

What Is the Most Dangerous Threat to 21st Century Christianity?

Standing at this critical crossroads in the history of our nation—and yes, the history of our world—we must ask ourselves this honest question, “*What is the most dangerous threat to Christianity in this hour? To the church? To your personal walk with Jesus?*”

Powerless Christianity. A “faith” of rhetoric *without* demonstration will absolutely cripple the 21st-century church if we continue to move in this direction. Paul warned young Timothy about this, listing a number of attributes that would be prevalent in the *last days*. Among the list is this descriptive: “having a form of godliness, but denying its power” (2 Tim. 3:5). In other words, so-called Christians will talk the talk, but their words will be without substance because their lives are *without demonstration*.

In the words of the late, great revivalist, Leonard Ravenhill, “The world out there is not waiting for a new definition of Christianity; it’s waiting for a new demonstration of Christianity.” Deadlier than agendas and political movements, when we redefine what Christianity actually looks like and how it should be expressed, we live beneath our inheritance as Holy Spirit-inhabited followers of Jesus.

At the day’s end, what are we even inviting people into? *Another* religion? *Another* agenda? Another group? No. It’s a kingdom ruled by King Jesus, and it’s a kingdom of demonstration, power and supernatural transformation.

Yes, I am troubled about the normalization of sin in our land ... and I am concerned about potential threats to our religious

liberties, but at the day's end, my chief concern is a redefinition of Christianity. The moment we subtract power and demonstration from the Christian faith, we are left with human words and religious rhetoric. While society continues to move in its direction, the church must arise, shine, and boldly demonstrate the Gospel of superior order—the risen and reigning Lord!

This begs the question, “*What does this demonstration look like?*”

Jesus is the Example

Go right to the source: Jesus, the Son of Man and the Son of God. Jesus paints a clear picture of this demonstrative faith in many instances, indisputable language:

In Matthew 10:8, He instructs the disciples, “Heal the sick, cleanse the lepers, raise the dead, and cast out demons. Freely you have received, freely give.”

Some argue, “That commission was *exclusively* for the twelve disciples.”

Consider his mandate to the 72: “Heal the sick who are there and say to them, ‘The kingdom of God has come near to you’” (Luke 10:9).

This demolishes the argument that supernatural Christianity was reserved only for the 12 apostles. Here, Jesus commissions 72 to do the miraculous works of the kingdom.

In addition, Jesus makes a powerful blanket statement in John 14:12, announcing that “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” (ESV, emphasis added).

Whoever means *whoever*. This is beyond the 12 apostles and the 72 called-out ones in Luke 10. *Whoever* spans all generations.

Whoever invites us, in the 21st century, to once again contend for an outpouring of supernatural power in our midst.

This challenges me ... considerably. I don't see this kind of phenomena flowing through my life in a normative, regular basis. I want to. I yearn to. I just don't see it yet. The good news is that this realization does not come with shame; it comes with hunger to pursue *more*!

My prayer is that by even reading this words, your hunger for the supernatural demonstration of God's power will awaken in a fresh, new way for you. And above all, you would catch a glimpse of the "more" that has been made available to you through the indwelling Holy Spirit!

As individual Christ-followers and church communities, we owe it to the world to *demonstrate* that God is alive and active in our midst. Our jargon alone will not draw them, but when our words are reinforced by the power of the Holy Spirit, the nations will take notice. No, miracles, signs and wonders do *not* guarantee conversions; this is true.

However, they do contain a powerful evangelistic element that directs attention to the living Messiah. Miracles have this ability to posture people eyes to see and ears to hear what we have to say concerning Jesus.

What Ever Happened to the Power of God?

While reading Joel 2:17 recently, I was pierced by these words: "Why should they say among the peoples, 'Where is their God?'" (MEV).

This question should be illegal! When people look into the community of God—the church—they should be witnessing a dynamic display of supernatural power in our midst. Signs, wonders, miracles, healings and deliverances are *not* side issues, nor should they be considered peripheral matters to the gospel. They announce the message! They reveal that the

gospel is not simply a message articulated through human words, but it is a transformative power that raises the dead, both physically and more importantly, spiritually.

Paul boldly declared: "For I determined not to know anything among you except Jesus Christ and Him crucified. I was with you in weakness and in fear and in much trembling. And my speech and my preaching was not with enticing words of man's wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power, so that your faith should not stand in the wisdom of men, but in the power of God" (1 Cor. 2:2-5, emphasis added).

Our problem? We have downgraded Christianity to a religion of rhetoric instead of a lifestyle of demonstration.

In his prophetic book, *Whatever Happened to the Power of God*, Dr. Michael Brown wrote,

"I am absolutely convinced that the church of today is not fully experiencing what Jesus died for and not yet becoming what He prayed for. There is something infinitely more and completely other than what we are walking in. There is a power, a purity, an authority, an anointing, a glory that we have barely touched."

There is so much more than what we are seeing and experiencing right now. No, we don't worship the wonders; rather, we recognize that the wonders direct our worship to the One who *incites* wonder. Signs point to a living, active, powerful Jesus who is working and moving in the midst of His people. Just consider the context of the early church. Jesus never painted some picture where His people got to make a choice: "Bible ... or Holy Spirit... *pick one*." Sadly, we have embraced this today and in the process thereof, have devalued the presence and person of the Holy Spirit in our midst.

We Must Stop Naturalizing the Supernatural

We cling to our tightly scheduled services and meetings, while

forbidding the Holy Spirit's intrusion (after all, we want everything to be done "Decently and in order").

We consider all physical manifestations of the Spirit's operation in our midst—laughing, shaking, jerking, falling on the ground, crying, screaming—as tolerable at best and abominable at worst (when in fact, these “manifestations” often signal a powerful work of the Spirit among us ... and yes, there will always be fakery, just as there will always be people who fake conversions or fake worship, but that doesn't mean we stop inviting people to Christ or have times of worship).

We negate the strange, unusual, and supernatural—even in charismatic and Pentecostal circles—practically upholding a human and un-Biblical concept of “decently and in order” in an idolatrous manner.

It's time to repent of naturalizing supernatural Christianity.

No, this doesn't give us a license for a charismatic, “Free for all” where “Anything goes,” and yes, we need to pastor and regulate such manifestations in a scriptural manner. The problem? We are so afraid of the weird that we completely reject the unusual. In the process of rejecting the unusual, could it be that we have rejected much of who God is? After all, He is beyond our natural minds' ability to safely wrap around. He is infinitely greater than the collective understanding and genius of the whole of humanity.

When God breaks it, the unusual *will* happen. Question: Are we living lives or developing communities where God is free to break in? The Gospels and Acts are filled with such occurrences! Result? Jesus is consistently glorified, lives are ushered into the kingdom, the community of God multiplies and regions are impacted by the power of God. Lord, we want to see it again!

It's time for us to push aside our prejudices and false

teaching, our disappointments and bad experiences, and take a journey back into the Gospels. We must, *must* get a picture for what normal Christianity needs to look like. We must saturate ourselves in the pages of Acts, asking the Holy Spirit to give us a picture and prototype for what the *demonstration* of Christianity should look like.

Could it be people are asking, “Where is their God?” because we are ashamed of the very Holy Spirit we are called to represent and host in our lives? In our gatherings? In our church services? Oh, that people would once again witness the power of God alive and active in the church of Jesus Christ! What a wonderful testimony to the power and authority in the name of Jesus—when the church flows in every gift and grace of the Spirit, using our corporate worship settings to “fill up” so we can be sent out to *demonstrate* the love of God in powerful, practical ways in the world.

People are still asking the question: “Where is their God?”

Sure, they hear what the church is saying. They hear and read the words of Christians in the media, on Facebook, in blogrolls, etc. Quite frankly, I am not too concerned about them hearing us; are they seeing *God among us*? Yes, we keep preaching using words; but I want us to start seeing the sick healed and the tormented free and captives released. And not just church people, but people who really need God’s touch.

How many times did (and does) Jesus touch those who are not yet Christ-followers? Not yet “in the fold,” speaking the lingo, or looking the part? Jesus has a tendency to reach down into the deepest, darkest, most religiously-written off parts of humanity and invading them with supernatural healing power. People hear about His works or see His acts, and these miracles create a hunger within them to draw close to this Jesus. Their encounters produce physical transformation, and deeper still, *spiritual transformation* that turns the lame, the blind, and the afflicted into bold gospel preachers and disciples.

In short, we need the supernatural so that we can fully preach the gospel ... since Christianity was never meant to be delivered strictly through words and rhetoric, but through the demonstration of power. Paul explained that the “the kingdom of God is not in word, but in power” (1 Cor. 4:20).

At the conclusion of his letter to the Roman church, Paul used the phrase, “fully preached the gospel” in conjunction with “the power of signs and wonders” and the “power of the Spirit of God” (see Rom. 15:19). Simply put, the gospel was meant to be accompanied by a demonstration of supernatural kingdom power! Does that mean people who are *not* seeing miracles are *not* truly preaching the gospel? No!! All it means is that there is *more*. We have only scratched the surface of this glorious gospel message. It doesn't mean we alter it to focus on miracles; it just means we attach a fresh expectation of the miraculous to its proclamation!

I want to give you three simple ways you can combat this agenda in your life and start to see God's power restored!

- **Go back to the Gospels and Acts.** In the Gospels, Jesus models what the supernatural life should look like and in the Book of Acts, the early church *demonstrated* it. This should be our standard for normal Christianity!
- **Make room for the Holy Spirit.** Whether it is in our individual devotional life, or in our church community, we must make time for the Holy Spirit. Sadly, we often schedule our lives past supernatural opportunities to pray for those in need, or see a genuine manifestation of the Spirit's presence in our church services. Beyond our programs and agendas, beyond our schedules and busy lives, all of these things should ultimately submit to Holy Spirit's plan. It's OK to have a plan or agenda; it simply must be willing to bow to *Heaven's agenda*.
- **Take risks.** In our churches and lives, we must start devoting time to things that were important to Jesus: healing the sick, delivering captives and giving space

for the miraculous—and not to be relegated to some “back room” on a Tuesday night or small group. Jesus was never bashful about the miraculous, nor was the early church. In fact, their boldness got them into trouble, not because they were claiming credit, but because they were attributing the miraculous works to the living Jesus! The example of Jesus and the early church invites us in the 21st century to step out, take risks, and watch God show up. We pray for the sick. We listen to the Holy Spirit. We share the prophetic words he places on our hearts (if they are scriptural and appropriate for the setting). We pray for specific needs as God inspires us. We allow the manifest presence of God to flow freely in our worship services, touching the sick, broken and tormented and releasing healing.

Why is all this demonstration stuff important? After all, isn't it the simple, but eternally profound gospel message—that Jesus shed His perfect blood for the sins of humanity and that *whosoever* receives Jesus' atoning work and makes Him Lord of their lives is saved—that deserves greatest emphasis? Absolutely! However, this message of salvation was meant to come accompanied by the supernatural power of the Holy Spirit, not for show or spectacle, but to demonstrate that the same Jesus who saved us from our sins *is still alive* and wants to live in His people through the power of the Holy Spirit ... and continue His mission of reconciling all humanity unto Himself.

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