

From the Pulpit of the Japanese Baptist Church of North Texas  
July 8, 2018

Gideon — Man of Faith  
Judges 7:1-7

7:1 Then Jerubbaal (that is, Gideon) and all the people who were with him rose early and encamped beside the spring of Harod. And the camp of Midian was north of them, by the hill of Moreh, in the valley.

7:2 The LORD said to Gideon, “The people with you are too many for me to give the Midianites into their hand, lest Israel boast over me, saying, ‘My own hand has saved me.’

7:3 Now therefore proclaim in the ears of the people, saying, ‘Whoever is fearful and trembling, let him return home and hurry away from Mount Gilead.’” Then 22,000 of the people returned, and 10,000 remained.

7:4 And the LORD said to Gideon, “The people are still too many. Take them down to the water, and I will test them for you there, and anyone of whom I say to you, ‘This one shall go with you,’ shall go with you, and anyone of whom I say to you, ‘This one shall not go with you,’ shall not go.”

7:5 So he brought the people down to the water. And the LORD said to Gideon, “Every one who laps the water with his tongue, as a dog laps, you shall set by himself. Likewise, every one who kneels down to drink.”

7:6 And the number of those who lapped, putting their hands to their mouths, was 300 men, but all the rest of the people knelt down to drink water.

7:7 And the LORD said to Gideon, "With the 300 men who lapped I will save you and give the Midianites into your hand, and let all the others go every man to his home."

## 1. Christian Demographics in Japan

Before studying the Bible, I would like to show the result of religious demographics of the year 2016 in Japan. This was created and published by Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology in Japan.

In Japan, the religions are classified into 4 categories, “Shintoism,” “Buddhism,” “Christianity,” and “Others” or “New Religions.” The numbers of follower are, Shintoism 84,739,699; Buddhism 87,702,069; so they are almost equal. Others or New Religions 7,910,440; Christianity 1,914,196. The sum of the followers of all categories is 188,892,502. However, the population of Japan in that year was 127,094,745. That means religious demographics are bigger than population in Japan. Why does this happen? This is because one person might have more than two religions. In Japan, many people, even atheists, are counted as the followers of Shinto shrine or Buddhist temple without knowing it. Therefore, any statistics of religious demographics are not accurate.

According to the report, “Christianity” has 1,914,196 believers; however, the actual number might be half of 1,914,196. According to other data, the Christian population in Japan has less than 1,000,000, which means approximately less than 1% of total population. I have researched about the Christian population. In Japan, Roman Catholic has 441,107, which is approximately 46% of whole Christian population. United Church of Christ in Japan has 117,773, Anglican Church has 49,228, and Baptist Church has 33,984. The total is 960,253.

Even though the Christian population is very small in Japan, the

Christians are very active in the society in a good way and support the churches very well. Christians protect and support orphans, women, and homeless people. The hospitals and hospices were started by Christians. There are so many Christian colleges and schools almost in every prefectures, and 750,000 students have opportunity to learn the Bible and meet Christians. However, the Christian population is very small in the country. Many people have been discussing on this issue but they have not found the answer. Sometimes we are discussing this without knowing the heart of God. We shall remember how God wants to save people as we read these verses, 1 Timothy 2:4 “God .... desires all people to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth.” 2 Peter 3:9 “The Lord is .... patient toward you, .... all should reach repentance ....” and Romans 10:1 says, “Brothers, my heart's desire and prayer to God for them is that they may be saved.” We would like to pray for more people receive the salvation of soul as the bible teaches us.

## **2. Quantity and Quality**

We are hoping for the increasing number of Christian, but we do not think number or quantity is the best priority, quality is also important. However, I think the quality improves if you work hard and encourage each other among a certain number. If a small number of people gather in the church constantly and their age older, also new people and young people do not come in, the church may stop growing. Church members may be intimate and able to create a comfortable space with upon society, but these environments lose an opportunity to learn new things, also do not help grow up with each other. If the

number of Japanese Christians is small in a church, I think better to gather together with other Japanese Christians and other churches rather than a few people gather in a church. If having done that, I think that we can appeal to people around more effectively about the church. If you interact with people from other churches, you can learn from each other also you can have mutual improvement.

There is the word “Big fish in a small pond.” It means “a person who is bossy in a small world,” saying in Japanese “I-no naka-no kawazu” (a frog in the water well). Even in any field, if you are in extremely small places, you will not encounter better people and you will not be able to grow yourself. As we are in the United States, in a sense, we came a huge world, we rather became “Small fish in a big pond,” let’s try to see things from different angles, learned, trained and desire to grow among numerous Christians.

The church began with one hundred twenty people (Acts 1: 15) gathered in Jerusalem. On the day of Pentecost, the church became with three thousand people from one hundred twenty people at once (Acts 2:42). “Five thousand man” are added to the three thousand believers (Acts 4: 4). The Bible marks the increase in number of Christians as; Acts 5:14 And more than ever believers were added to the Lord, multitudes of both men and women; Acts 6:1 Now in these days when the disciples were increasing in number ....; Acts 6:7 The number of the disciples multiplied greatly ....; Acts 9:31 So the church throughout all Judea and Galilee and Samaria had peace and was being built up. And walking in the fear of the Lord and in the comfort of the Holy Spirit, it multiplied.

Indeed, the word “number increases” used in Acts 6 and 9 is called

πληθύνω (plēthunō) in the original language. It means “to increase,” “to increase number,” and “to become many times.” It is translated as “to multiply” in English. “Multiply” has the meaning of “multiplication” in math. The church increased like “multiplication”  $5 \times 5 = 25$  instead of “addition”  $5 + 5 = 10$ .

I introduced the mission statement of The Dallas The Village Church previously. The statement says, is “We exist to bring glory to God by making disciples through gospel-centered worship, community, service, and multiplication.” As Matthew 28:19 the Lord Jesus ordered to “make all nation disciples”, the church set “discipleship” at the center of the church. Worship is the fuel for discipleship; Community is the context for discipleship, Service is the overflow of discipleship, Multiplication is the result of discipleship. This church understood like that.

This church began as a church of Southern Baptist by 13 families in 1869, moved to Lewisville in 1882 and became the First Baptist Church of Lewisville. This Lewisville church bore the Lakeland church in 1962. The Lakeland Church bore the Highland Village First Baptist Church in 1978. This Highland Village Church became The Village Church in 2002. And The Village Church created Providence Church in 2005, CityView Church in 2006, Denton Church in 2007 and Flower Mound Church and Dallas Northway Church in 2009. Other churches started in Coppell in 2011, Fort Worth in 2013 and Plano in 2014. The church started from dozens of people now literally “multiply” to the church with six campuses. Indeed, I think multiplication is a sign of the Church is alive.

### **3. 300 Soldiers of Gideon**

We, too, also wish that many people come to our church. Not only come to church, we wish them have faith, and become Christians by receiving baptism. And we aim that one baptized will grow up to a disciple of Jesus Christ and make another Christian through his/her witness. It is not a social phenomena that the first century church could increase in the number of Christians and church like multiplications. That is, like “walking in the fear the Lord and in the comfort of the Holy Spirit it was multiplied” in Act 9:31, godliness for God was raised in the church and individual lived by the life of the Holy Spirit. Today, there are no gain of Christians and number of churches if there is no fear of the Lord and no encouragement of the Holy Spirit. “Multiplication is the result of training disciples.” If you forget this and depend on “number,” the church will fall down to the world of “the subtraction” from the world of “multiplication”.

The story of Gideon will teach us the secret of multiplication. Gideon got thirty-two thousand of soldiers to fight against Medians. However, the Lord told Gideon, saying, “The people with you are too many.” Many soldiers would be more favorable in the war. Then, why did the Lord say so. Because people depend on number, instead of depending on God. The Lord knows that if they won against the Medians by overwhelming number of soldiers, people would say that “My own hands delivered me,” and proclaiming himself an forget the confidence in the God.

That’s why, Gideon said, “Whoever is fearful and trembling, let him return.” And twenty two thousands soldiers left. Ten thousand people remained. But God said “The people are still too many.” And

God said that He will show the people who will fight against Medians with Gideon. But, how God will shows that. That is by the way how people drink water. Gideon led ten thousand soldiers to the water front. Gideon told them to take rest and drink the water. Many of them lay by the water, put their mouth in the water and drink water like animals. The attitude is not suitable as soldiers. When they lay by the water, they would be very easily attacked by the enemy. They would not be able to protect themselves when arrows shot them.

But people who were trained as soldiers drank water with their one hand very carefully. Probably using one hand to drink and other hand holding his sword or spear. God told Gideon to make them go home, who lay down to drink water. When Gideon counted remained soldiers, there are only three hundred. They are less than 1 percent of the original thirty-two thousand. How can they fight against Medians with only this number of people? It seemed impossible according human strategy. But if the God was with them, anything became possible. Gideon fought the Medians and won the victory by trusting God, not by number. Just like, Psalm 33:16 says, "The king is not saved by his great army; a warrior is not delivered by his great strength." Gideon fought the enemy with only three hundred people believing the salvation of God.

The number of Christians in Japan is less than 1 percent of entire population. However, if the Lord fights with them, there is the victory and possibility of gaining the number, from 1 percent to 5 percent, 5 percent to 10 percent. God asks us have the faith that the God will fight with us. God requires us a determined will that we can say, "I, too, become the one of three hundred soldiers of Gideon." And we

need to train ourselves for the fight of the Lord. Let's take this training of faith willingly. If so, we will see the fulfillment of the verse of Act 2:47. It says, "And the Lord added their number day by day those who were being saved" even here and now. God will give us more results than our strength if the church have a clear goal and all of us pray and work hard in one mind. Believe in the Lord, and follow Him.

**(Prayer)**

Our God Father, we are a small group of people. Therefore, we may not proud of ourselves relying on "number." However, we may fall down to the unfaithfulness claiming that we can not do since "we are small number." We pray for taking away such unfaithfulness from us, and make us pray hard and work willingly for multiplication of believers. We pray this in the name of Lord Jesus, Amen.