

✠ Judges 7:1-23 ✠

IN NOMINE IESU

Gideon started with 32,000 men. God gave him 300. The reason is clear: God gave Gideon only 300 men so that no one might be able to give anyone but God the glory for the victory over the Midianites. In other words, it was made very clear that this was a divinely waged war, that the Lord, not Gideon or the Israelites, defeated the Midianites. Thus the Word of the Lord: “I am the Lord and besides me there is no savior” (Isaiah 43:11).

What else did Simeon mean when he held high the infant Lord Jesus saying, “Lord now let your servant depart in peace, for my own eyes have seen your salvation which you have prepared before the sight of all people. A light to reveal you to the nations and the glory of your people Israel.” Salvation from what? From the Midianites? The Romans? The barbarians? No. Salvation from *the* enemy: the devil and all his army.

The story of Gideon is the story of the Christ. Who ever heard of winning a battle, indeed a war, by having a grossly outnumbered army who advanced with no weapon but torches, pots, and their vocal cords? Even the American Revolution was not that big a miracle. For the colonists had weapons of war and tactical movements. Gideon fought with no weapon and stood in the open before the enemy.

Who ever heard of defeating an army this way? No one. For no general would pit 300 men against thousands, even with the best of battle plans much less with such a silly battle plan as to break jars, expose torches, and shout loudly. Yet there it is. Like Noah and the ridiculous ark, the birth of Isaac to the elderly Abraham and Sarah, like Joshua felling the walls of Jericho with nothing but trumpets and voices, God accomplished the impossible through His chosen vessels, Gideon and his band of 300. Thus the Lord, not Gideon, won the battle.

And so it is with the cross of Jesus. Who ever heard of waging war by dying? Who ever thought that victory would be masked in defeat? Who would have thought that by dying the Son of God would gain victory over death? Yet there it is, and to God be all the glory.

Who among man can stand before the enemy and say, “I have defeated you.” No one, for there are none who are righteous. There are none who have not transgressed the Law of God (Romans 3:10-18). The enemy has defeated us who are conceived by the flesh. He has bound us with sin and guilt, shame and iniquity. He has tied us up with lying lips and prideful hearts. We cannot break the bonds of sin and death. We cannot hide from the accusing finger of the Law.

And it does not matter how many men we have on our side, we cannot defeat the enemy of our own accord and might. The seeming allies of men, preachers telling us that it’s not our fault, that we’re not to blame, that if we have enough faith we’ll be better off, that if we just pray enough we’ll stay the forces of evil, that if we do enough good deeds we’ll escape judgment, that God is not angry with sin only with intolerance, these are of no use against the enemy. These are the 29,000 men God told Gideon to send home, they are no good in battle. In fact, if they are sent into battle the enemy will defeat them and turn and devour us. For if they

are sent into battle, then God has been ignored and He will not be mocked. Only the One appointed by God can wage and win the war.

For Gideon, 300 men were appointed by God, yet they shouted, “For the Lord and for Gideon!” That is, not on account of their military prowess or might, but on account of the Lord and His anointed do we have the victory! Not on account of our good works or kindly dispositions, not on account of our faithful giving or charitable deeds, but only on account of God and His Anointed One, Jesus Christ, do we have the victory.

For it is not we who wage war, but ours is a divinely waged war against the devil and his army. Thus our weapons are not weapons of conventional warfare, or even our own weapons. But the weapons used are those given to us by the Lord, sanctified for the use of His chosen ones.

For who ever heard of waging war by bending the knee and crying out, “Lord have mercy, Christ have mercy, Lord have mercy!” But this is our weapon. Not swords and guns, not arguments and fights, not even torches with jars, but confession of sins, Baptism, and the Holy Supper.

Not our weapons, but those the Lord gives to us. It is He who calls us to repentance, speaking the words of divine absolution over us. It is He who washes our hearts and minds clean with the healing waters of Baptism, drowning our sin and shame and clothing us with robes of righteousness. It is He who feeds us with His body and blood, whereby we participate in His resurrected life. It is He who gives life and salvation to His Church.

Thus do we dress for battle, putting on the whole armor of God. About our waist we put on the belt of truth, that for our sakes Christ died and rose again, defeating the devil, sin, and death. The breastplate of righteousness is put on us in the waters of Baptism, the promise of God in Christ, protecting us against the fiery arrows of the evil one. Our feet are shod with the Gospel, drawing us to life in Christ. And in our hands are the shield of faith, always before us defending us from the lies and trickery of the devil, and the sword of the Spirit, the Word of God, the Gospel of Jesus Christ, which is able to save our souls (James 1:21). And atop our head is the helmet of salvation,<sup>1</sup> which is the crowning achievement of the Anointed One of God, the true Gideon, who leads His chosen ones into victory over the enemy.

God broke the vessel by hanging it on the tree, the body that housed the eternal light that shine brightly into the darkness, scattering the enemy and giving victory to the Victorious One.

It is God who dresses us, God who leads us, and God who gains the victory, and then in His mercy shares the spoils with His Church, His chosen. To God alone be all glory.

In the name of the FATHER and of the ✠ SON and of the HOLY SPIRIT.

✠ AMEN ✠

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<sup>1</sup> Cf. Ephesians 6:10-20 for the armor of God.