

**Early in the morning, Jerub-Baal (that is, Gideon) and all his men camped at the spring of Harod. The camp of Midian was north of them in the valley near the hill of Moreh. <sup>2</sup> The LORD said to Gideon, “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, <sup>3</sup> announce now to the people, ‘Anyone who trembles with fear may turn back and leave Mount Gilead.’ ” So twenty-two thousand men left, while ten thousand remained.**

**<sup>4</sup> But the LORD said to Gideon, “There are still too many men. Take them down to the water, and I will sift them for you there. If I say, ‘This one shall go with you,’ he shall go; but if I say, ‘This one shall not go with you,’ he shall not go.”**

**<sup>5</sup> So Gideon took the men down to the water. There the LORD told him, “Separate those who lap the water with their tongues like a dog from those who kneel down to drink.” <sup>6</sup> Three hundred men lapped with their hands to their mouths. All the rest got down on their knees to drink.**

**<sup>7</sup> The LORD said to Gideon, “With the three hundred men that lapped I will save you and give the Midianites into your hands. Let all the other men go, each to his own place.” <sup>8</sup> So Gideon sent the rest of the Israelites to their tents but kept the three hundred, who took over the provisions and trumpets of the others.**

**Now the camp of Midian lay below him in the valley. (NIV84)**

Theme: Victorious in the Lord.

It was February 1836 when Commander William B. Travis told his roughly 200 men that they were going to die. They were in the Alamo, the little mission in what is now San Antonio while Santa Anna, the Mexican General, had the place surrounded with about 2000 men. They could have left—but they didn’t. The 200 men including co-commander James Bowie, who badly hurt, and famous frontiersman, Davey Crocket, stayed to fight. 200 against 2000 is not a fair fight. But the Texans fought valiantly, fighting off the Mexican attack twice on March 6 before the Mexicans breached the walls on the third attack. The Texans killed about 600 of

the Mexicans, but in the end Santa Anna’s army ruthlessly killed every single man in the Alamo—even those who surrendered.

Over 2300 years before, on the other side of the world another famous battle took place in which a small army faced insurmountable odds. King Xerxes of Persia had brought his army to invade Greece. The ancient historian, Herodotus, estimated the army to be 1.5-2 million strong; modern historians believe that the Persian army was anywhere from 100,000-300,000 men. Against them stood King Leonidas of Sparta who led 300 Spartans along with an alliance of the Greek city-states. It is estimated that they had only 7000 men. The Greeks met the Persians at a narrow coastal pass, Thermopylae, called the “Hot Gates” which would have minimized the effectiveness of the Persian numbers.

The Greeks held off the Persians for two days. But someone had tipped off a narrow pass around the Hot Gates to the Persians, which allowed them to outflank the Greeks. King Leonidas, knowing that he was outflanked dismissed most of the army and formed a rear-guard of around 1,500 men, including his 300 Spartans. They were wiped out but this sacrifice allowed the bulk of the army to retreat and regroup; and in all, about 20,000 Persians died.

In these two famous battles a relatively small army faced off against a much larger foe. They faced insurmountable odds and yet they displayed bravery and valiantly fought, taking out a large number of enemies.

We too face insurmountable odds—on a daily basis. Every day we face the battle against our sinful nature—the desire to satisfy our wants and desires, to do what pleases us, to do what feels good regardless of what God says in his Word. As we grow in our faith we are able to withstand these temptations more and more. And yet we still fail again and again. We succumb to the flesh; we fail to deny ourselves in favor of God’s Word. Even the Apostle Paul admitted to losing this battle constantly, **I have the desire to do what is good, but I cannot carry it out. For what I do is not the good I want to do; no, the evil I do not want to do—this I keep on doing.** A few verses later Paul describes his sinful nature as waging war against himself, keeping him from obeying God’s will.

At times the enemies we battle are friends and family, who try to get us to do something else instead of attend worship or read God's Word. They want you to go out and have some fun and not worry about what some guy wrote in a book thousands of years ago. And the problem is that we want to be close to our family members. We want our friends to remain friends. We don't want to make them angry or upset them and we try to do things with them. And so we compromise here and there trying to have the best of both worlds. But soon you realize that you have been compromising and God and his Word more than anything else.

We also face pressure from society, which tries to force us into its own belief about sexuality, love, and gender identity, just to name a few of the hot topics. We think that we can withstand the pressure put on us by society. It seems that we in the WELS are one of only a handful of church bodies sticking with God's word on social issues. But it could be that, over time, after years and years of being worn down, we lose our desire to fight this battle and we become almost indifferent to seeing such sins displayed on T.V. or in movies.

And as we talked about last week, Satan and his demons lie behind all of this. They are in the heavenly realms, the rulers and authorities of sinful darkness and this wicked evil world. It's not a level playing field between us and the devil. While we don't know how many are in Satan's army, we know that there are many.

But no matter what the number, it is a battle that we can't win—we don't stand a chance. We face insurmountable odds. And the worst part about it is that if we lose, we won't just die physically and be buried in the ground, we would die forever and suffer eternally in hell.

The Israelite army, it seemed faced insurmountable odds too. Each year the Midianites, along with some other countries to the east of the Jordan River would attack God's people and plunder everything. So God chose a little-known and unimportant man, by the name of Gideon, to lead his people against the Midianites. Soon the Midianites entered the Promised Land and camped in a valley. Gideon sounded the horn and called for help—and 32,000 men answered his call. 32,000 is not a small army, but it is quite a bit smaller than the 135,000 men that the Persians brought. Yet God said it was too many people. So anyone who was afraid to fight was allowed to go home. 22,000 left, while 10,000 remained. Then God dwindled the number even

more by choosing them men who lapped water up like dogs when they were taken down to a spring. Only 300 remained. The Lord said, **With the three hundred men that lapped I will save you and give the Midianites into your hands.**

Notice what the Lord said, **I will save you.** The Texans in the Alamo pleaded and pleaded for more reinforcements; King Leonidas would have loved to have thousands of more soldiers at his disposal. When an army goes to battle, especially in ancient times, it wants as many people to fight as possible. Even with all the men who showed up the Israelites were still outnumbered by more than 100,000! But God only wanted 300.

Why? So that it would be clear that the Israelites didn't defeat their enemies by their own power. Rather it was by the power of the Lord that the Midianites were destroyed. Twice in our text the Lord let it be known that he was responsible for this victory—we just read verse seven and in verse two he says, **You have too many men for me to deliver Midian into their hands.**

So he dwindled the number to 300; and perhaps you remember how the battle went. The Midianites were camped in a valley. So Gideon took his 300 men and gave them a lit torch covered by a jug and a trumpet. He divided them into three companies and in the middle of the night they surrounded the camp. And then following Gideon's lead they broke their jars, exposing the flames of the torch, blew their trumpets and shouted, **for the Lord and for Gideon!** When the Midianites woke up from their slumber they thought that they were being attacked and the Lord caused them to turn on each other and kill each other. The Midianites fled and Gideon and his 300 men followed them. Other Israelites joined the pursuit; and in the end they routed the entire Midianite army. God gave them the improbable victory!

The Lord also gives us the improbable victory. Over our enemies of sin, death, and the power of the devil the Lord has won. He won this battle and every other battle—he won the war, not with a mighty and numerous army but with an army of one. It was Christ alone who fought this battle, which he took to the cross. The thing about war is that you win by staying alive and killing the other guy. But Jesus won by dying. He died willingly so that he could take our place in hell, suffering for the sins we deserve and removing them far from us. On

the cross he then gave us his righteousness and as a result the Lord has declared us not guilty.

Of course, Jesus willingly died because he knew what would happen 3 days later. He rose from the dead! And when he rose from the dead, he crushed Satan's head, giving him the fatal, eternal blow. Death was turned into something horrible into something good—for in Christ in leads to eternal life. And since Christ paid for our sins on the cross, the sting of death has been removed!

We cannot defeat our sinful nature—we fail in battle numerous times a day. And yet, in Christ we are victorious—for the Lord gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ. We cannot defeat death on our own for we all will die. But because of Christ we will live even though we die. We don't stand a chance against Satan, but in Christ we are victorious; and with his full armor of God we are able to withstand his attacks and can go on the offensive with his Holy Word! In our gospel for today Jesus talks about the way into heaven—there are many roads that lead to hell, but narrow is the road that leads to heaven. Not that only a few are invited—all are invited to heaven and the Lord sincerely wants all to be saved. But few will enter—even those who claimed to be Christians will not enter. How can that be? They relied on themselves and their own power for salvation. They thought by their own works they could earn for themselves eternal life. But our victory, our salvation, depends solely on Christ and in his mighty power. By him and him alone, received through faith we are truly victorious—over all our enemies. You are part of the small remnant chosen by grace to be saved and to enter through the narrow gate.

The battle of the Alamo and the battle of Thermopylae are two famous examples in history of small armies facing insurmountable odds and putting up a good fight. But here's the thing—in both battles the small army was completely destroyed—not a single one of them survived! Not so with us; not so with Gideon. He and his 300 men faced an enemy of 135,000 not because they trusted in their own power or cunning, but because the Lord was with them and he had promised to give them the victory. They were confident in victory because they were confident in the Lord. And he gave them that victory. We too are confident in the Lord. And so we live our lives with the assurance that Christ has already won and since he has already won, so

have we! Eternal life is ours, forgiveness has been won and eternal life assured—for have been made heirs with Christ!

Knowing that our Lord stands behind us and has already won for us the victory, leads us to fight our battles. On our own we face insurmountable odds, and we will not win. But we still fight the good fight—day after day, striving to do what is right and obey God's commands. We will lose; and yet, we are victorious. For the battle is not ours, but the Lord's. In him we are victorious. Amen.