

“Divine Vision”—Jeremiah 23:23-24

The text for this sermon, the theme of which is, “Divine Vision”, is Jeremiah 23:23-24 → *Am I a God at hand, declares the LORD, and not a God far away? Can a man hide himself in secret places so that I cannot see him? declares the LORD. Do I not fill heaven and earth? declares the LORD.* This is the text.

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ Jesus:

“You can’t judge a book by its cover.” This adage was drilled into me from early childhood onward. It was an effort on my parents’ part challenging me to look at people on a deeper level than simply what I experienced from their outward appearances. I believe their intent was twofold:

- ① To encourage me to get to know the “real” person by engaging them in personal interaction before making a “judgment” about their character; and,
- ② To prevent me from making judgments about their character out of my sinful self-righteousness.

However, the principle of not “judging a book by its cover” is kind of a two-edged sword. While we desire to avoid sinning in our self-righteousness we also want to avoid being deceived by the hypocritical

actions of people trying to deceive us and take advantage of us. Thus, since we cannot see and know a person's heart—not that I even want the responsibility of knowing all that others think and feel—we depend upon their “cover” in an effort to determine the genuine from the fake. All we have to go by is their behavior toward us. The rest we take on faith. By the same token, when it comes to the will of God, how can we tell the message which conveys His truth rather than a lie?

By the use of rhetorical questions in our text, the LORD was “coming down” hard on the false prophets of Jeremiah's day and warning His people about listening to the *lies* which these prophets were speaking in His name. These questions were intended to challenge both the people and prophets to consider His omnipresence and omniscience. The fact that God can be everywhere at once, knowing and seeing everything, reveals that He knows what is in the hearts of all people, including these lying prophets! It is His unique “divine vision!”

Even though the false prophets may have been able to get away with lying to men for a time, they will never get away from God's “divine vision!” Since God does not need to “judge a book by its cover,” His “divine vision” can see every person's inner self or heart. **In fact, your heart is God's primary concern!**

This fact was reinforced when the prophet Samuel was sent to choose a king for Israel. While Samuel was looking over the

“candidates” from Jesse’s sons he thought Eliab “fit the bill” perfectly. In 1 Samuel 16:7 the LORD said to Samuel, “Do not look on his appearance or on the height of his stature . . . For the LORD sees not as man sees: man looks on the outward appearance, but the LORD looks on the heart.”

The real challenge for us is to strive to see people the way the LORD sees them. However, the challenge becomes even more heightened because we tend to focus on their flaws and failures in sin because our own sinful hearts.

When false prophets speak lies to us it may be difficult for us to determine what is truth and what is false, what is an expression of God’s Will as opposed to that which is against His Will. Thus, when these false prophets said, *I have dreamed!* that’s all it was—“dreaming.” Problem is, only the LORD knew it was all “dreams” and so revealed the false nature of their messages through the prophet Jeremiah. In effect God told them: “You’re dreaming all right! It just not a dream filled with My Will and desires for My people.”

It’s easy for us to believe the lies especially when it’s something we like and even want to hear. The false prophets in our text were declaring peace and security in relationship with the LORD while Jeremiah proclaimed destruction and punishment on God’s people because of their idolatry. Which would you rather hear? God loves you so you can continue in your sin and don’t have to conform to His Will or that God is

about to bring destruction on you because of your sins? Believing the lie becomes even easier when the majority of the people around us are also believing the lie. “Peer pressure” is powerful in sin. Believing the lie is easy when accompanied by smooth talk, flattery, a dynamic personality or how good the person makes us feel at the moment.

So . . . from where do we receive God’s “divine vision” in order to be discerning to determine right from wrong, genuine from fake and God’s Will from the devil’s schemes?

In the context the LORD mentions one criteria for determining His truth in the mouths of others—when they *make My people forget My name by their dreams that they tell one another* (cf. verse 27) Discernment is difficult because a prophet can appear to “have it all together” in his message. Deuteronomy 13:1-3 says: *If a prophet or a dreamer of dreams arises among you and gives you a sign or a wonder, and the sign or wonder that he tells you comes to pass, and if he says, “Let us go after other gods,” which you have not known, “and let us serve them,” you shall not listen to the words of that prophet or that dreamer of dreams. For the LORD your God is testing you, to know whether you love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul.* Thus, we must be discerning on the basis of to whom the prophet is pointing us: to the LORD or some other power. Does the message lead us to trust completely in the all-powerful LORD as He has revealed Himself to all

people in the Scriptures or does it lead us in other directions? If the message leads away from trust in Yahweh it is not a message received from God.

The deception spoken about in our text goes much deeper than simply giving and receiving “messages.” The satanic deception is really the fact that those who are teaching the lies in the name of the LORD and those who are believing the lies in the name of the LORD **don’t recognize them as lies. They believe that they are true and right.** Guess being “sincere” is not what it’s about because you can be sincerely wrong. Thus, not being deceived in our faith walk with the LORD begins as we take an honest look at our own hearts in light of God’s Law and His grace as expressed in the Person & Work of Jesus Christ.

In this chapter the LORD gives an interesting description of His Word in verse 29 → *Is not My Word like fire, declares the LORD, and like a hammer that breaks the rock in pieces?* Sometimes God’s Word is *like a hammer* or a *fire* of judgment when His Law condemns your sinful, stubborn heart in an effort to break your sinful pride so that God can work His forgiveness in your life through His Word of grace and forgiveness in Christ. In Jeremiah 15:16 the prophet confessed the wonderful nature of God’s Word for us sinners as His Law and Gospel does it’s work. He said: *Your words were found, and I ate them, and **Your words became to me a joy and the delight of my heart,** for I am*

called by Your name, O LORD, God of hosts.

In Matthew 7:15-16 Jesus gives us some guidance so that we guard ourselves from being misled. He says: *Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing but inwardly are ravenous wolves. You will recognize them by their fruits.* Then He used a number of examples to describe how you discern the heart by the actions which it produces. Thus the phrase, "Don't judge a book by it's cover" is not totally proper. We actually must depend upon the behavior and words of a person to reveal their mind and heart.

However, it's much too tempting for us to function in a cautious, discerning manner self-righteously. Our sinful hearts too readily notice the sin in everyone else, to which we quickly attach an accusation of their heart. Thus, Jesus' words need to include our own recognition that all actions that you or I display are reflections of the condition of our heart before the LORD at a given moment as well. Your actions will reveal the rebellion, guilt, fear, and struggles of your heart . . . or . . . the forgiveness, grace and peace in your heart.

As people called by God's name in Christ Jesus, we desire to avoid being false prophets ourselves—that is, messengers of false teaching and direction in God's name from His written Word. However, in order to *speak* God's written *Word* . . . *faithfully* you must receive God's "divine vision" upon your own heart and life first. This means that when you hear

the Word of God you face your heart honestly with the “divine vision” of God’s Law and Gospel so that you trust completely and alone in how He views you **in Christ**. God’s view from the cross is that He looks at you justified by His grace through faith in the suffering, death and resurrection of His Son, Jesus! You are forgiven of all self-righteousness, idolatry, and sin in every shape and form.

Then God’s Word is like a fire inside of us in a different way. Jeremiah 20:9 says: *There is in my heart as it were a burning fire shut up in my bones, and I am weary with holding it in, and I cannot.* It is the Gospel of peace in sin forgiven in Christ just waiting to be released in our words and actions.

“Don’t judge a book by its cover?” We praise God that He does look at us according to our “cover” **on His terms**—as those covered with the righteousness of Jesus Christ. So His “divine vision” is not just that He can see what’s in our hearts but that He chooses to always see Christ in our hearts and the judgment which Jesus willingly took upon Himself for our sin once and for all. Amen.

God has bestowed a new vision to us as new creations in Christ.

It’s a view of others with the vision of Christ

as 2 Corinthians 5:16-17 says:

*From now on, therefore, we regard no one according to the flesh.*

*Even though we once regarded Christ according to the flesh,  
we regard Him thus no longer.*

*Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation.*

*The old has passed away; behold, the new has come.*

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