

Pastor Russell's Sermon

DIVINE REWARDS ARE ETERNAL

Parable of the Sheep and Goats Clearly Explained.

GOD'S MESSAGE TO MANKIND.

Pastor Russell Corrects Some Misinterpretations of Holy Writ—Eternal Life is a Gift of God and the Blessing Will Not Be Conferred on the Wilfully Wicked—The Church Will Sit With the Messiah When the World is Judged.



Columbus, Ohio, Sept. 8.—Pastor Russell's text here today was, "These shall go away into everlasting punishment, but the righteous into life eternal."—Matthew xxv, 46. He said:—

We have been in all sorts of confusion respecting the future, because we have not studied the Bible's testimony critically. For thirteen centuries the Bible was almost unknown. The bishops of the Church were erroneously supposed to be successors of the Apostles and to speak with the same Divine inspiration and authority. Printing was not yet invented and education was confined to a wealthy few. No wonder the inspired message was lost in a mass of human tradition, much of which was devilish nonsense! We have been gradually progressing from darkness to light, though fettered by hobgoblin figures and each other's threats and persuasions of the Divine Message. It is safe to say that the Bible is being more critically studied today by earnest Christians of all denominations than it ever was before. The result of this study, and the advantages of our time, are manifesting themselves. Divine harmonies are filling heads and hearts once distracted by clashing creeds. Take our

Text as an illustration. Once blidly we read this Parable of the Sheep and Goats and applied it to rewards and punishments as a result of things done in the present age. Now we see that its proper application belongs altogether to the next Age of Messiah's Kingdom. It distinctly states that it is introduced thus: "When the Son of Man shall come in His glory, and all the holy angels with Him, then shall He sit upon the Throne of His glory; and before Him shall be gathered all nations, and He shall separate them one from another as the shepherd divideth the sheep from the goats."

The Church is not included in this parable at all. It relates, as we see, to the world—"all nations." Other Scriptures show us that when the nations shall then undergo their trial for life or death everlasting the Church will be glorified. As the Bride of Christ she shall sit with Him in His Throne and be associated in His work of judging the world. Note how clearly St. Paul expresses this, saying, "Know ye not that the saints shall judge the world?" (1 Corin. vi, 2). Thus it is the world's Judgment Day that He shall elsewhere mention, saying, "God hath appointed a Day (future—a thousand-year Day—the Day of Christ), in the which He will judge the world in righteousness by that Man whom He hath ordained."—Acts xvii, 31.

A right understanding of the doctrine of Election helps us gradually to a proper view of the Divine Program. The Church is being selected out of the world according to faithfulness and character-development, in preparation for great service for the non-elect world—the Messianic Kingdom, with Christ and the Church in control as the Royal Priesthood, is appointed for the very purpose of blessing the non-elect world—"all nations." For a thousand years the work of bringing all to a knowledge of the Truth will progress. To this end Satan will be bound at the very beginning of the thousand years and the light of the knowledge of the glory of God will fill the whole earth as the waters cover the great deep.

With all this brought to a clear comprehension of righteousness each will be on trial, and will either come into harmony with the Kingdom or remain an alien and lover of sin. All the latter are in the parable classed as goats—wayward ones—and will thus place themselves at the left hand of the King—in His disfavor. On the contrary, all who learn the ways of the Lord and come into accord therewith, are symbolically styled "sheep" in the parable, and by their conduct will gradually take their place at the King's right hand, or place of favor.

Sheep—Goats—Fire.

The Parable shows the conclusion of the world's Judgment. All will then have taken their places, either as sheep or as goats—either in the King's favor or in His disfavor. The sheep class will then bear His "Well done." "Come, ye blessed of My Father, inherit the Kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world."—Matthew xxv, 21, 23, 34. The world was made for mankind, Adam being its representative as the King of earth. He lost his dominion

when he lost his relationship to his Creator and lost his right to eternal life by his disobedience. The sheep class will represent all of Adam's race brought back to perfection by the processes of Restitution during Messiah's reign. (Acts iii, 19-21.) To them will come the dominion which Adam lost and which Jesus redeemed at Calvary and which He will give to the worthy ones at the conclusion of His thousand-year reign. Next, the fate of the goat class is stated—not in literal language, but symbolically. Indeed, the Prophet and the Apostle declared of Jesus that "He opened His mouth in parables," and that "without a parable spake He not unto the people." In other words, everything that Jesus said to the people in general was figurative, in order that only those of right condition of heart might be able to understand Him.

The message of the great King to the goat class will be, "Depart from Me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire prepared for the Devil and his angels." (Matthew xxv, 41.) We might as well insist that the parable applies to literal goats as to claim that this penalty is literal fire. All who have studied the subject will freely admit that fire throughout the Bible is used figuratively to represent spiritual death, the sentence upon all of the race, because God from the beginning purposed the setting aside of that sentence through the redemptive work of Jesus; hence Adam's death is not destruction, but in the Bible is styled, symbolically, "falling asleep," and resurrection is styled "awakening from sleep."

But when picturing the Second Death, the Bible uses strong terms, representing destruction in the fullest and most absolute sense. Mark the words used: "Perish," "Second Death," "Everlasting Destruction." We even overlooked the plain explanation which Jesus gave us when He said, "The lake of fire, which is the Second Death." (Revelation xx, 14.) St. Peter, summing up the fate of the incorrigibly wicked, says that they shall be destroyed like natural brute beasts. (1 Peter ii, 12.) Only a bugboo of eternal torment, hundreds of years old, could have so alarmed us that we failed to note these matters long ago.

Meanwhile, alas, while many of the learned have abandoned the doctrine of eternal torment, they have practically abandoned everything else in the Bible, because they supposed the Bible to teach this inconsistency. Let us not follow them into "Higher Criticism," infidelity and total rejection of the inspiration of God's Word, but let us compare Scripture with Scripture and use our God-given reason within the boundaries of God's Message. So doing we are seeing more and more the glorious perfection of our Father's character and of His inspired Word.

Reasoning by Contrast. Some shallow thinkers have been thrown off the track of religious investigation, reasoning that if there is a heaven, there must of necessity be a hell of torment. But the contrast which the Bible establishes in respect to the sinner and the saint is life and death—and not heaven and hell. As a matter of fact the Bible nowhere promises heaven to any except the Church of the First-born, who are now being called out of the world for association with Messiah in His Kingdom. The world of mankind never lost heaven and is nowhere promised heaven.

Adam's loss was an earthly Eden, a human perfection. Jesus declares that He "came to seek and to save that which was lost." The work of His Kingdom for a thousand years will be the bringing of earth to a Paradise condition. And He will restore all the willing and obedient of mankind to all that was lost, bringing them back again to the image and likeness of God in the flesh. Adam possessed these qualities when he was declared by his Creator "very good," and was given the dominion of earth.

When Adam was placed on trial in Eden he was endowed with perfection of life and organism as a man. God said not one word to him about heaven or hell, but did set before him life and death. If he would be obedient he should be privileged to maintain his life and all his perfections and blessings everlasting. If he would rebel against his Creator's laws and be disobedient thereto he should die—be cut off from life. He was disobedient, and was expelled from Eden into the accursed, or mud earth, where he died a slow death, battling with thorns and thistles. This has been the fate of his entire race—death—mental, moral and physical decay to completion.

"Life or Death—Blessing or Cursing." Addressing the people of old through the Prophet God declares, "I have set before you life and death, blessing and cursing—choose life that ye may live." (Deuteronomy xxx, 19.) The hope before the Israelites was of a resurrection—a "better resurrection"—to the faithful. (Hebrews xi, 35.) Not a word was said to them in all the four thousand years down to Jesus' day respecting eternal torment, or any hope of life in any condition except in harmony with God.

When telling the object of Jesus coming into the world, and describing man's redemption from the penalty of death, we read, "God so loved the world that He gave His Only Begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him might not perish, but have everlasting life." (John iii, 16.) What right had we or anybody to twist the word perish, which means destruction, to make it mean everlasting life in torture? Such perversions and wrestings of the Scriptures have brought great discredit upon our God and great confusion into the minds of His people. We should note

with emphasis the contrast so forcefully stated in this most precious text—"not perish, but have everlasting life." Certainly whoever gets the everlasting life will not perish; whoever does not get it will perish. How plain God's Word!

Notice again the various terms used in respect to the Savior and His work. The word Savior signifies Life-Giver. We would have seen the beauty of this if we had not been befogged as respects the penalty, death. Whoever sees that "the wages of sin is death" must perceive that the great need of the world is a Life-Giver—to rescue them from the death penalty by a resurrection. Again, our Lord represents Himself as the Great Physician who is able not only to rescue from the tomb, but to heal all diseases, all the imperfections which come to mankind as incidentals of the death penalty.

Hear again Jesus' words, "He that hath the Son hath life; he that hath not the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God (as expressed in the death penalty) abideth on him"—to him it becomes the Second Death. This explains also the meaning of Jesus' words, "Ye will not come unto Me that ye may have life." And again, "I am come that they might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly." What can be plainer than that "The wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life, through Jesus Christ our Lord?"—Romans vi, 23.

"Into Everlasting Punishment." We are asked, Does not the word everlasting, as applied to the goat class, signify as long a period as the same word applied to the sheep class? We reply, Most assuredly so. The punishment of sin is to be everlasting, and the reward of righteousness is to be everlasting. There is no question on this point. The question is, What is the punishment for sin? The thoughtless at once will say, Fire, torment, smoke, blazes, devils with horns and tails and pitchforks, a la Dante's Inferno.

But we ask for a Scriptural answer. What does the Bible say in the punishment for sin? Nothing like Dante's answer is to be found in the Bible, however much we might imagine that it was printed in every page and that we have read it scores of times. The Bible is most explicit. It declares, "The wages of sin is death." "All the wicked will God destroy." "The soul that sinneth, it shall die." "punished with everlasting destruction." These abundant and redundant Scriptural testimonies on the subject should settle the matter of future punishment to every reasonable mind—especially when there is not a Scripture to the contrary, either in the Old or in the New Testament.

I do indeed remember certain of our Lord's parables which, taken literally, might mean the literal cutting off of a hand or foot, the literal plucking out of the eye, the biting worms possessed of immortality, and literal blazes unquenchable. These we have already discussed and may yet again refer to, but not now. We content ourselves with the generally accepted and reasonable proposition that parables are never to be accepted as teaching doctrines, but at very most as illustrating them.

The Bible contains not a single suggestion of eternal torture as a penalty for sin. It tells of no place beyond the bounds of time and space where Dante's poem will find its fulfillment. It does tell of a God of infinite Justice, Wisdom, Love and Power, whose decree is that eventually all the wicked shall be destroyed; that eventually there will not be one inharmonious note throughout the Universe to mar the glorious harmony and perfection; that every knee shall bow and every tongue confess to the glory of God; that there shall be no more dying, crying, sighing; that God's will shall be done on earth even as it is done in heaven; that eventually, "Every creature in heaven and in earth and under the earth shall be heard saying, Praise, glory, dominion and might be unto Him that sitteth upon the Throne and unto the Lamb forever."

Analyzing It Carefully. Let us look still more deeply into our text: Let us note this word punishment in the Greek. It is kolasis. Its usage in the Greek classics signifies, to prune, to cut off. A secondary meaning of the word is, to restrain. Death is a most effectual restraint. The punishment which God shall be provided for sinners is that they shall be cut off from life, cut off from all the blessed privileges which God provided, not for them, not for rebels, but for sons in fellowship with Himself.

The punishment against Father Adam was cutting off from Eden and its blessings, from being the king of earth, from fellowship with His Creator, from being the son of God, from enjoying everlasting life. All this cutting off was included in his death sentence. Jesus came that Adam and his race might not everlastingly perish—that they might be rescued from the power of the grave by a resurrection of the dead, that all might thus through Him come to a full opportunity for life everlasting. Nevertheless the Divine Law still stands. The wages of sin still is death. Therefore, whoever shall receive the grace of God in vain, whoever shall sin wilfully, intentionally, after full enlightenment shall again be cut off—this time to perish, because "Christ dieth no more"—no more shall death have dominion over Him. The opportunity which His Kingdom shall grant for every creature, for every member of Adam's race, to return to Divine fellowship and everlasting life, will be so complete as to need no repetition. Those who die the Second Death will be without a remedy, will perish in everlasting destruction.

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