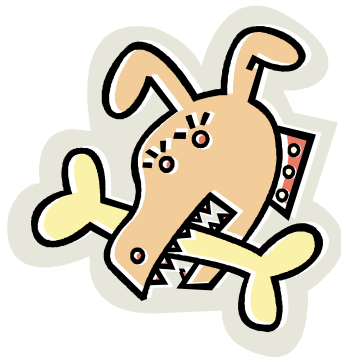


CRACK-POTS



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DOGS:

The Story of Gideon

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Crack-pots and Dogs: The Story of Gideon

“For we do not preach ourselves, but Jesus Christ as Lord” (2 Cor. 4:5).

Gideon was a judge of Israel, whom God raised up to deliver His people when the Midianites were raiding and oppressing them (Judges 6:1-6). Gideon began his ministry by demolishing an altar of Baal and hewing down an Asherah pole (Judges 6:28). When this deed was discovered, the men of the town surrounded Gideon’s house and demanded that his father hand him over to be put to death (Judges 6:30). That same day, the Midianites, Amalekites, and others formed a massive army and crossed the Jordan to attack the Israelites (Judges 6:33). Talk about stress!

Not the military type, Gideon described himself as a weak man (Judges 6:15). How could he save Israel? Many of us know how it feels to face an army of pressures, responsibilities, needs, and problems. As difficulties pile up, what strength we thought we had shrivels, and everything within wants to sound a retreat. But Judges 6:34 says, “Then the Spirit of the LORD came upon Gideon, and he blew a trumpet, summoning the Abiezrites to follow him.” Gideon also summoned others throughout Israel (Judges 6:35).

We also have a trumpet powered by the lungs of God’s Spirit—the gospel. The good news is this: we do not preach ourselves. We may be the least in the family, the weakest sheep. We may feel more like Custer than a Christian. But we do not preach ourselves. We preach Jesus Christ as Lord—Lord of our inadequacy, Lord of the pressures camped against us, Lord of creation in which a sparrow cannot fall without his leave (Matt. 10:29).

The trumpet-call of God’s Spirit emboldened Gideon. He did something that, quite frankly, made him look like a crack-pot: Rather than try to escape Midian or just sit by waiting for their hammer to fall, he led a preemptive strike against them. (Judges 7:8, 9). Gospel or no, this is not our idea of a good time. Deliberately place ourselves in close proximity to stresses, situations beyond our skill, and strain? Thank you, NO. Yet this is where we end up if we answer the call of the gospel—if Jesus is truly Lord as the gospel declares. But why would Jesus lead us to a place where He is the rock and an army of difficult circumstances is the hard place?

“For God, who said, ‘Let light shine out of darkness,’ made his light shine in our hearts to give us the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ. But we have this treasure in jars of clay to show that this all-surpassing power is from God and not from us. We are hard pressed on every side, but not crushed; perplexed, but not in despair; persecuted, but not abandoned; struck down, but not destroyed” (2 Cor. 4:6-9).

Thirty-two thousand men answered Gideon’s trumpet-call, a promising number. But God said, “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, announce now to the people, ‘Anyone who trembles with fear may turn back...’” (Judges 7:2, 3). By the time the selection process was over, Gideon was left with only 300 men (and these lapped like dogs) (Judges 7:7).

Gideon and his army were so few they could not even surround their enemy. When they had positioned themselves at various points around the Midianite camp, they did not give a war whoop and rush in brandishing swords. In fact, it isn’t even certain that they had swords. The Bible only mentions that they had trumpets and jars containing torches (Judges 7:16). On Gideon’s signal, every soldier blew his trumpet and broke his jar (Judges 7:19, 20). The blazing

fires and blaring trumpets sent the Midianite camp into a confused panic. In a frenzy of self-preservation, the Midianite soldiers slaughtered each other (Judges 7:21, 22).

Again, why would Jesus, the Lord, lead us into circumstances where our resources seem pitifully inadequate for the demand facing us, where we do not have the proper tools to do what He has called us to do, where life seems like a war of inconveniences, pressures, and failures? God has put a treasure in us—the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus—and He wants it to shine, to be the light of a new creation blazing out of the darkness of the old by His word. For this reason He places His treasure in jars of clay and then positions those containers in pressing, perplexing, long-suffering situations. The jar is clay because it must be weak enough to break. Otherwise, the light of Christ's glory will only shine within. It must also be clear that the all-surpassing power of Christ is from God and not the jar. If the jar's only role is to be broken then no one will confuse the treasure with the clay.

“We always carry around in our body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be revealed in our body. For we who are alive are always being given over to death for Jesus' sake, so that his life may be revealed in our mortal body. So then, death is at work in us, but life is at work in you” (2 Cor. 4:10-12).

We do not preach ourselves because we no longer live. Christ lives in us (Gal. 2:20). God does not just want us to preach the gospel. He wants the Person of the gospel revealed. If the Person of the gospel isn't revealed, then there is no gospel to preach (Gal. 1:15, 16). Having a message of victory while our old clay nature remains unbroken—oppressing us and stifling the light of Christ within—is not good news. How would it have been for Gideon's army if they merely blew trumpets in the dark? Often, this is how it is in the church. We preach the glory of Christ but no one can see the glory we preach manifest in us. We make a lot of noise but the light of love brings no contrast to the darkness (1 Cor. 13:1). It's no wonder that many conclude, somewhat rightly, that church is just another sham.

But whatever people may think, Christ is in us. We carry the One who died for us within. While people can't travel back in time to witness the historical cross, they can see the Spirit of the cross breaking down our clay jar. If we will follow Jesus, the Lord, into places where we are in over our heads, where His death can work in us, then His life will shine out of us and work life in others as well.

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