

Wednesday evening 8 March 2023

Rev Erlo Stegen

Ministers' Conference 9

How to go about fulfilling the Great Commission

SCRIPTURE READING: Judges 7:1-12, 15-18

Gideon Defeats the Midianites

7 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. ² The Lord said to Gideon, "You have too many men. I cannot deliver Midian into their hands, or Israel would boast against me, 'My own strength has saved me.' ³ Now announce to the army, 'Anyone who trembles with fear may turn back and leave Mount Gilead.'" So twenty-two thousand men left, while ten thousand remained.

4 But the Lord said to Gideon, "There are still too many men. Take them down to the water, and I will thin them out 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."

5 So Gideon took the men down to the water. There the Lord told him, "Separate those who lap the water with their tongues as a dog laps from those who kneel down to drink." ⁶ Three hundred of them drank from cupped hands, lapping like dogs. All the rest got down on their knees to drink.

7 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 others go home." ⁸ So Gideon sent the rest of the Israelites home 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. ⁹ During that night the Lord said to Gideon, "Get up, go down against the camp, because I am going to give it into

your hands. ¹⁰ If you are afraid to attack, go down to the camp with your servant Purah ¹¹ and listen to what they are saying. Afterward, you will be encouraged to attack the camp.” So he and Purah his servant went down to the outposts of the camp. ¹² The Midianites, the Amalekites and all the other eastern peoples had settled in the valley, thick as locusts. Their camels could no more be counted than the sand on the seashore.

...

¹⁵ When Gideon heard the dream and its interpretation, he bowed down and worshiped. He returned to the camp of Israel and called out, “Get up! The Lord has given the Midianite camp into your hands.” ¹⁶ Dividing the three hundred men into three companies, he placed trumpets and empty jars in the hands of all of them, with torches inside.

¹⁷ “Watch me,” he told them. “Follow my lead. When I get to the edge of the camp, do exactly as I do. ¹⁸ When I and all who are with me blow our trumpets, then from all around the camp blow yours and shout, ‘For the Lord and for Gideon.’”

I wish that God will give us eyes to see and ears to hear, because in these days we talk a lot about things we have got no idea about. We talk about spiritual things and ways of God. God doesn't hide it from us that His thoughts are not our thoughts, and our ways aren't His. One Day many people will say, “Lord, Lord,” and He will shake His head and say, “I don't know you.” And that is not something that can just happen thousands of kilometres from us, but it can happen right here. We can talk about revival, and a person can be right in it and say there is no revival. There is a possibility that a person says we are in the middle of a revival, and it is all nonsense.

Point 1: THE CHALLENGE

Here we find a word which is the direct result of the moving of the Holy Spirit – we can call this in modern language a mighty revival. In the previous chapter verse 43 we read that the Spirit of the Lord came upon Gideon, and he blew a trumpet. Now our text is the result and fruit of the coming of the Lord's Spirit over Gideon.

Let us just see what happened and what this man of God said when he was moved by God's Spirit. When one reads this with a sound mind, we are stunned by what we find.

They were brought face to face with their enemies. All their enemies joined forces. It wasn't just the Midianite nation, but all the Amalekites and all the eastern nations opposing Israel. So Israel was up against the whole world. Just as the Christian today is against the whole world, because the Lord Jesus tells the Christian, "Go into all the world," and not only preach the Gospel to all or preach by radio and then say you have done what you should do. He says, "Get hold of all the nations and make them disciples." And how shall they do that? By baptizing them into the Name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. We don't do that by baptizing people into water in the Name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. That may well be symbolic of what Jesus said and meant it to be. But you know that in the original text it doesn't say, "Baptize them in the Name," it says, "Baptize them into the Name." The name signifies the character, the very nature of the one to whom that name belongs. In other words, we should grab hold of the nations and baptize them into the very Character of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit.

There is no work on earth of such a high standard and such good quality as that. That is the highest degree, and the only true wisdom. The other is just worldly wisdom and foolishness.

So, **the Lord puts the whole world before us and says, "That is your mission field, the work that you have to do." That is just as great a challenge as the challenge that Gideon and the Israelites were faced with.** All these nations were as many as locusts, and their camels as the sand at the seashore – nobody could count them.

Point 2: HOW TO GO ABOUT IT

Now what would we do, and what do we do today? The natural thing is, we want recruits. We try and get as many people we can get hold of. That is the very thing Gideon did when he was prompted by the Holy Spirit. He blew the trumpet, and the result was that thousands, actually thirty-two thousand, responded to that call. Thirty-two thousand responded to the missionary call. People that were prepared to go into the battlefield. How wonderful! If you could gather so many people today, I don't think it would take 24 hours, and the whole world would know about it. It would make headlines all over – that is revival, a mighty move of the Holy Spirit.

And then God came onto the scene, and He made big headlines, and He says, "Gideon, you have too many people for Me to move." Can you understand that? There are those thousands, humanly speaking millions of people to be slain. What are 32,000 compared to

this multitude? And God says, “Gideon, I can't move because there are too many people.”

Isn't that in direct opposition to the thinking of any Christian? We say we need more missionaries – millions of people are dying. We need more men and women. And God says the trouble is, there are too many.

I don't know whether we understand that. That shows us that **God is not interested in quantity, but He wants quality.**

Then He said, “Gideon, I can't move. I can't deliver you from these people, you are too many. If I work through you, things will go wrong. The whole thing will be spoiled.”

Point 3: FEAR

And what does God do? He said, “Gideon, open the door wide. Everyone who has got fear in his heart, let him go home.” He says, “Anyone who trembles with fear may turn back and leave Mount Gilead.”

That is the first person the Lord wants to get rid of.

Gilead means strong, a rocky mountain. God says, “I don't want anybody with fear on this strong mountain.” Everybody that has got fear, may turn back. **Anybody who fears is unfit in the Lord's army.** He shouldn't be there. He should be at home with his wife and sleep with her under one blanket. Let him embrace his wife and his children, and have their family prayers and thank God that they can be happily reunited.

God can't use a person who has got fear.

We say, “That is only a natural thing. Just a little company against all the world united!” We tremble if only one group goes against us. Maybe we just hear a person saying something against us, and then we fear. Just one nation says something against us, how much more if people have joined forces! We say it is only natural if a person will say, “If the enemy attacks from all sides, there is no future for us. If such forces are against us, we must tremble because of those.”

Then people may suffer of depression and sleepless nights and worry – and it can be read upon the faces. A person can say, “One can understand – if a person is up against such powers, it is a lot of strain!” And God says, “Gideon, get rid of those as soon as possible. Tell them they can go home. Because they are not fit to go into the army, they will just be a burden.”

Just have a glimpse at your own life. Is there fear in your own life? Are you pressed down

because of things, and worried? A person like that is no good. God knows why He sends him home.

Example: Luther's wife

Somebody told me the other day about Luther when he was depressed. There were some days that were very dark. Then his wife came, all dressed in black, mourning.

When he looked up, he was amazed and said, "Who has died?"

She said, "Haven't you heard the news yet?" because news spread very fast. She said, "God has died!"

Then he caught on.

So I said to our visitors, "Now I know what to do when we get that kind of people here! I have got to get a black suit as well, and a black tie and a black shirt. Then I can maybe be a help to those people.

Maybe God knew that there were such wives at home, that is why He sent the husbands home. It would have been wonderful if the men would have gone home, if those wives would have gone on strike and said, "We won't sleep with you. If you don't go, we will go." What impression you get of all those women, when the men came back, that embraced their husbands with a holy kiss, and went down on their knees and said, "Let us thank the Lord that He has been so good to us, that He sent you back home." A person who has got no eyes to see, would say that that must have been a great revival. And they would have spoken about the wonderful prayer meetings that they have had in their homes.

But everybody who is not spiritually blind, says, "**How could anyone of them turn back?**" **Those people missed their reward, and the greatest experience that could have ever been theirs.**

"And 22,000 men turned back." Spiritually very often the majority is wrong. We always find that in the Bible. The prophets and the men of God were always in the minority. And the Lord Himself said that the broad way is where many people go, and the narrow path, only a few. Twenty-two thousand men turned back. Twenty-two thousand people had fear in their hearts.

If there is somebody with fear here tonight, it would be good if today would be your day where you could be saved from your fear. Otherwise you are no good and you are unfit to enter the Lord's army and be a soldier of the Cross. You will just be a soldier of your fear.

No matter with what difficulty or opposition you are faced. If the whole world is against you, you dare not fear if God sends you. And you dare not hesitate if God calls you.

Point 4: GOD'S SIFTING

And the Lord said to Gideon, "There are still too many men." God has got a problem here, and the problem is that there are too many. The Christian world says, "There are too few, we need more." The Lord says, "There are few – pray that there will be more." Yes, there are indeed too little, but of the right kind. Too many of the wrong.

And God says, "Gideon, there are still too many." You see where the problem lies? You see where God points at, and with what God is busy? He says, "Now you take them down to the water, and now I will sift them for you."

Now God undertakes the sifting. At first He says it was of their free choice, but now God says, "Now I will have to sift them, and you will have to send them back. If I say, 'This one shall go with you,' he shall go. But if I say, 'This one shall not go with you,' that man shall not go."

Remember that here are ten thousand people that are determined to go into battle. Hulle is nie bangbroeke nie, they are not people with no backbone. Some have got no backbone – the wife has got to be their backbone.

Example:

I told once of a German preacher who said there are two ways of interpretation:

1. The one is that the wife is the backbone of the husband.
2. The other is that the woman is the mouth of the husband.

He said he doesn't know which is true. Most probably one of the two.

Maybe these people that had to go home at first, did so because they had no backbone.

But these people had backbone. They were prepared to go into battle, even if it cost their families. They were prepared to die and let their families go on without a husband.

God said, "Gideon, now I will have to do the sifting. But if I say that man has got to go back, he must go home. And if I say he must go, he must go."

God emphasizes that. Because when Gideon says, "You have got to go back," the person

won't be prepared, he will say, "No, I will go into battle." You know, a person can be very stubborn and stiff-necked. Some people don't want to be told. They will just go through with it. God says, "If I say he must not go, then he must not go. Because they are still too many. I don't want these people in the fight. They will spoil things. They want to be there, but they shouldn't be there."

The problem with the Lord's army is not that there are not enough warriors or soldiers. The trouble with Christianity today is that there are too many people in the Lord's work. The sooner we can get rid of many, the sooner God can work. There are too many that make it impossible for God to work. They want to be there, and they shouldn't be there.

I think that this is God's Word that we have read and that God is speaking to us even through this.

Example: Sifting before outpouring of the Holy Spirit in '66

Before the outpouring of the Holy Spirit end of '66, God dealt with us all along, speaking to us through Gideon, and at the time we were too many. We were only 40, 50, 60 people – and we were too many, and God couldn't move. And a sifting had to take place. But before that, everybody whom it didn't suit, could go home. God doesn't force people into His army.

So if you have doubts or fear, if you think, "Will we succeed? Will we be able to make it?" forget about it and leave.

So then God says, "Now I will sift them. Just take them down to the water, but don't tell them the secret. I will tell you, but you just look carefully at them (hou hulle mooi dop). If they go down on their knees and drink (another translation says if they go down on their tummies, on their bellies, flat on the ground and drink), all those are disqualified. They must not go into battle. But those that just bend and lap the water like a dog, take the hand and throw the water into the mouth, only those have got to go into battle."

That is the difficult way. The comfortable way is, you go down on your knees – that is the easy way.

And then, out of those thousands of people only three hundred drank the way God said they should. They were going into battle, and if you go into battle, there is no time for comfort. A person who wants to see the mission field, a person who wants to see revival, and he wants a comfortable bed! And he still has got time for food and for comfort or luxury. God says, "I am sifting them. I can't use those people."

But to go down on your knees – it looks so nice. We could even say, "Well, going down on

their knees – they were even praying for the water.” In some things, they shouldn’t even pray, they should be like dogs. That goes against our sense. That is why I said God does it just opposite, He does it “the wrong way.” Put it to the vote! we say. God is even losing His vote.

Three hundred out of all those thousands. That is God’s way, the unpopular and insignificant and wrong way. That is God’s way. Is that where you are to be found?

Point 5: “HIS OWN PLACE”

Then God said, “*Gideon, now let everyone go to his own place.*” These people have shown by their actions and deeds that they have got their own place. God said, “Let them go there where they belong. Give Me these 300 that haven’t got their place. Their place is My place, and I will work through these 300 people. I will deliver and overcome all these joint forces through these 300 men.”

I wish we had time to go into detail and talk more about the meaning of these things. I am just giving you a bit of food for thought, something to digest. This is more than enough to digest, just what you are told. Sometimes we are too busy with services and things, and we don’t digest that which God has given us.

Every one of these persons had his place. Haven’t you got your place? Just tell me, when you came to KwaSizabantu, what did you expect? Didn’t you come with your place? What about your preconceived ideas? And if you don’t find the place as you expected, then you write it off.

You who want to go into the mission field and work for the Lord and serve Him, if you have your own place, stay where you are. The sooner you go back, the better for God’s Kingdom. God cannot use anybody who has his own place, like a bird having his own nest. The Lord Jesus said the birds have their nests, the foxes their holes, but the Son of Man has got no place to lay down His head. You know where His place was? **Only the Father’s will. That was His place.** That was God’s place. Jesus didn’t have a place.

“*The foxes have got holes.*” One day Jesus spoke about that man, and Jesus said, “*Go and tell that fox ...*” When the Lord Jesus speaks about birds and foxes, don’t think of those animals. He is talking about human beings. There is a possibility that we have got birds and foxes in this meeting tonight – people with their holes and birds with their nests. But that is not where you will find the Lord Jesus, but He gives you a free ticket and says, “You go to your place.” Even Judas Iscariot had his place, and he went to the place where

he belonged.

How marvellous it would be if God could just reveal your place tonight, the nest and hole of every one of us. Would you be happy if your place could be revealed? If it is not done today, a Day will come when God will expose you before heaven and earth.

The Lord Jesus went with a whip into the temple and said, “*You made this which should be the Father’s house, a den of murderers.*” In other words, these churchgoers made the church the den, the hole, the pit, the dungeon where the murderers gathered. In actual fact, those churchgoers were murderers, and the church was the place where they hid. But the Lord Jesus took a whip and chased them out of their den.

Even if the Lord allows you today and says, “Go to your place,” one day He will whip you out of it.

Point 6: GOING INTO BATTLE

Gideon called these three hundred men, divided them into three companies, placed trumpets and empty jars into their hands, with torches inside. Everyone had to have an empty jar. Has your jar been emptied? Have you been emptied?

With only a torch inside – that flame of fire. Everyone had to have this jar that was empty, with that torch burning inside. Because that light can’t burn properly if that thing hasn’t been emptied. We need to be emptied of self, self-will, egoism. There are a thousand and one things we have to be emptied of. Every jar in the hand of these three hundred men had to be an empty jar, with that torch shining – not just a little light but a beam of light in it.

In actual fact these three hundred men took over the trumpets of all the others, and even the provisions. That should inspire us to be true soldiers of the Cross. **They got the crowns of the others. They got the reward of the others. The others lost it.** The Lord Jesus said, “*Hold on to what you have, that no one takes your crown,*” that no one comes and robs it from you. And the Lord Jesus said, “*From him who hasn’t got, will be taken what he has got, and given to him who has got a lot.*”

Point 7: “FOLLOW ME AS I FOLLOW CHRIST”

Then Gideon said to these three hundred, “Now watch me! Follow my lead. Do exactly as I do, and blow your trumpets and shout, ‘For the Lord and for Gideon!’”

God's fight was Gideon's fight. Gideon identified himself with the Lord. He didn't just say, "It is God's fight, it is just for God." Not just, "God is at stake," but, "I as well."

We know that everyone, even the son, if he drives the father's car, he will drive it any old how. It doesn't matter, even if he wrecks it or doesn't take care of it. But if you say, "This is now your car," he doesn't even want another person to even drive that car, and he handles it with care. In actual fact it should not be like that. It just tells us, shows us that there are still some devilish things in his life. We should love others just as we love ourselves, and we should treat other people's things just as we treat our own things. And what we want others to do to us, we should do to them.

But Gideon knew that this was not just God's battle, but his battle as well. It is not just that God will lose a battle, but that his very life is at stake.

And he didn't want to let God down, because he knew that it would be his own downfall. He could say, "It is God's battle, and it is my battle."

Have you ever looked at the Christian life like that? Some say, "It is only God's, and God is a sovereign God. If God wants to do it, let Him do it." Right through the Bible we find that it is God's battle and it is Gideon's battle. The Bible says, "*Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling.*" That is not the fear and tremble which made these people go home. "*Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling.*" Why? Because "*it is God Who works both to will and to do.*" You see, it is God's battle, and it is Gideon's battle.

Gideon went into God's yoke. The Lord said we should take His yoke upon us. It is Him and you in one yoke.

The first thing he said, "Now watch me." Could you dare say such a thing? Would you invite us all to look at you? To watch you? The last week, the last month? Could you tell everybody that got into contact with you, "Watch me!" Is there nothing of which you would be ashamed? Isn't there something which you have said, and something you did, of which you would be ashamed? Could you tell that person concerned, "Watch me! Follow my lead and do exactly as I have done." The Bible teaches us all over that **we should be an example to others** – in word and action and in behaviour, and even in purity. He said, "Timothy, when you are with young girls, treat them as your own sisters." What would you think of a boy who lusts after his own sisters? Today such things happen. We live in the last times where there are terrible times where there are some sex maniacs in this world.

The Bible says that the last days will be terrible times, but it says, "You be an example to others. Timothy, if you meet up with girls, take that girl and treat her as your own sister.

And if you are with someone a bit older, treat her as your mother.” Can a man lust after his own mother who gave birth to him? Yes, a hellish person can do that. But the Word says, “Be an example.” The Word also says, “You shouldn’t rebuke an older man harshly, but treat him as your own father.”

Gideon got up and said, “Look at me! Look at me!” He was an example. Are we an example to people today? Can we say to the world, “Look at me”? If you speak to a person, when you correct somebody, can you say to others, “Look at me and follow my example”?

Here are true leaders. We don’t want people who just want position. Some people follow certain rituals to get hold of position. If you want to be a leader, be a leader through the life which you live. Not only through what you say. People fight for position. People even kill one another and spill blood. You know where the first blood was shed? The first blood that was shed was not at a beer party or where people were fighting over a girl – today many people die in fights because of alcohol and girls. But the first blood that was shed on earth, was shed in a service where people were fighting over position. The first blood that was shed, was in a prayer meeting, in the place of worship. And it hasn’t stopped since. Even today the blood is still flowing. You can kill a person with words, and you can kill him with thoughts. Even if that person is still alive, but there is a corpse before God in heaven. And God says, “You are the murderer of that corpse.”

Gideon said, “Watch me! Follow my lead.” He showed the people how to do it. We criticize people, find fault with them, but let me tell you, as sure as you find fault with those people, most probably your hell will be double that of theirs if you don’t show them how it is done. Everybody can criticize, everybody can find fault. Some days ago I said that that is the speciality of those that are on the wrong road. If you want to see the wrong of others, then you will judge others according to yourself. Birds of a feather flock together. You say you don’t flock together. Of course you do! Even if you are not with them, but you are flocking to their mistakes. Maybe you are the first one to notice it. But if you are on the right track and you see people doing it the wrong way, then you do it the right way. And you will want to be an example. You won’t try to murder them by your words, by your actions, but you be an example. You will try to get the attention of others and say, “Watch me!” And you will be an example to these people. You show them how it is done. Two wrongs don’t make a right. The Bible says, “*Overcome evil with good.*”

Gideon said, “Now watch me!” Now maybe if there would have been some super-spirituals,

then they would have said, “No, Gideon, we don’t look to man, we look to God. We don’t do what man tells us.” In actual fact those people don’t want to do what God says, they want to do what their own heart says. Paul says, *“You follow me as I follow Christ.”* That is what Paul says.

Every one of these three hundred immediately did and followed Gideon, because **they knew that Gideon does what God does. They were in step and tune with Gideon, and at the same time with God.**

CONCLUSION:

What a mighty victory it was! For the rest of all eternities, the Lord says, *“Heaven and earth will pass away, but not an iota of the Word of God.”* Down through all generations Gideon is showing us how it is done.

Today Gideon is telling you and me, and he says, “Watch me!” I wish that everyone of us would catch a glimpse of Gideon tonight. Watch him, and may God grant that you see the significance of what he does. That you will do exactly what he did.

That is the only way that we will overcome the joint forces of the enemy. And that God will be able to glorify and reveal His might and His power through us.

Shall we pray:

Closing prayer:

Lord Jesus, please grant us an ear to hear what You have got to say. May Your words not fall on deaf ears, and blunt and hardened hearts. But that we will be receptive and alive to Your speaking, that we may be found to be true soldiers of the Cross, that will be worthy of fighting the great battle of faith.

Amen

--- o o O o o ---