

Discerning Through Sermons: 3 Things to Watch out For *Secret, Symbolic, & New* (preach 11/19/23)

Please turn to *Matthew 13:10-17*, *1 Thessalonians 5:2-5*, *2 Thessalonians 2:1-8*.

This is a stand-alone sermon which will not only **help us to discern** how to interpret end times events, but to guard against approaches that can deceive us whenever we read the Bible, listen to sermons, or judge current events.

There are 3 things we need to patiently and prayerfully discern when it comes to how we interpret things:

- Secrecy
- Symbolism
- New/Hot

Here's what I mean by "discerning" these things: when I see too much of any of those 3 things in a sermon, doctrine, theology, or teaching, **a warning flag goes up in my mind and heart**. Allow me to elaborate a bit more. When any sermon/teaching/theology is...

- **Too secretive**, meaning God isn't letting us know much and we're in the dark OR that the speaker has been granted something no one else has.
- **Too symbolic**, meaning great emphasis on verses being allegories rather than just meaning what it's saying.
- **New/Hot that "no one's ever heard before"** that hasn't been exegetically verified & supported by the Bible.

Let's take them all one by one.

SECRECY: IS GOD HOLDING BACK A BUNCH OF STUFF FROM US, THE CHURCH, OR HAS HE CHOSEN TO TELL US WHAT'S GOING ON?

With only a few rare exceptions, **God is a REVEALER and not a CONCEALER.**

With the death, resurrection, and ascension of our Lord Jesus Christ our Heavenly Father **tells us the truth and helps us to discern the times.**

[Mat 13:10-17 ESV] 10 Then the disciples came and said to him, "Why do you speak to them in parables?" 11 And he answered them, "To you it has been given to know the secrets of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it has not been given. 12 For to the one who has, more will be given, and he will have an abundance, but from the one who has not, even what he has will be taken away. 13 This is why I speak to them in parables, because seeing they do not see, and hearing they do not hear, nor do they understand. 14 Indeed, in their case the prophecy of Isaiah is fulfilled that says: ""You will indeed hear but never understand, and you will indeed see but never perceive." 15 For this people's heart has grown dull, and with their ears they can barely hear, and their eyes they have closed, lest they should see with their eyes and hear with their ears and understand with their heart and turn, and I would heal them.' 16 But blessed are your eyes, for they see, and your ears, for they hear. 17 For truly, I say to you, many prophets and righteous people longed to see what you see, and did not see it, and to hear what you hear, and did not hear it.

We're going to keep this simple!

- Jesus is talking about 2 groups of people here: believers and unbelievers.
- Believers are in the know and unbelievers aren't.
- God has OPENED the spiritual ears and eyes of believers to truth & knowledge.
- Unbelievers are deaf and blind to God and His truths (which is why we must evangelize vs. lecture them).
- The more a believer seeks to know things, the more they will find: 30, 60, or 100 fold.

Notice Jesus refers to OT prophets who were righteous men & women of God, yet He says God **kept some stuff from even THEM**...why?

Answer: **the Holy Spirit had not yet been given by God to anyone:**

[Jhn 7:39 ESV] 39 Now this he said about the Spirit, whom those who believed in him were to receive, for as yet the Spirit had not been given, because Jesus was not yet glorified.

Jesus was glorified at His resurrection and He breathed the Holy

Spirit out upon the disciples. At Pentecost the Holy Spirit came in full power and anyone Saved after that point was filled with Him. It takes the Spirit to see and discern God and His Truth.

The Lord is a God of Light and part of that Light is knowledge.

Darkness isn't just sin and evil, it's ignorance.

When teaching on the Rapture, Paul told the Thessalonians:

[1Th 5:2-5 ESV] 2 For you yourselves [believers] are fully aware that the day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night. 3 While people [unbelievers] are saying, "There is peace and security," then **sudden** destruction will come upon them as labor pains come upon a pregnant woman, and they will not escape. 4 **But you are NOT in darkness, brothers, for that day to surprise you like a thief.** 5 For you are all children of light, children of the day. We are not of the night or of the darkness.

The same 2 groups of people are here: believers and unbelievers. Please listen carefully: the “day of the Lord” will only be a surprise to unbelievers because they lack the Holy Spirit. They walk in the darkness of ignorance, blind to the SIGNS and PORTENTS God will displaying.

The Church walks in the Light of Christ, meaning **GOD IS OPENLY TALKING TO US ALL THE TIME**, letting us know what’s going on. He’s the best communicator there is!

There are FEW exceptions such as knowing the exact day and hour of the rapture, or what the 7 thunders in *Revelation 10:4*. For reasons of His own, God is keeping those things from us.

Yet for the most part God gave us the Bible and **SEVERAL TELLING GIFTS** like knowledge, wisdom, and prophecy because we walk in the Light of truth, and not the darkness of ignorance.

Therefore any teaching, sermon, or interpretation of the Bible that places ***heavy emphasis on God keeping a bunch of secrets from the Church raises a red flag in me.***

Any group claiming they have a particular secret the rest of the Church or world doesn’t know, that God has supposedly revealed to just them, makes alarm bells go off in my heart.

The word “occult” means secret or darkness. We are children of the Light!

SYMBOLISM. There’s no doubt that some of the Bible is symbolic. The parables are a good example as well as Jesus telling us that if our right eye offends us, to pluck it out. In the latter He was clearing urging self-control...like removing junk food from our homes when dieting.

Yet I say to you now that **the majority of the Bible is literal and meant to be interpreted exactly as its stated.**

- Which of the 10 commandments is symbolic? None.
- When Jesus said He would die, He did.
- When Jesus said He would rise from the dead, He did.
- When Jesus said He was going to Heaven, He did.
- When Jesus said He's coming back, He's going to.
- When He said He was the way, truth, and life, and that no one comes to God the Father except through Him, He meant it.

I'm not normally a Message Bible person, but it's *translation of Hebrews 4:12* was interesting.

12 **God means what he says.** What he says goes. His powerful Word is sharp as a surgeon's scalpel, **cutting through everything, whether doubt or defense**, laying us open to listen and obey. 13 Nothing and no one is impervious to God's Word. We can't get away from it - no matter what.

God's Word is a sword and not a fog machine. Fog machines make smoke, blurring things and making it harder to see and discern. Do you like it when people are unclear about what they're saying? How about politicians, who love to play "Texas 2-step" meaning talk around an issue instead of straight at it? Whenever I see a politician being asked a question and they respond with "let me be clear on this" they almost never are in my opinion! They still dance around, play both sides of an issue, and avoid committing fully for fear of losing voters.

God isn't like that. **When He speaks He's clear.** He makes His will and plans known to us in a straightforward manner. If He didn't, that would be cruel! We would get to Judgment Day and be confused.

Many of His OT commandments have to do with morality and He's clear on all these commands. What's more is that He programmed them into the human heart, and we call it a conscience. If we don't know Jesus as Savior, we'll stand at Judgment before Him where our sins will be laid bare and our conscience will AGREE with the verdict. *None will be able to say they "didn't know" that this or that was a sin.*

If God weren't clear on Salvation, He would be sadistic and unjust. Yet He was. Salvation is only through Christ Jesus and there's no other way. You can't restrain yourself from evil enough to be Saved, nor do enough good things to make it to Heaven. Only the cleansing blood of Christ washes sin away and guarantees us a place in His Kingdom.

People say “*life doesn’t come with an instruction manual,*” but it does. It’s called the Bible.

[2Ti 3:16-17 ESV] 16 All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, 17 that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work.

If the majority of the Bible is symbolic then it’s not too profitable for teaching, reproof, correction, and how to live righteously. If most of Scripture is allegorical then we’re in trouble and can call anything into question...and there are some churches, denominations, and ministries which do exactly that. They attempt to make things into symbols that aren’t. *They see the Bible as flowing, interpretive, and fluid*...which means they can read anything into they want to.

There have been “Christian” movements in the last 2000 years, for example, **WHO CLAIM THAT THE 2ND COMING IS SYMBOLIC AND SPIRITUAL, VS. A LITERAL AND PHYSICAL EVENT**. Some claim that it’s already happened! The JW’s believed Jesus returned in October 1914. When asked good questions like “how did we miss it?” their answer is that it was spiritual—which means invisible. They combine both the things we’ve talked about so far today: secrecy and symbolism!

FULL PRETERISM is a growing movement within the Western church, and they believe Jesus returned in 70 AD. Why did no one see Him? Where is He? *They made His 2nd coming secret and symbolic: no one saw it and only a few discerned it.*

The same applies to the Resurrection. Orthodox teaching is that it will be a PHYSICAL raising from the dead and that our new bodies will share certain attributes that can be seen and touched. *Those who would make it an allegory say it will (or has already!) take place in the spirit only, invisible to the naked eye.*

Turning too many things into a symbol or an allegory dishonors God, deceives the self and others, and robs people of the beautiful promises the Lord Jesus made to us.

Our resurrection will be literal, bodily, and anyone around will witness this glorious transformation with the naked eye!

As to His Second Coming, the Bible says:

[Rev 1:7 ESV] 7 Behold, he is coming with the clouds, and EVERY EYE WILL SEE HIM, even those who pierced him, and all tribes of the earth will wail on account of him. Even so. Amen.

The 2nd coming will be a literal, physical event and everyone still standing on earth will be able to look up into the sky to see Jesus riding forth on a white horse! They'll hear it too and tremble! Jesus' feet will physically land on the Mt of Olives and split it in two. He'll go to war and shed lots of blood—not His own this time—and then will sit down on a real throne and rule from Jerusalem. **These things are not symbols and they won't (or haven't!) happened in secret.**

By all means, don't pluck your eye out...but when a sermon or teaching tries to symbolize too many things or turn a clearly physical event into an invisible/spiritual one, watch out! *It's another tool of deconstruction meant to rob us of living righteously and receiving God's prophetic promises.*

WHAT'S NEW & HOT. **Just because you hear a new teaching or sermon that you haven't heard before doesn't mean it's true or Biblical.**

How many of you were brought up in Church and/or have attended for many years? Here's what might have happened: you feel you've heard just about every sermon there is. "Nothing new under the sun" as Solomon once said. The same messages, verses, and points over and over for decades.

HERE'S WHY WE GET "BORED" OR "EXCITED." There's all manner of information and stimulation in our environment all the time: sights, sounds, noises, smells, etc. In order to keep itself sane, the brain filters out many of these it deems irrelevant or not a threat. People not able to regulate said incoming stimulus are prone to outbursts because they're overloaded.

I recall when I *first moved to Brooklyn*, I was living in an old apartment building that was heated by some massive boiler in the basement. There was a pipe that ran in the corner of main room which radiated heat. When the boiler reached its highest pressure, there must have been some big metal lid on it...because the pressure would literally blow the lid up to release itself. The lid had hinges and was designed to let the boiler do so BUT it would clang back down every time the pressure built! It sounded exactly like someone was hitting the pipe in my room with a large wrench!

MY FIRST NIGHT THERE I GOT NO SLEEP because that thing was so loud! Yet within a month I couldn't even "hear" it anymore. Whenever I would have guests over they would say "what's that?!" when it banged and clanged, and I would be like "huh? Oh...that's the boiler in the basement." Why did I stop noticing it? Why was I eventually able to sleep through the night? My brain began to block it out once it became familiar.

Such is the same with listening to sermons and teachings! *If we feel we've heard the message before, our brain dedicates less energy and awareness to it.*

Then along comes the new, hot teaching that we've never heard before.... The moment it's presented to us, our brains quickly realize it's something different and shoots a chemical cocktail into our system which heightens our senses...sort of a low level "fight or flight." We can hear better, we absorb the information more quickly and efficiently, and we're alert.

With this newfound stimulation and fascination, we might fall into the trap of **buying it before vetting it.**

Here are some possible examples:

You were brought up believing that the 2nd coming was a future event. One evening you attend a special meeting at a different church where the preacher gives a convincing talk that Jesus returned in 70 AD. He bolsters his position by quoting verses, historical events, thrown in with some math.

You've never heard this before! Even though he spoke for 2 hours, it only seemed like minutes! He's given you something to really think about! Brain stimulation....

You've never liked the study of the end times, because it always seemed like "doom and gloom." The few times you tried reading Revelation you got scared at all the terrible imagery of Beasts, fiery judgments, and water turning to blood. You tried listening to some sermons on it, but they made you feel anxious.

When browsing YouTube one day, you see a video titled **"Victory in the End Times!"** You clicked on it and for the next 90 minutes were amazed at this fresh new perspective. Instead of doom and gloom, the video talks of how all the scary stuff in Revelation happened already, at different points of time in the last 2000 years. Antichrist? Already come and gone! 7 year tribulation with its 21 judgment events? Already happened!

The video shows that the only thing left that needs to happen is that **the Kingdom Gospel spreads to all nations**, converting just about everyone, even taking over the governments of the world! When the whole planet has finally bowed the knee to Jesus, He will return and resurrect us from the dead!

Having listened to this new and fascinating teaching, **you feel hope for the end times the first time in years!** No more worry and anxiety for you, your kids, and your grandkids...only joy and faith for the bright new world that's on its way! Brain stimulation....

What can follow said stimulation is to **“REBEL” AGAINST THE ORTHODOX TEACHING** from which you were raised. Suddenly your old church, pastors, and elders are a bunch of Pharisees who were trying to keep you down and never had a new idea in their entire lives. You see them as “victims” of the generations who came before them, only parroting what THEY were taught in church.

Not you! ***You seek to take yourself and the church higher into its true calling!*** You believe you've been given a truth that no one else has had in the last 2000 years, and may even claim that “it's what the Apostles REALLY taught!”

I repeat: **just because a sermon or teaching is new**, stimulating, exciting, and something you've never heard before does NOT mean it's true. It does NOT mean it's what Jesus and the Apostles taught that was mysteriously lost to the Church in the last 1900 years. The black sheep in the herd isn't necessarily right or noble, and neither is the fish that swims upstream.

I openly admit that whenever someone **claims that they have a new teaching suddenly revealed** for the first time in centuries or millennia in the Church, a red flag goes up within me. So how do we respond?

[1Th 5:19-21 ESV] 19 Do not quench the Spirit. 20 Do not despise prophecies, 21 **but test everything; hold fast what is good.**

How do we test things? Whether a prophecy, teaching, or sermon? Compare it to the Bible and use God-given common sense.

Example #1: Did Jesus already return in 70 AD? You don't need to even open the Bible to answer that—common sense. If you DO open your Bible, though, it says what I already quoted from Revelation 1:7 where “every eye will see him” and then there's this:

[Mat 24:29-30 ESV] 29 "Immediately after the tribulation of those days the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light, and the stars will fall from heaven, and the powers of the heavens will be shaken. 30 Then will appear in heaven the sign of the Son of Man, and then all the tribes of the earth will mourn, and they will **see** the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory."

THE 2ND COMING WILL BE SEEN, with the naked eye, by everyone on the planet. So even though the teaching that He already arrived in the 1st century is a new one and certainly unorthodox, it's false.

What about Dominionism/Postmillennialism? The teaching that most of the events in Revelation took place sometime in the last 2000 years of church history? That all that's left is for the Church to dominate the nations of the world and then Jesus comes back?

Recently it's been **repackaged as "Victorious Eschatology"** which has a nice ring, doesn't it? I mean...if you even disagree with it, its new title suggests you might be a Debbie/Donny Downer.

COMMON SENSE: think of any country in the world—how is the Church doing taking it over? Do they run its government and pass Biblical laws? Are most Saved and going to Church? I can't think of a single country like this. The US was certainly founded on Christianity, but how are we doing now in the 2020's?

Yet we must open our Bibles....

If you read through Revelation, the Antichrist and False Prophet are still here—in bodily form—when Jesus returns. And that hasn't happened yet. Also, the Apostle Paul makes it clear that *things get worse up until Jesus appears* in the sky, not better:

[2Th 2:1-8 ESV] 1 Now concerning the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our being gathered together to him, we ask you, brothers, 2 not to be quickly shaken in mind or alarmed, either by a spirit or a spoken word, or a letter seeming to be from us, to the effect that the day of the Lord has come. 3 Let no one deceive you in any way. For that day will not come, unless the rebellion comes first, and the man of lawlessness is revealed, the son of destruction, 4 who opposes and exalts himself against every so-called god or object of worship, so that he takes his seat in the temple of God, proclaiming himself to be God. 5 Do you not remember that when I was still with you I told you these things? 6 And you know what is restraining him now so that he may be revealed in his time. 7 For the mystery of lawlessness is already at work. Only he who now restrains it will do so until he is out of the way. 8 And then the lawless one

will be revealed, whom the Lord Jesus will kill with the breath of his mouth and bring to nothing by the **appearance of his coming**.

- While many evil world leaders have come and gone in the last 2000 years, this one is directly tied to the 2nd coming of Jesus (verse 1).
- In other words, Jesus doesn't come back until after the Antichrist comes (verse 3).
- The Antichrist doesn't come until the mysterious "restrainer" stops restraining (verse 7).
- Jesus appears physically and directly and destroys the Antichrist (verse 8).
- ...and none of this has happened no matter how much history you try and point to.

GRAND SUMMARY:

- **Secrecy:** God is a revealer and not a concealer. Any teaching suggesting that He's holding back most stuff from us is suspect. Any person, church, or entity who claims God has given JUST THEM some secret teaching is in danger of being a cult.
- **Symbolism:** while some things in the Bible are symbolic, most are not. Teachings that imply that most things are allegorical are highly suspect and lead people to make the Bible fluid and relative. God is a straight talker Who means what He says!
- **New/Hot:** just because it's new and hot, doesn't make it truth. Just because it stimulated our brain and caused us to consider something different, doesn't mean it's right. Let's use our God-given common sense and vet everything in the Bible before buying into something new.