

The Necessary Virtue of Discernment

Matthew 16:1-12

June 17th, 2018

Big idea: Be discerning about the signs of the times and the influence of false teaching.

Intro –

Example from Tim Challies from *Antiques Roadshow*

Older man from Tuscon, Arizona brought in an old blanket he had inherited and hung over the back of a rocking chair. He knew it was old and suspected it might have some value, perhaps several hundred dollars. As the expert examined the blanket he could hardly contain his excitement. He said his heart stopped the moment he saw it.

He explained that the item was a Navajo chief's blanket woven in the 1840s. in wonderful condition, it was one of the oldest, intact Navajo weaves to survive to the 21st century, one of the only outside of a museum. He showed the fine detail of the weaving. He knew that it was more than a blanket. It was a rare national treasure of incredible value.

The appraiser had trouble conveying to the audience the significance of this blanket until he presented a dollar value of it's worth. He estimated it's value as between \$350,000 and \$500,000.

As the man walked out of the convention center he held the blanket very differently than when he walked in. He walked in with it held loosely in his arms, he walked out cradling it like the prized possession it is. He took it straight to the bank and put it in a safety deposit box.

What we have in the gospel is of great value.

2 Timothy 1:13-14 Retain the standard of sound words which you have heard from me, in the faith and love which are in Christ Jesus. ¹⁴ Guard, through the Holy Spirit who dwells in us, the treasure which has been entrusted to *you*.

Jesus talks to two different groups about discernment – the ability to distinguish between right and wrong, true and false, and apply it to life.

The first group fails to show discernment about the times in which they live – the arrival of the Messiah in their midst.

The second group is warned about the need to show discernment as the evaluate the teaching of the first group.

1. Understand the **times** in which you live. (16:1-4)
 - a. Jesus had left the Decapolis and travelled to the other side of the sea of Galilee when these groups came up to Him.
 - i. The saying, "The enemy of my enemy is my friend" is true of the Pharisees and Sadducees at this moment.
 - ii. Although they formed the Sanhedrin, the ruling Council for the Jewish people, they were typically opponents but united in their opposition to Jesus.
 1. **Acts 23:6-8** But perceiving that one group were Sadducees and the other Pharisees, Paul *began* crying out in the Council, "Brethren, I am a Pharisee, a son of Pharisees; I am on trial for the hope and resurrection of the dead!" ⁷ As he said this, there occurred a

dissension between the Pharisees and Sadducees, and the assembly was divided. ⁸ For the Sadducees say that there is no resurrection, nor an angel, nor a spirit, but the Pharisees acknowledge them all.

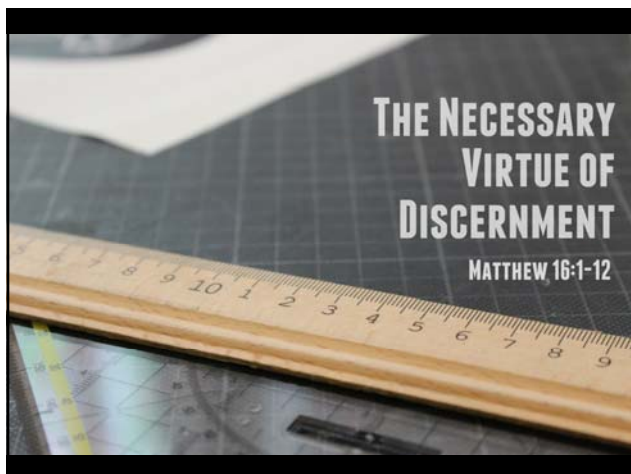
2. It would be like if Republicans and Democrats unite against a particular person or idea.
- iii. The Sadducees were the religious liberals of Jesus' day.
 1. They didn't believe in anything miraculous like angels or the resurrection. Religion was primarily a means to an earthly end, perhaps of keeping order or morality.
 2. They were nearly all priests and were a minority of the Jewish population with very little support among the general population. But they did have support among the wealthy because they came from the nobility.
- iv. The Pharisees were the religious hardliners, the legalists, going far beyond what the Scripture said to lay additional burdens on the people.
 1. They had strong support and influence among the people.
- b. Neither group liked Jesus. Why?
 - i. We may tend to think it's just because they are the bad guys in the story. If Jesus did something good, they opposed it. If he healed someone, they thought the person deserved to be sick. If he showed kindness and acceptance, they thought he was too loving. If he were to heal a puppy, they would come along and kick it. They seem to appear out of nowhere.
 1. Perhaps we have in mind the Grinch before his heart was enlarged.
 - ii. In their minds, their opposition was surely much more logical and compelling.
 1. To understand their opposition it helps to understand them.
 2. They appear to just show up in the gospels after no back story in the OT. Like in the original Star Wars movie, it starts with the empire already there and on the attack.
 - iii. He confronted them often on their hypocrisy and superficial morality.
 1. Matthew 6 – Sermon on the MT; All of chapter 23
 - iv. He challenges them for wanting additional signs without seeing what He has already done (Matt. 12:38; 16:1-4)
 - v. They saw Him as a blasphemer and a law breaker
 1. Matt 12 – Sabbath violation
 2. 26:63ff - Asked if he is the Christ, the Son of God, he replied “you have said it yourself” . . . and they accused him of blasphemy and began to spit in His face and beat Him with their fists and slap Him
 - vi. They were envious of Him
 1. Mt. 27:18 – Pilate knew it was because of envy that they handed Jesus over to be killed
 - vii. Feared for their position, power, and security as individuals and as a nation.

1. Morris – (the Sadducees) cooperated with the Romans and thus had political power; they saw Jesus as something of a danger, for he might provoke a movement in opposition to Rome and bring a strong reaction from their overlords.
 2. Tenny – NT Survey – Unlike the Pharisees, they (the Sadducees) did not survive the destruction of Jerusalem. The cessation of the priesthood, to which most of the Sadducees belonged, and the hostility with Rome, which had formerly protected the Sadducean clan, ended their existence as a group.
 3. **John 19:12-15** As a result of this Pilate made efforts to release Him, but the Jews cried out saying, "If you release this Man, you are no friend of Caesar; everyone who makes himself out to be a king opposes Caesar." ¹³ Therefore when Pilate heard these words, he brought Jesus out, and sat down on the judgment seat at a place called The Pavement, but in Hebrew, Gabbatha. ¹⁴ Now it was the day of preparation for the Passover; it was about the sixth hour. And he said to the Jews, "Behold, your King!" ¹⁵ So they cried out, "Away with Him, away with Him, crucify Him!" Pilate said to them, "Shall I crucify your King?" The chief priests answered, "We have no king but Caesar."
- c. Now they come testing Jesus asking for a sign from heaven (v. 1)
- i. Mark includes a description of Jesus sighing in His spirit in response to their arguing
 1. **Mark 8:11-12** The Pharisees came out and began to argue with Him, seeking from Him a sign from heaven, to test Him. ¹² Sighing deeply in His spirit, He said, "Why does this generation seek for a sign? Truly I say to you, no sign will be given to this generation."
 - ii. There have been plenty of signs but their request for a "sign from heaven" may indicate that they had something specific in mind.
 1. Mac – popular Jewish superstition held that demons could perform earthly miracles but that only God could perform heavenly ones. . . . desire to see a miraculous sign in the sky.
 2. This may explain why Jesus responds with a weather analogy that involves looking at the sky for weather patterns.
 3. Manna from the sky like Moses (Ex 16), cause the sun and moon to stand still like Joshua (Josh 10), thunderstorm as in 1 Sam. 7
 4. Morris – testing usually has a bad meaning like testing with the expectation of failure – not sincere in seeking a sign – they evidently thought that Jesus could not produce it, and their intention was not so much actually to see a sign as to show people that Jesus could not produce one.
- d. He points to their ability to see and discern the weather patterns but inability to understand the time in which they live.
- i. Old sailor's song – "Red sky at night, sailor's delight. Red sky at morning, sailors take warning."
 - ii. Is this accurate today?
 1. Yes, generally, as long as you are between 30 and 60' latitude

2. Red skies mean there are more dust particles in the atmosphere, otherwise the sky is more blue. Dust is associated with high pressure systems, in which the weather is better but the atmosphere has more dust. In lower pressure systems, clouds tend to form bringing rain but also cleaner atmosphere. If weather patterns generally move in from the west and alternate between high and lower pressure systems, if you see a red sky at night when the sun is setting to the west then it likely means a high pressure system is moving toward you. If you see a red sky in the morning when you are looking to the east then it means the high pressure system is moving on from you and likely a lower pressure system is replacing it and will bring storms.
- iii. What are the signs of the times?
 1. His present ministry and miracles ought to have been signs enough of the kingdom
 2. These things are presently happening and they cannot observe them for what they are
 3. It would be like someone saying, "Will it rain today?" when it is already pouring.
 - iv. The only sign that will be given to them is His death, burial, and resurrection.
 1. Related to the sign of Jonah as Jesus will be in the tomb and come out just as Jonah was in the fish and came out, as Jesus uses a similar statement in chapter 12
- e. What are the times in which we live?
 - i. We live in the **last days**, although we don't know how long these days will be.
 1. **Hebrews 1:1-2** God, after He spoke long ago to the fathers in the prophets in many portions and in many ways, ² in these last days has spoken to us in His Son, whom He appointed heir of all things, through whom also He made the world.
 - ii. The Lord is **patient** in His return, giving people an opportunity to repent.
 1. **2 Peter 3:9-10** ⁹ The Lord is not slow about His promise, as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing for any to perish but for all to come to repentance. ¹⁰ But the day of the Lord will come like a thief, in which the heavens will pass away with a roar and the elements will be destroyed with intense heat, and the earth and its works will be burned up.
 - iii. Things will get increasingly **difficult** in some ways, even while other things may improve.
 1. **2 Timothy 3:1-4** But realize this, that in the last days difficult times will come. ² For men will be lovers of self, lovers of money, boastful, arrogant, revilers, disobedient to parents, ungrateful, unholy, ³ unloving, irreconcilable, malicious gossips, without self-control, brutal, haters of good, ⁴ treacherous, reckless, conceited, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God,
 2. Sure we are seeing a drift towards this in our nation, but in other parts of the world things may be improving or worsening.
 3. To hold traditional Christian ethics in our culture today is rapidly becoming grounds for exclusion.

- a. CEO of Twitter, a large corporation had to apologize this week after eating at Chick-fil-a because the owner of Chick-fil-a is known to support traditional marriage.
 - b. Crossfit exec that lost his job
 - c. Where only 10 years ago the majority of public officials vocalized support for marriage as between a man and a woman on both sides of the political aisle, that view is now seen as oppressive and bigoted.
 - 4. There was a narrow victory for religious freedom in a recent supreme court ruling, but it is narrow because it does not apply broadly to many different circumstances.
- iv. We must respond to Jesus in this life.
 - 1. **Hebrews 9:27** And inasmuch as it is appointed for men to die once and after this *comes* judgment,
- 2. Be cautious regarding the teaching that influences you. (16:5-12)
 - a. A new parallel analogy – first it was about weather and discerning the times, now it’s about leaven (yeast) in bread and influence.
 - b. The disciples realize they don’t have food, the staple food for the people.
 - i. Keep in mind that food insecurity was a much bigger thing. This was more than just, “I forgot a snack.” It was, “I have no idea what we are going to eat.”
 - c. Jesus warned them to watch out and beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and Sadducees but they didn’t get it.
 - i. Pay attention, observe, notice
 - ii. yeast/leaven is something that is small but works invisibly to great effect
 - iii. But they don’t get it. They think he is talking to them about physical bread.
 - iv. Perhaps thought Jesus wouldn’t want them to eat bread baked by a Sadducee or Pharisee. Should have known better. He just taught that it isn’t what enters a mouth that defiles a person but what comes out from the heart.
 - d. Jesus responds with a series of 4 questions that expose the error in their thinking
 - i. They weren’t demonstrating faith in Him
 - ii. If he could provide food for thousands, couldn’t He take care of them?
 - e. The problem was not the bread from the Pharisees and Sadducees. The problem was their teaching.
 - i. Jesus was warning them not to be influence by their teaching.
 - 1. Trust in the political system more than the Messiah
 - 2. Disbelief in the supernatural
 - 3. Confidence in their own righteousness leading to pride.
 - f. We should be discerning without being constantly critical.

- i. **Acts 17:10-11** The brethren immediately sent Paul and Silas away by night to Berea, and when they arrived, they went into the synagogue of the Jews. ¹¹ Now these were more noble-minded than those in Thessalonica, for they received the word with great eagerness, examining the Scriptures daily *to see whether these things were so*.
 1. Be a Berean, check my teaching as well!
 - a. Notice that they weren't merely critical. They received the word with great eagerness.
 - b. But they did examine the word for themselves.
 - ii. **Colossians 2:8** See to it that no one takes you captive through philosophy and empty deception, according to the tradition of men, according to the elementary principles of the world, rather than according to Christ.
 - iii. **Philippians 1:9-10** And this I pray, that your love may abound still more and more in real knowledge and all discernment, ¹⁰ so that you may approve the things that are excellent, in order to be sincere and blameless until the day of Christ;
 1. Believe the best about people and ideas, be charitable, don't attribute motives where they aren't clear, but don't be naïve either.
 - iv. **Ephesians 4:14-15** As a result, we are no longer to be children, tossed here and there by waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, by craftiness in deceitful scheming; ¹⁵ but speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in all *aspects* into Him who is the head, *even* Christ,
 - v. **1 Timothy 1:3-6** As I urged you upon my departure for Macedonia, remain on at Ephesus so that you may instruct certain men not to teach strange doctrines, ⁴ nor to pay attention to myths and endless genealogies, which give rise to mere speculation rather than *furthering* the administration of God which is by faith. ⁵ But the goal of our instruction is love from a pure heart and a good conscience and a sincere faith. ⁶ For some men, straying from these things, have turned aside to fruitless discussion,
 - vi. **1 Timothy 6:3-4** If anyone advocates a different doctrine and does not agree with sound words, those of our Lord Jesus Christ, and with the doctrine conforming to godliness, ⁴ he is conceited *and* understands nothing; but he has a morbid interest in controversial questions and disputes about words, out of which arise envy, strife, abusive language, evil suspicions,
 - vii. **Hebrews 5:14** But solid food is for the mature, who because of practice have their senses trained to discern good and evil.
 1. We should have a childlike faith but not a childish faith.
 2. Little kids put anything and everything in their mouths, they lack discernment!
3. We discern the true value of Christ only after God opens up our eyes to do so.
 - a. In the opening example, the objective value of the blanket did not change. It was worth half a million before and after the gentlemen brought it in. What changed was the way he viewed the item.
 - b. Likewise, Jesus is of infinite value. We just need God to open our eyes to see Him as He is.



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