

A Great Victory

by J. Wilbur Chapman

J. Wilbur Chapman's sermon, 'A Great Victory,' explores the themes of faith, God's calling, and the power of a committed few in achieving spiritual victories.

Scripture: Exodus 14:13, Deuteronomy 28:1, Judges 6:12, Judges 7:21, 2 Chronicles 20:17, 1 Corinthians 1:27, Ephesians 4:8, Ephesians 6:10, 2 Timothy 2:3, Revelation 3:2

Topics: "Faith And Obedience", "Gods Sovereignty"

Description

J. Wilbur Chapman preaches on the story of Gideon and the victory achieved with a small, dedicated army, emphasizing the importance of standing firm in faith and obedience to God's call. The sermon reflects on the Old Testament Beatitudes and the consequences of straying from God's commandments, drawing parallels to the struggles and alternating feelings faced by the people of Israel. Through examples like Gideon and other individuals who responded to God's call, the sermon highlights the power of surrendering to God's plan, even in the face of challenges and doubts.

Transcript

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

Few things in this world are so inspiring to the traveler and at the same time so depressing as a city or temple in ruins. I remember a delightful experience in passing through the ruins of Karnak and Luxor, on the Nile in Egypt, and later passing through Phylae at Assuan on the Nile; and these two thoughts, each the opposite of the other, kept constantly coming to my mind. The loneliness is oppressive, and one would be delighted to hear the song of a bird, the bark of a dog, or the cry of a child. These ruins were once happy homes, or were temples filled with worshippers. Here little children played and gray-haired patriarchs worshiped their gods.

Akin to this picture is the one of the people of Israel at the time of this story, and the alternating feelings of pleasure and sadness keep constantly coming and going. The condition of the land begged description. Homes were there, but no children were about the doors; there were fields, but no crops to be harvested; pastures, but no cattle fed upon them; the hills were to be seen, but no flocks bleated on their sides; people were there, but they were found in the caves and hiding away on the mountain sides. When they had entered Canaan, these chosen people of God, he had said unto them, "And it shall come to pass, if thou shalt hearken diligently unto the voice of the Lord thy God, to observe and to do all his

commandments which I command thee this day, that the Lord thy God will set thee on high above all nations of the earth; and all these blessings shall come on thee, and overtake thee, if thou shalt hearken unto the voice of the Lord thy God. Blessed shalt thou be in the city, and blessed shalt thou be in the field. Blessed shall be the fruit of thy body, and the fruit of thy ground, and the fruit of thy cattle, the increase of thy kine, and the flocks of thy sheep. Blessed shall be thy basket and thy store. Blessed shalt thou be when thou comest in, and blessed shalt thou be when thou goest out. The Lord shall cause thine enemies that rise up against thee to be smitten before thy face; they shall come out against thee one way, and flee before thee seven ways. The Lord shall command the blessing upon thee in thy storehouses, and in all that thou settest thine hand unto; and he shall bless thee in the land which the Lord thy God giveth thee. The Lord shall establish thee an holy people unto himself, as he hath sworn unto thee, if thou shalt keep the commandments of the Lord thy God, and walk in his ways. And all the people of the earth shall see that thou art called by the name of the Lord; and they shall be afraid of thee."

We have here the Old Testament Beatitudes, and there is nothing like them.

The story with which the text is associated really begins in the first verse of the sixth chapter of Judges, "And the children of Israel did evil in the sight of the Lord; and the Lord delivered them into the hand of Midian seven years." But there must also be read in connection with this the last verse of the fifth chapter of Judges, "So let all thine enemies perish, O Lord; but let them that love him be as the sun when he goeth forth in his might. And the land had rest forty years."

It seems incredible that there could be such a difference in the experiences of God's people, and yet, as you study them in all their wanderings, you will find, if you turn over but one leaf of the Bible, the people who sing to-day are active in evil to-morrow, and the history of Israel is the history of one's self. Life is like a short ladder, as some one has said, and we spend most of our time going up to pray and down to sin. There is a striking picture in the second verse of the sixth chapter. The chosen people of God were dwelling in caves instead of their rightful positions in their homes, and the same is true to-day; men who ought to be at the front are left behind because they are living selfish lives or lives of sin. Do not for a moment think that I am saying that because a man is living out of sight that he is doing nothing, for we have only to remember Gideon to know that this is not true. He was a hidden man doing an honest work, and the Angel of the Lord called him, saying, "The Lord is with thee, thou mighty man of valor." To this Gideon makes a significant reply in the thirteenth verse of the sixth chapter of Judges, "And Gideon said unto him, Oh, my Lord, if the Lord be with us, why then is all this befallen us? and where be all his miracles which our fathers told us of, saying, Did not the Lord bring us up from Egypt? but now the Lord hath forsaken us, and delivered us into the hands of the Midianites." For the angel had said, "The Lord is with thee, Gideon," and Gideon had said, "If the Lord is with us, then how can these things be?" And the angel did not say it. How often it is true that we miss the truth of God because we miss the grammar of the Bible. When Gideon had thus replied, we read in the fourteenth verse of the sixth chapter, "And the Lord looked upon him, and said, Go in this thy might, and thou shalt save Israel from the hand of the Midianites; have not I sent thee?" And the thing to pay special attention to there is that the angel looked at Gideon. Sometimes in translating a foreign language you come upon a word which you cannot express in your own language; so it is with us here, for the Lord looked Gideon into a new man and said unto him, "Go and thou shalt save the people," which leads me to say that one man right with God is mightier than a host against God. The seventh chapter of Judges opens with the significant word "then." You must have all that goes before in your mind to appreciate this word. God has a plan for every life, and all your sickness, your disappointment, your discipline, is for something. There must be a "then" for you. It is the call of God and

the answer to it that makes real life. Compare Gideon the farmer with Gideon the soldier, and you will see the difference in a human life. Let one, however low or ignorant, but hear the voice of God and respond to it, and when such an one answers God's call for his country, for the church, or for Christ, the heroic in him is being stirred.

It is said that years ago there used to be a man in Mr. Spurgeon's Tabernacle who never had spoken in his social meetings, for the reason that he had a stammering tongue. One day he heard the great preacher say that the Lord could use even the tongue of the stammerer. It sent him to his home, and to his knees, and when he rose to his feet after having yielded himself wholly to God, as if by miracle God gave him the gift of speech, and I have been told that no one in the Tabernacle spoke more to the edification of the people or the praise of God than he.

Some years ago when John G. Woolley was delivering his closing address on the commencement day at college a young boy heard him under peculiar circumstances. He had walked in from the country. It was a hot day, and to quench his thirst he had tasted the water of one of the springs. It made him very ill, and just to escape the heat of the sun he crept under the platform, which had been erected upon the college campus for the commencement exercises. While there he fell asleep and was awakened by the sound of a musical voice. Something that the graduating student said stirred his soul, and he there made a vow that he would be a preacher. It was God's call to him and his answer. He has since become one of the world's most famous preachers, and his influence has been as wide as the world itself. When the Midianites stood against the children of Israel God called Gideon to lead an army against them, and this text is part of this story.

The scene was remarkable. Thirty-two thousand people following Gideon's leadership with the first flush of the battle upon them. They were ready to march, and God said when he looked at them, "The people are too many." They would seem to us to have been too few, for literally a multitude of Midianites stood against him. But we go wrong so often by applying human arithmetic to divine decrees. It is said that when Napoleon marched with his soldiers he was counted as being equal to 40,000 of his men, and so, after all, it is not a question of numbers with God, but of the few men whom he can use.

The test by means of which Gideon's army was decreased was remarkable. In Judges, the seventh chapter and the second to seventh verses, we read, "And the Lord said unto 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. Now therefore go to, proclaim in the ears of the people, saying, Whosoever is fearful and afraid, let him return and depart early from Mount Gilead. And there returned of the people twenty and two thousand; and there remained ten thousand. And the Lord said unto Gideon, The people are yet too many; bring them down unto the water, and I will try them for thee there; and it shall be, that of whom I say unto thee, This shall go with thee, the same shall go with thee; and of whomsoever I say unto thee, This shall not go with thee, the same shall not go. So he brought down the people unto the water; and the Lord said unto Gideon, Every one that lapped of the water with his tongue, as a dog lapped, him shalt thou set by himself; likewise every one that boweth down upon his knees to drink. And the number of them that lapped, putting their hand to their mouth, were three hundred men; but all the rest of the people bowed down upon their knees to drink water. And the Lord said unto Gideon, By the three hundred men that lapped will I save you, and deliver the Midianites into thine hand; and let all the other people go every man unto his place." This test is going on now among men; by the way we walk and talk, by the way we listen and work, men form their judgment of us, and so does God. We may measure our spiritual state by the way we spend our leisure moments, by the way we spend our Saturday

afternoons, by our rest days, and by the books we read. There is flowing past us the stream of literature and the stream of pleasure, and the question is whether we are going to fall down before these streams to drink or whether we are just going to dip up as we hurry along to fulfill our mission; or, in other words, whether we are to be so taken up with God's plan that we have no time to idle away and no disposition to turn aside.

"It does not so much matter how many members one may have in his church, for under the banner of a popular Christianity soldiers march. What if there should be a struggle ahead when to be a Christian would mean to suffer martyrdom, or dying at the stake, or contending with the beasts of Ephesus like Paul, how then do you think it would be?" And yet all the time to-day the struggle is going on; both from within and from without the foe is assailing us, the Bible is being attacked, Christ is being denied, the resurrection is counted a myth, and the future is being questioned, and in every part of the church it would seem as if men thought that the life of the Christian was all a holiday, for people are idling, gossiping, buying and selling, marrying and giving in marriage, instead of being in the thick of the fight in the name of the Lord of hosts. Give us three hundred in the church right with God rather than the thirty-two thousand compromising with sin and the world, and we shall win the victory.

I

I am impressed in this story with the thought of how much may be accomplished without wealth, influence or material strength. We somehow seem to think that we cannot work as ministers without a fine equipment. We have an idea that we must have a committee back of us to be assured of success, that if we are without influence we have a small mission in the world, forgetting that Michelangelo wrought the frescoes in the Sistine Chapel with the ochres which he digged with his own hands in the garden of the Vatican; forgetting also that the greatest work in the world has been accomplished by men like Gideon, who delayed not for elaborate preparation, but just took firebrands and torches--indeed, anything they could lay their hands upon--and cried out, "The sword of the Lord and of Gideon," and won the victory. The text is most striking, and presents an outline which any one ought to be able to see.

II

They stood. It is not so easy to stand as to march or to fight. I have been told that the most difficult service of the soldier is picket duty; and yet never until we learn to stand shall we be able to fight. In the fourteenth chapter of Exodus, the thirteenth and fourteenth verses, we read, "And Moses said unto the people. Fear ye not, stand still, and see the salvation of the Lord, which he will shew to you to-day, for the Egyptians whom ye have seen to-day, ye shall see them again no more forever. The Lord shall fight for you and ye shall hold your peace." And again, in 2 Chronicles, the twentieth chapter and the seventeenth verse, it is recorded, "Ye shall not need to fight in this battle: set yourselves, stand ye still, and see the salvation of the Lord with you, O Judah and Jerusalem: fear not, nor be dismayed; to-morrow go out against them, for the Lord will be with you."

Three thoughts are impressed upon my mind:

First: Before any service, let us stand, giving God a chance with us. Let him use you and not you use him so much. In the beginning of his Christian service Hudson Taylor, the China Inland missionary, was desirous of being used and cried out for God to send him out into service. At last God seemed to say to him, "My child, I have made up my mind to save inland China. If you will come and walk with me I will do it through you," and the China Inland Mission was born.

Second: Wait for orders. In Ephesians the sixth chapter and the tenth to the thirteenth verses, we have the following description of a soldier: "Finally, my brethren, be strong in the Lord, and in the power of his might. Put on the whole armor of God, that ye may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places. Wherefore take unto you the whole armor of God, that ye may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand." The striking part of that description is the sentence, "having done all, to stand." In other words, with all our ingenuity and our planning, with all our preparation and equipment, we lack one thing: that one thing is the touch of the Almighty God.

Third: Be willing to do the common thing. It was rather interesting to march with thirty-two thousand, and a striking thing to break pitchers and cry aloud, "The sword of the Lord and of Gideon," but just to stand was a different matter, and not at all easy. If we were only willing to do the common things for Christ we should accomplish more in our lives.

The great Bethany Sunday school building standing in Philadelphia is a model in its perfect equipment. The mighty Sunday school held there is one of the wonders of the world. The building was begun not only in the mind and heart of the distinguished superintendent, the Hon. John Wanamaker, but when he appealed for funds as they were then needed one of the poorest children in the city made practically the first and best contribution. She gathered bones from the alleyways, sold them and brought her few pennies to help make this wonderful work a success.

III

Every man in his place.

First: Let us remember that God has a plan for every life. Ephesians 4:8-13, "Wherefore he saith, When he ascended up on high, he led captivity captive, and gave gifts unto men. (Now that he ascended, what is it but that he also descended first into the lower parts of the earth? He that descended is the same also that ascended up far above all heavens, that he might fill all things.) And he gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers; for the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ; till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ."

Second: That which in our lives fits into God's plans dignifies and strengthens in every way.

A few years ago there was a young man selling farming implements. He felt inclined to do Christian work, and later on became a Christian Association secretary. He became known locally because of his ability to sing in a male quartette. He was a good singer. Whether he was more than the average secretary I do not know. He one day felt the call to preach and shrank back from it because he felt he was without ability, then gave himself to God without reserve. He has since become one of the greatest preachers to men in our country, has possibly led more men to Christ than any other man of his day, and it was my privilege a short time ago to see hundreds of men under the power of his preaching come to Christ; and this was all because Fred B. Smith gave himself unreservedly to Christ.

Third: It may be a very ordinary service that God calls you to perform, but if you feel it your place your service will please him. Rev. Dr. Torrey tells the story of the poor mother who by hard day's work made it possible for her boy to attend college. The day of the graduation came, and he said to her, "You must go

with me to the commencement." Naturally she shrank from it, for her clothing was of the poorest sort; but he said that there would be no commencement without her. He was the valedictorian of his class. Proudly he led her into the hall, and with beaming face she listened while the great throng applauded his brilliant speech. When he received his gold medal he walked down from the platform and pinned it upon her breast, saying, "This is yours," and she was as proud as any queen could have been. It was a very common thing to wash and iron for one's daily living, but to be honored thus was something any mother might long to experience. She simply did her best in a humble way and pleased God.

IV

Round about the Camp.

First: Let it be remembered that we have a responsibility to others. Some years ago on the Irish Sea a terrific storm was raging. It was known that just off the coast a vessel was going to pieces. Suddenly two men, an old sea captain and his son, put out through the storm. Everybody tried to persuade them not to do so, for it seemed to be absolutely useless. Over the waves, which appeared almost mountain high, they pushed along until at last amid the cheers of the waiting throng they returned with their little boat filled with those who had been all but lost upon the ship. When the minister said to the old sea captain, "Why do you do this? Why take such a risk?" he answered, "I have been there myself, and I knew the danger." It is because we have been once in sin and now are redeemed by the precious blood of Christ that we say something to those who are about us.

Second: We are responsible for others. When Horace Bushnell was a tutor in Yale he was a stumbling block to all the students because he was not a Christian. He realized this himself, and yet he said, "How can I accept Christ or the Bible, for I do not believe in either one." And then the question came to him as from God, "What do you believe?" and he said, "I only know there is a difference between right and wrong." God seemed to say to him, "Have you ever taken that stand where you would say, 'I am committed to the right even if it ends in death?'" and he said, "I never have." Falling upon his knees he said, "O God, if Jesus Christ be true, reveal him to me and I will follow him." And he began to walk in the light, which constantly increased, and almost every student in Yale came to Christ. "No man liveth unto himself alone." We are responsible for the souls of other men. We are also responsible for their service; if we are half-hearted they will surely be.

V

"And the host ran, and cried and fled." What hosts are against us to-day?

First: As individuals there may be coming constantly to our minds a question of doubt, of pride, or of secret sin, and we wonder if these are evidences that we are not Christians. Not at all. They are but the fruit of our old nature, and are the hosts encamped against us. We have only to take our stand with Christ, right with him, and we shall win the victory.

Second: In the Church we meet with indifference, worldliness, infidelity, and we wonder how we may win the victory. The answer is simply, "We have but to be right with God and to walk with God," and three hundred such followers of his could put the enemy to rout quickly.

Third: There is also a battle which those of us who are Christians are obliged to fight. It has to do with the unsaved man. Men are not Christians to-day not because they do not believe, not because they are

without interest in the future, but simply because they have put off and put off, and I know of no way to overcome this difficulty except by taking one's stand with Christ and with those who are like-minded with Christ. Having first concern for the lost, then his intense earnestness in their salvation, the procrastination of the sinner will flee away. For such a victory as this we plead and pray.

Source: <https://sermonindex.net/speakers/j-wilbur-chapman/a-great-victory/>

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