

Man's Cry for the Supernatural

by James Blaine Chapman

The world's cry for something beyond the material is a call for the supernatural, and God's new dispensation of revelation promises to satisfy this cry.

Scripture: Exodus 33:18, Psalm 27:8, Jeremiah 29:13, John 4:24, John 14:16, Acts 17:27, Romans 1:20, 1 Corinthians 2:4, 1 Corinthians 2:10, Hebrews 10:19

Topics: "Supernatural Longing", "True Christianity"

Description

James Blaine Chapman preaches about the innate human longing for the supernatural and the various expressions of this desire throughout history, from primitive worship to the rise of spiritism. He highlights the failure of some religious practices to truly satisfy the heart's cry for God and emphasizes the need for a genuine, experiential connection with the divine. Chapman discusses the shift towards materialism and intellectualism, cautioning against shallow substitutes for true Christianity. He encourages seeking God with earnestness, believing in the miraculous, and allowing God to reveal Himself directly to the spirit of man.

Transcript

For a brief space now and then the world has become so immersed in materialism that the majority of men have seemed contented to live the life of the beast, ending in oblivion. But with these few, brief exceptions, which have, by no means, included all the men who have lived during their day, the world of men has cried out for something which is instinctively felt to be beyond the veil of the time and sense world.

The objects and expressions of primitive and barbarian worship are often ludicrous, mysterious and disgusting; but down in the sources of the worshipping tendencies in the hearts of all, there is a pathetic cry that can not be stilled.

Calvin and others of his day believed that all religions except Judaism and Christianity, were born of the Devil. But a more intimate inquiry has convinced men of later times, that even the heathen are "feeling after God, if perchance they may find Him." They are in the dark and make but little success of their search; but their religion is a crude and distorted expression of the call for the supernatural that the true God planted within their breasts.

Amidst all the polytheism and religious wretchedness of their times, the most sincere among the Greeks and Romans used to prophesy of a time when the chief among the gods would come and walk among

mortals. While all the factors of the national religion were still functioning and the glory of the earthly house was still shining, Isaiah, among the Hebrews, told of the "Child born and the Son given."

The magi of the far east, as well as the seers at Jerusalem, were eager at the sight of the strange "Star of Bethlehem," and welcomed the answer to their longing for the manifestation of God to men.

The religions of the ancient world had failed, and the long delay of the hope of Israel had caused the hearts of many of the faithful to grow sick, but when the apostles went out to proclaim Christ crucified and risen again, the answers of their opposers were faint. The heads of men objected, but their hearts hoped that the story was true. The boldness of assurance gave unusual power to the testimonies of believers on Christ, and others could not "resist the power and wisdom with which they spoke."

Lack of proper enlightenment during the past centuries of the Christian era has given rise to many crude interpretations and superstitious practices. But through all the rubbish of burning candles, counting beads, wearing robes, marching on crusades, telling of strange visions, and going on long pilgrimages there was a strong faith in the supernatural, and a pathetic call for its revelation. Foolish men tried to assist God by telling strange stories of the power revealed in relics and of the revelation of God's will through ordeals, oracles, charms and dreams.

During the last century there was a shifting toward the deifying of the intellect. The arrogance of modern "headiness" stilled the cry of many a heart and soul that was hungry for God. The intellect had triumphed in so many things that many scrupled not to call it supreme, and the very audacity of their assumptions won many an argument for worshipers of the god of mind.

But right out of the midst of this elegant,, modern idolatry, and following on after it, as I believe and hope, there have come and are coming new expressions of the old craving for assistance from the miraculous. The unusual growth of spiritism since the outbreak of the war has given rise to many expressions of fear lest it should become the substitute for true Christianity. Though weird and disorderly, spiritism is no worse than materialism or intellectualism. Whether God or the Devil is the author, there are some things in spiritism that can not be explained by the "rules," and this is what makes it so satisfying to many who have for a long time been laboring to believe that there is no realm beyond nature.

Within the circle of orthodox protestantism there has been a long standing tendency to drift away from the miraculous in every way. Conversion in many places means no more than a change of mind. Or at most, it is interpreted as an intellectual matter to be proved by the practice of Christian morality. Demonstration of religious feeling has been frowned upon, and worship has become ritualistic. The purifying of the heart by faith and the enduement of power by the incoming of the Holy Ghost, if preached at all, are so compromised that no one thinks of receiving a definite witness from God to the reception of such realities. While this situation has laid the foundation for the progress of spiritism, it has also, become the occasion of turning many to seek God with greater earnestness. If the common people accept a religion that is all head and no heart, they do so sadly and reluctantly; for their hearts crave to know Him.

The church's failure to preach the Scriptural teaching regarding the power and willingness of God to heal the body in answer to the prayer of faith has opened the door for Christian Science and other substitutes for the real.

Empty denunciation of "speaking in unknown tongues" and other phenomena which approach "the border land of the supernatural" will not accomplish much good. To deny a hungry man his barley loaf without

offering him anything better is really cruelty.

But God still lives and reveals Himself to men. This dispensation is glorious because of the fulfillment of the Saviour's promise of a closer proximity to God than had ever been known before. In the old days God was before, above, behind, beneath and around His people, but the new promise was that He would be in them. In the old days, he visited with Abraham beneath the oak at Mamre, but in the new day He promised to abide with His people forever. In the old days God revealed Himself in dreams, physical deliverances and in the body of His Son; manifestations which must reach the real man through the medium of his senses, but in the new time, He makes Himself known by His Spirit directly to man's spirit. In the old time He showed His glory to the High Priest once a year when the priest went into the presence of the holy shekinah behind the veil, but the veil was rent through Christ, and now the way into the holiest is made manifest to all.

A Unitarian's Christ will not meet the world's heart cry. No matter how faultless the philosophy, no matter how sound the polity, no matter how noted the philanthropy, no matter how inviting the application of sociology, no system of religion is going to fill the bill that does not teach men how to apprehend God experimentally. The words of George Matherson are applicable to more people than we perhaps realize: "My heart needs Thee, O Lord; my heart needs Thee! No part of my being needs Thee like my heart. All else within me can be fulfilled by Thy gifts. My hunger can be satisfied by daily bread. My thirst can be allayed by earthly waters. My cold can be removed by household fires. My weariness can be relieved by outward rest. But no outward thing can make my heart pure. The calmest day will not calm my passions. The fairest scene will not beautify my soul. The richest music will not make harmony within. The breezes can cleanse the air, but no breeze can cleanse the spirit. This world has not provided for my heart. It has provided for my eye; it has provided for my ear; it has provided for my touch; it has provided for my taste; it has provided for my sense of beauty, but it has not provided for my heart. Provide Thou for my heart, O Lord! It is the only un-winged bird in all creation; give it wings, O Lord! Earth has failed to give it wings; its very power of loving has often dragged it in the mire. Be Thou the strength of my heart! Be Thou its fortress in temptation, its shield in remorse, its covert in the storm, its star in the night, its voice in the solitude! Guide it in its gloom; help it in its heat; direct it in its doubt; calm it in its conflict; fan it in its faintness; prompt it in its perplexity; lead it through its labyrinths; raise it from its ruins! I can not rule this heart of mine; keep it under the shadow of Thine own wings."

True, some are satisfied with the human spectacular and are easy victims of shallow substitutes; but there is a real answer to the prayer of the soul that will not be satisfied with any thing else. Elijah stood in the door of the cave while the earthquake passed, but God was not in that. The whirlwind passed, also, but God was not revealed. The fire appeared, but yet God was silent. After all, the "still small voice" of God called out and the persistent old prophet was there to hear. In like manner today, when one will brush aside all shams and substitutes and hunt "out God with the never-to-be-denied petition, "I beseech thee, show me thy glory," God will make Himself known.

The epochs in the revelation of God to the individual are the birth of the Spirit and the baptism with the Spirit. The progresses of revelation are without number or limitation. "It remains yet to be seen what God will do with and for a man who will let Him have His way with Him."

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