

# Lacking Discernment

## Matthew Chapter 16

In 2003, Dan Brown's book, *The da Vinci Code*, was published and set off a firestorm of reactions. In less than year, over three million copies were sold and over forty million were in print. It was one of the top selling books for several months. By 2006, over thirty-six million copies were sold and it had been translated into four languages. During an interview, NBC's Matt Lauer asked Dan Brown the following question, "How much is this based on reality in terms of things that actually occurred?" "Absolutely all of it. Obviously, Robert Langdon is fictional, but all of the art, architecture, secret rituals, secret societies – all of that is historical fact" Dan Brown replied. What made this book popular to the pagan and concerning for the Christian was the novel's premise. Jesus and Mary Magdalene were married and had a child whose descendants later founded the Merovingian dynasty; Mary's womb, not the cup used for the Last supper was the Holy Grail and a Catholic sect is killing people to hush it up. Books have been written explaining the skillful intermingling of fact with fantasy in this work of fiction. As a work of fiction, the writer keeps you on the edge of your seat but the problem was the undiscerning reader would have a difficult if not impossible time telling where the fact diverged into fiction. Morning television shows said the book has "new and uncovered" information. One morning, while on vacation, before leaving for the day's activities, I turned on the television just in time to hear the morning show commentators say their next segment was going to interview a professor of theology about the facts in Brown's book. The interview started with a question concerning the "new information" in Dan Brown's book. The professor looked rather puzzled and said the factual information in the book has been known for years. He went on to explain some sources of Browns information came from the Nag Hammadi scrolls discovered in 1945. They were well known, extensively studied but definitely not "new" information. He went on to explain another point but was interrupted because of a commercial break. When coverage returned the professor, commentator and topic seemed to disappear. Why? When their lack of discernment was uncovered by facts, there was no story to cover.

Matthew chapter 16 starts off with the Pharisees and Sadducees coming to test Jesus by asking Him for "a sign from heaven". It wasn't a new request. They wanted to see a sign that transcended all the healings, deliverance from demons, feeding the masses, healing the blind, the lame, the deaf, the dumb and raising the dead. They wanted a sign that would unmistakably identify Him as the Messiah and settle the issue once and for all. Jesus answers them with an age-old mariner's rhyme, "Red sky at night, sailors delight. Red sky in the morning, sailors take warning." This rhyme has been used by sailors as a thumb rule to forecast weather at sea for over 2,000 years. At mid latitudes, where weather pattern's predominantly travel from west to east, this rhyme is generally correct. Jesus, the Pharisees and Sadducees knew the phrase and how to "discern the appearance of the sky" but the Jewish leaders failed to see, "the sign of the times". They had heard and seen the teaching of John the Baptist but failed to realize the kingdom of God was at hand in the person of Jesus. They had heard, questioned and witnessed the teaching and miracles of Jesus. They had been reminded of Old Testament prophecies being fulfilled before their eyes and yet they had not perceived, understand or believe. They could discern the weather but totally overlooked the evidence standing right before them. Jesus goes on to rebuke the Jewish leaders and once again tell them, "An evil and adulterous generation seeks after a sign; and a sign will not be given it, except the sign of Jonah." Sounds like Matthew 12:39. "And He left them and went away." In other words, Jesus abandoned them.

Those who do not believe will always find a way to reject the truth. The lost today are no different than the lost of Jesus' time. No miracle would have been good enough, not even the miracle of resurrection. Much like Voltaire who said, "Even if a miracle should be wrought in the open marketplace before a thousand witnesses, I would rather mistrust my senses than admit a miracle". Signs didn't change Pharaoh's mind, and the rich man is told, "...if they don't believe Moses and the prophets, they will not be persuaded even if someone rises from the dead". The Pharisees, Sadducees and scribes lived in an amazing time, with evidence all around but because of their hardened and unbelieving hearts they never recognized the signs.

Discernment involves examining things with an objective standard, for us that standard is the word of God. Signs are all around us, Jesus is going to return and when He does the option of salvation will be replaced by perfect justice. Are you ready? Are you looking? Are you amazed? We should be, but few are.

**1. Where did the Jesus testing come from? What is interesting those who tested Him? What was the goal of their test? What was Jesus inferring when He answered their question and did they understand the meaning? What sign “ will be given” to them and what did Jesus do after this encounter?**

**2. What was Jesus warning to His disciples in verses 5-12 What was the meaning behind Jesus warning? Why was the warning necessary and what would the consequences be if they failed to listen? Do we see this today? Where?**

**3. Where did Jesus and the disciples go after this warning? What is interesting about this location? What question did Jesus ask His disciples and what were their answers? What was Peter’s answer and why was it unique and what did it reveal? What did Jesus promise Peter as a result of his answer? What did the promises mean?**

**4. Jesus What is Jesus warning to his disciples in verse 20? What does Jesus tell his disciples in verses 21-23? Why was it necessary? What was Peters response? How did Jesus respond to Peter’s rebuke? Why?**

**5. What do we learn from Jesus words in verses 24 & 25? What was Jesus explaining and what did these verses mean to the disciples and for us? How would you explain the paradox contained in verses 25 & 26? What do we learn about Jesus second coming in verse 27? What does verse 28 mean?**