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

**August 16, 2020**

**Just Outside Our Senses**

**Selected Scriptures**

**Prayer:** *Father, this morning again we are privileged to look into your word, we are privileged to examine the gift that you've given us in addition to the gift of your Son and that is your word. And Lord, this morning I especially want to pray for an extra measure of your Holy Spirit's grace and power as we are going to be concentrating on just what it is your word gives to us, especially in these days, especially in these circumstances. And so this morning I pray for the presence of your Holy Spirit, I pray that you would give us your grace, your peace, your power, your wisdom and the ability to make this of permanent value, and we pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.*

Well, a few years back I was flying somewhere, I don't quite remember where it was but it was a gray and rainy and cold day and so we took off and we began to climb and we wound up climbing right through the clouds to the strangest thing, something that probably most of you who have flown have seen. We climbed right through a very thick cold layer of rain and clouds and there above it all was

this bright blue sky, with sunshine absolutely everywhere. And you could look down and see directly below you the cloud deck that was underneath the plane now. It was the very same cloud deck that I had been looking up at while I was on the ground. And I never realized it, but every single day the sun is always shining and the sky is always blue up there. Sometimes the rain and the clouds get between the sun and the sky when we're on the ground. And what it points out is that there really is two very separate weather realities. On cold, gray and rainy days the reality that we perceive is the one that we see on the ground. However, there's another one, and it's right above it and it's shining on unbeknownst to us. Well you know the same is true on a spiritual level. There's the life that we live on the ground with our senses. We eat, we sleep, we get up, we go to work, we do all the physical things we associate with living this life and right alongside it on the other side of our senses is another separate reality that's just as real and just as invisible as the sun shining above us on a rainy day. You see we tend to define boundaries by our senses. If we can see, hear, taste, touch or smell it, it's real. If we can't, well basically it doesn't exist. And most of our lives are lived this way. We have this great wall between the natural and the supernatural. For those who are outside of the kingdom, the natural really is all there is. It's what you see, is what you get. I mean naturalism is the idea that

nothing else exists outside of the natural forces that you can perceive with your senses. Life is nothing more than what you can sense. You're born, you grow, you reproduce, you grow old, and you die. It's quite simple. It's what our senses tell us, it's natural. But God hates it. He hates it because it's life lived on the very same level as the animals. 2 Peter speaks of those who -- quote -- *"follow the corrupt desire of the sinful nature."* And the scripture says this, it says: *But these, like natural brute beasts made to be caught and destroyed, speak evil of the things they do not understand, and will utterly perish in their own corruption.*

Now it's actually easy to form a false picture of God's displeasure at this brutish lifestyle. You know you hear a brutish lifestyle and immediately you start thinking of Joe six pack or maybe the Hell's Angels, maybe somebody driving around in a beat-up pickup truck terrorizing decent citizens, but that's not it at all. A -- quote -- "brutish lifestyle" is simply a natural existence devoid of any supernatural context. And we've been so shaped and molded by the media to think if we look sophisticated, if we look elegant and we live outside of the kingdom, somehow we're not at all brutish. God's idea of a brute beast is someone who lives to satisfy his senses and drives because that's all that an animal is capable of. And God made us for so much more than that. You know, a person may put all of his energy into his home or his car or his

RV. Well, animals put it into their nests. I mean a person may be consumed with his job. Well, animals as well, they're driven by an instinct to work. Maybe it's relationships. Well, animals as well are driven by instinct to form bonds and mating pairs. They're only doing what comes naturally. But there's a difference with animals. You see, animals are basically preprogrammed biological robots. And if your home, your work, your relationships with others is all there is to life, that is if you're outside the kingdom of God, you can drive a fancy car, you can vacation in the Hamptons, you can work on Wall Street, you can even be married to your same spouse for many, many years and never realize that in God's eyes you're just a sophisticated brute beast. But that's all our culture is really interested in. In fact for many, that is the only goal they have in life. I mean some call it "the good life," some call it "making it," some call it "arriving," but you have to ask yourself arriving at what? God has a simple one-word definition for that model that's held up to us by the media, and that single word is "fool." Listen to what God says in *Luke 12*. He says this: *And he said to them, "Take heed and beware of covetousness, for one's life does not consist in the abundance of the things he possesses." Then he spoke a parable to them, saying: "The ground of a certain rich man yielded plentifully. And he thought within himself, saying, 'What shall I do, since I have no room to store my crops?' So he said, 'I will do this: I will pull*

*down my barns and build greater, and there I will store all my crops and my goods. And I will say to my soul, "Soul, you have many goods laid up for many years; take your ease; eat, drink, and be merry."' But God said to him, 'Fool! This night your soul will be required of you: Then whose will those things be which you have provided?' "So is he who lays up treasure for himself, and is not rich toward God."*

Well, this is a guy who thinks to himself, I own a piece of the rock, I mean, I've got lots of stuff, I've got stuff laid up for many, many years. I mean isn't that what we are all in some ways pushing for? I mean you, too, you can have it all. And God says, "You fool." And he says that because you've looked at life just like animals do. You've narrowed your scope so that you only take in what it is that animals take in. God declares that we were never intended to live that way. I mean that may be fine for beasts but it's wholly unacceptable for creatures who bear the very image of God. Jesus goes on to say in *Luke 12*, he says:

*"Therefore I say to you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat; nor about the body, what you will put on. Life is more than food, and the body is more than clothing. Consider the ravens, for they neither sow nor reap, which have neither storehouse nor barn; and God feeds them. Of how much more value are you than the birds? And which of you by worrying can add one*

*cubit to his stature? If you then are not able to do the least, why are you anxious for the rest? Consider the lilies, how they grow: They neither toil nor spin; and yet I say to you, even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. If then God so clothes the grass, which today is in the field and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, how much more will he clothe you, O you of little faith? And do not seek what you should eat or what you should drink, nor have an anxious mind. For all these things the nations of the world seek after, and your Father knows that you need these things. But seek the kingdom of God, and all these things shall be added to you."*

God says do not set your heart on what you'll wear or what you'll eat or what you'll drink, in fact don't set your heart on stuff at all. But that's so foreign to our way of thinking. I mean everything around us shouts that the only thing that matters is the stuff and how much stuff we can accumulate. You hear Jesus say don't be anxious. And if you're like me, your first reaction is, okay, that may sound fine, but when the rent payment is due and the electric company is sending me its second notice and I'm not thinking about God's provision for sparrows and ravens, I'm thinking I've got bills to pay and God's not writing any checks for me. You know, that's just where Satan, that's where the prince of this world wants you to be, wrapped up, anxious and doubt-filled.

Because there's two great different systems that are at work in this world, there's the natural, which is that which we see, and there's the supernatural, which God expects us to see. And both systems are always operating side by side, just like the sun shining above on a gray, rainy day. I mean it's easy to only operate in the one that we see with our senses but again, that's how animals operate. God demands more of us. I mean there's two kingdoms but there's only one choice. And I've said it many, many times, what Christ said in *Matthew 6*, he said: *"No one can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or else he will be loyal to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and mammon."* So what did Jesus mean by that? How do we flesh that out? I mean that's a question that's been asked for centuries and for centuries the church has debated what it means to be in the world but not of the world. And believe me, God knows all about Orange and Rockland and Shop Rite and the IRS and he expects us to meet our obligations in this world. Jesus said, *"Render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's and to God the things that are God's."* And Paul in 2 Thessalonians 3 stated a general rule for the church, he said: *For even when we were with you, we would give you this command, if anyone is not willing to work, well, let him not eat.* Jesus was a carpenter. I mean the creator and sustainer of the universe was a worker of wood. I guarantee you he worked very, very hard, and he expects us to work

as well.

You know, there's an old saying: He's so heavenly-minded that he is no earthly good. And some of that is true. I mean, we must be in this world but, you know, I have never met anyone who I would consider to be overly Christian. Have you ever met anybody like that? I mean how many folks do you know that are so given to prayer and fasting and worship and fellowship that they neglect their daily obligations? I don't doubt that such people exist, I've just never met one. But what about the opposite? I mean do you know anyone who is so given to work or to relationships or to home that they neglect prayer and fasting and worship and fellowship? I think we'll all agree there's no shortage there and that that applies virtually to all of us. See, we constantly wrestle with the question of commitment. How much is enough? And what does God expect from me? Can I suggest to you that such thinking is doomed to failure. You see when we think like that we're simply trying to figure out how to serve two masters. How do we figure that out? I mean it's the very question that I asked just a few weeks ago, I said is fifty percent world, fifty percent God? I mean is it sixty-forty or seventy-thirty or eighty-twenty? God says if you think like that, you will be devoted to one kingdom while you are despising the other one. That's to say one kingdom will rule your life and the other kingdom is going to be an



intrusion into that life. If the world and mammon rules your life, then the things of God are always going to represent an intrusion into your world. Worship and Bible study, prayer and fellowship, it's always going to be the intrusion that your guilty conscience is forcing you to deal with constantly.

I mean I remember way back when I was a child. I remember my mother forcing me to bring my little brother to my friend's house to play. Even though he was decent to play with and sometimes he could even be fun for a while, that would wear out fairly quickly. I just resented the fact that I had to bring him along. I resented the fact that he was intruding into my life. Now honestly, do you ever feel that the things of the kingdom are intruding in your life? Well, let me suggest a solution. This is what I run into again and again. In fact this is the key to successful Christian living on every level and I've spoken about it again and again. I spent an entire message on it just a few weeks ago. I said I believe the missing link for the church in America is one word and that word is "discipline." However in this case I'm not talking about discipline of body. Today I want to talk about a discipline of mind and spirit. You see, we live on the gray, cold, rainy side of reality and it requires mental and spiritual discipline to focus on the other reality that exists right beyond our senses. It's the reality of the kingdom of God. You see, our question shouldn't be:

What kingdom should I devote myself to. It's really a matter of asking ourselves what kingdom is truly real, because the choice is ours. And that choice will affect how you see everything because one kingdom is reality and the other kingdom is an intrusion on that reality.

In *John 14*, Jesus makes a series of statements to his disciples. Let me just read them, he says: *"Let not your hearts be troubled. Believe in God; believe also in me. In my Father's house are many rooms. If it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you? And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself."* Two very clear very simple statements. But there's also a parenthetical statement that Jesus inserts between those two thoughts. It's a very simple statement about reality from Jesus's perspective. In fact it's a line that we often sing, Jesus said, *"If it were not so, I would have told you."* Jesus is telling us about the kingdom not just because he wants us to feel good or because he feels that we need a goal and a hope to aim at, no, Jesus is telling us that because it is reality. He's telling us there's an actual mansion in heaven with many rooms and that he is actually going there to prepare a place for his disciples for one reason, because it is so. I mean as a matter of fact if it were not so, I would have told you, says Jesus. God tells us in his word all kinds of things are so and he

tells us it's for one simple reason, because it is so, because it's reality. And so we all face a choice and the choice is which kingdom is real? I mean you can rely either on what you see, hear, taste, touch and smell, and you'll be entering into the very same reality the animal kingdom enters into. Or you can rely on God's word to establish his kingdom as the ultimate reality. This is where disciplining your mind and disciplining your spirit becomes absolutely necessary.

*1 Peter says: Therefore, preparing your minds for action, and being sober minded, set your hope fully on the grace that will be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ.* And literally what God is saying here, he says, roll up the sleeves of your mind. God is calling on you and me to discipline our minds to look at this world through faith and not through the same sensory channels that animals do. Anyone can walk by sight. Paul tells us we walk by faith, not by sight. The fact is the kingdom that you accept as real will be the kingdom that dictates how you perceive reality. I mean if this world is your reality, your trust will center only on what your senses tell you, and you will sense those senses and you will perceive them with your heart.

But what if the data that your senses and your heart delivers to you is not trustworthy at all? What if it's been shaped and

modified and packaged by the world in order to sell you something that's just as unreal as the world thinks the kingdom of God is. I mean we know we can trick every single one of our senses into delivering false information to us. In fact we have a whole brand new industry called "virtual reality," and it's based entirely on tricking all of our senses to give us a virtual experience of flying or scuba diving or race car driving, something that seems as real as if it was actually happening and even if you're just sitting in your living room wearing a special pair of glasses. See, the fact is that information that is delivered to us through our senses is capable of being manipulated to move us in a host of different directions, all of which seem real but they're not. On top of that we are told by our culture that we are to judge the information that our senses delivers to us by our hearts. And the problem as you well know as Jeremiah tell us: *The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately sick; who can understand it?* I mean I can't tell you how many people I've heard say, "Just follow your heart," as if your heart is some kind of beacon of truth and reality. It is not. I mean according to God's word it's exactly the opposite. I mean you see your heart is your mindset and the mindset that dominates the world of our senses is anything but neutral. It's anti God. *1 John says: Do not love the world or anything in the world. If anyone loves the world, love for the Father is not in them. For everything in the world --*

*the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life -- comes not from the Father but from the world. The world and its desires pass away, but whoever does the will of God lives forever. You see, you are either for the kingdom of light or knowingly or unknowingly you represent the kingdom of darkness. The natural mindset of the world around us, the world that we take in by our senses is in fact hostile to God. And that's not my opinion, that's God's opinion. He says in Romans 8:7: For the mind that is set on the flesh is hostile to God, for it does not submit to God's law; indeed, it cannot."*

So how can a world system that cannot submit to God's law, that is grounded in hostility toward God ever hope to give us an accurate picture about God and his kingdom? Peter says naturally oriented people -- quote -- *"speak evil of the things they do not understand, and will utterly perish in their own corruption."* And you know twenty-four hours a day every day of the week they march right into our living rooms through our computers and our TVs. Every time you flip on the TV, every time you open up your browser, you're inviting these folks to define your reality. The kingdom of God is reality. The problem is to perceive it you first have to discipline yourself to see with your spirit and not with your senses. Now I admit it sounds nice, it sounds spiritual, but practically speaking what does that mean? This is the key. It is

letting the scripture fill in the blanks of my perception of reality. I'll say that again. It's letting the scripture fill in the blanks of my perception of reality.

Let me give you an example. This is Paul in 2 Corinthians 2. He's speaking about the need to forgive. And he's giving an excellent example of seeing, seeing -- a sense -- with the spirit instead of just with your heart and with your eyes. This is what Paul says in *2 Corinthians 2:10*. He says: *Anyone you forgive, I also forgive. And what have I forgiven -- if there was anything to forgive -- I have forgiven in the sight of Christ for your sake, in order that Satan might not outwit us. For we are not unaware of his schemes.* Do you get that? Do you get what Paul is doing? Paul is literally seeing reality through spiritual eyes. He's seeing through the sight of Christ. These are eyes that see through scripture first and foremost. These are eyes that perceive unforgiveness as a tool of the devil, a scheme hatched by the enemy to outwit the saints. That's kingdom vision. How do you get it? You get it by disciplining your mind. You get it by being transformed by the renewing of your mind. Listen is what Paul says in *Romans 12:2*. He says: *Do not conform to the pattern of this world -- which you take in with your eyes and perceive with your heart -- do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve*

*what God's will is -- his good, pleasing and perfect will.*

You see you renew your mind by replacing its operating system with a brand new upgraded version. The old operating system relied on your senses and your heart to determine what is real. This new operating system is Holy Spirit-empowered and it relies on God's word instead of your senses for its input. Instead of your senses you allow scripture itself to shape your mind, your heart, and your spirit. See, Paul saw the need to forgive the Corinthians because he refused to use the information that his eyes and his ears and his heart were giving him. You see his senses and his heart told him that he was being used and abused horribly by these miserably rotten people. And when we hurt like that, the world tells us what? You need to hurt back. Instead Paul chose to see through Christ's eyes, and that's why he said, *"I have forgiven in the sight of Christ for your sake."*

The same is for how we hear. I mean you can hear with ears that you were born with and you can hear all of the noise that world pumps out, you can hear how important you are, you can hear how wonderful the stuff of the world is, you can hear all the juicy news about everybody else or you can hear with the ears that God gives you. They're very different ears. They hear very different sounds. And again, God makes it very clear that the ears that he

gives are absolutely unique because they perceive the reality of his kingdom. And he goes on to say if you don't belong to him, you literally will be unable to hear with your ears. This is what he said to the Pharisees in *John 8:43*. He said: *"Why is my language not clear to you? Because you are unable to hear what I say. You belong to your father, the devil, and you want to carry out your father's desires. He was a murderer from the beginning, not holding to the truth, for there is no truth in him. When he lies, he speaks his native language, for he is a liar and the father of lies. Yet because I tell the truth, you do not believe me! Can any of you prove me guilty of sin? If I am telling the truth, why don't you believe me? Whoever belongs to God hears what God says. The reason you do not hear is that you do not belong to God."*

How's that for a different sense? I mean God is talking not just about ears, he's talking about disciplined ears. These are ears that are awaiting direction and command, not just information. If you want ears that are tuned in to the kingdom, you have to train those ears first to hear what the word of God is saying. If you want to hear with kingdom hearing, you have to be committed to be obedient, not just to get enough information but to doing what it is that God wants. Listen to what he says in *James 1*. He says: *But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves. For if anyone is a hearer of the word and not a doer, he is like a man who looks intently at his natural face in a*



*mirror. For he looks at himself and goes away and at once forgets what he was like. But the one who looks into the perfect law, the law of liberty, and perseveres, being no hearer who forgets but a doer who acts, he will be blessed in his doing. James is saying to hear with no intention of obeying is like forgetting what you look like the minute you turn your face away from the mirror. And what he's pointing out is an interesting fact and that's our natural senses, they can only supply us with information in real time. The same is true for all of our senses. They're all designed to give us information about the world that we live in. But there's a huge difference between the two kingdoms. You see, both kingdoms use all of our senses to feed us information, they just feed it differently to the two different kingdoms. The kingdom of this world says that your sense is all that you need to perceive reality. The kingdom of light says reality reveals itself to you when all of your senses are transformed by the renewing of your mind and that by scripture itself. Again Romans 12: Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then, then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is -- his good, pleasing and perfect will.*

Well let's look at another sense. God tells us all about taste in Psalm 34. He says: *Taste and see that the Lord is good; blessed is the one who takes refuge in him.* God's actually appealing to

our sense of taste to prove that the kingdom is the ultimate reality. I mean you know how go about tasting something that you might think is bad, you know, somebody gives you, you take a little tiny portion, you just kind of touch it to the tip of your tongue, you don't want it to be yucky? Yeah, but once you find out that that tiny sample is good, then you're willing to take maybe a larger taste. And when that proves to be even better, then you become enthusiastic about the whole thing. Well God is so gracious that he's willing to submit to that tiny tentative taste, knowing that if you genuinely submit to it, you will find nothing but goodness will follow. That's how God gets us to change our taste from this world's perspective to the kingdom's perspective.

God speaks about smell. In *2 Corinthians 2:15* he says: *For we are the aroma of Christ to God among those who are being saved and among those who are perishing, to one a fragrance from death to death, to the other a fragrance from life to life. Who is sufficient for these things?* He says our task in this world is to spread the fragrance of the knowledge of Christ everywhere pointing out to some, this is going to be the sweet smell of life itself, to others it's going to be the stench of death itself. The aroma of Christ is obviously not something you perceive with your nose. It doesn't make it any less real to any other aroma. In fact the aroma of Christ should be far more persuasive and lovely than any

perfume and it should follow us wherever we go, drawing others to the loveliness of Christ.

I've said at the beginning of this message we think if we can see, hear, taste, smell, or touch something that it's real. Hopefully you will see that that's not necessarily the case and that God wants our senses transformed by the renewing of our minds so that we can see with kingdom eyes like Paul did when he forgave those who severely mistreated him for Christ's sake. And we hear words from our master that we literally cannot hear otherwise because we're not part of the kingdom. And because our desire is not for obedience but for information, again, *John 8: "Why is my language not clear to you? Because you are unable to hear what I say. Whoever belongs to God hears what God says. The reason you do not hear is that you do not belong to God."* We taste God's goodness by committing to him, seeing even in small tastes that he's good. We smell of life or death solely on the basis of whether or not the gospel is received, and yet perhaps the most important sense is that last sense, it's the sense of touch. You see, everywhere that Christ went, people longed to touch him. *Luke 6 says: And he came down with them and stood on a level place, with a great crowd of his disciples and a great multitude of people from all Judea and Jerusalem and the seacoast of Tyre and Sidon, who came to hear him and to be healed of their diseases. And those who were troubled*

*with unclean spirits were cured. And all the crowd sought to touch him, for power came out from him and healed them all.*

Folks, that hasn't changed one bit. Lately people still want to touch Christ, they want to feel him, they want to see him real, they want to make him palpable. And whose job do you think that is now? Who is it that makes Christ real, makes him palpable, makes him touchable? It's you and me. *Ephesians 5* says: *Therefore be imitators of God as dear children.* See, we are the ones who are to communicate the kingdom senses to the world. *2 Corinthians 5* says: *Now then, we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God were pleading through us: We implore you on Christ's behalf, be reconciled to God.* You see it's our task to tell the world that what they see is not really what they get, but that the prince of this world has succeeded in foisting the illusion that your senses define what matters in this existence. They do not. In fact it's only in God's word that we learn about this alternate reality, that God himself became one of us and that he lived his life perfectly in order to go to a cross and pay the price of our sin with his blood so that we could by faith exchange our sin for his righteousness and stand before God with his holiness and his righteousness now counted to our account. He loved us enough to die for us. And he wants us not to be taken in by a world seen only through our senses, and he's given his redeemed the task of

representing him to that world. I mean this world sees, hears, smells, tastes and touches God through us. I mean there's two different kingdoms, two different perspectives, two different sets of senses. One kingdom walks by faith, one kingdom walks by sight. One kingdom perceives with the heart in all its wickedness the other perceives with the Spirit of God and the word of God. And again, the question is not which kingdom is more deserving of my effort, actually the question is which kingdom is really real? The one your senses perceive or the one your spirit sees? Are you a naturalist or are you a supernaturalist? See, the world wants you to trust only in your eyes, your ears, your nose, your tongue, your touch. God wants you to trust in his Spirit through his word. And like I said, the old operating system relied on your senses and your heart to determine what is real. This new operating system is Holy Spirit-empowered, it relies on God's word instead of our senses for its input.

See, this mundane existence where you're born, you grow, you reproduce, you grow old and you die, that's only half the story. I mean there's literally a parallel universe that operates right beside ours. It's a world where the sun is always shining and the sky is always blue and there God receives the honor, the power, the wisdom and the glory he deserves. That universe is the real one. The one that we occupy is the one that's going to eventually

disappear. 1 Peter says: "All fresh is like grass and all its glory like the flower of grass. The grass withers, and the flower falls, but the word of the Lord remains forever." See, God wants you in this world with eyes focused on his kingdom. That's what he's always wanted. Hebrews 12 tells us that right now we are surrounded by a great cloud of witnesses who are already living in that kingdom above us. Hebrews 12 says: *Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight, and sin which clings so closely, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us.* These are the folks that live in the real world, the world that surrounds this one. They're the ones that are cheering us on while we are temporarily in this world. See, God makes it very clear there are two competing systems, each claiming to be the ultimate reality, there's the natural world and there's the kingdom of God. I believe in the kingdom because it is reality. Jesus said, "If it were not so, I would have told you." And to quote an old cliché that works perfectly fine for me, "God said it, I believe it and that settles it for me." Let's pray.

*Father, I thank you that there is a world just beyond our senses where the sun is always shining, the sky is always blue and you receive the glory and honor you are due. And that world is populated by all of those who have gone before us who are cheering*

*us on while we're here temporarily in this phony, fake world that will one day pass away. Father, I pray that you would give us the ability to seek, to hone our senses, to renew our minds by your word, by the truth that you've contained therein. And I pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.*