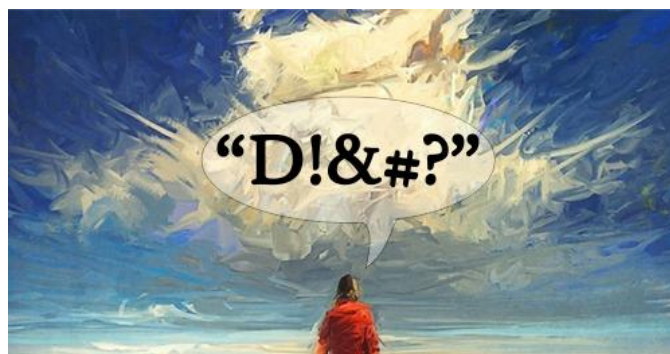


# The Cause of Spiritual Stupidity

Second Series – Sermon Fifteen

Original by George MacDonald

Paraphrase by Dale R. Howie



D\*mn, are we Spiritually stupid? Are we penny-wise and dollar-poor? Have we so missed the point that the insignificant has usurped the significant? That we have traded the temporary for the infinite? This concluding sermon in the trilogy on *things* drives the point home with a practical perspective on the way forward to Kingdom Life.

The Jewish leaders Jesus confronted were the wealthy of His day. They believed their riches proved they were blessed by a God they had never seen and did not know. Their ideas and concepts of the Divine had become idols. They were blind and refused to enter into a relationship with God and barred the way for others as well! A full cup of things has no room for anything else. God can pour in the wine of Life, and it just spills over the rim and runs down the side onto the ground, spoiled in the spilling for the drinker!

**“Every storm [in our lives] is but an assault in the siege of Love. The wrath of God is but the other side of His Love. It is the love outside the house that wants inside. The house that is no home until He dwells there.”**

## Outline

**The Problem** – Their thoughts and concerns for the wrong thing reveals their heart!

**Understanding** – Life, in action lived, is alone the human condition into which the light of the Living can penetrate!

**Lesson of the Miracles** – The lesson is that God cares for His children!

**Issue of Trust** – Jesus reveals the Father so that we can know Him! And in knowing Him, trust Him!

**Hindrances to Trust** – The principle of corruption is the same. It is about things!

**Truth about Troubles** – Troubles are things that hide from you God's loving thoughts.

**Storms** – Every storm is but an assault in the siege of Love!

### Mark 8:18-21 NLT

*“You have eyes—can’t you see? You have ears—can’t you hear?’ Don’t you remember anything at all? When I fed the 5,000 with five loaves of bread, how many baskets of leftovers did you pick up afterward?”*

*“Twelve,” they said.*

*“And when I fed the 4,000 with seven loaves, how many large baskets of leftovers did you pick up?”*

*“Seven,” they said.*

*“Don’t you understand yet?” he asked them.*

## The Problem

We begin with the miracle of the feeding of the four thousand with a few loaves and fish. Afterward, they cross the Sea of Galilee by boat. Here Jesus encounters some hostile Pharisees and decides to re-cross the lake. This sudden change in plans leaves the disciples aware that they have but only one loaf of bread.

## Understanding

However, Jesus is aware and concerned about the hostility and possible influence the religious leaders might have on His disciples. So, He begins to warn them. Jesus, once again using the metaphor of leaven as representing the hidden invading power of ideas and concepts. Jesus had taught them that the kingdom of Heaven was like leaven. Yeast hidden in flour gradually affecting all of it. He now builds on this image, warning them of the leaven of the Pharisees, which was the religious ideas and concepts that informed their thoughts and motivated their actions.

The disciple's thoughts, being on a different page, are thinking of their lack of food. They then believe that Jesus is talking about the leaven of bread. Not understanding, they assume He is talking about some problem about food when they say, "It is because we have taken no bread!" The leaven, hidden from their awareness, was already at work in their hearts. The signs the Pharisees sought with their mockery of belief and hostility towards Jesus already forgotten from just a few hours before.

**It is the person who is trying, trying to live. The one obedient to the word of the Master, that the word of the Master reveals itself.** We think when we understand the surface of something, we possess it. The Lord, on the other hand, puts His forms in vague and subjective patterns. Ideas that do not readily suggest themselves to the intellect but reveal themselves to the conscience and heart, to the inner person. The one who is in the process of life's effort. This process, according to the nature of the new

creation, is at work in them and advancing. In this awareness, a person can understand the words, symbols, and parables of the Lord. **For life in action, lived, is alone the human condition into which the light of the Living can penetrate!** This Life alone can receive and fully understand. This Life can change food into growth. See how the disciples missed it!

Jesus doesn't tell them they are wrong. He instead goes after the root, which led them to their mistake. The source is far more critical than the fruit. Jesus does not waste time explaining about the bread, for His concern is not on the surface. **He often speaks not about the words, outward expressions, but the thoughts. Here Jesus even goes beyond the ideas. He goes to the whole way of thinking, the matrix or paradigm, the context for their thoughts, to the very inward awareness of the person.**

## **Lesson of the Miracles**

He speaks directly to the issue, to awaken in them their lack of confidence in God. This lack is the cause of their misunderstanding. He reminds them of the two miracles of the loaves and the overflow of leftovers above the need. The latest miracle just yesterday. Yet, here they are worrying and doubting already!

He reminds them of the details of the miracles. He tells them not to refresh their memories, but to get them thinking beyond the obvious. **For they had already forgotten or had failed to see the central truth. The truth that God is love. He is care and compassion.**

- They knew the number of men.
- They knew the number of loaves.
- The baskets of fragments they took up each time.
- **But they forgot the Love that had so broken the bread.**
- **The "Bread so broken" that its remnants outweighed its loaves by twenty times.**

Having questioned them like little children and listened to their answers he then turns the light on their thoughts. The view with an argument that makes everything understandable, demanding, "How is it that you do not understand?" Then they got it, knew this was not about bread, but the teaching of the Pharisees and Sadducees. The one who trusts can understand; he who sees can discover the meaning.

**The universal lesson He wanted them to learn from the miracle, the only one worthy of the miracle, was that God cares for His children! That He did, could and would provide for their necessities. This simple lesson they had not learned. No doubt, the power of the miracle proved something about His mission. But the love expressed in the miracle demonstrated it better! It settled love as the pulse of the Father's heart!**

## **Issue of Trust**

The basis of the Master's criticism was not that they did not understand Him. It was that they did not trust His Father! After all they had experienced they still worried about food. It is so easy for us to imagine ourselves in need. We project this fear onto God as His readiness to desert us. These miracles were nothing spectacular, but rather simple, ordinary works of His Father that they could comprehend. The simple truth that God was always present and ready to help. Their purpose was to reveal the Father, not Jesus. The heart of God as Father, as who He is. No other idea of God could be or would be worthy of trust. No different concept of God worth having.

**The incarnation was not about Jesus revealing Himself. Jesus did not come to show Himself as having all power in heaven and earth. He came to reveal His Father! Jesus revealed the Father to us as He is so that we could know Him! Through knowing Him we could then trust Him!** It would have been only a small blessing to forgive us and not give us Himself! It would have only accomplished returning our basic humanity. Anything less than God Himself could not have relieved us of the fundamental distress of our existence. **Only the Father as the "gift" can turn our sorrow into essential joy! Jesus came to give us His Father, who is eternal Life!**

These miracles touched all of their senses- their eyes, hands, and mouths, and His words were revealed through their ears when He said, "So don't worry about these things, saying, 'What will we eat? What will we drink? What will we wear?' These things dominate the thoughts of unbelievers, but your heavenly Father already knows all your needs. Seek the Kingdom of God above all else, live righteously, and he will give you everything you need." They had received so little of this so far as they only considered the bread and forgot their Father. Just like men of theology have forgotten the Logos of God!

Having forgotten, they were troubled about their daily bread. "What could Jesus mean?" The connection was plain! Jesus' reminder of the miracles given to highlight its message instead of their preoccupation with their needs. It had revealed the truth of the Father's heart towards them. God's loving care without which He could not be their God! Had they learned this lesson? Their minds were so full of care that they could not see the lesson that they were in a relationship with He who makes all the loaves! Therefore, the need for their daily bread was already met in He who made them and the loaves!

The concerns of the disciples were for today. They were not concerned about tomorrow. Tomorrow speaking of any and every point in the future. Even the next hour or the next moment, all of which are beyond our grasp. These are in God's hands as a year or hundreds of years away. Concerns for the next minute are just as foolish as concerns for tomorrow or any day in the next thousand years. We are helpless in doing anything in any of them while God is capable of doing everything in all of them. **The concerns of tomorrow that have to be prepared today are alone today's care. Today's attention is only for the things in front of us in the moment. Tomorrows belong only to God!**

Concerning their lack of bread, this was not a failure on their part. If there had been a lack of foresight, it would not have concerned Jesus. He was not looking to find fault, but the primary wrong of living life without God. This independence is at the root of all sin, from hatred to unkindness. Indeed, most certainly, all minor values like frugality, among others, would be almost if not altogether obsolete.

Another example, if a person forgets something, God will see to it. We are not in control of our memory or our intellect, but we are in control of our will and actions. We are responsible when we are aware and ignore or postpone something before us and so forget. If we but concentrate on the task in the moment, little foresight will be needed. This type of foresight is only required, which reveals the task and enables

its response. If we took care of yesterday's work well, the work of tomorrow would go great. Work done is more important for the future than the foresight of an archangel.

## Hindrances to Trust

The disciple's problem, like the wealthy youth's, was things. Things prevented them from understanding. Because of the youth's possessions, he failed to see the beauty of the call with which Jesus had honored him. Things so filled his heart that there was no room for God to occupy. The disciples, a little further along, had left all and followed Him. However, they were not rid of things yet either. A loaf of bread was enough to hide the meaning of the Lord's words. Why? Because having forgotten, they could not trust.

**In the case of the youth, it was wealth. In the disciples, it was having but a single loaf. Each with the same outcome, the principle of corruption the same. It is about things! It doesn't matter whether it is about things you have or things you don't.** The youth, not trusting God as the source of his riches, could not receive the word of His Son. Jesus was offering better riches directly from the heart of the Father. The disciples, forgetting who is the Lord of the harvest, feared a day's hunger. The youth, not trusting that God had already given, and the disciples in God's readiness to give!

We are like them when, in any situation, we do not trust. It is hard on God when His children will not let him give, and when His children posture themselves so that He cannot help. When His help would distract, confuse, and harm them. For us to receive would deny the source of our help, would be to confirm our delusions and idols. Our trusting in that which is not! Distrust is atheism and the hindrance to all growth.

**Worldly things so crowd our hearts that there is no room for the things of God. Being filled with God's heart would raise us above our fears and make us happy children in our Father's house!** Tomorrow makes today's whole self sick, and our heart faint. Instead of resting, we are worrying about the day yet to come! The concerns that are filling our minds at this very moment or waiting until we set the book aside to consume us. The apparent needs that are no needs at all. They are but controlling spirits, sucking at the very center of our lives.

"No, my concern is reasonable, a necessary one!"

*(The Spirit says,) "Is this something that needs your immediate attention?"* • (Me) "No"

*"Then, you are allowing it to seize the moment, replacing the task before you!"* • "But, there is no task before me at the moment."

*"Yes, there is, the greatest task before us all."* • "What is it?" • *"Trusting in the living God whose will is your life."*

"He may not want me to have what I need!"

*"Maybe you just think you need it. Is it a good thing?"* • "Yes, of course."

*"Then, why the doubt?"* • "Because God may decide not to give it to me."

"Why should He?" • "I don't know."

"Perhaps it is to give you something else instead?" • "But I don't want anything else."

"I thought I was talking to a Christian!" - "Yes, absolutely, you are."

**"Then do you not understand that when God says no to anything His child wants, He desires to give you something better?"** • "What if I don't want it?" • "God knows you are miserable without it. The youth, instead of wealth, was offered the friendship and presence of Christ with treasures in heaven as well. When God refused to heal Paul of a painful condition, one Paul had asked of Him three times, when Paul was denied. **God gave him instead His grace, His own presence!** God was personally comforting him in his distress." • "Yes, but that was Saint Paul!"

"So, why does that matter?" • "He was a special one!" • "No, God respects all His children the same. He loves them all as their Father. Nothing could be true of Paul, that is not true of you. The scriptures are showing God's universal way with man. If you don't want to submit to God's best for you, then, by all means, go and be miserable! Until your misery drives you into the arms of your Father."

"I do trust Him in spiritual things, but not in material ones." • "Everything is a matter of spirit. If God has a way, then that is the only way. Every little thing where we want our own way becomes an opportunity for our conversion. God treating you like a disobedient child until you take His way as yours!"

There will be one big difference between the rich who leave their riches and the poor who hates his poverty. When they die, the heart of the rich will still be crowded with things and their pleasures. While the poor will be relieved of their lack. The one has had his good things while the other has had nothing. However, the wealthy who have held their possessions lightly, not letting them into their hearts. The rich who were channels, not containers. These will begin in the new world, side by side with the poor who accepted, not hated, his poverty. Each will say, "I am free!"

**The only air for the child, in which it can breathe and live, is the presence of God and the souls of the free. This presence is our heaven, our home, and our beautiful place.** Freed and cleansed of greed, jealousy, vanity, pride, possessions, and all things filled with the evil self. Then we will live as God's children on the hills and fields of that heaven. The children not desiring place or privilege over anyone anymore. Ambition and hatred seen as one evil. "What you have, I will have. What you want, I will desire. I will provide for myself ten times before I give once to you."

## **Truth about Troubles**

**I want to be practical. We are all willing to be miserable over nothing and believe God is not good enough to be concerned about it. Let me appeal to your reason to help you rid yourself of troubles. Troubles that hide from you God's loving thoughts towards you.**

The key is focusing on the things in the moment ready to be done. Not those that are at the door, but already in your mind. The ones we are already aware of are generally the most neglected, ignored, and postponed. The Lord of Life demands goodness of us. How can God not care about the first principles of

fair play? Can we become active in God's life without learning to speak truth to our neighbor? Can a man climb to the top step of the stairs who has never set foot on the lowest?

Truth has but one voice. The evidence of it seen in the small things of our lives. The one who does only the big things that can be seen and puts off the small ones before him, he is a liar. Let me offer a few comparisons between ourselves and the disciples. Their worry over the trivial, bread, when the Bread of Life is at their sides in the boat. We, too, miss the important while worrying over the trivial. We also are filling our hearts with shadows while losing precious time and life with anxiety. Heaven's insights come to those who possess themselves in patience.

When I am troubled over nothing, troubled over something unimportant, and search for it even though I don't need it. My concern is for the loss of it more than its need. Like a book borrowed and not returned. One, in which I had forgotten the borrower and become distressed about the missing volume while I have hundreds on my shelves. I am losing the moment of gathering treasure from the ones I have. In this, am I not like the disciples? Am I not foolish whenever loss would trouble me more than recovery would encourage? God would have me be wise and smile at the insignificant. **Isn't it then time to lose a few things? When I care for them so excessively? This loss comes from the mercy of God. Loss occurs to teach us to let go.**

Or, have I forgotten a thought that came to me? An idea that impressed me as being of the Truth, one that revealed something to my heart. A view important enough to keep, one to apply to myself or others, one that just vanishes! I keep struggling to get it back, feeling diminished by the process. Somehow more lost than if it were in a notebook I may never look in again.

I forget that it is about living things that God cares; living, breathing truths. Not words on a page, memories, or knowledge, in which I take joy. But matters of Life that lift the hearts and minds, alive in their doing. True, my lost thought could have been like that, but trust in God the Maker of thoughts and memories. Knowing if it was from God, which alone is worth anything, it will return for it is in God.

"These are foolish illustrations, not worth writing!"

If they are not helpful, then yes, they are foolish. If these illustrations are useful, then you are foolish for not seeing them. I chose them for their simplicity and ease of recognition for all who cannot hear or see God for their loss of insignificant things in this life.

With every difficult trouble, great or small, the loss of millions, or just a single dollar, all go to God. The God of your life to deliver you, His child, from that which is unlike Him. That which is against and does not belong to your nature. If the trouble is so consuming that you cannot take it to Him, then it is all the more you must! When we cannot go to God for our liberation, the more disastrous is our life.

## **Storms**

If you are distressed with thoughts for tomorrow, next month, or next year, you are miserable. If you are letting the chatter and noise of the world, unconsciously influence your motivation. If you hear and pay attention to the judgments of men, capable or incapable, these open the doors and windows of your heart to the pests that drown out with their constant noise, the voice of the Eternal!

Are you telling me that “care” is the motivation for your work? What work can be done better by the greedy and anxious than by the free? Is anxiety a better motivation than the grace of God? If your labor is not His work, then indeed our anxious care may help, for its success is lost. Is fear a more significant motivator than the joy of the Lord? I know this is not a successful strategy for getting rich, but neither does it stop the flow of the kingdom of heaven.

**Ambition in every form is about Things.** It is about the advantages we consume upon ourselves. It is pride, the shadow of Satan, that replaces the light of aspiration. **Aspiration is the single ambition that comes from God. It is about rising above one’s selfish self;** all others are of evil. Yet ambition is fed and sought by many who live religiously, filling their souls with petty cares and disappointments. The love of men’s praise, desire for fame, pride so easily offended and being filled with the knowledge that puffs up, these and every other form of easily adaptable projections of our self-importance. We must get rid of them all! We must be free!

Men so filled will not once participate with God, even though He is beside them all day. Nor will God force any door open to enter. He may send storms to our house. The winds of His warnings blowing out the doors and windows, shaking it to its foundation, but still, He will not enter.

The door must be opened by the willing before Love will cross its threshold, as He watches to see the slightest movement from within. **Every storm is but an assault in the siege of Love. The wrath of God is but the other side of His Love. It is the love outside the house that wants inside. The house that is no home until He dwells there.** Things must be cast out to make room in our souls. Room for the internal, eternal Truth, so that they can take outward form.

But who is strong enough to cast them out? If we take courage and desire to encounter them, we find the task too much for us! We cannot cleanse our house by ourselves. Let us who have tried and failed, remember, with hope and courage, that He who knows everything, once told a parable to the end that we ought always to pray and not to faint.

## CLIFFNOTES WITH ORIGINAL MACDONALD QUOTES

### The Problem

### Understanding

It is to the man who is trying to live, to the man who is obedient to the word of the Master, that the word of the Master unfolds itself.

For life, that is, action, is alone the human condition into which the light of the Living can penetrate!

Often he speaks not to the words but to the thought; here he speaks not even to the thought, but to the whole mode of thinking, to the thought-matrix, the inward condition of the men.

### Lesson of the Miracles



For they had already forgotten or had failed to see their central revelation—the eternal fact of God's love and care and compassion.

But they forgot the Love that had so broken the bread that its remnants twenty times outweighed its loaves.

The lesson he would have had them learn from the miracle, the natural lesson, the only lesson worthy of the miracle, was, that God cared for his children, and could, did, and would provide for their necessities. This lesson they had not learned. No doubt the power of the miracle was some proof of his mission, but the love of it proved it better, for it made it worth proving: it was a throb of the Father's heart.

### **Issue of Trust**

The mission undertaken by the Son, was not to show himself as having all power in heaven and earth, but to reveal his Father, to show him to men such as he is, that men may know him, and knowing, trust him.

Only God the gift can turn that sorrow into essential joy: Jesus came to give them God, who is eternal life.

Those claims only of the morrow which have to be prepared to-day are of the duty of to-day; the moment which coincides with work to be done, is the moment to be minded; the next is nowhere till God has made it.

### **Hindrances to Trust**

In the former case it was the possession of wealth, in the latter the not having more than a loaf, that rendered incapable of receiving the word of the Lord: the evil principle was precisely the same. If it be Things that slay you, what matter whether things you have, or things you have not?

The things of thy world so crowd our hearts, that there is no room in them for the things of thy heart, which would raise ours above all fear, and make us merry children in our Father's house!

Do you not, then, know that, when God denies anything a child of his values, it is to give him something he values?

He gave him instead his own graciousness, consoled him in person for his pain.

For the only air of the soul, in which it can breathe and live, is the present God and the spirits of the just: that is our heaven, our home, our all-right place.

### **Truth about Troubles**

But let me be practical; for thou art ready to be miserable over trifles, and dost not believe God good enough to care for thy care: I would reason with thee to help thee rid of thy troubles, for they hide from thee the thoughts of thy God.

Is it not time I lost a few things when I care for them so unreasonably? This losing of things is of the mercy of God; it comes to teach us to let them go.

### **Storms**

Ambition in every shape has to do with Things...aspiration. The sole ambition that is of God is the ambition to rise above oneself.

Every tempest is but an assault in the siege of love. The terror of God is but the other side of his love; it is love outside the house, that would be inside—love that knows the house is no house, only a place, until it enter—no home, but a tent, until the Eternal dwell there.