

# (The Full Gospel) 23. the Secret of Discernment

by Zac Poonen

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*The secret of discernment is given by God to those who are sincere of heart, and can be applied by checking for rest and unrest, justification and complaints.*

**Scripture:** Isaiah 11:3, Isaiah 57:20-21, Matthew 27:39-44, Luke 23:34

**Topics:** "Discernment", "Spiritual Insight"

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## Description

Zac Poonen emphasizes the importance of discernment in recognizing truth, as illustrated by the thief on the cross who, despite his criminal background, discerned Jesus' innocence amidst the accusations of the religious rulers and soldiers. He highlights that true discernment is not based on intelligence or knowledge but is a gift from God to those with sincere hearts. The thief's ability to see Jesus' forgiving nature, even in the face of mockery, serves as a model for how believers should approach conflicts and discern right from wrong in the church. Poonen encourages the congregation to look for signs of unrest and agitation in others as indicators of their spiritual state, contrasting it with the peace found in those who are righteous.

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## Transcript

"The religious rulers were sneering at Jesus.... The soldiers also mocked Him.... One of the criminals who were hanged there was hurling abuse at Him.... But the other rebuking him said, 'This man has done nothing wrong' (Luke 22:35-41).

It is indeed amazing that while the elderly Bible-scholars in Israel, and the shrewd, educated Roman soldiers could not discern Who Jesus was, a thief-cum-murderer who knew nothing of the Bible could do so in his last moments on earth. Why was this so?

Discernment does not come through intelligence, Bible-knowledge or experience. It is given by God to those who are sincere of heart.

The thief on the cross teaches us how we can have discernment.

The entire range of bishops, priests and Bible-scholars in Israel were there at the foot of the cross that day accusing Jesus of one thing and another (Matthew 27:41). Many of the chief citizens of the nation also, who were passing by, were abusing Jesus mercilessly and accusing Him of saying that He would destroy

the temple (a false accusation, since Jesus never ever made such a statement) (Matthew 27:39).

Both the thieves were so convinced by these accusations, that they too joined in the tirade against Jesus (Matthew 27:44).

But all of a sudden, one of them stopped, and said concerning Jesus, "This man has not committed a single sin" (Luke 23:41).

How did he know that? How did he discern that Jesus was the Messiah that He claimed to be? How did he reject all the accusations of the people as false - at a time when no-one took up for Jesus?

After all, "there cannot be smoke without a fire", can there? Going by the worldly wisdom of that proverb, the thief could have thought that there must be some grounds, however small, in Jesus, for all these hundreds of people to accuse Him.

Yet the thief said that Jesus did NOTHING wrong!!

How did the thief become so spiritually-minded as to reject "what his ears heard" (Isaiah 11:3)? Because he heard Jesus saying, "Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing." (Luke 23:34).

On one hand, the thief saw the unrest, the agitation, the bitterness and the hatred of those Bible-scholars. On the other hand, he saw the forgiving spirit, the absence of self-justification, and the rest that there was in Jesus. Thus he discerned who was right and who was wrong.

In the church too, this is how we are to exercise discernment. When two brothers or sisters have a controversy, if you use this thief's yardstick, you will soon be able to discover who is right and who is wrong.

"The wicked are like the tossing sea, for it cannot be quiet, and its waters toss up refuse and mud. 'There is no peace', says my God, for the wicked" (Isaiah 57:20, 21).

Those who are wrong in God's eyes are doomed to a life of constant agitation and unrest, in which they will keep on tossing up rubbish and mud from their mouths (gossip, accusations, complaints and abuses) against godly brothers and sisters. When you meet such a brother or sister, you can, without any hesitation, categorise him/her as a wicked person, for that is what God calls him/her in Isaiah 57:20, 21. There is no need for further evidence or even to look into the facts of the case. The unrest and agitation in that person are the clearest evidence of all.

In worldly court-cases, the judges sometimes take many years to sift through all the evidence, before arriving at a judgment. And even then they could be wrong. If we have to adopt this method for disputes in the church, then we will have to spend all our life just listening to one side and the other before arriving at a conclusion. And we could still be wrong!

But God has given us a better way: Just check as to who is at rest and who is in unrest. Check as to who refuses to justify himself and who is full of complaints. And you will have the answer straight-away, as to who is righteous and who is not.

The thief on the cross has shown us the secret of discernment.

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