

Pentecost 14

Judges 7:1-8a – Only a Few Belong to the Lord

August 28-30 by: Pastor Wessel

Judges 7:1-8a – *1Early in the morning, Jerub-Baal (that is, Gideon) and all his men camped at the spring of Harod. The camp of Midian was north of them in the valley near the hill of Moreh. 2The Lord said to Gideon, “You have too many men for me to deliver Midian into their hands. In order that Israel may not boast against me that her own strength has saved her, 3announce now to the people, ‘Anyone who trembles with fear may turn back and leave Mount Gilead.’” So twenty-two thousand men left, while ten thousand remained.*

*4But the Lord said to Gideon, “There are still too many men. Take them down to the water, and I will sift them for you there. If I say, ‘This one shall go with you,’ he shall go; but if I say, ‘This one shall not go with you,’ he shall not go.”*

*5So Gideon took the men down to the water. There the Lord told him, “Separate those who lap the water with their tongues like a dog from those who kneel down to drink.” 6Three hundred men lapped with their hands to their mouths. All the rest got down on their knees to drink.*

*7The Lord said to Gideon, “With the three hundred men that lapped I will save you and give the Midianites into your hands. Let all the other men go, each to his own place.” 8So Gideon sent the rest of the Israelites to their tents but kept the three hundred, who took over the provisions and trumpets of the others.*

**Introduction** – How does it feel to be part of a small group of people? How does it feel to be just one out of a very few? I suppose it depends on the circumstances. I suppose it depends on why the group is small and what its characteristics are.

If you are one of a few who has a rare disease, it wouldn't feel so good. If you are one of a few that no one seems to pay attention to, it wouldn't feel so good. Sometimes it's nice to be in the majority, when the majority seems to be safer, happier, just better off. Being in the minority can make you feel as though you are facing incredible odds and you might not be able to overcome those odds and succeed.

But if you are one of a few who achieves success, then it feels pretty good to be part of that small group. If you are one of a few who is able to participate in the small musical ensemble, or in the employee of the month club, or in the elite special forces of the military, then it can feel pretty good to be only one out of a very few in that select group.

As hard as it might be to accept and as much as many modern religious thinkers might condemn the idea, Jesus shows pretty clearly that Christians are a small group of people. Jesus says, *“Make every effort to enter through the narrow door, because many, I tell you, will try to enter and will not be able to.”* (Luke 13:24) As we look back in history to the time of the Judges of Israel, we ponder this truth:

### **Only a Few Belong to the Lord**

#### **I. Chosen by Grace, Those Few Cannot Boast**

#### **II. Chosen by Grace, Those Few Must Give Thanks**

#### **I. Chosen by Grace, Those Few Cannot Boast**

The time of the Judges was like riding a merry go round. You know when you're on a merry go round, you keep passing the same point and you keep seeing the same thing over and over. That's how it was. Talk about nothing new under the sun. In that 350-400 year period, one generation of people would thank and praise God for his blessings, but then their children would forget about God, so enemies would come in and take over. Then that generation would cry out to God for help and God would rescue them and one of the Judges would lead the rescue party.

Gideon was one such Judge. He was just a man, but a man who was living in fear, because the Midianites from the eastern desert, with their camels and their allies, would come and invade every time there was a harvest and they would wreak havoc. How could God let this happen? The answer was right in Gideon's hometown – religious monuments dedicated to the gods of nature, Baal the male god and Asherah the female goddess. Gideon's people pled allegiance to these false gods instead of honoring the God who is the Creator and the one who chose them and led them by the hand out of Egypt.

So the Angel of the Lord came and spoke to Gideon, choosing him to be a mighty warrior who would send the Midianites away in fear of the true God. Somewhat reluctantly, he accepted the mantle of leadership from the Lord. Gideon tore down the religious monuments and became known as “he who contends with Baal” – Jerub-Baal. And he gathered a force of 32,000 Israelites, so that they could drive away the Midianites and their allies, numbering over 100,000, and take back their land.

But God had a plan for Gideon and his armies. It was called troop reduction. *“Too many Israelite soldiers!”* God said. They were already outnumbered. What could God be thinking? God was thinking about only one thing. He didn't want Israel to boast that their strength had saved them. So 22,000 soldiers who were afraid were let go. (Wouldn't it make

the 10,000 more afraid?) And then 9,700 were let go who had their drink directly from the stream. The troop was reduced to a mere 300 soldiers, facing a huge army of Midianites.

These were God's special forces, but not because they were the best soldiers necessarily. They were chosen by God and would have to fully rely on God if they were going to win the battle. It would not be their power that won the day. God would give them the victory. There would be no reason for them to boast. They would just have to let everyone know it was all in God's hands.

As it was with the army of Gideon, so it is with us. There are very few who believe that it is entirely by the grace of God that we are saved. Jesus says that it is a narrow door by which we enter heaven. Many try to enter, not fully relying on God, but boasting of their own feeble attempts to live a good life and somehow thinking that God will be satisfied.

But we have no reason to boast, friends of God! If we boast about the good we do, then we have to accept the punishment for all the wrong we have done. Then we are relying on the law of God and there is no hope for you or me. Instead, rely on the grace of God, which tells us that all the good that needed to be done to save us was done by Jesus of Nazareth. Fully rely on God for the victory which has already been won.

We are among the few that God has chosen by grace. We have been adopted into the family of God. We have been sanctified by the power of the Holy Spirit. We are the faith filled disciples who trust in God's Word. Feels pretty good to be one of the chosen few, doesn't it?

But we aren't chosen because we have the best skills, the nicest personality, the most ambition, or the strongest character. We are chosen by God's grace. We are chosen, even though we have been rebels, wrestling with God for control of our lives. Even though we are sometimes reluctant to praise and thank God, God forgives us. Even though a million witnesses could stand against us and tell God that we have not done what we should have done, yet we can say today, *"I am God's own child."*

We are chosen by grace, dear friends. We confess what one hymn says: *"Your Works, Not Mine, O Christ"*. My attempts to do good are just an attempt to try and say thank you to our loving and merciful God. He saw our need and, in Christ our Savior, he took us by the hand and said, *"For the sake of my Son's sacrifice for you, I choose you to be mine forever. Enter through the narrow door and live forever."*

## **II. Chosen by Grace, Those Few Must Give Thanks**

We are already winners in the battle, although it might feel like we are still fighting sometimes. The army of Gideon had already won the battle, even though the battle hadn't even started. Look at what God promised Gideon, *"With the three hundred men that lapped I will save you and give the Midianites into your hands."* There was no uncertainty, no question – Gideon and the 300 soldiers of Israel would win the battle over the Midianites. God said so.

That's how God's promises are. They are definite. They are certain. We can fully rely on them. So what was left to do? What would you do if you knew that the place where you were interviewing for a job was going to offer you the job? What would you do if, before you started playing a game, you knew you were going to win? Would you avoid the interview? Would you say, *"No, I don't feel like playing today"*? Wouldn't you be eager to go ahead, so that you can get the benefits of what is about to happen?

The army of Gideon would be free from the terrorizing forces of Midian. They would be at peace again and not have to worry about their fields getting raided and their economy being destroyed. Onward into battle, right? The victory is ours.

How about remembering to do one thing first before moving forward? How about taking a moment to give thanks to God before rushing headlong into the blessings like a kid at a playground? Where do the blessings come from? Why do I get to enjoy the blessings when someone else might not? How come I trust in God's promises, when other people do not?

We are chosen by grace. We can't boast about success, or opportunity, or blessing, but we must give thanks. Are we blessed in our lives because we make wise decisions? Yes. But as Christians we recognize that both the wisdom to choose good over evil and the blessings that come are gifts from God. Non Christians might choose wisely and they may benefit. But without faith in our eternal Creator and the eternal peace he gives through his son, the worldly wisdom and the worldly success will only last a short time – "till death do us part".

God has informed us that we have already won the battle. The devil wanted us to be doomed to endless fear and pain, as he is. But every plot of the devil has been uncovered. His attempts to use our sinful pride and lust to destroy us have fallen on their face.

It may not seem like we have won the battle. But what else does an empty tomb shout, except, "VICTORY!" over sin and death? What else does Baptism shout, except, "PEACE!" with God? The battle is done. Chosen by God's grace, you are on the team that is already enjoying the victory celebration.

Isn't that what we do when we come to church? We celebrate our victory! It's not an uncertain victory, but a guaranteed victory, because no matter how we may waver and falter, God's message of forgiveness through Christ does not. It is his peace treaty with us.

So, as you come here, and as you invite others here, come with your guilt and your pain and your foolishness and remember that just as God condemns what you've done wrong, he also covers up your wrong with Jesus' righteousness. There is no more to be done when your Savior did it all.

**Conclusion** – You are part of a privileged few. I'm not going to say how many, because we believe that God knows who are his. We believe that the amount of people who belong to the Lord is a number only God himself can say for sure. We believe that wherever God's Word is preached and people are baptized into the name of our Triune God and people receive the body and blood of Jesus in the Lord's Supper, there are true believers there.

We cannot boast about being part of this small group of believers who will enter heaven through the narrow door. We can only give thanks that God would be merciful to people like us, with all those guilty stains on our souls. We can only give thanks for Jesus and the victory he gives us. Fully rely on him, dear friends, because the victory is yours. Amen.