

Pastor Russell's Sermon

KEY OF KNOWLEDGE LOST BY PHARISEES

Modern Application of Jesus' Words by Pastor Russell.

THE LORD'S BLESSINGS HIDDEN

As the Jewish Expounders of the Law Refused to Instruct the Common People, So Do Our Modern Doctors of Divinity—Failure of the Scribes and Pharisees to Endorse Jesus Bared His Message to the Multitude, Who Trusted the Scriptures.



Brooklyn, N. Y., May 5.—The Academy of Music was crowded today to hear Pastor Russell's discourse on "The Lost Key of Knowledge." Taking his text from Luke xi, 52, he said:—

In the New Testament the word *teacher* has a very different meaning from our general usage. It applied to those religious teachers of the Jews who made special professions of sanctity of heart and earnest desire to know God's will, as expressed in the Mosaic Law, and to teach the same to the people. The corresponding class of today are designated Doctors of Divinity. Our text, therefore, with this correction reads: "Woe unto you, Doctors of Divinity, for ye have taken away the Key of Knowledge; ye entered not in yourselves, and them that were entering ye hindered."

"The Common People Heard Jesus Gladly."

It was the custom amongst the Jews that lessons from the Law and the Prophets should be read every day in their synagogues. The people were thus familiar with the letter of the Divine Law and promises. The majority of them, of course, were illiterate, for educational facilities were not what they are now. As a result only a few claimed to have an understanding of the spiritual part of the Law and the Prophets. These were chiefly of the literary and wealthy classes. To these the common people looked for guidance respecting the Divine will and plan.

As an illustration. When the common people heard Jesus gladly they were unwilling to trust their own judgments, but inquired, "Have any of the Scribes and Pharisees believed on Him?" Have the Doctors of the Law, the Doctors of Divinity, endorsed Him? They have made a study of these things and we would rely more upon their judgment than upon our own. But none of the Scribes and Pharisees endorsed Him, and hence comparatively few of the people believed Him and became His disciples.

The common people were hungry for the Message which Jesus brought. It is recorded that they said of Jesus' teachings, "Never man spake like this Man." The nation would have gone over promptly to Jesus had the Scribes and Pharisees, the Doctors of the Law, set the example and given the word. Moreover, the teachings of Jesus harmonized the message of the Law and the Prophets over which the Scribes and the Pharisees and the Sadducees had long wrangled and disputed. Had the Doctors of the Law been as hungry for the Truth as were the people, undoubtedly all of their differences of interpretation of the Old Testament Scriptures would have speedily been solved in the light of the then present Truth and knowledge of God, which was shining upon the Bible through the Holy Spirit, Jesus and the Apostles being Jehovah's mouthpieces.

The Key of Knowledge Buried.
In our text Jesus charged the Jewish Doctors of Divinity with the responsibility of having taken away the Key of Knowledge, refusing to use it themselves to enter into the great appreciation of the blessings then due, and hiding it from the common people who trusted them so implicitly. We charge that the same thing is true today. Not only were the Jewish people typical of spiritual Israel, and their Age typical of this Age, and their Harvest typical of the Harvest or closing time of this Age, but additionally, now as then, "God's people perish for lack of knowledge." (Hosea iv, 6) Now, as then, the Doctors of Divinity will not use the Key of Knowledge themselves, to enter heartily into the wonderful privileges and blessings now due, and additionally they have buried the Key of Knowledge, hiding it from the people under a mass of forms and ceremonies.

But is Knowledge Necessary?
In our Lord's day the Jewish Doctors of Divinity, or Rabbis, contented themselves with telling the people what they should do and what they should not do, but they did not teach the people—they did not help them to any understanding of the deep meaning of the Law and the Prophets. In our text Jesus said to the "D. D.'s," "You bind heavy burdens on the people, grievous to be borne," but you do not attempt to carry those burdens yourselves.

It is so to this day with the Jewish Rabbis, as well as with our Ministers; for instance, a minister stands as a representative and mouthpiece of the church creed, which in round-about terms declares that whoever does not live a saintly life will suffer an eternity of torment. Is not this a grievous

burden to put upon any conscientious soul? Has it not caused untold anguish to many of God's true people? And has it not repulsed and driven many from God and the Bible, thousands of the most intelligent minds in the world?

As the Jewish Doctors of Divinity carried no such burdens, neither do the Doctors of Divinity of Christendom. In private they acknowledge that they carry no such burdens. In public they give the inference that they do not so much by positive terms as by implication, tone and inflection of voice, and by the general fact that they stand for and as representatives of the creeds which so teach. It does not excuse these influential teachers for them to claim that in their official capacity they lose their personal responsibility and shift it upon those who made the creeds and those who adopted them. The people are no longer trusting the creeds. They realize that the creeds contain many inconsistencies, and that greater light is today shining from one page of the Bible upon another, than shone in the days when those creeds were formulated.

The common people trust the Bible—Jesus, the Apostles and the Prophets. They know that all of the creeds of Christendom claim to be built upon the inspired Record. They understand the Scribes and Pharisees of today, the Doctors of Divinity of Christendom, to give assurance that those creeds properly present the teachings of the Bible. The creeds claim to be ropes of sand if all the prominent Doctors of Divinity of Christendom came forward and publicly renounced them, as they nearly all do in private conversation.

It is this matter of misleading the people, deceiving them, that constituted the basis of Jesus' charge against the Doctors of Divinity of old, and we believe that His judgment is very similar today respecting the Doctors of Divinity of Christendom—"Ye have taken away [ye have hidden] the Key of Knowledge. Ye have not entered in yourselves, and them that were entering ye hindered."

Christian people today are so disgusted with the creeds which have separated them and their forefathers into six hundred different denominations that they are quite ready to discard them all, and to come together as one Church of the Living God to study the Bible in its own light.

Systematic Key-hiding.

The Scribes and Pharisees of our day are proving themselves to be the anti-types of those addressed by Jesus in our text, and have a substitute for knowledge. Taking away the Key of Knowledge, they say to the common people, Do not bother your head about doctrines; leave doctrines to the clergy; let the clergy endorse all the creeds, however conflicting they be. We do this in order to lull you to sleep. There is nothing so calculated to disturb the Christian's rest as the discussion of the doctrines of Christ. If there be in any congregation those who cannot feel satisfied without some kind of Bible study, let them have it, but get them rather to discussing the geography of Palestine and the habits and customs of the people, etc., rather than the prophecies of old or the interpretations of them, as given by Jesus and the Apostles. We ministers will keep aloof from such Bible study; we will not let on but that we understand these prophecies thoroughly, but we will keep a watch upon the Bible classes, and interfere only if we find some brother therein who is inclined to delve after the doctrines of Christ and the Apostles.

One minister, voicing this opposition to Bible study, especially along the lines of differences where it would be of special value, said, "The Church is like a great Hospital. Everything like doctrinal discussion must be banished and excluded, just as in a hospital all noise is forbidden, that the patients may sleep, or just as in a nursery noise is excluded that children may sleep."

Alas! It is too true that the nominal church of Christ is like a hospital, many of whose patients are blind and deaf and asleep and mentally confused. But the trouble is: These got into this condition because of a lack of healthful exercise; and keeping them quiet will but turn the present hospital into a cemetery.

What the churches of all the denominations need is the Word of God—as presented in the words of Jesus and the Apostles: "The words that I speak unto you, they are spirit, and they are life." The sick and lame, the blind and deaf and mentally perplexed need to hear the voice of Truth—"Wonderful Words of Life"—otherwise they will become more sick and will perish as Christians, but to become alive perhaps as "lovers of pleasure more than lovers of God."

An Episcopal minister is our hearing urged his congregation to simply rest, not to bother themselves about their own future or that of others. The Holy Catholic Church, he said, resembled a ship, in which the members should come as passengers to be carried to the heavenly destination. They need not examine the compass, nor the chart, nor the machinery. All they need to do is to sit down and enjoy the journey, trusting that their baptism and the Holy Spirit have given them a free ticket to a proper destination.

Necessity For Knowledge.

Knowledge of God, the Bible declares, is indispensable for the attainment of the Great Prize of the High Calling. Thus Jesus said, "This is life eternal, that they may know Thee, the only True God, and Jesus Christ, whom Thou hast sent." (John xvii, 3) We are not to understand this to signify that anyone who has merely been made acquainted with the fact that

there is one Creator, and that Jesus is His Son, is on account of this knowledge to be granted everlasting life. Some think to be able to make void the various Scriptures which tell us of the necessity of making our "calling and election sure," by so running as to obtain the prize. (1 Corinthians ix, 24.)

Our Lord's words do not refer to a knowledge about God, but to a knowledge of or personal acquaintance with God and His Son. And such an intimate acquaintance is not obtained merely by an introduction, but by companionship; it signifies an intimacy of acquaintanceship, a familiarity. Everything in the Divine Word encourages those who accept the Divine invitation to draw near to God, to come into fellowship with Him.

But this knowledge of God which will bring a saintly life to salvation on the highest plane stands related to God's Word—the teachings of the Bible—for thus God exalted His Word, by making it the channel for spiritual refreshment and personal acquaintanceship with Himself.

Thus Jesus prayed for us, His followers, "Sanctify them through Thy Truth, Thy Word is Truth." Any who neglect the Divine Word will fall of the sanctifying power and thus fall of the ultimate acquaintanceship with God which alone will guarantee everlasting life. The reason why the Lord has thus arranged the matter and made knowledge of the Scriptures essential, doubtless is that thus His faithful people may be benefited; and they alone receive the instruction which will profit them alone, but would more or less injure others. Thus it is written, "Ye shall know the Truth, and the Truth shall make you free."

To this class our Lord says today, as He said to His Jewish followers eighteen centuries ago, "To you it is given to know the Myteries of the Kingdom of God, but to all outside these things are spoken in parables and dark sayings, that hearing they might not understand and seeing they might not perceive." To the outsiders—the Doctors of Divinity—is not permitted the Key of Knowledge. "Even so, Father, for so it seemeth good in Thy sight."—Matthew xi, 25, 26.

What Constitutes the Key?

The Key of Knowledge consists of the faithful study of God's Word, with an honest purpose to know the things that are freely given unto us of God. This implies a consecration of heart, for none others would really desire that they might do the Divine will. And this implies also a faith in our Lord's promise that He that doeth "the will of My Father shall know of the doctrine." (John vii, 17.) It is this consecrated, conscientious Bible study that is lacking today—that is being discouraged today by the great teachers and Doctors of Divinity.

Everything calculated to help Bible study, to get rid of the darkness of the creeds and superstitions of the past, is opposed—but not openly. The Doctors of Divinity of our day, like those of Jesus' day, are wise and act as though they do know. But they do not know; they oppose real Bible study—not openly, but secretly, "for fear of the people." (Mark xi, 32; xii, 12.) The great religious leaders of the Jews were marked by our Lord as being less conscientious, less honest, than the masses of the people. Concerning the people we read that "Jesus was moved with compassion when He beheld the multitude, that they were like sheep without a shepherd."

And is it not so today also? Are not many of God's people hungering and thirsting for the Truth, and greatly perplexed and discouraged because, going time after time to the religious leaders, they have received instead of bread "a stone," instead of a fish "a serpent"—a false doctrine, a devilish misrepresentation of the Almighty's character and Plan in respect to humanity? These devilish doctrines of the Dark Ages St. Paul calls "doctrines of demons," because the demons, the fallen angels, evidently have propagated them. They are to be found amongst all of the heathens, but nowhere in any worse form nor as bad as amongst Christians of all denominations. Is there not therefore a great responsibility resting upon every conscientious minister of the Gospel, that he should step out from amongst the mass of the Doctors of Divinity, who are hiding the Key of Knowledge and misleading the Lord's trusting sheep of nominal Christendom?

"Impossible to Deceive the Very Elect."

As we have already shown they cannot keep penned, nor keep asleep, nor keep the knowledge from the saintly ones who constitute "the very elect." Our Lord, speaking of this time, said that the deceptions would be such that they would deceive, if possible, "the very elect," but in their case deception will not be possible, for the True Shepherd Himself will help them. But, oh, what weeping of disappointment, and what a chagrin and gnashing of teeth will come shortly to the "false shepherds," to the Key-hiding Doctors of Divinity, when they find that with all their endeavors to bolster up shams and superstitions in which they themselves do not believe, the entire fabric of Churchianity will collapse, as the Scriptures predict!

It is quite unnecessary that I press the lesson of this text; I leave the matter before you—not merely before this congregation of Brooklyn, but before the twelve millions of readers whom the Newspaper Syndicate assure us come in contact with my weekly discourses. God will urge and press the "Pearl of Great Price" upon nobody. It is for sale to those who will give the price—all that they have. God has adopted plans and methods which will demonstrate and prove the class worthy of a share in Messiah's Kingdom.



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