

Introduction to “The Cause of Spiritual Stupidity”

By Mark Lama

Are we the slaves of Things? Do we ever worry about not having enough money? About not having any thing that we feel to be essential to our well-being? Is there any thing that we feel that we cannot do without, that we must have before life can be a good thing to us? If so, then we are slaves, because we are dependent on what is less than ourselves. And we will not cease to be slaves until we have ceased to worry about money, about our bodies, our reputations--about anything--until we have ceased to be consumed by care and anxiety over our lives, even in matters that appear trifling.

George MacDonald's purpose in writing this sermon is to rouse us to cast off this slavery. It is the third sermon in a series he wrote on freedom from Things. The first two sermons, "The Way," and "The Hardness of the Way," dealt with the story of the rich young man from Matthew 19 and Mark 10. Those sermons addressed the slavery of people who have money and cannot part with it. This sermon, based on an incident in Matthew 16 and Mark 8, addresses the slavery of those who do not have money and cannot do without it. As MacDonald says, "If it be Things that slay you, what matter whether things you have, or things you have not?"

The reason that we must cast off our slavery to worry and care is deeper than merely because it spoils our happiness. It is because, as MacDonald says, "Distrust is atheism, and the barrier to all growth." God made us to be sons and daughters, not slaves, in his house, the world. To be a son or daughter of God is to relate to the Father as Jesus does, placing in him the same absolute trust and confidence born of an absolute love and obedience.

When we are at home with the Father in this world as Jesus was, we will no longer fear anything or worry about our own lives at all. Things, the outward things and appearances of the world, will not oppress us. We will see everything in its relation to God, as issuing from him and being actively upheld and governed by him every moment. Knowing that he is with us, we will know that we have all things. We will see that we are able to do everything that the Father has given us to do, and we will care for nothing beyond that. Caring only for the will of our Father, we will be able to have the confidence that he takes upon himself the care of our lives.

But is it possible to live this way? MacDonald maintains that it was to show us this way that Jesus came, and that it is not only possible but imperative for us to learn it. If we are to learn it, we must be ready to confront the cares that swarm in our minds like bats, driving out the thoughts of God. We will have to turn over to God every matter in which we are tempted not to trust him, no matter how seemingly insignificant. MacDonald says, "Every little thing in which you would have your own way, has a mission for your redemption."

You would not think that we would cling to the cares and anxieties that make us miserable, but we do. We define ourselves by what we perceive as our place in the world, whether that "place" is a lifestyle, a reputation, or a relationship. When something happens to threaten the structures, economic or otherwise, that assure us of that place, we feel that our very being is threatened. It is painful for us to be stripped of our external securities down to our naked human selves. But if our sense of safety and wellbeing is anywhere but on God the wellspring of our being, it is founded on a lie, and the sooner it is shaken, the better for us.

It was Jesus' friends, whom he had chosen to be with him and learn from him, who were given the privilege of having to live, like Jesus, from moment to moment, in absolute dependence on God. It is when we set ourselves to live as Jesus did that we will be ready for the help that only he can give us, help we need to overcome the spiritual stupor of our worries and come awake to the world of God's endless provision.