

## **Be Careful When It Comes to This Do You Ever Judge Books by Their Cover?**

Years ago I was at a party with a group of friends from church. An eight year old boy was there, and he walked into the room where all the adults were sitting and talking and challenged anyone who wished to a game of chess. We had come late to the party and apparently he had already beaten one of the adults there in dominating fashion. No one volunteered to play him because they were afraid of being embarrassed by a child. He came straight up to me and almost told me to play him in chess. Later I learned he had sized me up and figured I would be a quick victim. Both of us in fact had the same idea about the other. "There is no way this guy can beat me!" Each of us were judging a book by its cover. One of us was wrong in our assessment. In the movie, "The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe", one of the main characters, a little girl named Lucy, is magically transported into another world, the land of Narnia. It is winter and she joyfully enjoys the falling snow. As Lucy is looking around, she spots a mysterious creature who at the same time sees her. Each is afraid of the other at first, but eventually they gather up enough courage to speak to one another. Lucy asks the strange creature what he is, and he tells her he is a faun. The faun then asks Lucy if she is a dwarf, and Lucy laughs. She informs him, "I'm not a dwarf, I'm a girl." You see, the faun had never seen a human being before just like Lucy had never come upon a faun.

It's not easy to know what to make of certain people who are different from us...or even very similar. Sometimes we get it right when we judge them but most of the time we get it wrong. Racism is the ugliest way we misidentify others, but certainly not the only one. Abraham Lincoln, who is widely recognized as the greatest of all American presidents was called a "coward", "an idiot" and the "original gorilla" by the commanding officer of his armies, George McClellan. A renowned New York lawyer said President Lincoln was a "yahoo" and a "barbarian". The famous preacher and abolitionist Henry Ward Beecher often ridiculed Lincoln in the newspapers, mocking him for his lack of sophistication. Northern newspapers openly called for President Lincoln to be assassinated. You may think it horrible that such ugly things were said about that great man of courage and conviction but all of us fall under the plague of judgementalism. Even the prophet Samuel was rebuked by God for judging a book by its cover. In Samuel's case, the great man of God thought too highly of someone because of how he looked, a sort of reverse profiling. Samuel was given the task of anointing the next king of Israel and was sent by the Lord to the home of Jesse. Samuel didn't know which of the sons of Jesse God had in mind but when he came upon the first born, Eliab, Samuel was convinced he was the chosen one. **But the Lord said to Samuel, "Do not consider his appearance or his height, for I have rejected him. The Lord does not look at the things man looks at. Man looks at the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart."** (1 Samuel 16: 7 NIV)

Like Samuel, you can give someone too much credit for how they look or seem. The opposite also is the case. When Jesus spoke with the despised tax collector Zacchaeus, many present were stunned. He was too short to see over the crowd when Jesus, already famous as a preacher, healer and prophet came to town. Zacchaeus climbed in a tree to catch a glimpse of Jesus and shockingly, Jesus came upon where Zacchaeus was perched and called to him there. **When Jesus reached the spot, he looked up and said to him, "Zacchaeus, come down immediately. I must stay at your house today."** (Luke 19: 5 NIV) Now pay careful attention to what the people there thought of this. **All the people saw this and began to mutter, "He has gone to be the guest of a 'sinner.'"** (Luke 19: 7 NIV) It says "all the people" were muttering about Zacchaeus and what a bad person he was. Apparently, even Jesus' disciples were contemptuous of Zacchaeus based on what they saw of him. Zacchaeus turned out though to be a great man of faith, an example to all of us of how truly following Jesus looks. **But Zacchaeus stood up and said to the Lord, "Look, Lord! Here and now I give half of my possessions to the poor, and if I have cheated anybody out of anything, I will pay back four times the amount."** Jesus said to him, **"Today salvation has come to this house, because this man, too, is a son of Abraham."** (Luke 19 :8-10 NIV)

All those who judged Zacchaeus got it wrong.... really wrong. Jesus warns against such thinking. **Do not judge, or you too will be judged. For in the same way you judge others, you will be judged, and with the measure you use, it will be measured to you.** (Matthew 7: 1-2 NIV) There is a person you are most likely to judge wrongly, and you might be surprised when I say this. It is you! You are the one you most often judge, and it is about you that you are likely to make wrong evaluations. You are generally going to judge yourself based on your accomplishments or failures, what people say about you or how they treat you. God told Samuel the prophet that he and everyone else judges others based on what is on the outside, God instead judges based on what is within. We tend to do that about ourselves too. Even though we know our own thoughts and motivations, we still tend to judge ourselves by the cover.

There is a frequently misunderstood comment made by the Apostle Paul that needs to be examined closely. **I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.** (Philippians 4: 13 NKJV) What is often forgotten or even ignored by most who have put their faith in Christ is the dynamic change that takes place. Christ becomes a part of you, joined to your personality so that you become someone completely new. Many make this huge mistake when they read Philippians 4:13. They take the first part and ignore the rest. Oh, this promise states I can do anything. But that is not exactly what Paul says about you. You cannot just willy nilly do anything you feel like doing. It does say that you can do "all things" but with a very important stipulation. I can do all things through Christ who strengthens or empowers me. God is not telling you that you can just do anything you want. It has to be through Christ that you do it and then yes you can. If it is by the direction and inspiration of Jesus Christ and with Him and you doing what you are doing together, you can do anything He wants to do and by extension what you want to do. Jesus has to inspire it and lead it for it to fit into the "all things" category but it will happen when it is the two of you together doing it.

What if Moses never stretched out his staff over the Red Sea when the Lord told him to do it? He never would have reached his potential. What if David never approached Goliath with his sling and stones when the Lord made it clear this was his battle to fight? He never would have reached his potential. What if the Israelites never crossed the Jordan River when the Lord told them it was time to enter the Promised Land? They never would have reached their potential. What if Peter had never gotten out of the boat as the storm raged over the Sea of Galilee when Jesus urged him to do so? He never would have reached his potential. What if Ruth never left her home in Moab and went to Bethlehem in Israel? She never would have reached her potential. What if Mary never agreed to bear the Christ child when the Lord's angel came to her and she instead had an abortion? She never would have reached her potential. What is it you should be doing now that you have passed on because you don't grasp your potential with Christ living in you and through you? What you accomplish in your life will be decided by your faith in Christ working through you and in you. It is not your intelligence or talent or looks that will accomplish the sort of deeds that will be celebrated forever. It is what you do through Christ who strengthens you and leads you and urges you along. You are told, **'Not by might nor by power, but by my Spirit,' says the Lord Almighty.** (Zechariah 4: 6b NIV)

This is the year for you to begin to do what you were too afraid or too lacking confidence to do before because you could not see what you could be with Jesus living in you. Take a step in faith this year and trust Christ to give you the power, the ability, and the resources you need to accomplish what seems impossible. Be careful not to judge yourself wrongly. Factor in Christ joined with you before you say "yes" or "no" to who you can be and what you can do!