

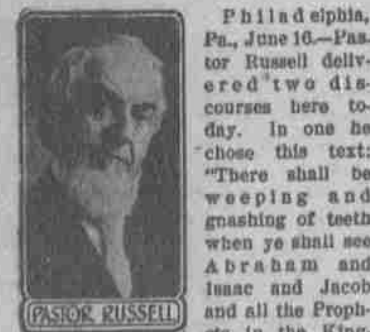
Pastor Russell's Sermon

MISCONCEPTIONS OF THE DARK AGES

"Gnashing of Teeth" Merely Bible Hyperbole.

SCRIPTURES MISINTERPRETED

Pastor Russell Says the Bible Does Not Substantiate Horrible Teachings of Dark Ages—Classes the Spirit Mediums of Today With the Witches and Necromancers of the Past.



Pastor Russell

Philadelphian, Pa., June 16.—Pastor Russell delivered two discourses here today. In one he chose this text: "There shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth when ye shall see Abraham and Isaac and Jacob and all the Prophets in the Kingdom of God, and you yourselves thrust out."—Luke xlii, 28.

Bible students in the past, resting under a terrible fear of an eternity of torture after death, were inclined to twist the statements of Scripture into supports for their misconceptions. We are now breaking loose from some of those horrible nightmares of the Dark Ages, finding that the Bible, rightly interpreted, does not substantiate them.

Satanic Influence Near.

St. Peter, so far from believing that Satan is far off stoking fires, described him as a roaring, angry lion, going about amongst men seeking whom he might devour—deceive, involve in sin. St. Paul forewarns us that Satan and his agents are crafty and are to be expected to present themselves as angels of light—leaders in advanced truth.

The Scriptures especially forewarn us of great activity on the part of the evil spirits in the end of this Age, and intimate that they will have much to do with the great Time of world-wide Trouble which will precede the inauguration of Messiah's Kingdom.

The words "weeping and gnashing of teeth" represent, not new conditions amongst men, but those which may be witnessed every day—sorrow, heartache, grievous disappointment; and this is the use of this expression in the Bible.

Our text the Lord graphically pictures the disappointment of the Jews when they shall find out how great was their mistake in the rejection of Jesus and His Message.

Jews' Bitter Disappointment.

In our text the Lord graphically pictures the disappointment of the Jews when they shall find out how great was their mistake in the rejection of Jesus and His Message. They will find that the glorious opportunity offered to them of becoming members in the Bride of Christ was the highest favor that Divine mercy could offer them as the children of Abraham.

whom they esteemed as publicans and sinners and Gentiles, by accepting Christ and becoming His disciples, became heirs of the highest promise made to Abraham—became Abraham's spiritual Seed—members of the Messiah, of which Jesus is the Head and the Church His Body.

Alas, poor Jews! Our hearts may well go out to them in sympathy in their chagrin and disappointment when they shall learn the truth on the subject, when they shall learn that they have lost not only the heavenly glory but also the honorable place of being Messiah's earthly representatives.

Then favor will return to the natural seed of Abraham: "They shall obtain mercy through your mercy." Their eyes of understanding will open; mentally "they will look upon Him whom they have pierced." They will mourn for Him, and the Divine promise is that God will then pour upon them the spirit of prayer and supplication.

Other Similar Texts.

All Bible students will recall several other passages of very similar language to that of our text. But when we get the right focus upon them we perceive that they all belong to experiences in the present life, that none of them relate to incidents beyond the tomb. A greater care in the study of the Bible might have protected us from the thought that any of these references apply to the dead, because the Scriptures not only tell that they are sleeping and waiting for the morning, but they also particularly inform us that "the dead know not anything"; "their sons come to honor and they know it not, to dishonor and they perceive it not of them"; and that "there is neither work, nor device, nor knowledge, nor wisdom in the grave [sheol]"—whither all go.—Ecclesiastes ix, 5, 10; Job xiv, 21.

This expression, "weeping and gnashing of teeth," is found also in the parable of the Wise and Foolish Virgins. The context tells us that this parable applies in the end of this Gospel Age, at about the time for the second coming of Jesus—not as a sin-bearing Sacrifice, but as the King of Glory. His consecrated, saintly people are likened into ten virgins—five wise and five foolish.

The parable does not relate to the world at all, but merely to the saints. They are all virgins, all pure, all justified, all sanctified ones. The difference between them is in respect to their wisdom or unwisdom. The wise saints of God in the end of this Age, guided by the Divine Word, will walk very circumspectly, very faithfully, searching the Scriptures in respect to all they believe and striving to conform themselves to the Divine will in all that they do and say.

Because of their watchfulness, alertness, devoutness and loyalty they are wise and will be in a special position of advantage and knowledge in respect to the things of the Harvest time of this Age. The Master, the Bridegroom, will lead those; and gradually, one by one, they shall go through the door of death into the marriage, experiencing the glorious change promised, "In a moment, in the twinkling of an eye." They will complete the Bride Class, to which none can be added, because it is a foreordained and predestinated number.

The Foolish Virgins.

The "foolish virgins" will miss their glorious opportunity by reason of unwisdom. They will be so overcharged with the cares of this life and the deceitfulness of riches and the attempt to have the favor of the world as well as the favor of the Lord that it will hinder them from proper Bible study and from faithfulness in walking in the footsteps of Jesus.

The parable shows them as finally, in the very close of the Age, obtaining the light which they should have had sooner and they not been overcharged with earthly cares and ambitions. As soon as they obtain the light they realize the situation and ask for admission as members of the Bride of Christ, to which they were called; but the answer is that it is complete, that the Bridegroom can know only one Wife and cannot recognize them thus. Then to them will come weeping and gnashing of teeth, sorrow, disappointment, chagrin, that they have failed to obtain through their own carelessness this highest prize, to which Divine mercy and love had invited them.

At that time will be great tribulation in the world, such as never was since there was a nation, and these "foolish virgins" will have their portion in it—with the hypocrites. The "time of trouble" will be especially upon the hypocritical or "tare" class of Christendom, which has pretended loyalty to God as His Church when in reality their hearts were far from Him. The "foolish virgins" are not hypocrites, but true saints; nevertheless, on account of not living fully up to their privileges, they will fail to gain the prize and be given a portion in the great trouble time with the hypocrites.

tells us that after the completion of the Church, spiritual Israel, the 144,000, a great multitude will "come up through great tribulation and wash their robes and make them white in the blood of the Lamb." These will be honored with a place before the Throne, while the "elect," as the Bride, will be honored with immoel in His Throne.

This multitude will be granted palm branches, representing a final victory, but they will never be granted the crowns of victory, which will belong only to the elect, "wise virgin" class, the Bride upon the Throne. The Bride class will be the Temple, composed of living stones; but the Great Company, the "foolish virgin" class, will not be stones of that Temple, but will serve God in the Temple. An honorable place will thus be granted the "foolish virgins," who finally get the oil and finally cleanse their robes in the time of trouble, but never will they attain the portion of the Bride.

In Psalm xlv we have a description of the Church in glory, the Wise Virgin class. She is pictured as a Bride, all glorious with and clothed in raiment of gold and fine needlework. The Heavenly Bridegroom will present her faultless before His Father, the Great King; and then we read, "The virgins, her companions, shall follow her; they shall be brought into the presence of the King." How glad we are that in Divine providence their weeping and gnashing of teeth and sorrow and disappointment at losing a place in the Bride Class will eventually work out for them a contrition of heart and a demonstration of loyalty which God can reward with a blessing upon the Heavenly plane!

Waiting in Outer Darkness.

Another text dealing with "waiting and gnashing of teeth" deserves consideration here. It occurs in connection with the parable of the Wedding Garment. That parable pictures the closing time of this Age, when under Divine blessing God's most saintly people will be given greater light on His Word and be enabled thereby to more fully appreciate the lengths, breadths, heights and depths of His Love and His wonderful providences.

These consecrated ones are represented as being gathered into a great banquet hall, radiantly beautiful. In it they tarry, waiting to be ushered into the banquet proper, in an adjoining apartment. The light of these apartments is in the parable vividly contrasted with the darkness that prevails outside, which darkness represents the condition of the world and all of God's people who have not yet come into the light of "present truth."

The parable is given specially to show the necessity of the "wedding garment"—that none may enter into the marriage feast except he acknowledge and wear the "wedding garment." On such festival occasions in ancient times it was customary that all guests should be furnished by the host with garments of white which would cover their own garments, and for the time being, as his guests, thus placed them all on the same footing, whatever their ordinary station in life. Thus we have pictured the justification which all God's people receive as a gift through the merit of their Redeemer. Being justified by faith the consecrated have not only peace with God, but they have access to this figurative "marriage supper."

The parable is laid in the end of this Age and points out that at this time an inspection of the Church may be expected. "When the king came in he beheld a man who had not on a wedding garment." The implication is that the man had put on the wedding garment, else he could not have gone to at all; and his appearing later on without a "wedding garment" implies that he had rejected the robe provided by his host.

Thus he represented a class of Christians in this our day who, after believing in the merit of Christ's sacrifice, and accepting it as the passport to favors and privileges, ultimately reject it and count it common or unimportant. The parable shows what is to be expected now, namely, that the Great King will command that such as ignore the merit of His sacrifice be cast into outer darkness.

Outer Darkness General.

But let us note carefully that the "outer darkness" is not something beyond death, but that it prevails everywhere, all around us. "Darkness covers the earth and gross darkness the heathen." The only ones who are in the light are the ones whom the Lord has specially received and specially enlightened and specially privileged because they wear the "wedding garment" of Christ's righteousness. The casting out of the one without the "wedding garment" into "outer darkness" therefore would mean mercy that such a one, despite his struggles and desire to remain in the light, would by Divine providence be forced into the darkness common to the whole world and lose those special privileges which he had enjoyed as one of the children of the light and heirs of glory.

About the time that the faithful will be ushered into the marriage the great "time of trouble" will break upon the world, and all who are in darkness will have "weeping and gnashing of teeth" as they behold the collapse of those things upon which they have set their hearts and affections—the things of the present order. Thank God, their weeping and gnashing of teeth may ultimately be turned into joy, because there is a silver lining to the dark cloud which is about to envelop the world! It will be the dark hour preceding the dawning of the New Dispensation and the blessing of all the families of the earth by Messiah and His Bride, to a place in which, by the grace of God, dear hearers, let us strive to make our calling and election sure.

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