

ONE PLUS GOD

"When I blow with a trumpet, I and all that are with me, then blow ye the trumpets also on every side of the camp, and say, The sword of the Lord, and of Gideon." Judges 7:18.

"And they stood every man in his place round about the camp: and all the host ran, and cried, and fled." Judges 7:21.

Men of today look back to the days of the apostles, and wonder why God is not with His people in mighty blessings as He was on the day of Pentecost. In the days of the apostles men must have looked back to the age of the great prophets and longed for a demonstration of the divine power such as was granted unto them. In the age of the great prophets men must have looked back to the age of the patriarchs, as Gideon looked back to the day of Israel's deliverance from the land of Egypt and the house of bondage. It is natural to think that yesterday was a better day than today, and that God did greater things for the men who served Him generations ago than He does for us today. In His own way God gives us evidence that He is, and that He is a hearer of prayer, and that His arm is not shortened that it cannot save.

It was in the midnight hour of Israel's hope when God called one man, Gideon, to the task of commanding the armies of Israel in driving out the invading Midianites and in delivering His people from their bondage. This call came as a complete surprise to this great lover of his family, his country and his God. The task to which this man was called was enough to fire the imagination of any man of faith and valor. The call came to Gideon when he was faithfully performing his humble duty of threshing wheat with a flail by a winepress in a secluded spot on his father's farm. He had selected that unusual spot in which to do his threshing in order to conceal from the tyrants the small quantity of grain which he had harvested. Fearful of being spied upon, naturally Gideon's piercing eyes watched closely for the approach of an enemy while he worked.

Suddenly an angel of the Lord appeared on the scene and sat down under an oak tree and watched Gideon as he worked. Before Gideon could speak, the angel's voice rang out with the astonishing salutation: "The Lord is with thee, thou mighty man of valour." In the light of the depressed state of his people, the message of the angel seemed startling and ridiculous to Gideon. Seven years of bitter slavery had caused him to wonder if God actually cared. He wondered why God would succor a people whom He had subjected to such constant and grievous oppression. In touch with reality, Gideon challenged the surprising words of the angel with the significant question, "If the Lord be with us, why then is all this befallen us?" It is not difficult to understand why Gideon spoke so despondently. It was as if he were saying, "If failure and defeat and slavery are marks of the divine presence, then the Lord may be with us. But I have been taught that victory and freedom and abounding joy are indications of His nearness and help." It was simply the age-old question: "If God loves us, why does He permit these things?"

Gideon could see that something was wrong. He refused to shut his eyes to the fact that there was little indication at hand that the mighty God was present. His mistake was in failing to see that he and his people had made it impossible for God to do for them what He was able, willing and eager to do. They were simply refusing to give God an opportunity.

To Gideon's query the Lord responded in the words: "Go in this thy might, and thou shalt save Israel from the hand of the Midianites: have not I sent thee?" Aware of his limitations and insufficiency. Gideon did not have any inclinations toward the assignment, but cried out in protest against assuming such tremendous responsibilities by saying, "Oh, my Lord, wherewith shall I save Israel? behold, my family is poor in Mannasseh, and I am the least in my father's house." He honestly felt that he was utterly unqualified for so vast an undertaking, since he had come from a poor family and from an uninfluential tribe.

Gideon's modesty, humility and distrust of self were highly commendable. He has certainly provided us with a splendid example of the right spirit for entering upon any high task, namely, distrust in one's own powers and reliance upon a higher power. However, Gideon's excuse was met with the assurance of the Divine Presence: "The Lord said unto him, Surely I will be with thee, and thou shalt smite the Midianites as one man." That assurance from God was all that Gideon desired or needed. When we know that God has given us a definite task to perform, we may rest assured that He will also give us the strength which is necessary for doing it.

Like many other people, the Israelites called on God for help and at the same time refused to separate themselves from what they knew to be very displeasing to Him. However, if they were to enjoy His favor and to serve Him, it was necessary that the worship of Baal be eradicated. So, that night God commanded Gideon to destroy the altar of Baal which was near his father's house, and which was a symbol of the spiritual degradation of his people, and to erect in its place an altar of Jehovah. With the assistance of ten of the servants on the farm, Gideon proceeded, under cover of darkness, to demolish the altar of Baal and use the stones therefrom to erect an altar to Jehovah. Thereon he courageously and heroically offered a burnt sacrifice to Jehovah. As was to be expected, when it was discovered that the altar of Baal had been destroyed, Gideon was suspected of being responsible for it because he had previously repudiated all idolatrous practices.

Gideon is a splendid example of the action which every Christian should take in separating himself from worldliness and sin. Cherished sin in the life always limits one's usefulness in God's service. Before God can use one effectively in His service, it is absolutely necessary that he give the Lord His rightful place in his life. Having discovered the will of God for his life, Gideon dedicated himself unreservedly to the doing of that will in the strength and under the direction of the Lord. This same spirit should characterize all of God's children.

Assured of the Lord's presence and power, Gideon dared to call the Lord's people together to fight the Midianites. It is a great tribute to him that thirty-two thousand men, with apparently much devotion to the cause which he espoused, responded to his call, left their families and their homes and came forward to meet the dangers and to endure the hardships which might ensue. They appeared to be animated by the same spirit and to be willing to die for their country and for their faith, if need be.

When Gideon raised the standard of independence and blew the trumpet an army of thirty-two thousand men flocked to him. When God looked this army over He was not pleased with the size of it. He said to Gideon, "The people that are with thee are too many for me to give the Midianites into their hands, lest Israel vaunt themselves against me, saying, Mine own hand hath saved me." Not wanting the Israelites to take all the credit to themselves and to boast of what they had done, God commanded Gideon to issue a proclamation to his army and cut down its size.

The first test by which Gideon was directed to reduce his army was that of fear. "Whosoever is fearful and afraid, let him return." The faint-hearted and fearful usually panic when the battle starts. It is better to have ten courageous and fearless men than to have a hundred if ninety of them are afraid. An army is better off with the cowards out of its ranks than with them in it, no matter how numerous they are. Likewise, the self-interested and fearful are always a handicap to the Lord's work. It is better to have a few who are dependable than a large number who are fearful and vacillating.

Gideon's proclamation caused twenty-two thousand of his men to fall out of the ranks and go back to their homes. The shame of deserting their comrades did not restrain them. What a blessing that Gideon did not try to lead that bunch of cowards into battle!

Not yet satisfied with the size of the army, God ordered the test of earnestness and zeal. Gideon was directed to march his army over a stream. Nine thousand and seven hundred of the soldiers laid aside their weapons, got down on their knees or laid flat on the ground, put their mouths to the water and drank leisurely until they were filled. But the other three hundred scooped up the water with their hands and lapped it hurriedly with their tongues as they watched from the oncoming enemy. Their manner of drinking showed earnestness and zeal in the cause in which they were enlisted.

Gideon arranged his men in the form of three sides of a square, in order to leave the impression that the camp of Midian was practically surrounded. At the appointed time he and his three hundred picked men blew their trumpets, threw down their pitchers, held up their lamps and shouted: "The sword of the Lord, and of Gideon."

Awaking from a sound sleep, hearing the blaring of the trumpets and the crashing of the crockery, and seeing the glare of the three hundred lights, the enemy quickly concluded that innumerable foes had surrounded them. No wonder there was such a wide-spread panic among those undisciplined hordes! In their confusion they rushed hither and thither in the darkness, mistaking friend for enemy and slaying multitudes of their own people. When the bloody tragedy was ended, many had been killed and the rest had fled, and that without a one of Gideon's men as much as receiving a wound. This complete and final victory was won within a few minutes and without Gideon's forces striking a single blow. Truly this victory was one of the military marvels of all times.

It is only natural for one to ask, "What was the secret of their great victory?" That secret is revealed in the verse which says, "And they stood every man in his place round about the camp." Gideon and his men were united in mind and purpose. All of them were willing to do all they could to win the victory. All of them were obedient. They followed the example of their leader and obeyed his orders to the letter. Not one of them became discouraged. They were courageous and brave all the way through. They were faithful. "They stood every man in his place." Each man did his part. Each one enthusiastically put everything he had into the battle for God and righteousness. Because they took their rightful places before God and did their part, He blessed them with a wonderful victory.

As certainly as God had a work for Gideon and his men in their day, He has a work for each of us today. Greater emphasis needs to be placed on the value of one.

In World War I a brief paragraph in the news read: "Quick advance made in surprise attack by American troops. Great battle won, and only one man lost!"

Just one man killed, that was all -- only one. But that one was of much value to a little woman over yonder in a cottage home, with three small children tugging at her skirts, looking up wonderingly into her face, as she read a cablegram to which no answer was expected. That quick advance, when only one man was killed, took the sun out of the sky of her life. To the children who would listen in vain for his returning footsteps, to the wife who would now hear his voice only in dreams, he was "all the world."

Think of things of lesser value than a man -- and you will see how they emphasize the value of just one. One link in a chain means much, whether the chain be short or long. One brick in a wall is of value, whether the wall be high or low. One letter is essential to a complete alphabet. One figure is essential in the multiplication table. One note counts on a sheet of music. One key on an organ is indispensable.

Different Sunday School teachers have said, "I'm through. I had only one boy today in my class." But he is one. He is not everybody, but he is somebody. He is none the less important because he is the only one.

Andrew brought Simon Peter to Christ. Simon Peter was just one, but there came a day when he was one among many. He preached the sermon at Pentecost under which three thousand passed from death unto life, adding greatly to the strength of the first church.

Joel Stratton, a waiter in a restaurant, brought John B. Gough to Christ. Gough was just one, but in a ministry of forty-four crowded and productive years he turned many from the foulness of drunkenness to the fragrance of sobriety.

Henry Kinball, a Sunday School teacher, led Dwight L. Moody to Christ. This bootstore clerk rocked two continents toward God.

The power of one plus God is illustrated in such Bible characters as Noah, Abraham, Jacob, Joseph, Moses, Samuel, David and Elijah.

Achievements of one plus God are recorded in history. England kept John Bunyan in jail for twelve years, but, instead of settling down to gloom, despondency and complaining, he picked up a pen and with it wrote that immortal allegory which stands next to the Bible in circulation in the English language.

Do you realize that God calls you to be one? Do you hear? Will you hear? Will you answer? Will you give Him your bits or your best?