

Place: Lurgan Baptist 3:12:2002

Reading: Judges 7:1-25

## HEARTS OF IRON, FEET OF CLAY

### 7. PREPARED FOR VICTORY !

A Frenchman named Emile Coue flourished in the early part of the 20th century. He claimed to have discovered and developed an almost infallible method of healing. Basically it was this, when you were sick, if you kept insisting to yourself that you were really getting better, you could quite literally talk yourself out of your illness. You were to repeat a little phrase twenty times in a row on two occasions daily.

*" Every day, in every way I am getting better and better Every day, in every way, I am getting better and better."*

Coue claimed that he had seen people cured of heart trouble, ulcers, bronchitis, clubfeet, bad nerves and a multitude of other problems, by following his method. Believe you're getting better, and you will. And often you do. Coue is only one of hundreds of people in various walks of life who hold that a positive outlook on life and a strong sense of self-confidence will take care of their problems. *" If we believe, we can we can."* Convinced of that, an athlete " psyches himself up," before a big game, a coach inspires his team with a pep talk, a sales manager conducts a motivation seminar, and a general tries to convince his troops that they

cannot possibly lose. *" Men we can do it. We've got what it takes. Let's go get them."* That reminds me of a little melody that goes like this:

*He tackled the thing that couldn't be done  
With a will he went right to it  
He tackled the thing that couldn't be done  
And he found he couldn't do it.*

Now its interesting to see the way God prepares His men for the battles they will face. The Coues, the Churchill's of this world seek to prepare us by building up our self-confidence, but the Lord does something completely different. He does not build up our self-confidence, but out dependence upon Him. When God wants a man or woman to do great things for Him, He builds into that man or woman not self-confidence but God-confidence. Nowhere is this seen more clearly than in ( Judges Ch 7 ) when God prepared Gideon for battle against Midian. Now we're going to try and summarise the teaching of two chapters this .... and in seeking to do that I want to use four words.

### (1) SUBTRACTION: GOD MUST HAVE THE GLORY

God teaches this lesson, at the Spring of Harod located at the base of the Gilboa range. Hudson Taylor pioneer missionary in China believed that God knew his needs and would meet them. On one occasion when Taylors assets were down to 87 cents he wrote to a friend.

*" We have this and all the promises of God."* You see,

God frequently cuts down our resources in order that we may depend entirely on Him. Sometimes the Lord allows sickness or financial reverse or difficulty of one kind or another to put us in fighting trim and train us to rely solely on His power. For when the Lord finished preparing Gideon and His army for battle Gideon had no other choice but to trust God. When the odds are overwhelming God overwhelms the odds. Now look at this situation. Camped at the Spring of Harod at the foot of Mount Gilboa the Israelites were keenly aware of the army of the Midianites numbering 135,000 ( 7:12 8:10 )

Can't you imagine Gideon saying, " *Lord how can we do it ? We don't have a chance. There's not enough of us.*" Then God comes and says, " *Gideon you have too many. You are too big. We have to cut down your numbers.*" ***Subtraction ! Why ? God must the glory !*** ( 7:2 ) So what did God do ?

### ***(a) GOD TOOK AWAY FORCES FROM ISRAEL:***

Did you that two test were applied ? There was:

#### *1. The Test of FEARFULNESS:*

In ( Deut 20:1-4 ,8 ) God gave an order about how Israel was to enter the battle. You see fear is contagious, it focuses on the problem, not upon the God who is greater than the problems. Fear and faith can't live together very long in the same heart. Either fear will conquer faith and we'll quit, or faith will conquer fear and we'll triumph. John Wesley said on

one occasion,

" *Give me a hundred men who fear nothing but sin and love nothing but God, and I will shake the gates of hell.*" Can you imagine how Gideon felt when 22,000 left ? He probably expected a few to go, but two thirds of his army ? My .... by this time his heart was in his boots. But God was not finished with Gideon yet for He came to Gideon again and said, " *Gideon, you still have too many men,*" and then He announced a second test.

#### *2. The Test of FERVENCY:*

For Gideon was to test the remaining 10,000 men at the nearby Spring of Harod by observing how each drank.

You see, the way they drank revealed their attitude to the enemy. Most of the soldiers had their mind only on drinking. They forgot all about Midian. But there were 300 men, 3 percent of the 10,000 who had a different perspective. There were the lappers and the kneelers, and God chose the lappers, who would not take their eyes off the enemy even to satisfy their thirst. There were *32,000 Faithful men*, who were willing to fight. There were *10,000 Fearless men*, but there were only *300 Fervent Men*, who were committed wholeheartedly to engaging the enemy in battle. Imagine, 300 men going out to do battle with 135,000, outnumbered 450 to 1 ! *It was either trust God or perish !* You see, God frequently cuts down on our resources in order that we might depend entirely on Him and give Him the glory.

You see, you cannot be too small for God to use, but

you can be too big. If you want the credit for what God is doing, God will not use you. " *I am the Lord that is my name, and my glory will I not give to another.*" ( Is 42:8 ) This is why, as you look around, you will see God working in a powerful way in the lives of some very weak people. Why ? They are careful to give God the glory. (a)

**(b) GOD TOOK AWAY FEAR FROM GIDEON:**

I don't imagine that Gideon was sleeping very well that night. I certainly wouldn't be. Only 300 men left ! Then in the middle of the night God came again to Gideon. Gideon's first thought was probably, " *Oh, no not again.*" But this time the Lord's message was different. Look at ( 7:9-11 ) You see, Gideon needed to have his courage strengthened so the Lord says, " *Take your right hand man with you and do a little eavesdropping and what you hear will strengthen your heart.*" What did they hear ? One man relating a dream to another. ( 7:13-14 ) Now barley was a food very poor people ate. It was a picture of Israel. The tent was a symbol of the nomadic Midianites. God had given Midian into Gideon's hand. Isn't this a beautiful picture of the sovereignty of God ?

You see, the Lord directed Gideon and Phurah to exactly the right tent at the right time. God protected Gideon so he would not be noticed. God planted that dream in that Midianite's head and God led the other Midianite to interpret it precisely, even using Gideon's name. My ... what a God we have, a God who is in control of the world of men. " *A God who doeth*

*according to His will in the army of heaven and among the inhabitants of the earth and none can stay His hand or say unto Him, what doest thou ?" ( Dan 4:35 )*  
(a) (b)

**(c) GOD TOOK FORTITUDE FROM MIDIAN:**

You see, the Lord was not only preparing Gideon and the Israelites he was also conditioning Midian for defeat. How else can you explain ( 7:13-14 ) ? I mean why should an army of 135,000 men be afraid of an army of 300 soldiers led by a man with no military experience ? I don't think the Prime Minister lies awake at night worrying about an invasion from the Republic of Ireland ? Why this strange anxiety in Midian ? Because God planted fear in their hearts. When God calls us to do battle for Him, He always goes before us.

That's why Paul says in ( 2 Cor 2:14 ) " *Now thanks be to God which always causeth us to triumph in Christ.*" He does not lead us into our triumph, it is His victory and we enter into that victory when we learn the lesson of absolute dependence on Him. (1)

Few would have suspected William McCulloch of kindling a revival. He was parish minister in Cambuslang Scotland about 1740. A scholarly pastor excelling in languages, especially Hebrew he had, little gift for the pulpit. His own son described him as " *not a very ready speaker not eloquent .... his manner was slow and cautious.*" In fact he was called an " *Ale-minister,*" which meant that when he rose to speak, a number in the congregation left to quench their thirst at

the local tavern. Yet God chose to use William McCulloch's ministry as the means of revival at Cambuslang, some time before George Whitefield visited there.

I wonder was God pleased to use William McCulloch in order to make clear, that He takes weak vessels, so that the Glory might be His. (1)

## **(2) ACTION: MAN CAN SHARE THE VICTORY**

Now how would you have felt if you were about to enter into this battle ? You realise that you are outnumbered 450 to 1. But you are in the queue to get your weapons and what are they ? A trumpet ( ram's horn ) to blow, a pitcher ( earthen jar ) to shatter, a torch to shine, and a voice to shout. Now that was it. I think if I had managed to get into the last 300 I would have traded these things and headed home. However, these men knew what it was to trust God. They had:

### ***(a) FAITH IN GOD'S PROMISE:***

Look at ( 7:9, 15 ) Now in those days there were three periods of sentry duty each night. The first watch was from 6pm until 10pm. The middle watch was from 10pm till 2am, and the last watch was from 2am until 6 am. Now according to ( 7:19 ) it was about 10pm and suddenly out of the darkness came the noise of 300 pitchers smashed to the ground, the sight of 300 torches, the sound of 300 horns and the shout of 300 voices,  
*" the sword of the Lord and of Gideon." ( 7:18 ) To*

men that were half asleep everything that moved was an enemy. Confusion broke out as the Midianites began to slay one another, and the loaf of barley flattened the tents of Midian. (a) Do you recall the words of John ?

*" This is the victory that overcometh .... even our faith."*

( 1 Jn 5:4 ) Oh, that we would trust God in all our weakness to work through us for His glory. (a)

### ***(b) FELLOWSHIP WITH GOD'S PEOPLE:***

Look at ( 7:23 ) How do you defeat Midian, strife among the people of God ? You defeat it when God's people *" gather themselves together."* When they stand together, *" endeavouring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace."* ( Eph 4:3 ) Think again of ( Phil 2 ) which describe the relationships among the people of God. *" Let nothing be done through strife or vainglory but in lowliness of mind let each esteem other better than themselves .... let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus who being in the form of God thought it not robbery to be equal with God ...."*  
*" What a stoop as the Lord Jesus came down ? Down from 32,000 to 300 that's coming down is it not ? Not puffing up ourselves saying " we've done it." The Lord Jesus came down so low. Paul came down so low. What about Timothy and Epaphroditus ? Was this not the problem with Euodias and Syntyche ?*

They must come down and humble themselves if unity was to prevail in the Philippian church ! My .... is this not the message of Gideon ? Coming down, getting

smaller, more humble. For it's when we learn to take that humble place that we'll have hope of getting unity among the people of God ! (a) (b)

### **(c) FAITHFULNESS TO GOD'S PURPOSE:**

What was God's purpose ? That they defeat Midian by the weapons they had. There was:

#### 1. The BLOWING of the Trumpet:

( 7:20 ) Trumpets speak of the Word of God. Do you recall what Paul said to the Thessalonians ?

*" For from you sounded out ( trumpeted out ) the Word of the Lord not only in Macedonia and Achaia but also in every place " ( 1 Thes 1:8 ) Did you notice that Gideon alone was not to blow the trumpet ? You see, every believer has a part in this ministry. My .... are you blowing the trumpet of God's Word ?*

#### 2. The BREAKING of the Pitcher:

( 7:19 ) Now if the trumpet speaks of the Word of God, the pitcher or vessel speaks of the servant of God. Are you a clean, broken vessel ready for God to use ?  
( 2 Tim 2:21 )

#### 3. The BEAMING of the Light:

( 7:20 ) The Word of God, the Servant of God, and now the Christ of God. ( Jn 8:12 ) Did you notice that as long as the vessel was unbroken the light was

concealed ? But when the vessel was broken the light was revealed ? Is Christ being revealed through you ? Is Christ increasing because self is decreasing ? (1) (2)

### **(3) REACTION: SATAN WILL THE UNITY**

Is it not invariably so that when the work of God is going forward some kind of opposition begins to show itself ? When God was blessing the early church, and thousands of people were coming to know the Lord, and the Jewish leaders were in total confusion, Satan counterattacked. ( Acts 6:1 ) And he still counterattacks today from exactly the same direction as he did in Gideon's day. Can you see here:

#### **(a) THE WILES OF THE DEVIL:**

This is the Greek word for "*schemes*," carrying the idea of cleverness, crafty methods, cunning and deception. Do you see the first device of the devil ?

#### 1. RESENTMENT:

Look at ( 8:1-3 ) Here is a tribe that is angry because their importance has not been recognised. Do you remember when Joshua allotted to them their portion, how they responded ? ( Joshua 17:14-18 ) Can you see them better now ? They would be the first to tell you how important they were. They were filled with a sense of their own self importance. Gideon did not make enough of them and there was resentment. Do you know any saints like that ? I tell you they are still alive. The Ephraimites. Full of their own importance, full of

their own greatness. Their complaint was, " *nobody asked me.*" Do you know anybody like that ? God blessed, and they were not in it and they complained they were not consulted.

Someone in the church has an exercise, and God blesses it and instead of saying, " *Praise the Lord,*" they say, " *you should not have done it without asking us first.*" " *Why was I not asked ? Why was I not included ? Why was I not made of ?*" Oft times I feel that the role of the pastor/elders has been reduced to that of humouring people. 1. But then there was:

## 2. DISCOURAGEMENT:

Look at ( 8:4 ) Here were 300 tired, exhausted men seeking refreshment in the town of Succoth, one of the Israelite towns on the other side of the Jordan. I tell you they should have been excited about what God had done through Gideon. He had liberated them from Midian, but instead of refreshment there was discouragement.

Ruth Paxson says, " *the believer has a very subtle adversary whose three fold aim is to despoil him of his wealth, decoy him from his walk, and disable him for his warfare, and what better weapon can he use for this purpose than discouragement ?*" And what better people than Christians to heap buckets of discouragement on you ? How did Gideon handle all this ? Well, look at;

## **(b) THE WISDOM OF THE LORD:**

In Gideon !

### 1. For the Problem of Resentment there was Gentleness:

( 8:2-3 ) Now do you really think that makes sense ? Was it really greater for Ephraim to kill two kings than for Gideon to attack 135,000 men with 300, and to conquer them ? Of course not ! *But you see, to Gideon the unity of God's people was more important than personal pride.* So what if he was wronged, mistreated, criticised ? It was more important for God's people to be one than for Gideon to be vindicated. My .... none of us likes to be wronged, or to be misrepresented the way Gideon was. But how much better to take that hurt to the Lord and let him deal with it, than to be in discord with my brother. Do you know what Proverbs says, " *A soft answer turneth away wrath.*" ( Prov 15:1 ) 1.

### 2. For the Problem of Discouragement there was Steadfastness:

There's a telling phrase in ( 7:4 ) " *Faint yet pursuing them.*" Its so easy to get our eyes off the enemy, but here was a man who refused to be deflected from God's call in his life. Often people who find lots to criticise in the lives of others are people who have no sense of urgency about God's call for their lives. Satan has got them so confused that they are fighting with God's people rather than with him. But Gideon persisted !

D.L.Moody once said " *Give me a man who says, this one thing I do and not, these fifty things I dabble with.*" Benjamin Disraeli declared, " *the secret of success is constancy of purpose.*" My .... Gideon knew that kind of constancy. Do you ? Make no mistake about it. Satan counterattacks. The devil does not give up easily.

Satan often tries to draw us into division where there ought to be unity, ( Acts 6:1 ) and sometimes he tries to draw us into unity where there ought to be division. ( Ezra 4:2 )

#### **(4) DEFECTION: LEADERS SHOULD FULFIL THEIR MINISTRY:**

How often it is true that on the heels of victory there comes the moment of temptation. Andrew Bonar was right when he said, " *Let us be as watchful after the victory as before the battle.*" Did you notice here that was defection on two fronts. There was defection in:

##### ***(a) The PEOPLE'S Request to Gideon:***

Look at ( 7:22 ) Why did God not allow Gideon to attack Midian with 32,000 men ? Because Israel would say, " *Mine own hand hath saved me.*" ( 7:2 ) Now God had prevented them from doing that, but they still had not grasp the lesson. True, they did not take the credit for themselves, but neither did they give to God. As ( 8:22 ) tells us they tried to give it to Gideon. Sometimes we can learn more from what is not recorded in Scripture than from what we actually read. Thats certainly true of this chapter. For as you read this

passage there is not one word of spontaneous praise, gratitude or thanksgiving to God. My .... before they approached Gideon, they should have been pouring out their hearts in praise to God who gave them the victory, but that never occurred to them. They did not have the singing faith of Moses, or Joshua or Deborah. Their hearts did not ring with praise to their God. What about us ? Are we guilty of spiritual ingratitude ? Do you ever spontaneously praise God and acknowledge what He has done in your life ? What victories He has wrought for us ? ( Deut 33:5 ) Or is there defection in our worship ? (a)

##### ***(b) The LEADER'S Request to the People:***

Look at ( 8:24-27 ) Why is it that so many great and useful men, before finishing their course on earth, will write or say or do something that, if it does not undo all their previous work, leaves some kind of blemish on their good name, causing the wicked to laugh, and the righteous to grieve ? My .... the lesson we need to grasp from this passage is that awful moral lapses and falls may take place after years of remarkable service and faithful living. Look at Gideon's sad ending ! Notice:

##### **1. The Request he Makes:**

( 8:24 ) It was the custom for Midianite men to wear an earring, and that meant the Israelites had collected 135,000 earrings, and a great deal of other war booty. It amounted to 1700 shekels about 15,000 dollars. 1.

## 2. The Idolatry he Establishes:

He took the gold and made an ephod " *and all Israel went thither a whoring after it, which thing became a snare unto Gideon, and to his house.*" ( 8:27 ) After this, on the death of Gideon, the people worshipped Baal, one wrong step leading to others, deeper, darker and more depraved.

My .... do you recall his first victory ? In destroying the altar of Baal ? His final tragedy is to lead the people back to idolatry ! How diligent we need to be lest when we are old we undo the very work that we did for God when we were young. 1. 2.

## 3. The Lifestyle he Enjoys:

There was **Polygamy:** ( 8:30 ) Gideon adopted not only the Canaanite's idea of having a harem but apparently their moral standards as well, because he had a concubine in Shechem.

There was **Luxury:** He began his career by describing himself as " *least in Manasseh,*" ( 6:13 ) but he ended his life enjoying great luxury. ( Deut 17:17 )

There was **Hypocrisy:** For do you see the name he gave his son ? ( 8:31 ) Abimelech means " *My father is king.*"

Oh, he refused the kingship but he adopted a very kingly lifestyle. What a sad ending ! **Its good to start well, its better to go on well, its best to finish well.** We have all known men who not only thought they stood, but really did stand and were used of God, and yet we

have seen them sour, grow bitter, become envious, backslide in heart, backslide in life, lie around for years as helpless, and useless, sad in appearance as the wrecks of ships thrown by a storm on the beach and left after that to whiten and fall to pieces as the days and months rolled by.

My .... over the life of Gideon we can write the words " *Let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall.*" ( 1 Cor 10:12 ) The most spiritual Christian may fail. Thats why we need to keep our eyes on the Unfailing Example, Christ Himself. In the course of his final series of Bible lectures at Dallas Theological Seminary Harry Ironside said he often prayed, " *O God keep me from becoming a foolish old man.*"

When Dr. Culbertson retired as President of Moody Bible Institute he heard the trustees planned to name a building in his honour. He protested, " *Men you do not know how I will end.*" May God give us the grace to end like Paul, " *I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith.*" ( 2 Tim 4:7 )

