

KWASIZABANTU MINISTERS' CONFERENCE 2019

Rev Erlo Stegen, Director of KwaSizabantu Mission

REVIVAL – GOD AT WORK

Tuesday, 5 March

How does one get revival?

Not by might, nor by power, but by My Spirit, says the LORD of hosts. Zechariah 4:6

May God bless the reading of His holy Word.

The Comforter convicts of sin. When Jesus was with His disciples, they experienced heaven on earth as He taught them and did miracles. They must have thought that there was nothing better. When He said He would leave them, their hearts broke. However, He said that it was to their advantage that He went, for if He did not go, the Helper, the Holy Spirit, would not come. If He went, He would send the Holy Spirit. The Lord Jesus had something better for them.

A life filled with the Holy Spirit is the best life there is. When the Comforter has come - the Parakletos, the One who will rub shoulders with you, the One who stands at your side - He will convict the world of sin, of righteousness and of judgement. When the Holy Spirit comes, He will convict people of sin through you. If this is not the case, I suggest that you cry to God so that He will reveal the state you are in - you are spiritually dead. Convicting people is not our job, it is the job of the Holy Spirit. He can only do that once our lives are in order and we are clean vessels for Him to use.

Now the question is: How does one get revival? It is tough. It is a very steep mountain to climb. I would like to share a bit of the process I went through and how God dealt with me and put me through His mill before the revival started.

We earnestly prayed for revival at Mapumulo. I expected the Lord to begin working with the heathen and lukewarm Christians. But the Lord started with the greatest sinner and that was me. The first thing the Lord dealt with was pride. It happened like this. Every morning at 7 and every evening at 5 or 6 we came together to pray. One Saturday morning, a few Christians said that they had a long way to walk home perhaps 5, 6 or 7 miles, and they asked whether we could not meet immediately after 1pm for our Bible study after which they could go home. When we assembled in that old building, the magistrate, assistant magistrate, post master and police master were playing tennis on the other side of the road. The assistant magistrate was an atheist. I was ashamed to be on my knees, praying for revival with black people, while they were nearby. What would they think of me, the only white man amongst the black people? I looked for a way out. Maybe I could tell the Christians to return at 5, but what reason would I give them? I could not tell them that I was ashamed to pray with them. Suddenly I had a bright idea - let me close the window then those who are outside cannot hear what is going on inside. I got up and when I closed that old-fashioned kind of window, there was a voice that said to me, "Fine, I will be outside and you will be inside." I understood that language. I saw how terribly proud I was in God's eyes. I cannot describe what it was like. In front of my eyes I saw the words GOD RESISTS THE PROUD written in large letters. I had always thought it was the devil who resisted me. But now it was God who resisted me. I could never understand why there was so little fruit in my ministry but now I understood and realised. If it was only the devil who resisted me,

there was hope that by the grace of God I could overcome him and triumph, but if God resisted me, I am fighting a losing battle.

I stood in front of those people and cried like a baby. I could only say, "Oh Lord, forgive me." This is how the Lord began to work. He put his finger on one thing after another in my life. Friends, God's Spirit is holy. For the first time in my life, I saw the holiness of God's Spirit. I had spoken about the Holy Spirit perhaps thousands of times but on that Saturday afternoon, the Lord revealed some of the holiness of His Spirit.

Here, I must touch on the fire of the Holy Spirit. I would like to relate something that happened at a later stage in 1966 at Mapumulo. Because we were not allowed to hold services, we held secret prayer meetings in a shop. We were just a small circle of people who called to God and prayed for this fire to burn in us. John the Baptist said, "... but He who is coming after me is mightier than I, whose sandals I am not worthy to carry. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire." Matthew 3:11

Suddenly I heard one person crying, "Woe to me, my eyes are burning as if they are on fire! Oh Lord, I have read books and looked at pictures which I should not have." Another person cried, "O God, my tongue and lips are burning in the fire. I gossiped and said things I should not have said." We could not see the fire but the person felt it. I thought of Isaiah the prophet, who cried out, "Woe to me, I am a man of unclean lips!" when he saw God in the temple. "I live among a people of unclean lips." God cleansed him there where he was unclean. Do you know the baptism of fire? Maybe your life is as it is because you have not experienced this. Another took off his shoes and threw them across the shop to the other end. He tried to extinguish the fire on his feet. I could not see any fire but he felt it. He said, "I walked ways where a child of God should not go. I went to places where no Christian should go."

On another occasion, many people attended the service so the furniture was removed and the people sat on the floor. We prayed for God to come down and let His fire burn in our midst. A woman jumped up and down on the cement floor as if she sat on a red hot plate. She said she was burning. She asked permission to leave. She went to her house and made things right with her people. She asked her husband for forgiveness for not being the wife that she should have been. She asked her children for forgiveness for not being an upright mother in the Lord. If a neighbour would come she would say, "Oh, there she is again, wanting some sugar. She does not buy it for herself but comes to us." She asked for forgiveness for gossiping and using the names of people when she spoke to her children. She made things right with her neighbours. She made right with her employer because she had been unfaithful in her work. She was lazy and had stolen things. We were still praying when she returned and said, greatly relieved, "I thank You, God, that I could make those things right." When the Holy Spirit comes He convicts of sin, righteousness and judgement - by these signs you know it is the Holy Spirit. If that fire, which Jesus promised, comes, it burns all evil and dross and people confess their sins.

The next thing the Lord dealt with was the fear of man, living before people. I was late for a service and when I arrived by car I heard them already singing. I felt prompted to enter immediately but I thought that without a suit and tie I could not stand in front of the people, with a Bible in my hand. What will So-and-so think of me? How will that person feel? What will that person say of me? I saw three people in front of me. As I was thinking these thoughts, I was struck by the word of God. Elijah the prophet, when he stood before Ahab, his earthly king, he said, "*As the LORD, the God of Israel, lives, before whom I stand,*" 1 Kings 17:1

Here I stood before these people and I do not ask what God says but what these people will say or feel or think? My heart broke and I said, "Lord, I always liked that prophet of fire and I always prayed for that fire to be poured out on us, but I do not stand where that man stood." He stood before God. I did not stand before God, I stood before people. Then I had a vision of a heathen temple filled with foreign gods and I saw myself bowing down and worshipping them. I cried out, "Lord, I preach to these people to repent from worshipping foreign gods but I myself am worshipping those very gods!" I heard the words of Paul, "For am I now seeking the approval of man or of God? Or am I trying to please man? If I were still trying to please

man, I would not be a servant of Christ." Galatians 1:10 "Lord," I said, "for 12 years I have told these people I am a servant of Jesus Christ and it is Jesus who sent me and now I am being judged by the Word of God." I cannot tell you how I felt and how my heart broke. The Lord Jesus said, "I did not come to judge the world, but ...*the word that I have spoken will judge him on the last day.*" John 12:48 This happened to me on earth. I am so thankful that it happened here and not before the throne of God and that the Lord could use that word to shake me awake. I walked to the service but could not preach. I just wept and asked the people to pray. We got onto our knees and prayed, "Lord, please save me from my sins."

The Lord brought one sin after the other to the light and I could only ask the Lord to be merciful to me, a sinner and that I would no longer wonder what the people would say but only what God said about things. God showed me that I was not dead to sin and the world.

One day when I went to the service, I realised that I had not shaved. To be unshaven was a dreadful thing for us. I thought: What will the world think of me? Then the word came to me, 'Dead to the world, dead to sin.' It is one thing to speak about this and quite another thing to really meet with God. I cried out, "Lord, now I can understand why Your Spirit cannot work - with all this filth and sin in my life." I said that I believed in the Lord but not as the Scripture says. I realised that it was not the godless, the unconverted, those who do not go to church or the people who listened to my sermons who stood in the way, but it was me. By this example of being unshaven I am not promoting untidiness and an unshaven appearance, but the Lord used this in my life to reveal to me where I stood. I did not stand on the Word of God but next to it. Then I realised why I had prayed for revival for so many years but it never came. There were so many things in my life that grieved His Spirit and it was impossible for Him to work.

During that time the Lord always took me a step further.

One day it was through the word: "Love your neighbour as yourself." He reminded me of the words of a previous South African prime minister who said in connection with the Bantustans, that we should love our neighbour as we love ourselves. At that time I thought it was impossible to love the Africans as we love ourselves. We were the 'verkrampstes' of the 'verkrampstes' - far right, our hearts were filled with discrimination against the blacks. We treated them terribly on our farm. In fact, before I got converted, I honestly could not believe that a black person had a soul as we have, but when I was in God's mill He said to me, "Erlo, today it is not an earthly minister, but the Prime Minister of heaven who tells you to love your neighbour as yourself." I knew that I did not love them as myself. "*Do to others as you would have them do to you.*" Each day it worsened. God went further. "What you want them to do you, you must do to them." "What did not these people do for me? I always received the very best from them - you cannot expect me to do the same for them," I cried. The Word of God said, "*The first must be the last.*" The Lord tightened the screws and said, "The greatest must be the smallest." "No, Lord," I said, "You cannot expect that of me." But the Lord went a step further and said, "*The greatest among you should be your servant.*" I said, "Lord - impossible! I cannot do this." I had to learn that sometimes you might need to bow even under children. The greatest has to serve the others.

I do not know for how many days I wrestled. It was a difficult time. Very difficult. I sweated. I sometimes woke up at night, wet with perspiration, caused by this terrific battle within. "No, Lord, sorry, I cannot do this. Rather send me to some island, but here in my homeland it is impossible to live like that." The Lord said, "*What you did for the least, you've done for Me.*" The battle continued. The Lord said, "On Judgement Day when I judge you I will say whatever you did for the least, you did for Me." Who was the least in my eyes? It was the black man and now the Lord said to me, "Erlo, what you do to him, you do to Me." If a black man came to visit me, he would sit in the kitchen and get coffee in a mug. Friends, what will things look like on Judgement Day? Will we be able to stand in front of God? Jesus will take the most insignificant person and say, "That what you did for him or her, you did for Me," and we will be judged accordingly. We will go to heaven or hell based on that. It is good if judgement begins on earth already and not just one day over there. The Bible says if we judge ourselves we will not be judged. "Lord, I cannot anymore," I would

say. God responded with, "Leave it then. It is not Me asking you, you pleaded with Me to work."
"O Lord," I said, "I do not want to leave it, I want to be a Christian like the Bible says. But Lord, not here in South Africa, here I cannot do it." (It was in 1966, the height of apartheid.) The Lord said, "Leave it then, Erlo. You can live as you want to. If you want Me to be in your midst and that I work as the living God, if you want to be in My kingdom then you need to bow and accept My laws. You will have to be like I tell you."

What a bitter pill to swallow. It was a terrible battle. I said that I could not. I could not, but on the other hand, I did not want to give it up. "*The one who wants to save his life will lose it.*" I eventually said, "Lord, You must understand, if You expect me to live that kind of life, it will be the end of me, I will die." He did not feel sorry for me but He rubbed in more salt by saying, "Do you not hear? He who wants to save his life will lose it, only he who loses his life will find it." I received another blow. "*You will reap what you sow.*" On top of that, the Lord still added that whatever one sows, that he will also reap.

Well, eventually I was in such a state that one of the Christians heard some people who saw me standing, ask whether I was a tramp and that I looked like a drunkard. Even the people who I looked down on, now looked down on me. That is how God dealt with me. I think you now understand when I say it was like a mill with a huge millstone inside. "Oh God," I said, "I cannot. It goes against my grain. Against my feelings. Against my whole being. Against everything in me." But then I could only fall on my knees and say, "Lord, don't go according to my feelings, neither according to what my parents taught me, I want to learn to know You. Teach me, Lord. I say, 'Yes, Lord.' Write it in Your book that I say Yes. Let Your will be done in my life - not what I say but what You say."

One day it was as if I saw three different groups of people on three different standards or levels. On the ground was a big crowd of people. In the middle, not even half as many and only a few people at the top. At the top their faces shone like angels' faces. The people in the middle looked very unhappy with long sour faces. At the bottom was a big tumult and a lot of noise. The Lord spoke to me about those who are cold, those who are hot and those who are lukewarm. I was in the middle, not a raw heathen but also not on fire. Not red hot for the Lord. I could only weep and cry out, "Lord, let Your fire burn in my heart."

God's ways are not ours. I had to learn to follow God and not to want Him to follow me. I would ask the Lord to work through His Spirit, but then I feared disorder. Today I am ashamed of it. There is disorder if God is not in our midst. I asked the Lord to work but not like that, not with tongues, and to do it according to our tradition, in the way we are used to. The Lord taught me that if He comes He will work according to His will and not mine. He said, "You cannot dictate to Me how I must do things. You must bow and accept what I do."

Due to time constraints, I am just touching on the hem of the garment, but may this be enough for us that we are conscious of the fact that our only hope is that God comes down, that God moves and that God works. May each one be willing to go through with God and pay the price.

Friends, it is God working in and through us. May your life and your ministry be such that God can work through you. We are a few thousand preachers of the Gospel. What couldn't God do through us if we are truly His disciples! But let us ask ourselves - Do I walk in the footsteps of my Master? Do I live according to the Bible? Is His word 'yes' and 'amen' to me or have other things crept into my life?

One thing helped me before the revival broke out: I had heard of an American preacher who wanted revival badly. He visited another minister who was experiencing revival in his church. When he arrived he asked whether he could stay for two weeks and be present when the minister preached and prayed so that he could find the secret of revival. He said that in his congregation it was so hard. The young people were uninterested, the elders and deacons were as hard as granite. This man of God responded by saying, "My friend, you do not need to be here for two weeks. You can return home right now. I will give you the remedy. Go to your office. Remove all the furniture from the centre of the room. Sit on the floor, draw a ring around you with a white crayon. When you have closed the circle, ask God to send revival and to start

within the circle.” This American preacher was disgusted. He probably felt like Naaman when he was told to go dip in that dirty river seven times. He said that the fault was not with him, it was the congregation, the deacons, the elders, the youth. We like to point at others. I did the same. But when I point at a person, three fingers point back to me and the thumb points to God as a witness that I am three times worse than the man I am criticising. We must get to the place where we forget about the next person, other nations, forget about your wife or your children for a while, your difficulties. Take that crayon and draw a circle around yourself. Ask God to come down and work by starting in the circle.

The minister calmed down and humbled himself. He did what he had been advised to do. He beseeched the Lord to begin working in his own life. The following Sunday when he preached he saw people weeping under his preaching. After the service they tearfully said that they were not right with God. They repented. That was the beginning. The fire of God was ignited in that place.

Four walls cannot contain the Spirit of God. If God is in your life and He has free swing, there is nothing to stop Him from moving across the borders.

Now in conclusion, may God grant that the prayer of the prophet Isaiah will be our prayer: “God, rend everything that has got to be rent in my life. Come down and work according to Your will in a way that is pleasing to You.” Let each one pray, “O God, come. Grant us Your power that once again we will be a church aflame and ministers aflame, full of the power of the Holy Spirit and truly be Your witnesses in Jerusalem - right where we are - and then in Judea and Samaria and to the uttermost parts of the earth. May we then experience what Jesus has said, *“I will be with you always.”* That He will be with us in His resurrection power. He has said, *“All power is given to Me in heaven and on earth,”* and that is the reason why He has commissioned His disciples to go to all the world.