

Excerpts from Unspoken Sermons, Series Three

George MacDonald

This is my final instalment of excerpts from George MacDonald's "Unspoken Sermons Series" ... the following being from Series Three. After sending out one of the previous instalments, a friend observed one of the questions MacDonald had posed ... "Is God so bound to keep the sinner alive so that He can punish him more, though punishing him more will not make him better?" She went on to observe, "To believe that is so ridiculous. I don't see how people can believe it, but with about every preacher preaching hell I guess they are afraid not to."

And of course the biggest reason to believe that God will ultimately save all is that the Bible clearly tells us this is so. None will be tormented endlessly. Sadly most preachers and most people attending the churches of our day are locked into the errant teachings and traditions of men, including the errant Biblical translations that support such notions ... and they do not see God's wonderful plan to save all and to reconcile all to Himself.

But now ... let's hear from George MacDonald and these words penned by him in 1889.

"Justice"

Punishment, I repeat, is not the thing required of God, but the absolute destruction of sin. What better is the world, what better is the sinner, what better is God, what better is the truth, that the sinner should suffer-continue suffering to all eternity? Would there be less sin in the universe? Would there be any making-up for sin? Would it show God justified in doing what he knew would bring sin into the world, justified in making creatures who he knew would sin? What setting-right would come of the sinner's suffering? If justice demand it, if suffering be the equivalent for sin, then the sinner must suffer, then God is bound to exact his suffering, and not pardon; and so the making of man was a tyrannical deed, a creative cruelty. But grant that the sinner has deserved to suffer, no amount of suffering is any atonement for his sin. To suffer to all eternity could not make up for one unjust word. Does that mean, then, that for an unjust word I deserve to suffer to all eternity? The unjust word is an eternally evil thing; nothing but God in my heart can cleanse me from the evil that uttered it; but does it follow that I saw the evil of what I did so perfectly, that eternal punishment for it would be just? Sorrow and confession and self-abasing love will make up for the evil word; suffering will not ...

If my friend has wronged me, will it console me to see him punished? Will that be a rendering to me of my due? Will his agony be a balm to my deep wound? Should I be fit for any friendship if that were possible even in regard to my enemy? But would not the shadow of repentant grief, the light of reviving love on his countenance, heal it at once however deep? Take any of those wicked people in Dante's hell, and ask wherein is justice served by their punishment. Mind, I am not saying it is not right to punish them; I am saying that justice is not, never can be, satisfied by suffering-nay, cannot have any satisfaction in or from suffering. Human resentment, human revenge, human hate may. Such justice as Dante's keeps wickedness alive in its most terrible forms. The life of God goes forth to inform, or at least give a home to victorious evil. Is he not defeated every time that one of those lost souls defies him? All hell cannot make Vanni Fucci say 'I was wrong.' God is triumphantly defeated, I say, throughout the hell of his vengeance. Although against evil, it is but the vain and wasted cruelty of a tyrant. There is no destruction of evil thereby, but an enhancing of its horrible power in the midst of the most agonizing and disgusting tortures a divine imagination can invent. If sin must be kept alive, then hell must be kept alive; but while I regard

the smallest sin as infinitely loathsome, I do not believe that any being, never good enough to see the essential ugliness of sin, could sin so as to deserve such punishment ...

God is bound by his love to punish sin in order to deliver his creature; he is bound by his justice to destroy sin in his creation. Love is justice-is the fulfilling of the law, for God as well as for his children. This is the reason of punishment; this is why justice requires that the wicked shall not go unpunished-that they, through the eye-opening power of pain, may come to see and do justice, may be brought to desire and make all possible amends, and so become just. Such punishment concerns justice in the deepest degree. For Justice, that is God, is bound in himself to see justice done by his children-not in the mere outward act, but in their very being. He is bound in himself to make up for wrong done by his children, and he can do nothing to make up for wrong done but by bringing about the repentance of the wrong-doer. When the man says, 'I did wrong; I hate myself and my deed; I cannot endure to think that I did it!' then, I say, is atonement begun. Without that, all that the Lord did would be lost. He would have made no atonement. Repentance, restitution, confession, prayer for forgiveness, righteous dealing thereafter, is the sole possible, the only true make-up for sin. For nothing less than this did Christ die. When a man acknowledges the right he denied before; when he says to the wrong, 'I abjure, I loathe you; I see now what you are; I could not see it before because I would not; God forgive me; make me clean, or let me die!' then justice, that is God, has conquered-and not till then ...

But then, I say, no atonement would be made for the wrongs they have done; God remains defeated, for he has created that which sinned, and which would not repent and make up for its sin. But those who believe that God will thus be defeated by many souls, must surely be of those who do not believe he cares enough to do his very best for them. He is their Father; he had power to make them out of himself, separate from himself, and capable of being one with him: surely he will somehow save and keep them! Not the power of sin itself can close all the channels between creating and created.

“Light”

If we were punished for every fault, there would be no end, no respite; we should have no quiet wherein to repent; but God passes by all he can. He passes by and forgets a thousand sins, yea, tens of thousands, forgiving them all-only we must begin to be good, begin to do evil no more. He who refuses must be punished and punished-punished through all the ages-punished until he gives way, yields, and comes to the light, that his deeds may be seen by himself to be what they are, and be by himself reprov'd, and the Father at last have his child again. For the man who in this world resists to the full, there may be, perhaps, a whole age or era in the history of the universe during which his sin shall not be forgiven; but never can it be forgiven until he repents. How can they who will not repent be forgiven, save in the sense that God does and will do all he can to make them repent? Who knows but such sin may need for its cure the continuous punishment of an æon?

“The Displeasure of Jesus”

There is a good anger and a bad anger. There is a wrath of God, and there is a wrath of man that worketh not the righteousness of God. Anger may be as varied as the colour of the rainbow. God's anger can be nothing but Godlike, therefore divinely beautiful, at one with his love, helpful, healing, restoring; yet is it verily and truly what we call anger. How different is the anger of one who loves, from that of one who hates! yet is anger anger. There is the degraded human anger, and the grand, noble, eternal anger. Our anger is in general degrading, because it is in general impure.

A CD ROM including 47 of MacDonald's books can be ordered from www.george-macdonald.com

- Bob Evely -