



Unspoken Sermons Series I, II, and III

George MacDonald

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Unspoken Sermons was written by G. MacDonald, a Scottish author and Christian minister. MacDonald states his theological views most distinctly in the sermon Justice found in the third volume (included here) of Unspoken Sermons. C. S. Lewis wrote about MacDonald and his theology, expressed in this work: "I know hardly any other writer who seems to be closer, or more continually close, to the Spirit of Christ Himself."

Unspoken Sermons Series I, II, and III Details

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From Reader Review Unspoken Sermons Series I, II, and III for online ebook

Tabitha says

Not completely finished just yet, but I'm pretty sure I'll re-reading this book for the rest of my life, so I'll go ahead and mark it as done.

George MacDonald is my personal hero and these sermons blow my mind with their beauty and wisdom every time. His incredible love for Jesus shines through every word, and his unique perspective had transformed my faith. I can't recommend these highly enough.

If I ever get married I'd like my spouse to at least appreciate MacDonald's approach. The language is archaic to some, but the truths are gloriously timeless!

Cralls says

Oh my goodness. This far exceeded any expectations I could have had of the book.

I'd tried to read this book several times. His manner of writing is a bit round about and he often starts with some odd and seemingly unimportant detail of the text. For example, in the very first sermon, he makes the claim that the child that Jesus held in his lap was Peter's. I remember thinking... huh? How could we possibly know this and why would it possibly matter? I felt this way about many of the sermons. But by the end, I was always blown away. In fact, it was not at all uncommon for me to feel the need to stop partway through a sermon and just pray and dwell on what was being discussed. It would either be so powerful I couldn't move on or wouldn't dare for fear of forgetting what was stirring within me. This is a pretty big deal to because I am someone who really hates stopping partway through a chapter. I would rather not read than not finish. But this book wouldn't allow me to do that.

What George MacDonald does here is spill out with the heart of God. What I learned through every sermon was who God is and what God desires.

I have begun rereading immediately.

I read on my kindle, and I highlighted so many lines that the highlights are essentially worthless now. In case you are not persuaded to read this just yet, perhaps hearing from George MacDonald himself will be helpful.

"For he regards men not as they are merely, but as they shall be."

"The one use of the Bible is to make us look at Jesus, that through him we might know his Father and our Father, his God and our God."

"Forgiveness can never be indifference. Forgiveness is love towards the unlovely."

"Many a man, many a woman, fair and flourishing to see, is going about with a rusty moth-eaten heart within that form of strength or beauty."

"Man's first business is, 'What does God want me to do?' not, 'What will God do if I do so and so?'"

"Try not to feel good when thou art not good, but cry to Him who is good."

"Every highest human act is just a giving back to God of that which he first gave to us."

"But let a man once love, and all those difficulties which appeared apposed to love, will just be so many arguments for loving."

"The love that enlarges not its borders, that is not ever spreading and including, and deepening, will contract, shrivel, decay, die."

"But in the working of the Divine Love upon the race, my enemy is doomed to cease to be my enemy, and to become my friend."

"The refusal to look up to God as our Father is the one central wrong in the whole human affair."

"The simplest peasant loving his cow, is more divine than any monarch whose monarchy is his glory."

"God is not bound to punish sin; he is bound to destroy sin."

"God does destroy sin; he is always destroying sin. In him I trust that he is destroying sin in me."

"May we trust God with our past as heartily as with our future."

"Whatever the place [Heaven, or perhaps more broadly, the afterlife] be like, one thing is certain, that there will be endless, infinite atonement, ever-growing love."

Gretchen says

I am a pastor's daughter, so I have heard my share of sermons. This collection of sermons was truly life-changing for me. Like no one else (other than perhaps Dallas Willard), MacDonald is able to present God in a way that corresponds with reality. His teaching is dense, but full of nourishment. My life truly took on a better quality because of the guidance in this book, becoming a life more in step with our Messiah, Jesus Christ.

Some favorites are the following: "The Fear of God," "Life," "Self-Denial," "The Truth in Jesus," "Inheritance," "The Eloi," and "The Displeasure of Jesus." Really, just read them all. You will not regret it. Even the sermons that do not "hit it out of the park" are very, very good--still full of wisdom, insight, and understanding of life in reality.

Glen Grunau says

I cannot possibly do justice in just a few words to describe how these three volumes have impacted me! For the past 30 years of my life, I have developed a keen fondness for the stories of George MacDonald . . . and

have fallen in love with this man who seemed to know the heart of God in such an intimate manner. Since purchasing the complete works of George MacDonald for my Kindle, I have been rediscovering my love for his stories . . . yet also drawn more than ever before by his theology . . . leading me to this three volume set of his Unspoken Sermons.

Reading these volumes has represented the most delightful journey into Christian theology that I have ever experienced. He was harshly judged by his church for his theology, a rejected prophet in his day. But if his teaching were to become less obscure in our day, no doubt he would be equally and harshly condemned by many of our contemporary theologians, indignant at his challenge to the atonement theories that prevail in the 21st century evangelical church. We need only look so far as the recent condemnation faced by Rob Bell when he offered an alternative view of God's loving judgement. Perhaps it is only in the relative obscurity of MacDonald's theological works that permit his novels (where his theology is also accessible) to continue to grace the shelves of church libraries everywhere.

It is a pity that MacDonald is not more known for his theological teaching. It would no doubt serve as the same valuable corrective and soothing balm for the judgemental theological correctness of our day as it did for his day. But no doubt the vast majority of us will need to depend on other more familiar names to bring us the spirit of the teaching of this dear man whose deep love for God oozes out everywhere in his teaching.

Christian author Oswald Chambers (1874–1917) wrote that "it is a striking indication of the trend and shallowness of the modern reading public that George MacDonald's books have been so neglected." Thanks to contemporary authors like Michael Phillips, and perhaps also to e-book technology, this is fortunately less the case in the past 30 years than it has been previously.

Here is what C.S. Lewis says about MacDonald's Unspoken Sermons: "This collection, as I have said, was designed not to revive MacDonald's literary reputation but to spread his religious teaching. Hence most of my extracts are taken from the three volumes of Unspoken Sermons. My own debt to this book is almost as great as one man can owe to another: and nearly all serious inquirers to whom I have introduced it acknowledge that it has given them great help—sometimes indispensable help toward the very acceptance of the Christian faith. I know hardly any other writer who seems to be closer, or more continually close, to the Spirit of Christ Himself. Hence his Christ-like union of tenderness and severity. Nowhere else outside the New Testament have I found terror and comfort so intertwined . . . I have never concealed the fact that I regarded him as my master; indeed I fancy I have never written a book in which I did not quote from him. But it has not seemed to me that those who have received my books kindly take even now sufficient notice of the affiliation. Honesty drives me to emphasize it."

MacDonald was able to avoid the dualistic error made by so many of us who have viewed the anger and the love of God as separate and distinct qualities of his nature. MacDonald viewed them as one and the same: "I believe that justice and mercy are simply one and the same thing; without justice to the full there can be no mercy, and without mercy to the full there can be no justice; that such is the mercy of God that he will hold his children in the consuming fire of his distance until they pay the uttermost farthing, until they drop the purse of selfishness with all the dross that is in it, and rush home to the Father and the Son, and the many brethren--rush inside the centre of the life-giving fire whose outer circles burn. I believe that no hell will be lacking which would help the just mercy of God to redeem his children".

Another favourite author of mine (Dallas Willard) always struck me for his gracious holding of truth. Yet he could be severe when needed. He had no hesitancy in confronting, in his book *The Divine Conspiracy*, the fundamentalist teaching of a popular theologian of our day – John MacArthur. With similar boldness, MacDonald harshly confronted what he saw as the error of the teaching of one of his most infamous

predecessors: “From all copies of Jonathan Edwards's portrait of God, however faded by time, however softened by the use of less glaring pigments, I turn with loathing. Not such a God is he concerning whom was the message John heard from Jesus, that he is light, and in him is no darkness at all (from MacDonald's sermon Justice)”. The title of Edwards' infamous sermon “Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God” is still frequently quoted today, treated as on a level with inspired scripture, and still influencing 300 years later the minds of believers and unbelievers alike on the character of a harsh and condemning God.

Although I need some time to continue to sift through some of MacDonald's more controversial doctrines (on atonement and his view that not even the most evil person born may yet be allowed the opportunity for repentance, while requiring perhaps aeons of punishment before he may be willing to come to such repentance), MacDonald is not only one of the most brilliant theologians I have ever read but also one whose writing continues to exude a deep love for his Master. In aspiring to the same love that he had for his God and his diligent hunger for the truth of his God, I continue to regard MacDonald as one of my most important mentors on the Christian journey. I view him as I would a father.

Kevin Finelli says

MacDonald's *Unspoken Sermons* builds a picture of a simple, childlike faith revolving directly around the gospels. He eschews the common penal substitution model, and many have written that he here favors the *Christus Victor* theology. Though there are elements of this, his main message seems to be to tear down any presumptuous theology or opinions in favor of this simple childlike faith, and a commitment to obedience. MacDonald spends several chapters discussing, in his very dense and logical style (made very clear and understandable by Baldwin's excellent reading), why he believes penal substitution is a false doctrine.

This was my first MacDonald book, and finding it positive I plan to try *Phantastes* next.

Luke says

These sermons are the deepest writing I have ever read, and probably my favorite book. My wife and I were reading one out loud on a day off in a public park, and we both burst into tears and prayers and had to close the book. "Life" is my favorite sermon, but they are all powerful. I have not read them all, but I have read many of them 2 or 3 times in the past few years.

I qualify this 5-star review by saying that I find MacDonald weird for the open-ended way that he discusses the afterlife—a fault, which, if it is a fault, is shared by C. S. Lewis in *The Great Divorce*, in which MacDonald is actually a character. Another problem I had was the occasional philosophizing—probably because MacDonald had to explain his views of God's character which were not ordinary in the 1800s! But the unfathomably profound thoughts about God make it entirely worth continuing! MacDonald was obsessed with the heart of God, and if you follow his heart and attitude towards the Father, you cannot go wrong.

As an aside, if you have read *Mere Christianity*, you will find many statements scattered in these sermons which are repackaged or restated by Lewis, just as *The Chronicles of Narnia* draws from MacDonald's fantasy novels.

I tell my friends that I would sell everything in my library published after 1950 if I can keep these sermons.

Reading each one is like seeing the Grand Canyon for the first time.

Adam says

I've been reading this for ages, and for good reason. I get through a few pages at a time, stumbling backwards afterward with hunger, tears, and remembrance of simpler, more trusting times within my heart. George MacDonald was C.S. Lewis' most profound spiritual mentor, and if you in any way enjoy Lewis' work, I must recommend this book to you.

It's hefty, meaty, and worth the time it takes to spend with it. MacDonald's reflections upon the Presence and love of God, Christ, Man as and for what God has made Him, Nature, and the Holy Spirit show a wisdom and depth that has been ridiculously underappreciated by the general populace. However, I can't say that I don't misunderstand that underappreciation - MacDonald's not necessarily an easy read, and he writes in an older style within which the English language shows flourish, style, and promise it seems to have lost in recent years.

If you have interest in the many ways the Kingdom of God weaves its way through this world, read this book.

Brad Holaway says

These sermons hold the theological keys to unlock all of MacDonalds fantasies, novels, and childrens stories. The only trouble is that the language takes a bit of getting used to. But once I became familiar with MacDonalds style, my life has never been the same. I am helplessly addicted. I have read a number of these sermons over a dozen times.

I will never finish reading MacDonald...

Mike says

This is a book I keep going back to. Often dense and difficult to understand - MacDonald's writing style leaves something to be desired - it's full of gems and wisdom and spiritual insight. MacDonald verges on being a universalist (that is, the doctrine that everyone will eventually be saved, not just those who have their faith in Christ here) and he argues a good case for it without even completely coming out and saying that's what he is. It was plainly something he struggled with throughout his life.

But universalism is just one of his many themes here, and there is a great deal more about living the Christian life than there is about universalism.

Samcwright says

This isn't the easiest book to read. The language feels overly complicated. But there are incredible nuggets of truth throughout.

“What I want to say and show is that a man will please God better by believing some things that are not told

him, than by confining his faith to those things that are expressly said...but is not this dangerous doctrine? Will not a man be taught to believe the things he likes best, even to pray for that which he likes best?.... The danger lies, not in asking from God what is not good, nor even in hoping to receive it from him, but it from him, but in not asking him, in not having him council.”

David Gregg says

Without qualification, this is the best work of theological and devotional literature I have ever read. I find it wholly Christian and Spiritual in the best and truest senses of those terms. Whenever I want encouragement, chastisement, spiritual food, or something theologically and antiphilosophically substantial -- I cannot recall ever failing to find all this here on each occasion. I waiver just a moment to speak so highly of any book. But, God help me, this has been the truth of my experience.

Tiffany says

Hard, heavy reading. But worth it. Lots of gems in here.

Chris Salzman says

Only read the first series in here, but I plan on re-reading at some point. Three stars because of how difficult his prose is to read. The theology though is excellent. Even if you disagree with his Universalism, he presents a better case than any other writer on the subject I've run across.

Also, if you're a C.S. Lewis lover, you should really read MacDonald. Lewis cribs heavily from him, although he comes up with slightly different conclusions.

Justin Wiggins says

George Macdonald's theology I absolutely admire, even though I disagree with his Universalism. His Unspoken Sermons were challenging and very powerful. C.S.Lewis spoke very highly of this work, and I certainly see why. George Macdonald rejects cold intellectualism and the theology which portrays God as no better than a Moloch of a tyrant, and instead trust in the great beautiful God, Jesus Christ himself and no theories about the "atonement." This book has changed my life, as all of his other one's have. "Liltih" would still have to be my favorite though, and in my personal opinion is his best work he ever wrote.

David says

George MacDonald is a fascinating writer whose works cover a wide range from imaginative fantasy stories to deep reflections on the Christian gospel. This series of sermons is the latter and are beneficial for any Christian to work through. MacDonald's unspoken sermons cover a wide range of topics from the nature of

judgment and punishment to the Trinity to our reward from God. I assume MacDonald was a controversial writer in his day, he certainly would be today for he takes pleasure in poking a stick at cherished traditional beliefs. He scoffs at imputation, arguing that it makes no sense, is even unjust, for God to punish Jesus for our crimes. His reflections on adoption gave me a whole different way to think, for he argues that it is wrong to see God as adopting children who are cut off from him, instead we are always God's children, though estranged through sin. On top of all this, MacDonald was a universalist who saw all coming to God through Jesus eventually.

(November 2017) - I've been rereading this as a sort of devotional, about a chapter (i.e. sermon) a day or so. MacDonald is one of my favorites, especially because his influence on the likes of CS Lewis, another of my favorites, is clear. Upon rereading, I most appreciated a few themes that came up over and over. One, MacDonald is less interested in theological debate than in discipleship. For example, he is not impressed with precise theories of the atonement, especially when they take away from actually living as Jesus commanded. Two, MacDonald is not impressed with traditional theology when it does not fit with common sense or scripture. The idea of punishing an innocent person in order to save guilty people (traditional view of atonement) makes no sense to him. Three, MacDonald wants nothing to do with any balance of love and justice, for him, God's love wins. Any sort of punishment or justice must serve love in the end. Maybe because I am reading Greg Boyd's *Crucifixion of the Warrior God* right now, I see lots of parallels. Fourth, the traditional view of hell is sinister for MacDonald. I think that people like MacDonald and Lewis, who are often honored by evangelicals today, would be more akin to Rob Bell and seen as dangerous, if they were actually alive and writing today.

Anyway, read MacDonald. He's great.

Agree or not, reading MacDonald is rewarding. He greatly influenced Chesterton and Lewis, which makes me ask a question: who are the Christian writers today who write good fiction stories AND also deep theological reflection akin to MacDonald or Lewis? The only one I can think of is Marilynne Robinson. It almost seems like there are two types of people. First are those who gravitate to a more scientific mindset and thus desire a detailed systematic theology that answers nearly all questions. Then there are those who are more mystical, who enjoy and are moved by myth and who gravitate more to fantasy stories and meandering reflections on faith. That is probably a false dichotomy, but it is intriguing to me that people like Lewis, MacDonald and Chesterton never attempted to write a systematic theology.

I think we need both - systematics and imagination. Better yet, in a world obsessed with fantasy and superheroes (see *Star Wars*, *Avengers*, etc.) we need a systematic theology informed by deep imagination and mysticism.

At any rate, I highly recommend MacDonald. If you're not a fiction person, read the *Unspoken Sermons*. But really, give his fiction a try too.
