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**Grace Fellowship Church, Port Jervis, New York**

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**Now You See Me, Now You Don't - Spiritual Warfare**

**Selected Scriptures**

**Prayer:** Father, we just thank you for again the privilege that we have still today to gather together openly and freely to worship you, openly and freely to thank you for what you've given to us in this body, in your word, in your Son. And Father today as we unpack and open up part of that gift of your word, we pray again for the presence of your Holy Spirit. May you accompany us, may you open up our eyes and our ears and give us the ability to make this of permanent value, we pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

Well we have spent much of this summer just looking at the idea of God's presence or absence in our lives. And hopefully we have discovered that it's normal to have times where God is very real, very active and very present and other times where he seems distant and missing. And both types of times have to do with God growing faith in our lives. This is the way God defines faith in *Hebrews 11:1*. He says: *Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen.* The conviction of things not seen means just what you might think it means. It means believing

in something that doesn't yield any physical material evidence of its existence. Today that's a very big deal.

Materialist naturalists dominate our culture and that's the view that much of modern science takes that says nothing exists outside of the material world. It says if I can't see, taste, touch, hear or feel something, if it doesn't have length or height or density, then it doesn't exist. It's a bizarre view because so much of our existence is made up of things that are metaphysical rather than physical and applying physical definitions to metaphysical things is useless. I mean you can't see love, you can't taste courage, you can't weigh loyalty or compassion, and they're all things that are not seen and yet everyone knows that those metaphysical things exist. I mean we think this skepticism towards those things that are immaterial is a modern phenomenon but you can trace it all the way back to Thomas in the confrontation that he had with the risen Lord Jesus. This is *John 20:24*. It says: *Now Thomas, one of the twelve, called the Twin, was not with them when Jesus came. So the other disciples told him, "We have seen the Lord." But he said to them, "Unless I see in his hands the mark of the nails, and place my finger into the mark of the nails, and place my hand into his side, I will never believe."* Thomas is thinking just like a materialist. You see unless he sees, unless he touches the very wounds that he saw inflicted on Jesus, he will never believe. It

says: *Eight days later, his disciples were inside again, and Thomas was with them. Although the doors were locked, Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you." Then he said to Thomas, "Put your finger here, and see my hands; and put out your hand, and place it in my side. Do not disbelieve, but believe." Thomas answered him, "My Lord and my God!"* Well Jesus's response to Thomas sums up God's position on the importance of the conviction of things not seen. This is what he said: *Jesus said to him, "Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed."* Jesus explains that the value of believing in something simply because you've seen it is negligible. He's saying what truly matters is not seeing and still believing, and that's really the difference between the kingdom's view of faith and our understanding of it. I mean everything, everything about our way of understanding shouts seeing is believing and everything about God's way of understanding shouts the opposite: *For we walk by faith and not by sight.*

If God wanted to grow faith in you or me, do you think he would do so more by his presence or by his absence? Well let me give you a hint. For 33 years God walked among us. For the last three years of his life, he lived and worked intimately with twelve disciples growing them in their faith. You could not get a more present and more visible presence than Jesus had. 24 hours a day, seven days a

week. And yet at the end of that time when Jesus desperately needed them the most, their faith failed them all miserably. They all scattered. So much for faith that is seen. What I want us to see and what I think we have seen in the lives of Abraham and Joseph and Paul is that God is always there. He's always present in some way, and yet he sometimes intentionally absents himself from us in order to grow and develop in us the very faith that he defines as the conviction of things not seen. I mean I've labeled this series "Now You See Me, Now You Don't" because it encapsulates the way many of us experience God. And my hope is that you would see this recurring pattern in scripture and perhaps in your own life and sense that God rather than abandoning you is actively growing in you your capacity for faith.

And so far we've seen a number of reasons for why God grows faith in his sheep. I mean, first it's for the advancement of his agenda which is always for our good and his glory, and we saw that in Joseph's life. And the second was to grow in us our understanding of God's sense of timing which is radically different here in the West than it is in the East and we saw that in the life of Abraham. And next was how God is growing us individually through discipline which we saw in the life of Paul.

Well this morning we want to examine "now you see me, now you

don't" through the lens of spiritual warfare, and what better example could we have than the book of Job. There we have the advantage of a split screen view of a battle between heaven and earth. I mean understand, this is an advantage that we have that Job never did, at least until the very end. It's an ongoing account of spiritual warfare that takes place not just in heaven but on earth as well and we're privileged to see both of those worlds unfold in this book. I mean the story starts out with Job having a great deal of "now you see me" moments and they're all wonderful, he's incredibly blessed of God. And Job was an upright, God-fearing man who had seven sons and three daughters and he loved God dearly and God blessed him abundantly until, until this meeting took place in heaven. This is *Job 1:6*. It says: *Now there was a day when the sons of God came to present themselves before the LORD, and Satan also came among them. The LORD said to Satan, "From where have you come?" Satan answered the LORD and said, "From going to and fro on the earth, and from walking up and down on it." And the LORD said to Satan, "Have you considered my servant Job, that there is none like him on the earth, a blameless and upright man, who fears God and turns away from evil?" Then Satan answered the LORD and said, "Does Job fear God for no reason? Have you not put a hedge around him and his house and all that he has, on every side? You have blessed the work of his hands, and his possessions have increased in the land. But stretch out your*

*hand and touch all that he has, and he will curse you to your face." And the LORD said to Satan, "Behold, all that he has is in your hand. Only against him do not stretch out your hand." So Satan went out from the presence of the LORD.*

So God invites us as it were into heaven itself to see this contest as it's unfolding unbeknownst to Job. We see Satan given permission to wreak havoc on Job and his family. Within one day Satan succeeds in taking all of his sheep, all of his camels, all of his servants, all of his property along with all of his children. The blows come in rapid succession all within one day, one after another, each one succeedingly worse until the very end Job is left with no material goods and all of his children all dead. This is *Job 1:20*. It says: *Then Job arose and tore his robe and shaved his head and fell on the ground and worshiped. And he said, "Naked I came from my mother's womb, and naked shall I return. The LORD gave, and the LORD has taken away; blessed be the name of the LORD." In all this Job did not sin or charge God with wrong.*

Now as bad as this is, we all know it gets worse. I mean Job absorbs the brutality of his loss without bitterness or sin and Satan and God had yet another meeting in which Satan challenges God again once again over Job saying that if he was allowed to attack

Job personally, then Job would fold and curse him. Well God again gives Satan permission and things go from bad to worse. This is *Job 2:7: So Satan went out from the presence of the LORD and struck Job with loathsome sores from the sole of his foot to the crown of his head. And he took a piece of broken pottery with which to scrape himself while he sat in the ashes. Then his wife said to him, "Do you still hold fast your integrity? Curse God and die." But he said to her, "You speak as one of the foolish women would speak. Shall we receive good from God, and shall we not receive evil?" In all this Job did not sin with his lips.* Well, how would you like to be the one person who for all time defines bad things happening to good people? I mean of every human who's ever lived, no one compares to Job, I mean not just in the evil that he suffered but in the height that he fell from. People decry Job's wife as vengeful and bitter but I believe she represents exactly what a normal human response would be with such abject horror that not only Job went through but she did as well. She too has lost everything. I mean how could things possibly get worse, I mean, how can you possibly recover from something as awful as this? Better to acknowledge reality and state the obvious that God is worthy not of blessing but of cursing and then just die.

I mean as extreme as that reads it's exactly what goes through our minds when we're experiencing times of great suffering. I mean why

would a God who claims to love us so much that he would die for us allow us to embrace misery such as Job embraced? I mean we're blessed to be given a vision of what takes place literally in heaven but even the vision is disturbing. It looks like a contest between two giant egos, and one belongs to Satan but the other one seems to belong to God. I mean Satan tells God that Job's worship is phony, that it's rooted in what he receives from God, and God's response is to tell Satan do whatever you will, just don't kill him. God seems to sit back and just watch Job wallow in his misery. I mean the whole interchange between Satan and God strikes us as odd. It seems almost casual, like God is on his throne and Satan just kind of strolls up and God says, "Hey, what have you been up to?" And Satan says, "Well, just walking around on the earth." We know that's a lie. We also know that God knew exactly what Satan was up to. Ephesians 2 says Satan isn't just walking, it says he's the prince of the power of the air at work in sons of disobedience which all of us were. *Ephesians 2 says: And you were dead in the trespasses and sins in which you once walked, following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience.*

Satan is always, always actively at work opposing everything of the kingdom of God. Satan would love nothing more than to paint a picture of God and he involved in some kind of game with Job as the

object. I mean Satan makes his claims, God makes his counterclaims and the whole thing looks like a chess game being played out on earth by powers far greater than us who don't really seem to care what's happening. What's actually happening is a man's family has been destroyed, he's been physically afflicted with a hideous disease and heaven seems almost bemused to watching how it turns out. That couldn't be farther from the truth. We know for a fact that Satan is a defeated foe, he's a displaced tyrant who was physically thrown out of heaven to wander around the earth that he speaks about. We also know about a large part of our role here is to be participants in an ongoing battle that takes place between the kingdom of God and the kingdom that Satan has established here on earth.

As John MacArthur puts it: "There is no middle ground, no third option. Everyone is part of God's kingdom, or of Satan's. In the words of Jesus, 'He who is not with Me is against Me; and he who does not gather with Me, scatters' (Luke 11:23). Or as James scathingly declares, 'You adulteresses, do you not know that friendship with the world is hostility toward God? Therefore whoever wishes to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God' (James 4:4).

See this meeting that took place in heaven between God and Satan

was not some kind of genteel social gathering. It was an ongoing part of an ongoing war. Satan was once again challenging God's rule and authority before who we're not really told. And God's response is to call Job front and center as Satan's primary opponent and once again this is for Job's good and God's glory but once again we see the exact same pattern repeated as we've seen in Abraham, Joseph, and Paul. For reasons known to God alone, God chooses not to inform Job of the purpose behind the events that are swirling around him. Quite frankly that offends us, it offends our sensibilities, it offends our understanding. I mean like Abraham, like Joseph, like Paul, we think, God, if you only sat down, if you only just had a moment's chat with Job, if you only told him, "Hey, you are in a cosmic contest between myself and Satan. I'm going to use you to show the depth of my love and power in you and I'm going to demonstrate my ability that I will give you to resist everything that Satan throws at you. It's going to be incredibly difficult but I'll get you through it." If God had done that I don't think anybody would have an issue with the book of Job, but I think we've already established that's not the way God operates. He works in the lives of his saints almost always without telling us what he's doing. And should you be tempted to think God is unfair here, we need to understand three things: Number one, it's God who makes the decisions and choices here; number two, it's God who equips us with all that we need to execute those decisions; and number three,

it's God who so identified with us as we go into battle that he too bears the scars to prove it.

So first we look at these issues with God's choices. Of course the big question is why is it that some believers go through life struggling endlessly with difficulty upon difficulty while others just skate by almost effortlessly? Why does God distribute trials and tribulations so unevenly? Second is our doubts about God's provision. I mean God promises we will not be tempted beyond which we are able and oftentimes particularly looking at Job, that just seems untrue. And thirdly we have a problem with God's identification, I mean, are God and Satan having a chess game at Job's expense? I mean is God just sitting in heaven looking down at the mess that we're all in? Does he really care what Job is going through?

Well let's look at each of these. First let's look at God's choices. So why did God choose Job instead of any of his companions? I mean why was this clearly righteous man who God refers to as blameless, why was he singled out for such horrendous treatment and why would God allow it? I mean this question has lots of relevance for us today. Why is it that God chooses some believers to sail relatively untouched through lives like they live, while others equally loved of God seem to have trials and

struggles piled on relentlessly? Well one thing we do know is that God is very concerned that we understand his right to make those choices along with his right not to disclose why. In Romans 9 Paul is discussing an even weightier question. He's discussing why God chooses some to receive salvation while others he passes by, and God's answer is decidedly unsatisfactory to some. This is what Paul says in *Romans 9:14*. He says: *What shall we say then? Is there injustice on God's part? By no means! For he says to Moses, "I will have mercy on whom I have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I have compassion." So then it depends not on human will or exertion, but on God, who has mercy.* You see one thing that God insists on is that every last person on this planet is entitled not to mercy but to justice. God doesn't owe grace and mercy to anyone. I mean we all know you can beg for mercy but you can't demand it, and those who don't receive it have no case to make as long as what they've received is just. Hence God can say there's no injustice on his part when he bestows grace and mercy on some but not all provided, provided everyone receives justice. That doesn't sit well with us. It doesn't sit well with us because all of us in this culture are hopelessly addicted to the idea of fairness instead of justice. See fairness demands equal shares for everyone but God doesn't owe us fairness, he owes us justice. Webster's dictionary defines "justice" as conformity to truth, fact, or reason. And the truth that we all must conform to is that

the wages of sin is death, and God's justice owes that wage to virtually everyone. Jesus went to the cross to pay the price of that justice for every one of his sheep, and having satisfied justice for his sheep's sin he feels free to give mercy to whom he wishes because he knows that those who refuse that payment will receive justice, and God answers to no one for the choices he makes. I mean Jesus made that crystally clear in a conversation that he had with Peter about the choices that Jesus makes. He told him just like Job that he too was going to be singled out for a severe test. Jesus tells Peter, by the way, you're going to be crucified and Peter's response is to say, well, what's going to happen to him, pointing to John? This is *John 21*. It says: *When Peter saw him, he said to Jesus, "Lord, what about this man?" Jesus said to him, "If it is my will that he remain until I come, what is that to you? You follow me!" So the saying spread abroad among the brothers that this disciple was not to die; yet Jesus did not say to him that he was not to die, but, "If it is my will that he remain until I come, what is that to you?"* That's God's ultimate answer to the question of why Job was singled out as opposed to anyone else. It's the answer that Jesus can give to all of us. What's it to you? I mean I wish I knew how and why God makes his choices but I don't, and I recognize that he reserves that privilege for himself.

Secondly is the question of God's covering or provision for Job. I mean, reading the initial account of God and Satan we think they're simply observers watching the contest unfold and that God is basically saying to Job, "Good luck." Job is left alone to experience the biggest "now you see me, now you don't" moment in history. But that's not what happened because that's not how God operates, and we know that from scripture itself. *1 Corinthians 10:13* says: *No temptation has overtaken you that is not common to man. God is faithful, and he will not let you be tempted beyond your ability, but with the temptation he will also provide the way of escape, that you may be able to endure it.* Well it turns out that Job's friends just may have been that escape. You see one thing we know about Job's friends is that they were well-intentioned enough to sit with them in silence for a full week over the misery that he was in. And trust me, that was the best thing they could have ever done for him. *Job 2:12* says: *And when they saw him from a distance, they did not recognize him. And they raised their voices and wept, and they tore their robes and sprinkled dust on their heads toward heaven. And they sat with him on the ground seven days and seven nights, and no one spoke a word to him, for they saw that his suffering was very great.* Well scripture here is giving the simplest and most effective advice there is for ministering to people who are in great pain. I know people struggle like crazy with this, they say I don't know what to

say, I don't know how to act. I don't think you need to worry about either of those things if you do what Romans 12:15 says we need to do. It simply says -- quote -- "*rejoice with those who rejoice, weep with those who weep.*" Let God speak to hurting people through you.

I've told this story many times before but it bears repeating. Many years ago I had a relationship with my dentist, I mean, I tried to share the gospel with him and he actually listened and he tried to share his understanding of God with me. And neither of us gained much ground on the other until one day he severely injured his back and he was in absolute agony. And even though he didn't buy my gospel at all, he desperately wanted prayer for relief. And his wife called me and said, "Look, he's in terrible shape. He's asking if you would come down and pray with him." I said, sure, I'd be happy, happy to pray with him. So I came down to his house, went into the living room and he was in the back in the bedroom and I walked in and he was panting. He was in so much agony. And I just took one look at him and I burst into tears. And after a while, you know, I prayed with him and I left. And it turned out that weeks later he recovered. And after he fully recovered. It was months later and he had a party and I was at the party and he was with a group of people and he saw me and he made a B-line for me. He came over and he put his arm around me. He's telling

everyone, "This guy cried with me." You think that doesn't mean something to somebody? I mean that's an incredible thing that God gives to anybody. You don't need to have any words. *Weep with those who weep.*

The problems began with Job's friends once they started opening their mouths. See, they were convinced that there was nothing but a one-to-one correspondence between the evil taking place in someone's life and the sin that Job must have committed. So they wound up being adversaries rather than companions and who knows, they may well have been a means of Job's escape from the temptation that he was facing. You see instead of reflecting inward on his misery he was able to defend himself before them, rejecting as simplistic and wrong their attempts to make him out as an evil person simply receiving his just due. Instead what really was happening was that Job was being called front and center to participate in one of the greatest spiritual battles ever undertaken. And he uttered perhaps the single greatest response to the attack of the enemy that any human has ever uttered. See at this point Job is completely fed up with his friends and their empty theology, so he says to them: *Your maxims are proverbs of ashes; your defenses are defenses of clay.* Understand, Job has lost his family, his fortune, his wife, and his health. He's sitting in a pile of ashes covered with boils surrounded by his

former friends who now act as accusers. And then he says this, he says: *"Though he slay me, I will hope in him."* Right then and there Job wasn't just speaking to his accusers, he was speaking to the entire universe across all of space and time who had heard the challenge that Satan had uttered: *Stretch out your hand and touch all that he has and he'll curse you to your face.* That was the challenge. Should Job had been separated from the benefits he found in God, should he find his own person under attack he would surely then curse the God that he used to bless. Well Job found himself in a unique position having had every possible worldly blessing stripped away in the worst possible way, he then just says not just to his adversaries but to Satan himself and all his minions, I don't care if God kills me. I'm not going to stop trusting and hoping in him. Well it effectively shattered to pieces Satan's prediction that he would curse his God.

See the cynic sees the whole challenge between God and Satan as a clash of egos between semi-equals. I see it as an ongoing act of war by a defeated rebel still intent on wreaking havoc on God's creation. God paid Job the supreme compliment of placing his trust in his ability to withstand the attacks in of Satan himself by trusting and relying on the grace of God. I think it was Donald Grey Barnhouse who said at that very moment Satan, who thought he would receive a victorious universal affirmation of his low opinion

of God and his creation, instead what did he get? He got a mouthful of gravel to chew on. And you and I have no idea who the scenario is playing out before, but I suspect it's a lot more than we think. I mean we know it involved the entire angelic host, and that's why in many ways Job is a model for us. You see, God called Job front and center in a war that's been ongoing ever since Satan was thrown out of heaven to land here on earth in the same way that God has called on all of his saints at one time or another to likewise do battle with creatures that are really from another dimension. This is the way that Paul puts it in *Ephesians 6*. He says: *For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places.*

Job is just the most famous wrestler of all time, but he's not alone. I could rattle off the names of a dozen or so other "wrestlers" that I've known through the years but I don't want to single them out or embarrass them. They've been housewives, they've been businessmen, they've been nurses, they've been teachers, construction workers and every other type who God has called on to go front and center right now in the ongoing war against the spiritual forces of evil in heavenly places. And just like Job they've been called on to demonstrate their faith in a

"now you see me, now you don't" mode. It may be sickness or injury, strife, stress or finances that are driving it but almost every Christian I've ever known has at one time or another been called upon by God to engage the spirit world with essentially the same challenge that Job faced. They may not have realized it at the time but all of us believers are actively engaged in a fight against the spiritual forces of evil in heavenly places and the challenge is always the same. The challenge is am I going to trust God when everything around me seems to shout that that trust is crazy. One thing that's helpful to remember, when you're in the midst of that kind of pain and trouble is how precious to God is that kind of faith itself. You see faith in good times is incredibly easy to come by. Faith when you're tempted to simply curse God and die like Job was is a faith wrung from circumstances that would have Satan repeating his challenge all over again:

*Stretch out your hand and touch all that he has and he'll curse you to your face.* Job chose to bless God instead of curse him and when we do likewise, I genuinely believe that a cheer goes up in heaven.

Luke 15 tells us: *"There is joy before the angels of God over one sinner who repents."* I believe there's also abundant joy over us sinners any time we refuse to be tempted by Satan and affirm God's trustworthiness in spite of circumstance. I mean if you can say along with Job, *"Though he slay me, yet I will trust him,"* you have

hit the high note as it were of what faith really means and you have reason to rejoice. What I don't think you realize is that you have given something to God that God finds precious. What else can we give to God? Listen to what *1 Peter* says. It says: *In this you rejoice, though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been grieved by various trials, so that the tested genuineness of your faith -- more precious than gold that perishes though it is tested by fire -- may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ.*

So first we looked at God's choice. I mean God's ultimate answer to the question of why Job was singled out as opposed to anyone else or why you and I might have such wildly different outcomes in our lives is to ask in return like Joseph did: What's it to me? Secondly is God's provision. God recognizes that we are in a war against spiritual forces in dark places and he doesn't just wish us good luck, he promises to provide strength when we need it the most. I've said it often, you don't get boiling oil grace until somebody throws you into boiling oil. Job's ability to resist temptation to curse God and die came from a place other than Job himself, trust me. *1 Corinthians 10* says: *God is faithful, and he will not let you be tempted beyond your ability.* He gives us the grace that we need to resist and triumph over sin. And again *1 Corinthians*: *But with the temptation he will also provide the way*

*of escape, that you may be able to endure it.*

And finally there's God's willing identification with us in this mess of a fallen creation. Here's the key point in all of this. You see, everything that Job went through Jesus went through as well. When God called Job front and center for battle, he never called him to something that God himself wasn't willing to undergo. Job experienced immense physical pain, psychological isolation, abandonment by friends and worst of all a sense of God's abandonment. This is what he said in *Job 23*. It says: *Then Job answered and said: "Today also my complaint is bitter; my hand is heavy on account of my groaning. Oh, that I knew where I might find him, that I might come even to his seat! I would lay my case before him and fill my mouth with arguments. I would know what he would answer me and understand what he would say to me. Would he contend with me in the greatness of his power? No; he would pay attention to me. There an upright man could argue with him, and I would be acquitted forever by my judge. "Behold, I go forward, but he is not there, and backward, but I do not perceive him; on the left hand when he is working, I do not behold him; he turns to the right hand, but I do not see him. But he knows the way that I take; when he has tried me, I shall come out as gold. What he's saying, to encapsulate what he's saying is now you see me, now you don't, and it's now by now so familiar. But listen to what Jesus*

says. He says: *My God, my God, why have you forsaken me? Why are you so far from saving me, from the words of my groaning? O my God, I cry by day, but you do not answer, and by night, but I find no rest.* See, Jesus also experienced immense physical pain, psychological isolation, abandonment by friends and a sense of God's abandonment all to pay the price of our sin so that we could by faith have his righteousness claimed as our own. And he too came out as gold. It says: *Posterity shall serve him; it shall be told of the Lord to the coming generation; they shall come and proclaim his righteousness to a people yet unborn, that he has done it.*

See, the bottom line for us folks is that we are still at war and there still is an ongoing battle between the kingdom of light and the kingdom of darkness and at any moment any one of us can be called front and center to do battle on behalf of the kingdom of light. It may be your finances, it may be your job, your friends, your health, your family or anything else that the enemy chooses to mess with. And sometimes it's a minor skirmish, sometimes it's a full-out battle, sometimes it's literally a matter of life and death. But each time I know three things: Number one, God is sovereignly making his choice to engage us; number two, he promises to equip us; and number three, he has already been there and done that for us. It's our task to keep our eyes focused on King Jesus

who told us in *John 16:33*: "I have said these things to you, that in me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation. But take heart; I have overcome the world." Let's pray.

Father, I just again thank you for Job. I thank you for the example that he is of how to win the spiritual battle. I thank you for how you equipped him and gave him the ability to do just that. And Lord, I just continue to pray that you would equip us when it's front and center time for us to do battle. And I pray this in Jesus name. Amen.