now in thine hand, that we should give bread unto thy men that are weary? And he took the elders of the city, and thorns of the wilderness and briers, and with them he taught the men of Succoth. And he beat down the tower of Penuel, and slew the men of the city," v. 13-17.

"Then said he unto Zebah and Zalmunna, What manner of men were they whom ye slew at Tabor? And they answered, As thou art, so were they; each one resembled the children of a king. And he said, They

were my brethren, even the sons of my mother: as Jehovah liveth, if ye had saved them alive, I would not slay you. And he said unto Jether his first-born, Up, and slay them. But the youth drew not his sword; for he feared, because he was yet a youth. Then Zebah and Zalmunna said, Rise thou, and fall upon us: for as the man is, so is his strength. And Gideon arose, and slew Zebah and Zalmunna, and took away the ornaments that were on their camels' necks," v. 18-21.

"Then the men of Israel said unto Gideon, Rule thou over us, both thou and thy son, and thy son's son also; for thou hast delivered us from the hand of Midian. And Gideon said unto them, I will not rule over you, neither shall my son rule over you: Jehovah shall rule over you," v. 22, 23.

The Lord Jesus would not be made king by the people (John 6:15). He came in His Father's name (they would not receive Him thus) and He would not be received in His own name. It is a very different thing being received in our own names, from our being in the name of the Lord. Gideon retires; he will not take the place of rule that belongs only to Jehovah. He knows that if the people's minds are fixed on Gideon, nothing but weakness and dishonour can result; but that if Jehovah be acknowledged and leaned on, there will be strength and blessing. Do we not find this principle running all through the New Testament?

366 Paul hides himself. Though having had such revelations from the Lord, though possessing such a compass of knowledge, yet the moment he sees the spirit coming in of setting up Paul, he says, "Who then is Paul, and who is Apollos, but ministers by whom ye believed, even as the Lord gave to every man? I have planted, Apollos watered; but God gave the increase." So again, "Therefore let no man glory in men: for all things are yours; whether Paul. or Apollos, or Cephas," etc. (1 Cor. 3). Had he put himself forward, Christ would not have been seen. And this principle, true of Gideon, true of Paul, is true of every saint acting in faith.

One special mark of growth in grace is evidenced in our magnifying the name of the Lord Jesus, even though it be in the vilifying of our own names before the saints, and before the world, in our taking all blame to ourselves, and our giving all praise to the Lord. "He that glorieth, let him glory in the Lord."

Had the history of Gideon closed here, what a beautiful picture would it have presented!

There is none perfect but the Lord. He is the true Gideon, the true Samson, the true David. At the close of the chapter we see declension after revival - speedy declension, and that proceeding from Gideon himself.

"And Gideon said unto them, I would desire a request of you, that ye would give me every man the earrings of his prey (for they had golden earrings because they were Ishmaelites)": -

He wanted some monument to signalize his victory. These earrings were the spoils of triumph confessedly from Jehovah.

"And they answered, We will willingly give them. And they spread a garment, and did cast therein every man the earrings of his prey. And the weight of the golden earrings that he requested was a thousand and seven hundred shekels of gold, besides ornaments, and collars, and purple raiment that was on the kings of Midian, and besides the chains that were about their camels' necks. And Gideon made an ephod thereof, and put it in his city, even in Ophrah: and all Israel went thither a whoring after it, which thing became a snare unto Gideon, and to his house," v. 24-27.

367 Man seeks something whereby to perpetuate present blessing. This has ever been one way of his perverseness. 'What security have you that it will last?' he asks, and faith answers, 'None whatever, but

the presence of the Holy Ghost.' If we attempt to secure it by other means like Gideon, we make an ephod. We seek to perpetuate blessing, to secure it to others, but in a very short time keep up the form (having lost the power), and worship that instead of God, just as Gideon's ephod had divine honours paid to it. What is it to have a set of principles (however scriptural) without the power of the Spirit? The only thing to give perpetuity of blessing is the presence of the Holy Ghost. God has wrought in the way of revival, and men whose hearts bounded with love to God and to their fellow-men have said, "Oh, we will perpetuate the blessing," and nothing but evil has come of it. We cannot secure the truth of God by arrangements of our own. Such arrangements may spring from a feeling of piety, but they evidence a want of dependence upon God. There was the energy of the Spirit working in Gideon, but he it was who prepared the way for Israel's re-apostasy.

The restoration lasted not longer than there was individual energy of faith.

"Thus was Midian subdued before the children of Israel, so that they lifted up their heads no more: and the country was in quietness forty years in the days of Gideon. And Jerubbaal, the son of Joash, went and dwelt in his own house And Gideon, the son of Joash, died in a good old age, and was buried in the sepulchre of Joash his father, in Ophrah of the Abi-ezrites."

"And it came to pass as soon as Gideon was dead, that the children of Israel turned again, and went a whoring after Baalim, and made Baal-berith their god. And the children of Israel remembered not Jehovah their God, who had delivered them out of the hands of all their enemies on every side: neither shewed they kindness to the house of Jerubbaal, namely Gideon, according to all the goodness which he had shewed unto Israel," v. 28-35.

Of what use was the ephod now? It had entirely failed of effecting that, which doubtless Gideon designed it should effect. And have not the well-designed efforts of men of God, who have sought to provide for the pure truth, repeatedly ended in the same way? The great thing we have to look to is (not the holding in prominence this or that particular doctrine, but) the ungrieved presence of the Holy Ghost. Let us remember that He is the Holy Spirit, repressive ever of the flesh. If I have set up something, that something becomes an object to me instead of the Lord. His glory must be the prominent thing. How speedy was the departure of the church from God at the first even in Paul's days! "All sought their own, not the things which are Jesus Christ's," Phil. 2:21.

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