

Home Group study: week beginning 8th November 2020

Flawed Heroes — Gideon Part 2: Into Battle

What good ideas do people have for Christmas, given that we might not be able to go Christmas shopping and we may not be able to have family gatherings over Christmas this year?

Read: Judges 7: 1-25

Discovery

This is the story of a great victory. At the end of chapter 6 Gideon, the man who was hiding in his winepress until the angel told him he was going to save Israel, had, we read, 'sent messengers throughout Manasseh, calling them to arms, and also into Asher, Zebulun and Naphtali, so that they too went up to meet them.' It transpires that he was very successful and had raised an army of 32,000, (Judges 7:3) though we do know that the enemy, the Midianites had huge resources.

What does God think of Gideon's nice big army? Why does he get Gideon to reduce the size of it? How many men does the army finally reduce to? And how does that small army actually defeat the Midianites?

Application

We're being very radical and missing out the 'Understanding' section of the study this week, so that you have time to have a discussion on what the story of Gideon says to us.

The first thing to say is that Gideon was a fearful man, hiding away from the oppression of the Midianites. What transformed him into a conquering hero? What is there to stop any of us being transformed into conquering heroes?

Gideon's final army was tiny: yet managed to conquer the vastly superior forces of Midian. What do you think of God's military strategy in achieving that victory?

On Sunday Matt pointed out that as a church we are comparatively small in number. He suggested we were about 70-80 people; depending on how you count it we may be a bit more than that but not a lot: and we are called to be God's people in a population of around 11,000 in Shepperton. We all know that over the years church attendance has dwindled dramatically. Here are a few facts and figures about church attendance:

- On 30 March 1851 7.26 million people went to church in England and Wales, out of a population of 18 million. (40% of the population)
- In 1980 5.6 million people went to church in England and Wales, out of a population of 48 million (11.6% of the population)
- In 2015 2.62 million people went to church in England and Wales, out of a population of 55 million (4.76% of the population); a decline of more than 50% in 35 years.
- In 1980 75,000 people were recorded as going to 'new churches' (Jubilee was formed in 1982); in 2015 that had risen to 166,000.

On the face of it those figures are pretty depressing; we are no longer a Christian nation. Even the Roman Catholic Church, to which people are usually very loyal as part of their culture, saw decline such that by 2015 its attendance was only one third of what it was in 1980 and the Anglican church saw its attendance halve in that time.

Do you think God can achieve more or less with a reduced church congregation? Does the rise in 'new churches' give us cause for hope? (Even in those denominations where there has been decline, there have been major increases in attendance at churches which have been renewed by the Holy Spirit: take St Saviour's in Sunbury, for example.)

What are the parallels between Israel in the time of Gideon and the UK in 2020? *(think in terms of a general moral and spiritual decline in the population at large leading to oppression).*

Spend some time discussing how we as individuals and we the church need to respond to the oppression facing the world at the moment. For example, does the prospect of a locked-down Christmas present any opportunities?

God shows us in these episodes in Judges just how weak, frail humans can be galvanised by him into extraordinary acts to defeat oppression: how might the same apply to us weak, frail humans?