

Keep Your Spiritual Glasses On

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[0:00] Greetings from Heritage Baptist Church and to express our love for you and our appreciation! for your fellowship in the gospel. We thank a great deal of Grace Fellowship Church and! are so thankful to be working together for the advance of God's kingdom. Now, I need for you to watch what I'm going to do.

Because what I'm going to do is critical to what I'm going to say. Here's what I'm going to do. I need to look carefully here before I do this. Okay. Now, I'm going to describe to you what I see.

What I see is really fuzzy. And there are, I think there are men and women out here.

At least I think that's the case. And some of you look okay. Like the people on this row, there's a man, a woman, a woman, a man, and a woman. Did I get that right? Okay. But if I go back about three rows, I don't know. It's really difficult. The colors are all blended together. And even if I squint, I can't tell if what I'm seeing here is head or forehead. I can't tell if the hair belongs here or here. I can't tell if... Okay. Let's see. One, two, three. About four rows back on that side.

If I try to go man, woman, man, woman, I'm not even going to do that. I just... Well, let's see. I could try it. But that would probably be foolish. Okay. There's a little bit of blue back there. There's a little bit of red. There's... It's really difficult. I'm trying to describe to you what I see.

[2:09] And it's hard to put words to what I see because what I see is so fuzzy. But it's what I see. It's what I actually see. It may not be what is there, but it's what I see.

Now, oh, good morning. You look much better than you did just 10 seconds ago. And I did get this row right, didn't I? But past that, I'd have been in hot water. My point is that things are not always as they appear. Things are not always as they appear. Things appear really fuzzy. And I can't tell in the back few rows, whether it's man or woman. I can't tell that. But that's what I see.

That's what I actually see. But now this is what's really there. Now I see clearly because I have my glasses on.

Things are not always as they appear. And that's the idea I want to set before you this morning.

We'll look at that idea expressed in a couple of different ways. Time permitting. Some things appear to be very difficult and dark and hard and cruel and harmful and distressing and painful and miserable and perplexing and troublesome. That's how they appear to us.

And other things appear to be very good, delightful, pleasant, positive, helpful, gratifying, satisfying, enjoyable, advantageous. That's how they appear to us.

[4:01] Now, hopefully you're already thinking of illustrations of both of those principles because they're very common and I'm not going to tell you anything new. I just want to underscore something we're all familiar with that things are not always as they appear.

And we're probably pretty good at enunciating this principle when we're sitting together in Sunday school class. And if I started, give me an illustration of things are not always as they appear.

We could do that. And that would be easy to do when we're sitting here together in an adult Sunday school class. But a Sunday school class is not the test of how well our operating system is working. You know what the operating system of a computer is. It's what's always running in the background. It's always working. It's always doing its thing. And that's what makes the computer do all kinds of other things when you run programs. What we could enunciate sitting together in a Sunday school class is not always a good test of our operating system, of what's always running in the background and is helping to make everything else operate efficiently and properly. It's real life that reveals what our convictions are. It's the reality of everyday living that tests the depth and quality of our convictions and that proves whether our operating system is really functioning well.

We can all say the right thing sitting here. But when you go home and answer the phone and the news is bad, or you go to work on Monday morning and find out that your job is coming to an end

on Tuesday, that's when your real convictions come to the surface. And that's when you can tell if you're looking at things biblically or not.

Hebrews 5.14 talks about having our senses trained to discern good and evil. And there are a couple of interesting words here. The word for senses is the word that we get our English word aesthetics from.

[6:14] And it means the capacity to understand, the faculty for distinguishing the real nature of something. That's what we're talking about here. We're talking about learning to see past the appearance on the surface to the real nature of something and what it actually is.

And the other word here in this text in Hebrews 5.14 is the word we get our English words gymnasium and gymnastics from. He's talking about really rigorous training for our minds so that we learn to discern and to see clearly the way things really are. I need these to see the way things really are.

We need rigorous exercise in this book to see the way things really are. So, we've got to learn to think biblically. David said, from your precepts I get understanding.

The unfolding of your words gives light. It gives understanding to the simple. He prayed, give me understanding according to your word. Those are all from Psalm 119.

This book is what misshape our thinking. You all know that. You know it well. And you understand that we've always got to have the glasses of Scripture on all the time so that we learn to see things clearly. It is so easy to walk by sight.

[7:53] Isn't it? And sometimes it's really hard to walk by faith. When the children of Israel walked by sight as they spied out the promised land, what was their conclusion?

Moses sent the spies into the wilderness and the twelve spies went out and spied out the land and they came back. And what did they say?

There are giants out there. There are... What else was out there? Fortified cities.

Walls. And their conclusion was... What? We can't do this. We can't do this.

How were they walking? By faith or by sight? By sight. They saw the big people. And were there giants in the land?

[8:56] There were some. There were some. Were there walled cities? Yeah, there were some. But how did they look at the giants in the walled cities?

They looked at it like this. Instead of like this. They walked by sight. Not by faith.

And the consequence was 40 years of wandering in the wilderness. It looked impossible. And yes, the city was fortified. And yes, the people were big. Those things were true.

But that was only part of the picture. And when we only take in part of the picture, are we seeing accurately? The answer is... No.

The answer is... When we see only part of the picture, are we seeing accurately? No. Thank you. I thought you'd all fallen asleep. Your eyes are open, but...

[9:55] Do you ever do that? You know? Your eyes are open, but nobody's there. You all are here. It looked impossible. When Peter stepped out of the boat in the storm, he really did walk on the water.

For a few steps. Until he focused on the what? Until he focused on the waves and the wind. And he lost his focus on the Lord Jesus.

He really did walk on the water. But seeing the wind, he became afraid and beginning to sink, he cried out saying, Lord, save me. When he walked by sight, he sank.

Were the winds and the waves real? Yeah, they were. His robe was whipping in the wind. The spray was splashing in his face.

And he was actually walking on the water. Wow! But he very quickly lost his focus on the Savior.

[11:02] And he sank into the waves. The winds and waves were real. They were strong and frightening and powerful. But that was only part of the picture.

The rest of the picture was the stronger power of the Lord Jesus that was so easily eclipsed by the wind and the waves. And so he ceased to see accurately.

Not seeing accurately, that is biblically. Failing to see the whole picture. Failing to take into account all of the factors always leads to difficulty. It's like walking in the dark.

And we've got light. And sometimes we just don't turn on the light. Do we? And when you walk in the dark, what do you do?

You know what I do when I walk in the dark? I generally stub my toe or crack my shin or do something really stupid and painful. And to solve that problem, what do you have to do?

[12:07] All you have to do is turn on the light. Here's the light. Here is the light.

And all we've got to do is turn on the light so that we see. So, things are not always as they appear. Some things appear to be very bad. Many, many common expressions of this idea. How many of you have teenagers? Were you afraid to admit it?

How many of you have children 12 or older? Have they ever said? They've never said this to you. Well, maybe they have said this to you. If they haven't said it right to your face, it has been reported that they have said, my parents are ruining my life. Have your kids ever said that or thought that?

[13:13] My parents are ruining my life. Rules, requirements, narrow-mindedness, their expectations, restrictions, curfews, they are totally ruining my life. That's how it appears to them.

Are you ruining their lives? No, no. Did we ruin your life? Thank you. I'll pay you later for saying that. No. We're protecting them. We're guarding them. We're helping them. We're keeping them on the path. It doesn't look that way to them. Because no other parent on the planet does what you do with them.

They're the only one who's got such parents. You're ruining their lives. But we do the same thing. We say the same thing.

How could this possibly? This disease, this accident, sickness, job loss, flood, drought, fire, tornado, earthquake, disappointment, delay, cancellation, rain.

[14:26] How could this possibly be for my good? How could this possibly be for my good? We don't see it.

We don't see it. We don't see it immediately. And so we say the teenage thing to God. God, you're ruining my life. Hopefully we haven't actually said those words.

Maybe some of us have. We've thought them. What's the use? What's the use? What's the point of living any longer? Everybody would be better off if I were dead.

I have no reason to go on living. Is that an accurate perception of whatever the desperate situation may be?

And the answer is no. Because things are not always as they appear. Let's look at some biblical illustrations of this.

[15:25] Remember Abraham and Sarah. God had promised that he would make a great nation of, at that time, Abram. And that that nation would spring from his seed.

He was going to have children. And the nations would someday be blessed through him. What was the problem? He had no children.

Huh. He had no children. And it didn't look like he was going to have any. That's the way it appeared. It appeared so much that way that Abram said in Genesis 15, O Lord God, what will you give me?

For I continue childless. He'd already promised the blessing of the nations through his seed. But no children. So Abram says, what will you give me?

For I continue childless. And the heir of my house is Eliezer of Damascus, my servant. Behold, you have given me no offspring. And a member of my household will be my heir. That's the way it's got to be, God, because I don't have any children.

[16:28] So Abram took steps to remedy the situation by making arrangements for one of his servants to be his heir. What else could he do? It was obvious, wasn't it?

That he was not having any children. So it appeared. And God's answer to Abram at that point was, No, Abram, this man will not be your heir, but one who shall come forth from your own body.

He will be your heir. God said, No, Abram. It's not going to be your servant. It's going to be your very own son. Then God gave Abram one of the most striking, solemn confirmations of the covenant that he had made with him, as if to confirm beyond doubt that his own son would be his heir.

Remember that really strange ceremony where God told Abram to get all these animals and cut them in half and lay the halves opposite each other, and this smoking torch passed through between the halves?

Remember that really strange thing? You know what that was? God was saying, Abram, if I don't keep my covenant promise to you, may I, the God of heaven and earth, become, as these animals have become, torn asunder, if I don't keep my word to you.

[17:53] Wow. That's very cool. God really meant what he said. And Abram's really struggling here. That was in chapter 15.

Then we come to chapter 16, and it appears that way to Sarah as well, that children are not in their future. 16.1 says, Now Sarai, Abram's wife, had borne him no children. So she acts on what appears to be a certainty that they're not having any kids, and she says, Go into Hagar, and I'll obtain children by her.

He does. And did good or ill come from that? Ill. Trouble. Multiplied trouble came from that.

In Genesis 17, God renews the covenant, complete with the promise of offspring, changed their names. Abram becomes Abraham, father of a multitude, is what the name means.

Father of a multitude. But time is moving on, and Abram looks at the obvious. He's 100 years old. Sarah is 90. He laughed and said, Shall a child be born to a man who is 100 years old?

[19:06] Shall Sarah, who is 90 years old, bear a child? Oh, that Ishmael might live before you. Abram's still walking by sight on this score. Oh, that Ishmael, the son of Hagar, might live before you.

Genesis 18, the Lord appears to Abram and says, This time next year, Sarah will have a son.

Genesis 18, 11 and 12 says, Now Abram and Sarah were old, advanced in years, the way of women had ceased to be with Sarah.

So Sarah laughed to herself, saying, After I'm worn out, and my Lord is old, shall I have pleasure? There was every appearance that they were not going to have children. That's how it appeared. It looked impossible.

But now the rest of the story. Then the Lord took note of Sarah as he had said, and the Lord did for Sarah as he had promised. So Sarah conceived and bore a son to Abraham in his old age, at the appointed time of which God had spoken to him.

[20:23] He called his name Isaac. He circumcised him. Now Abram was 100 years old when his son Isaac was born to him.

And Sarah said, God has made laughter for me. Everyone who hears will laugh with me. And she said, Who would have said to Abram that Sarah would nurse children? Yet I have born him a son in his old age.

What was the reality? 90-year-old Sarah had a baby. That was the reality. What was the appearance?

They are way too old to have kids. It ain't going to happen. What was the reality? They had a baby. And they didn't have a baby like Mary had a baby. Do you understand?

[21:25] They had a baby like everybody else has babies. Wow. Things are not always as they appear. Are they? No, they're not.

Remember the sad, dark, distressing days of the judges. The hallmark of those days was every man did that which was right in his own eyes.

The book of judges is a sordid tale of lawlessness. It's a depressing read. Isn't it? The horrendous things that happen in the book of judges.

Leave us. You read through the book of judges and you come to the end of the book and you're just aghast at the kinds of things that took place. the kinds of sins that were rampant.

And while God occasionally sent a deliverer, a judge, don't they all, don't every one of those judges leave us longing for a judge that is perfect and flawless and righteous altogether?

[22:41] Yeah, they do. It appears, it appears that the light is out. And especially toward the end of the book we wonder if the light will ever come back on because it's so dark.

It appears to be hopeless. But then we read in the opening of the little book of Ruth in the days when the judges ruled.

And what follows in the book of Ruth? But the marvelous story of God saving a pagan Moabite woman and through the gracious kindness of a man who was her kinsman redeemer, he makes her the great grandmother of David the king.

When did that happen? When every appearance was that the lights were out. the lights were out.

And every man did that which was right in his own eyes. But the reality was that there was this laser beam that shined right through the darkness heralding the coming ultimately of Jesus Christ, the greatest judge of all.

[24:02] In the midst of all of that darkness, there's Ruth and Boaz and they have a baby and Ruth is the great grandmother of David, the king.

It appeared that the lights were out. Were they out? No. 2 Kings chapter 6 is a great story and what makes it great is that it's true.

2 Kings chapter 6 the king of Syria is planning all these little raids against the Israelites. But every time he plans a raid, the Israelites are tipped off and the raid fizzles.

And the king gets really, really, really upset. And he rakes all his commanders over the coals.

Which one of you guys is ratting to the king of Israel?

Somebody in my camp is feeding information so that every time I go to launch one of these raids, they know ahead of time that is coming. So he tries to rat out the traitor in his camp.

[25 : 11] But who is it? It's not somebody in his camp. It's the prophet Elisha. And one of his men says to the king, King Elisha knows what you say in your bedroom.

There's the problem. The problem is Elisha. So the solution is easy. Send an army to find Elisha and do away with the guy.

Easy. So they find out where Elisha is. He's in the city of Dothan. The king sends a huge army. Do you think the king was a little concerned about this guy?

I mean, Elisha is how many people? And what does the king send? A whole army. They surround the city of Dothan.

Done deal. We've got him. He's in the net. End of problem. It looked really bad for Elisha.

[26 : 16] Didn't it? Yeah. So, he's surrounded and Elisha's servant gets up early in the morning and about the time he gets the sleep rubbed out of his eyes, he sees the Syrian army.

Now, read the Bible. When you read the Bible, especially these remarkable stories, put yourself in the skin of the people in the story.

Don't just read it from a distance. Become Elisha's servant. Okay? He gets up in the morning, he walks outside. Oh! Oh!

Oh! Oh, no. Oh, no.

Oh, my goodness. He sees the whole army. They're everywhere. They're everywhere. Wow.

[27 : 27] Elisha. Elisha. Elisha. Elisha. Wake up! Be the servant for a minute.

His knees are knocking. He is scared out of his skin. What are we going to do? These are his words.

Alas, my master, what shall we do? How did it appear?

How did it appear? How did it appear to Elisha's servant? End of story. It's over. My servant is toast. That's how it appeared.

My servant, my master. My master is toast. How did it appear? It appeared really, really, really, really bad. Two guys. Elisha and his servant and a whole army.

[28 : 31] Whoa. Elisha comes out and he says, because Elisha is not walking by sight.

He's walking by faith. And walking by faith is not, it's not this blind leap in the dark. Oh, please.

Elisha was walking by firm conviction on the revealed truth of who God is.

That's walking by faith. So Elisha says, do not be afraid. For those who are with us are more than those who are with them.

Huh? Huh? Elisha, would you please open your eyes and look around the city? You said those who are with us are more than those who are with them.

One, two. What do you do? There's 600 guys out there. Elisha, are you okay?

[29 : 44] Elisha, would you open your eyes and see what's out there? And Elisha says, he prayed and said, O Lord, please open his eyes so that he may see.

And the Lord opened the eyes of the young man and he saw, he saw, what do you see? Behold, the mountain was full of horses and chariots of fire all around Elisha.

Way cool. Right? And he saw, he saw, he saw what was really there.

And what was really there was deliverance from God. what he saw when he was standing like this was nothing but trouble.

But when God opened his eyes, he saw what was really there. Oh, that we had eyes to see every day what's really there.

[31 : 05] there. There's so many other examples. You know the story of Joseph well. When his brother sold him into slavery and everything looked bleak. How could good possibly come from his brother's treachery, the lies upon for his wife, and the forgetful cupbearer to Pharaoh who left Joseph languishing in prison?

How could good possibly come from all that stuff? What it did, the disciples with Jesus in the boat during the storm? They appeared to be in grave danger.

They were never in reality more safe. Think about the single most striking example of all. Think about the cross.

How did it look? How did it look? There has never been an event in all of history so pivotal as the event of the cross.

There has never been an event so radically life-changing as the cross. There has never been an event so transforming as the cross. There has never been an event so sin conquering as the cross. [32 : 23] But how did it look when it was happening? It looked like utter failure. It looked like defeat.

Isn't that how the disciples felt? The two on the road to Mass said, we had hoped that it was he who would deliver us.

We had hoped. hoped. We had hoped. We had hoped. Was that hope continuing or did it come to an end? We had hoped. How did it look?

It looked bad. How was it really? The greatest success ever in the history of the world as he accomplished redemption.

Think about the spread of the gospel during the days of the apostle Paul. Three extensive successful missionary journeys that turned the world upside down. And then Paul is thrown into jail in Rome.

[33 : 39] He's imprisoned. Paul is traipsing all over the Roman empire, spreading the gospel. Churches springing up, growing, people being converted, all kinds of things, and then Paul's in jail.

How did it look? How did it look? It looked like somebody put the brakes on the spread of the gospel.

That's how it looked. But what did Paul understand? What did he see? What did he see?

Philippians chapter 2, or I'm sorry, chapter 1.

He said, I want you to know, brothers, that what has happened to me has really served to advance the gospel.

Paul, you're all over the empire, spreading the gospel, gospel, and now you're stuck in a Roman prison, and this is advancing the gospel? You're confined to a jail cell.

[34 : 55] Paul says, I want you to know that this has served, that my circumstances have fallen out for the greater progress of the gospel, so that it's become known throughout the whole imperial guard and all the rest, that my imprisonment is for Christ.

And most of the brothers, having become confident in the Lord by my imprisonment, are much more bold to speak the word of God without fear. You see?

How did it look? How did it look? Paul's in jail. Oh, no. Oh, we're in trouble. The spread of the gospel has suffered a major setback.

Paul says, no, no, no, no, no, no, no, no, no. I want you to know that my circumstances have fallen out for the greater progress of the gospel. That's what really was happening.

When it looked like it was stuck, Paul says, no. it's going even further. You see?

[36 : 05] There may be the appearance of darkness and difficulty and even impossibility of heartache and discouragement and pain of circumstances that could not possibly be good.

And we really do feel those things. Don't misunderstand. The pain is real. The loss is felt. The difficulty is hard.

And the providence sometimes really hurts. But that's not the whole picture.

And that's how it appears to us. but there is a greater reality behind all of those difficult things that is good for God's people.

And if we lose sight of that, we'll say with the servant of Elisha, alas, what shall we do? But if we keep our biblical glasses on so that we see past the appearance, then we can endure and we can even embrace the hard, sometimes hard, providence of God with thanksgiving.

[37 : 33] because we know that God is working all things together for good to those who love Him and are called according to His purpose.

You can flip this principle on its head and see it from the other side. There are lots of things that look really good that are totally absolutely bad. It's what the devil tries to do with sin.

He tries to make it look good and it's really bad. So see it from both sides. The point is we got to walk through this world with our glasses on. We got to see past the surface and this is the doctrine of providence practically applied.

What are God's works of providence? God's works of providence are His most holy, wise, and powerful, preserving, and governing all His creatures and all their actions. And if that's true, then we got to keep the biblical glasses on because things are not always as they appear.

They're better because God is ordering it all for our good and for His glory.

[38 : 49] God let's pray together. Father in heaven, how grateful we are for the reality that You indeed are working all things together for good.

And we pray, Lord, that You'd forgive us for the multitudes of times we've only looked at the surface of things. and we've only seen all the tangled threads on the back of the tapestry and we've forgotten the picture that is on the front.

So, Lord, help us to see clearly and help us more and more to delight in and embrace with gladness the doctrine of Your good and wise and gracious and kind and sovereign, though sometimes mysterious, providence.

So, Lord, teach us to see beyond the surface of things because things are not always as they appear and how glad we are for that truth.

Accept our thanks and help us to keep our glasses on. In Jesus' name, Amen.