

The people that are with thee are too many for me

by William MacDonald

Transcript

“The people that are with thee are too many for me...” (Judges 7:2)

Everyone of us has a subtle desire for numbers and a tendency to judge success by statistics. There is a measure of reproach connected with small groups whereas large crowds command attention and respect. What should our attitude be in this area?

Large numbers should not be despised if they are the fruit of the Holy Spirit's work. This was the case at Pentecost when about 3,000 souls were swept into the kingdom of God.

We should rejoice in large numbers when they mean glory for God and blessing for mankind. It is only proper for us to long to see multitudes lifting their hearts and voices in praise to God, and reaching out to the world with the message of redemption.

On the other hand, large numbers are bad if they lead to pride. God had to reduce Gideon's army lest Israel should say, “Mine own hand hath saved me” (Judges 7:2). E. Stanley Jones once said he loathed our contemporary “scramble for numbers, leading, as it does, to collective egotism.”

Large numbers are bad if they lead to dependence on human power rather than on the Lord. This was probably the trouble with David's census (2 Sam. 24:2-4). Joab sensed that the king's motives were not pure and he protested—but in vain.

Large numbers are undesirable if, in order to achieve them, we lower standards, compromise Scriptural principles, water down the message, or fail to exercise godly discipline. There is always the temptation to do this if our minds are set on crowds rather than on the Lord.

Large numbers are less than ideal if they result in a loss of close fellowship. When individuals get lost in the crowd, when they can be absent and not be missed, when nobody shares their joys and sorrows, then the whole concept of body life is abandoned.

Large numbers are bad if they stifle the development of gift in the body. It is not without significance that Jesus chose 12 disciples. A huge crowd would have been unwieldy.

God's general rule has been to work through a remnant testimony. He is not attracted by large crowds or repelled by small ones. We should not boast in large numbers, but neither should we be content with small

numbers if they are the result of our own sloth and indifference.

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