

KWASIZABANTU MINISTERS' CONFERENCE 2019

Rev Erlo Stegen, Director of KwaSizabantu Mission

REVIVAL – GOD AT WORK

Monday, 4 March

The theme for this evening is *Revival - God at work*.

I would like to add two other words to the word revival: *spiritual awakening* and an *outpouring of God's Spirit* – God coming down from heaven.

Oh that you would rend the heavens and come down, that the mountains might quake at your presence—as when fire kindles brushwood and the fire causes water to boil—to make your name known to your adversaries, and that the nations might tremble at your presence! When you did awesome things that we did not look for, you came down the mountains quaked at your presence.

⁴*From of old no one has heard or perceived by the ear, no eye has seen a God besides you, who acts for those who wait for him. Isaiah 64:1-4*

This verse is a perfect picture of revival. Revival is not what modern people suppose it to be, it is not man made. Man is not in the foreground. God Himself dwells among men, meets their needs and reveals Himself to them.

Dear friends, I believe with all my heart that there is only one thing that will help us in our country, in Africa and in the world and that is a genuine Holy Spirit revival, where God Himself will rend the heavens, come down, kindle His fire and do great and marvellous things which shake the nations. Then the world will once again realise that God is on the throne and that He is the first one through Jesus Christ our Lord.

I was reminded of 67 years ago when God called me into the ministry. I recalled my words at the beginning when Christ called me. It was a blow when He called me because I wanted to be a farmer and make money and I knew this calling would mean the end of all these ideals, dreams and plans for my future. So I counted the cost and I realised that I could not pay the price. This disobedience caused me to go through hell on earth for 18 months. After this period of time, I bowed to the Lord of lords and King of kings, I agreed to obey. "Lord," I said, "in obedience to Your call, I want to go, but on one condition – I want to do it as You did it, to preach the way You preached and live the way You lived. I would like to be a preacher according to the Biblical standard."

Shortly after my conversion as a young boy, besides reading the Bible, I loved reading books on revival. I read every single book I could get hold of. Revival is not many people gathering to hear God's word, it is not churches filled with people but people filled with God. Revival is more than just thousands of people meeting to listen to God's Word and commenting about the wonderful service. Revival is exactly the opposite – people leave the service weeping and sometimes they lie on the floor during the service because a holy God reveals Himself and they realise they are sinners who need to repent. They do not enter the church with their sins, comment on how wonderful the service was and leave with their sins but in times of revival they remain behind to make peace with God. The person who used to steal, stops stealing. The person who committed adultery, stops. People stop sinning.

I devoured those books where thousands were converted when God came down. I prayed and asked the Lord whether He would please pour out His Holy Spirit in our area and throughout the country.

There is a difference between evangelisation and revival. Revival is when the Spirit comes down and He brings the people. This happened at Pentecost when God sent His spirit - divine magnetism was in action. People were drawn by the Spirit of God and brought in by Him. This occurrence has happened now and then throughout the ages when God works mightily through His Spirit, entering homes bringing the people without church bells or invitations. Nothing is announced. When the Spirit of God comes over people, they gather together in one place.

After 12 years on the mission field, I was a disillusioned man. After 12 years of preaching I did not know of 12 men who were really on fire for God. I held evangelistic campaigns that lasted 10, 12, 14 years where I preached every day of the year, sometimes twice a day. I said that I would preach until fire came down from heaven. People accepted the Lord, sometimes by the hundreds, but nothing changed and after a while there was nothing left.

Then our hearts cried and we prayed this prayer of Isaiah 64. O God, that You would rend the heavens and come down. Do you know how God dealt with us during the time of preparation? I always thought that the problem was 'the people' who were so hard but in 1 Peter 4:17 God says, *For it is time for judgment to begin at the household of God;* and if it begins with us, what will be the outcome for those who do not obey the gospel of God? Revival always begins with the children of God.

I found the Zulus to be hardened towards the gospel. It was difficult for them to separate from the ancestral spirits. They said that Christianity was a white man's religion, it was good and had many advantages but their ancestral spirits and traditions were also necessary and they needed to get medicine from the witchdoctors. The political spirit and hatred towards whites also made it difficult, as well as alcohol and other worldly things. It was hard for me. I was told by them to preach to my own people first because they get angry and shout at them. They said that if the whites get converted they might listen to me. All these issues made it very difficult. (Once revival broke out they were no longer problems.) Because of these things I asked God for a way to convince these people that they did not need all the other things. I preached a sermon to that effect, telling them not to go to the witchdoctors and witches anymore. I said that they should not worship the dead but come to Jesus with their problems. When I finished the sermon a woman came who said she was happy to have found someone who served a living God. She had an adult daughter who was mad and she asked me whether I could ask the Lord to heal her. I saw the girl at home and she was in a shocking state. We had been praying for revival for 6 years and I thought that if this girl was delivered it might result in the conversion of the tribe which might be what we had been praying for all these years. I took her to my parents' place where we prayed for her day and night for three weeks after which she was worse than ever and I was almost a nervous wreck. I felt like the evolutionists who looked for a missing link to back up their theory. There seemed to be a missing link. The promises are in the Bible and in theory are correct but in practise, it does not work. I had to return to this mother and tell her that it did not work. How could I ever stand in front of these people and preach again? They all knew that the Christians were praying for this girl and now they would say that I said they must stop going to the witchdoctors and come to Jesus but Jesus cannot help either. Do you understand how I felt? I had to be honest, I could not say that it worked when it did not. I had to be honest with myself and I knew in my heart that it did not work. This was a difficult time and the beginning of modern ideas. From that time I could no longer believe that the Bible was literally the Word of God from cover to cover e.g. John 14:12 *Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever believes in Me will also do the works that I do; and greater works than these will he do, because I am going to the Father.* No, that was not the truth. But I could not call the Lord a liar. But I reasoned out how it happened: in the early centuries when they wrote everything by hand, something may have been left out and what we read today does not reflect what the original text says. Parts of the Bible were true and others were not. I was the fool who said what was inspired and what was not. During that time I no longer prayed for revival because I did not believe that anything like this was possible anymore.

After 12 years, toward the end of 1966, I arrived at Maphumulo, which is about 20 km from where KwaSizabantu is today. In 1963 I had held daily services there for 10 months. Hundreds attended and hundreds would come forward when I made an invitation. Sometimes, there were so many who wanted to accept the Lord, that there was not enough space for them in the front. My heart rejoiced but 2 or 3 weeks later there would be nothing left and nothing had changed. Things simply continued the way they had been. No shebeens were closed. I sold hundreds of Bibles during that time but nothing changed. If there was a change, it was very, very small.

Three years later when I arrived there, I found 20-30 Christians who met once or twice a week for Bible study and prayer. I said, "Look people, I cannot anymore." I asked the people whether they would be prepared to meet every morning from 7-8 and in the evenings from 5-6. We would study the Word of God and search for the truth. They were prepared. I said that we would not excuse or justify ourselves anymore and we would not try and reason things out of the way. We would forget our own wisdom and accept for once that the Bible is the Word of God and allow Him to speak to us through His word.

We started with the word in John 37:38 – *Whoever believes in Me, as the Scripture has said, 'Out of his heart will flow rivers of living water.* I asked who of them believe in Jesus and everyone in that room said that they did. Then I asked whether there were streams flowing out of our lives - not one stream but streams? Not drops but rivers flowing out of us. Water brings new life. A desert can be changed into a garden with one stream and the glory of the Lord can be seen there. If out of one life, streams of living water flow, imagine what could happen? But there we were - without streams flowing from our lives. Why did we not believe as we should? We would search the Scriptures to find out. We would test ourselves against the Word of God. We decided to start with the book of Acts. We did not want to pick a verse here and there like a child picking raisins out of a cake. We would take it all.

We started with the first chapter and worked through the whole book. The further we read, the more heart broken we became because we saw the church in Jerusalem. We compared ourselves to the first Christians and realised that the standard of our lives was as far removed from theirs as the east is from the west. We say that the Lord will return to fetch His bride, the church, but what does His church look like today? Where is that bride without spot or blemish? Where is the church that will stand next to Him as His bride in robes washed whiter than snow without spot or blemish and not in torn rags. The further we read, the more we wept. Those prayer meetings were no longer prayer meetings. Had someone entered the room after a prayer meeting, they would have found pools of water under the chairs. Not because the people were trying to cry but because we had been reading God's Word and took it literally. We pleaded with the Lord to be in our midst. We read that the people in Acts were together on a daily basis. They loved each other and were of one heart and one soul. This was the greatest miracle because it was the opposite of what we experienced in our small group. No wonder that the place where they prayed was shaken. They met in their own homes and shared their belongings with each other. It was clear that Christ was their life. Jesus meant more to them than anything else on earth.

Can you understand why we were unhappy, why we wept and why we could not be satisfied with our religion? We cried to God, "Lord, we cannot carry on like this. We will be unable to stand before You one day in this condition." If there would be a church like the one in Jerusalem today, would we want to be part of it? We read about Ananias and Sapphira. I asked myself what I would have said if I had been Peter. I might have been too thankful for such a large donation, but Peter was not prepared to accept the money from Ananias. He realised that something was wrong. He would not even allow such a man to be part of the church. I wondered too what I would have done if Ananias was my brother or Sapphira, my sister? If such a thing would happen today, what would we have said? Maybe the whole Christian world would have said no, no, no, this is not right! Be careful, it is a dangerous sect!

Remember, if you pray for revival, you pray for trouble. If you do not want trouble, rather stop praying. If there is one thing the devil hates, it is that God is in control of His work and He is working. The devil does not want God to work and he will resist it with all his might. We can testify to this.

This is what it was like in that early church and this is what the preachers of that day looked like. Now we can understand why it was possible for them to shake the earth and shake the foundations of hell. The Lord says that if the Holy Spirit comes on you, you will receive power. A Spirit-filled life is one of power. The Bible says that if we believe as the Scriptures say ... Not as our theories and doctrines, but as the Scriptures say. Our lives must be witnesses of whatever the Scriptures say and they should testify to the world of the truth in the Scriptures.

I will never forget the day when God rent the heavens and came down. It is over 50 years ago but I remember it as if it happened yesterday. I know one thing - God is able and He is still the same. He can fulfil His promises and if we serve Him with all our hearts and we pray that He works, He will work because He did it in this area over 50 years ago. The day He did that, there was a God-consciousness. There was something in the air - a hope, a knowledge - God had begun and God was at work.

I made statements that I do not know where they came from. I said to the people that I would be prepared to go to Russia and preach the Gospel there. I believed that God could send a genuine revival. (Russia was a closed country at that time.) I said that I did not know of a place where God could not work. That is what it is like when God comes down and begins to work in revival power. What He has done in these nearly 53 years of revival, is great grace. There have been big challenges along the way and we praise God for having kept us and carrying us through until this day and we still see Him working in a marvellous way.

When God came down in 1966, more happened in 2 or 3 days than in the 12 years of hard work on the mission field. There were no church bells, no organisation was done, no invitations were sent, the Spirit of God came down and He literally went into the homes and brought the people, starting with the very strongholds of evil.

I remember when the first person arrived. She was a witch who had a training school for witches. We were in a service in the cowshed which we had cleaned by taking out the cow dung and chasing out the rats and snakes. I was told that there was a witch outside who wanted to speak to me. I went out and asked her what she wanted. She asked me whether Jesus could set her free from the chains of hell which bound her. I was amazed. For 12 years I had been trying to convert witchdoctors and witches but they were hard and told me that what they did was a gift from God. Now this witch said in desperation that she was bound by the chains of the devil. I asked her who had preached to her. She said no one. Who told her that she was going to hell? She said no one. I could not believe what I heard. We had prayed for God to work and He convicted her of her sin. The Holy Spirit had come and His shoulder touched the shoulder of this witch and He brought conviction to her and she realised she was lost. I told the witch that if she wanted to be set free she could use the opportunity to pour out her heart to a co-worker, confess her sins and put things right. Afterwards she asked me to pray for her that God would drive out the evil spirits – the Ndawos, the Ndigis, the Dlozis, the Zizwes - the latter being the spirits of the nations which gave people the ability to speak in languages they had never heard before or learned. I did not know how to pray for such a person, but we sat down in a circle and began singing a song, 'My Jesus lives, what shall I fear?' Suddenly she went on all fours and her face took on the expression of a wild animal ready to catch its prey. One of our co-workers jumped and ran out in fright but I called her back and told her not fear because the Lord is victor. We prayed and the demons began speaking. Firstly, many dogs barked from her, then many pigs squealed, after which she spoke to us in English even though she was illiterate, had never attended school or worked for English people. The demons began speaking in a man's voice and said, "We are three hundred strong warriors. This is our home. We will not leave this person." The Bible says that we are not fighting against flesh and blood

but against principalities and powers of darkness. We continued praying and then the demons cried out, "We are burning since the Holy Spirit has come. We cannot bear this anymore!" There on our knees I remembered the verse from Zechariah 4:6 – *"Not by might, nor by power, but by My Spirit, says the LORD of hosts."* I never knew before how one fought against these forces. We responded by telling the demons that they would have to leave because Jesus has conquered on the Cross. The first hundred left with a great noise and then the second and then the third. You know what the face of an old witch is like but after she had been delivered, she looked like a saint who had lived in the presence of the Lord for years. She smiled and said, "Thank You, Lord, for setting me free from these terrible chains. I thank You, my Lord." It was a heavenly smile. It happened over 50 years ago but I cannot forget that smile. After that she lay down and the Lord took her. She had walked for 7 kilometres from her school for witches, saying she was going to die but she said, "Woe to me if I die before the Lord has set me free." In the last minutes of her life she met with the one who broke the chains of hell. *Not by might nor by power but by My Spirit.* The Holy Spirit convicted people. He went into the homes and they came to make peace with God. People confessed their sins without us having preached to them. There were no arguments – is this a sin or not? The Holy Spirit had done His work in their lives.

After her, others followed. More witches, then the witchdoctors, then the possessed and after them many others from all walks of life. Day and night they came, for two or three months we got very, very little sleep. Sometimes we worked right through the night, day and night. There was no time to eat. As one group left, the next group came at any time of the day, any day of the week. I asked each one personally, "How did you get here? Who told you about this place?" They said no one. The answer was always, "No, nobody." "Yes, but why do come here then?" I would ask, and they would answer, "We are bound and felt that we should come here. We can no longer sleep, we have no peace." We realised that it was God who was working through His Spirit to bring the people to hear His Word and make peace with Him. Some heard a voice out of the blue which told them to go to that place or to that house where you will be told what you should do. Some did not hear or see anything, they just had a feeling inside that they had to come. This is the way it had been since the beginning of revival. Some of them were raw heathens – strong, blood thirsty men who wept like babies as if someone hit them with a whip. "What's the matter?" they would be asked and their response was, "We are sinners and it seems there is one inch between us and hell." Sometimes it seemed as if it was the Day of Judgement already. People were unable to go to work. Children could not go to school but came for help. Sometimes when we left the house, we would find a hundred, two hundred people outside in the garden on the lawn, any time of the day, any day of the week, young and old, Christians and non-Christians, the learned and the illiterate - they came and said that they were on their way to hell. The Spirit of God had convicted them of sin, righteousness and judgement. But though they came weeping, they left with radiant faces because they had peace in their hearts. Back home, the husband would ask his wife what had happened to her. Parents would ask their children why they had changed so much. It was exactly as the Scriptures say: *"Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come."* (1 Corinthians 5:17) In this way the Name of the Lord Jesus was praised and glorified.

This is how it all began and the streams which started flowing in 1966 are still flowing to this day and more than ever. People come from all over the country, all over the world and from all continents. It is God who is at work. It is not something which we do. There are no church bells ringing, no invitations, but God came down and He is glorifying His Name to this day. To Him be all the glory. The prophet Micah 7:18 was right when he said, "Who is a God like You?" *Who is a God like You...* One day we held an open air meeting in a certain place and before the service a Hindu woman came with her 16 year old daughter. She told me this story: Her daughter had been mentally handicapped since birth, most probably due to brain damage. Her mother had taken her to many doctors and they said that she was incurable and would be like this to the end of her life. She visited many temples but their gods could not help her. "Two weeks ago," she said, "I met a Zulu man who said that I should take my daughter to Maphumulo because there are Christians there who serve the Lord Jesus. 'They will pray for you and Jesus will heal your daughter.' When I heard that, I

said, 'That is the God I want to serve!' The moment I said that, my daughter was healed and she is in her right mind. Here she is, you can speak to her." I spoke to her and she was perfectly normal. She also said that from now on she wanted to serve God. "Our gods have failed, but your God has healed me."

We should shout it from the mountaintops and proclaim it to all the world: there is no God like Jesus Christ. When will the nations acknowledge that there is no Lord but Him, the Lord of lords, the King of kings?