

Have We Discovered Fool's Gold or True Treasure? 1 John 4:1-6

Does anyone know the name James Marshall? He was the man credited for the first discovery of gold in California back in 1848!

His discovery sparked a gold rush of 300,000 people flooding into California looking to strike it rich in the mid 1800's!

Some of these prospectors were fortunate & became exceedingly rich, while others sacrificed everything they had, just to come up empty handed!

Along the way, some believed they discovered gold, only to realize that it was iron pyrite! "Fool's gold" looks a lot like gold but is entirely worthless!

In many ways Christianity is a lot like the California Gold Rush!

- Discoveries of true treasure found in Jesus Christ happen!
- An interest & desire is ignited in others to get in on this discovery.
- Some, at great personal sacrifice, pursue this treasure for themselves and they do find it, and their lives are forever changed.
- Others don't get out of it what they longed for, so they walk away disappointed.
- And some think they have found it, yet it is only a counterfeit.

How do we discover the priceless treasure of true Christianity without falling for fool's gold - a counterfeit version of it?

When someone says, look what I have discovered about God, about Jesus, about the church, or about the Christian faith, how can we discern & know whether what we're hearing/seeing/experiencing is true Christianity or not?

Vs. 1 - "Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, for many false prophets have gone out into the world."

There are many voices today that claim "the truth", many voices that seem to be valid, even our own! How can we be sure that we are not just like those who claimed to have found gold, only to discover a cheap imitation?

What does it mean to "test the spirits", to discover the difference between true Christianity & fool's gold? Well... Just like in the gold rush of the 19th century, there are some quick and easy tests to discover the truth!

When searching for gold, the "it's shiny", or "it looks like gold" tests are not

adequate! A few better tests are needed to establish credibility.

- They would bite it! Why? Because gold is softer than a human tooth!
- They would scrape it across a white stone to see what color mark it left!

The same is true for Christianity! Just because a church looks nice on the outside, or because their people seem to fit the description, that doesn't make it a true church, or a manifestation of the true Kingdom of God!

John shares with us here in this text two very simple tests to determine true Christianity from fool's gold!

"By this you will know the Spirit of God: every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God..." – vs. 2

If a person is going to proclaim any truth about God with credibility, they must first get Jesus right! There is no greater truth in the Christian faith than the identity of Jesus Christ as fully God & fully man – the Messiah!

If a person claims to speak for God, or claims to have heard a word from God, a critical test question is "What do they embrace about Jesus?"

If we/they get Jesus right, & embrace Him as Savior & Lord, then the Spirit of God lives within us/them & He becomes our truth discerner! **Vs. 4**

A 2nd test question John gives is, "Does what we hear/say/think/believe/live out align with what has already been revealed as "from God" & "the Truth?"

The Belgic Confession Article 5 states that "We receive all these books (the 66 books of the Bible) and these only as holy and canonical, for the regulating, founding, and establishing of our faith..."

Our Christian faith is built upon the truth of this book (the Bible)! Any other voice that speaks of Christianity that does not align w/Scripture is fool's gold

This is what John meant when he said, **"We are from God. Whoever knows God listens to us; whoever is not from God does not listen to us. By this we know the Spirit of truth and the spirit of error."** – Vs. 6

The "us" in this statement is the teaching of the Apostles – whom Jesus gave authority to proclaim the truth of God, in Christ, to the world! To be light in the darkness today, we must be discerners of the truth of God as well as proclaimers of it! Does the treasure we possess pass these simple tests?

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