

What In The World Am I Here For?

Judges 7:1-15

Created to Belong

Introduction

When I was a kid, my favorite television show was called “The Life and Times of Grizzly Adams”. The series was “loosely based” upon a real life character, John Adams, who was a California mountain man who lived from 1812-1860. The TV “Grizzly Adams” was played by Dan Haggerty and was about a mountain man who was accused of a crime that he didn't commit and in order to escape false prosecution, fled to live in the mountains with his pet grizzly bear “Ben”. I loved that show, because with every episode, I was awe-struck with the majesty of those rugged mountains that Grizzly Adams called home. Heck, I wanted to BE Grizzly Adams. I wanted to venture off into the Rocky Mountains and live a life of solitude just like him. As a child, I wasn't very good at the social graces that were required to make friends. I grew up on a farm, and quite frankly, I could relate to my critters a lot better than I could interact with folks. I was quite certain that the life of a mountain hermit would be the best thing for me. No neighbors, no kid brother constantly going through my stuff, no mom and dad telling me what to do. Now THAT had to be the life for me. I was certain of it. Unfortunately, I was a foolish child who had absolutely no clue of what life was all about. I think that is why God gives children parents to guide them, because quite honestly, sometimes kids just don't have a lot of good sense (but that is a sermon for another day).

The main problem with my “Grizzly Adams” life plan was that no human was EVER designed by his Creator to “go it alone” as it were. We were created for God's purpose, for God's pleasure, and to be a part of God's community. Jesus never said, “You will know that they are My disciples by the way that they avoid one another!” But rather, He said, **“By this everyone will know that you are My disciples, if you love one another” (John 13:35)**. Love doesn't run off to the mountains. Love binds you to others. God has specifically designed us for community, not solitude. All my life I have heard people say, “Pastor, I can worship God just as good up in the mountains, or out on the lake as I can in church.” There is a Greek word for that, “Baloney”! While it is certainly true that you can worship God in the mountains (I know, because I have done some really good praying from a deer stand), if you truly belong to God, and are living according to His plan, you WILL be in a church somewhere. Period. It is perfectly fine to go climb a mountain to “get away from it all”, but it is absolutely NOT fine to stay on that mountain. Your life can only be fulfilled by being a part of something bigger than yourself. Every Christian must be part of The Body of Christ in order to live a life of obedience.

All that being said, The Church is NOT just a social club either. Though we do spend time in fellowship encouraging one another, God has placed us within this body of believers with a mission in mind. We are not here just to have a group of friends, we are actually called to be soldiers in an army of God with an important mission to accomplish. We are, as you have heard me say many times, here to make disciples of all nations (**Matthew 28:19-20**). Simply put, we are an advancing army, assembled by Christ Himself to take ground from our enemy the Devil. Christ is our commander, and we advance by His order, for the battle can only be won by His might. I love the recruitment slogan for the U.S. Army; “BE ALL THAT YOU CAN BE. JOIN THE ARMY”. What a powerful statement! Truth be told, while I am a great fan of our nation's military and am so very grateful for their service, there is but ONE way to truly become “ALL that you can be”, and THAT is by joining up to be a member of God's special forces, to surrender your all to Christ and forever belong to His mighty army, keeping in mind these three things: 1) The Battle Is The Lord's; 2) The Battle Is Not For the Fainthearted; and 3) The Battle Is Not For The Self-Absorbed.

The Battle Is the Lord's

After Gideon had been firmly reassured by The Lord that he was indeed to go and make war upon the Midianites, He arose early the next day to assemble his troops (**vs. 1**). I LOVE it that he got up early! That says a lot about Gideon's faith at this point. It is as if he is saying to himself, “There's no sense in putting it off any longer. God has spoken. THAT SETTLES IT, I BELIEVE IT, SO LETS GO!”

There is no point in waiting once you have had a word from The LORD, the time of action is at hand. Jesus commanded us in the church to go out and make disciples. There's no need to pray about it, we have already received the command, all that is left for us to do now is obey. When the commander says "March", it is time for the troops to start moving. We should take a lesson from Gideon and get busy doing what we know to be doing.

Thirty-two thousand men showed up that day to fight. While that sounds like a lot of soldiers, it was actually an insignificant force compared to the one hundred and thirty-five thousand Midianites that they were going to fight against! Gideon, was probably wondering to himself as to where he could find some additional fighting men, when the voice of The LORD speaks to him and says the unthinkable: **"You have too many men for Me to deliver Midian into their hands" (vs. 2).** OH MY GOODNESS, how Gideon must have thought that he had heard THAT wrong! Too many men? He had less than a fourth of the force that the Midianites had. The problem was, God didn't want these troops to be assembled as a great and mighty fighting force, he wanted them assembled so that they could bear witness to the fact that HE was an Almighty God. He wouldn't be needing their help for that, they had just been invited to go along. God told Gideon the if He gave them the victory with their 32,000 men, then they would take the credit rather than giving it to God where it belonged. God tells Gideon that He wants the army reduced, **"In order that Israel may not boast against Me that her own strength has saved her..."** The word that God uses here that is translated "boast" in the text is "*pa-ar*" which actually means to glorify oneself. God was about to do a mighty miracle to prove to the nation of Israel that He alone must be worshipped as God. He was about to display His mighty power in order to Glorify Himself. There wasn't going to be the slightest chance that He was going to share that glory with men. It was HIS glory. This was HIS moment, and this was HIS battle. The only ONE who would be glorifying Himself on this day was God, and not a single one of Gideon's soldiers. We must, as Christians, be ever mindful of this fact. If this church is to do anything of greatness for the kingdom, we MUST remember that it has nothing to do with us and everything to do with Christ! Don't take credit for God's work. To do so is a sure fire way to be ineffective in this war against the Devil. God is the only one who can fight this battle. We have simply been called alongside to be His witnesses! If we are truly able to keep this in perspective, then we will see God do wondrous things in our midst. If we start to take the credit, then we will only be able to do what we can do, which is quite frankly, nothing (**John 15:5**). The Battle is The LORD'S.

The Battle Is Not For the Fainthearted

In the first phase of the "weeding out" process The LORD instructs Gideon to announce to the people that any who are afraid may return to their homes, if they so choose. This was actually a long standing policy that dates back to The Law of Moses:

"When you are about to go into battle, the priest shall come forward and address the army.

He shall say: 'Hear, Israel: Today you are going into battle against your enemies.

Do not be fainthearted or afraid; do not panic or be terrified by them.

For The LORD your God is the one who goes with you, to fight FOR you against your enemies to give you the victory.'

The officers shall say to the army:

"Has anyone built a new house and not yet begun to live in it?

Let him go home, or he may die in battle and someone else may begin to live in it.

Has anyone planted a vineyard and not begun to enjoy it?

Let him go home, or he may die in battle and someone else enjoy it.

Has anyone become pledged to a woman and not married her?

Let him go home, or he may die in battle and someone else marry her.

'Then the officers shall add, 'Is anyone afraid or fainthearted?

Let him go home so that his fellow soldiers will not become disheartened too.”
Deuteronomy 20:2-8

God gave Gideon's men the choice. If you are too afraid to fight, then go home. Notice that He didn't MAKE them go, He simply gave them the option. Faith is usually mingled with a little fear. I believe that most of us can agree on that. The problem is, when we do not have enough faith to OVERCOME our fear. One of my favorite examples of this reality can be found in the story of "The Rich Young Ruler" in **Mark Chapter 10**. The man fell on his knees before Jesus and desperately desired to have eternal life. But sadly, he was unable to part with his money and surrender his all to Christ. It wasn't his greed that kept him from following, but rather it was his fear. He trusted his money, more than he trusted Christ. His fear kept him from following. Immediately after he turned to walk away, Jesus turned to go to Jerusalem. His followers knew that by going there they would all be risking their very lives. The Bible says in **Mark 10:32** that ***"as they followed they were afraid"***. Did you catch that? They were afraid, but they followed nonetheless! I LOVE that verse. Let's just be honest for a moment here. Sometimes, I get a little afraid of what God has called me to. Sometimes I get discouraged and want to run away. Can I get a witness? But God, has called me to a life of obedience, but I have determined that I will trust in Him. Therefore, I will follow where He leads. I will go and make disciples. I will preach and teach His word on every opportunity that He allows me, and I will trust Him to use it for His glory. I may be afraid, but I WILL follow .

Being an obedient soldier in The Army of God (The Church) is NOT for the faithless or fainthearted. It is for those who are determined to obey no matter the consequences. When the Bible says in **Revelation 21:8**, that the cowardly and the unbelieving will be cast into hell alongside the immoral and other evil doers, this is exactly what that verse means. If we shirk away from God's call to follow in spite of our fears, then it is proof that we were never really His in the first place. Now THERE'S a message you'll never hear from the "TV preachers". The Church is no place for half-hearted followers who are willing to turn back at the first sign of trouble. Jesus is looking for soldiers, not quitters.

Twenty-two thousand of Gideon's men turned back that day! The Bible doesn't tell us how Gideon felt about this turn of events, but I imagine He wasn't exactly overcome with joy. Every day, I see people quitting on God. It is terribly discouraging when you put such effort and encouragement into some people only to see them walk away when things don't turn out exactly like they wanted. The Apostle John tells us that those folks were never really believers to begin with (**1 John 2:19**). We have been called as Christians to ***"take up our cross and follow Jesus"*** (**Matthew 16:24**). Doesn't the very language of that statement suggest that it is most likely going to involve some degree of difficulty? Don't be a quitter. Allow your faith to overcome your fears, and I promise you'll be there to see God do a mighty work. Twenty-two thousand men "played it safe" and missed out on one of the greatest victories ever recorded in scripture! I'll bet that they lived to regret it for the rest of their lives. Faith is the victory that overcomes the world (**1 John 5:4**). I say again, the Battle is not for the fainthearted.

The Battle Is Not For The Self-Absorbed

Being in the ministry for several years now, I have learned a few things about church. Lots of people try to plant churches with a particular demographic in mind. There have been scores of publications written that will tell you if you're after this type of congregation, then use this kind of worship music, and if you're after this type of people group, teach using this particular style, and the list goes on and on. If you truly feel led to plant a church, then let me give you a piece of advice. Just be who God created you to be. Be as authentic as you possibly can, and by all means, just let God send you who he wants to send. In short, let God build the church, and you just serve the people he sends you. He alone knows what He wants to accomplish, and only He can search the hearts and minds of the people He can use to do the work.

After thinning Gideon's forces from 32,000 to a paltry 10,000, God tells Gideon that he still has too many in the army. He directs Gideon to take his men down to the water and observe them as they drank. No doubt every man was thirsty for they all proceeded to drink the cool water to quench their thirst, but little did they know that God was testing them there at the spring of Harod (a word meaning anxious or careful). Nine thousand, seven hundred men fell down to the ground putting their faces into the water and carelessly drank their fill, while only three hundred remembered that they were about to go to war as they cautiously dropped to a knee and lapped the water from their hands. These three hundred men, who were just as thirsty as the rest, never for a moment placed their own needs above the mission that was at hand. God spoke to Gideon and said, **"With the three hundred men that lapped, I will save you and give you the Midianites into your hands" (vs. 7).**

THREE HUNDRED MEN! These were the only ones chosen to be present as witnesses of God's miraculous victory over the Midianites! Why? Because God is looking for those who do not place their own wants and desires above the calling that He has given them. As we referenced earlier the verse where Jesus said we must take up our cross and follow, there is also another part to that verse that says before we can take up our cross and follow we must FIRST deny ourselves. There can be no such thing as a self-absorbed Christian. We can either live to please ourselves or live a life that pleases God. There is no in-between. Nine thousand, seven hundred men were sent home that day because God uses the selfless and not the selfish. To follow Christ and be a member of His mighty army, The Church, we must be willing to sacrifice our selves upon His altar and by faith follow where He leads. Does this sound like what you signed up for when you became a Christian? Each of us must count the cost and determine whether or not we are willing to make the sacrifice. This is what the Apostle Paul meant when he said to the Romans, **"Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God's mercy, to offer yourselves as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God—This is your spiritual act of worship" (Romans 12:1).**

In closing, I would like to look closely at what God did for Gideon to encourage his faith after He reduced his army to a paltry three hundred troops. He directed Gideon to take his armor bearer and sneak down to the Midianites' camp for a little recon mission. Gideon obeyed and took his servant Purah under the cover of darkness to the edge of the enemy encampment. We serve an Awesome God. Never forget that. He led Gideon to a specific tent where he could overhear a Midianite soldier who had just awakened from a terrible nightmare about a loaf of barley bread that had rolled into his tent and demolished it (**vs. 13**). The soldier with him, his voice trembling with fear interpreted the dream, telling his companion that the barley loaf was none other than Gideon the Israelite who was coming to destroy them all. Think about that for a moment. God saw to it that Gideon would hear of his soon coming victory from the very mouths of those he was about to go and fight! No wonder he prostrated himself upon the ground and worshipped God on that very spot! God had removed any doubt or fear that had remained in this young farmers heart.

It is also important to note that God had used a barley loaf to represent Gideon in the dream. Barley was considered to be an inferior grain when compared to wheat. A barley loaf was in this culture "poor people's bread". What is the significance? Remember what Gideon had said to God when He called him to lead? He basically said, "How can You use me like that? I am a nothing and a nobody. What he did not understand is that God can use a "nobody", someone who is humble and weak. Scripture is filled with wondrous stories of God taking a nobody and changing the world. Jesus used twelve "nobodies" to turn the whole world upside down with the gospel. Do you know what that means? It means that He can use us as well. And He will. He has called us together as a church to do wondrous things in His mighty name. This is what you were created to do. You were designed not to be a Grizzly Adams, wandering alone in the wilderness, but rather, HIS hand picked soldier in the army of God. Just remember that, if you're wanting to join today and be all that you can be, 1)The Battle Is The Lord's; 2) The Battle Is Not For the Fainthearted; and 3) The Battle Is Not For The Self-Absorbed. So let's get ready to rumble! And ALL of God's people said... TRUTH!!!