

## **Spiritual Illusions** (When Promises become Problems)

**Text:** Ps 37:1-11

### **Introduction:**

- **Optical Illusion:** A visual image that is deceptive or misleading!
- Optical illusions are specifically designed to fool or mislead the viewer.
- Magician: Performing—secret to most of his tricks is to create an optical illusion that will mislead your attention away from what is really going on!
- MGM studios: drove us on a tour of the backstage sets used to create illusions of reality on the screen.
  - Took us to a huge pool with a scale model of a warship—used wind machines and rain machines to create a storm—Filmed it and showed us what it looked like on screen.
  - Took us backstage—Beth—on Lucille Ball show—looked real!
  - Took us for a drive and saw beautiful homes—but they were just optical illusions designed to mislead the viewer—no backs—just fronts!
- Optical illusions are images or perceptions that are created and designed with the specific purpose of deceiving or misleading the viewer!
- **Satan has created some Spiritual illusions that are designed to deceive and mislead the believer!**
- God has given every believer some tremendous promises in His word!
  - **Romans 8:28** *All things work together for good to them that love God.*
  - **Phil 4:19** *And my God shall supply all your needs according to His riches in glory!*
  - **Mark 11:24** *Therefore I say to you, all things for which you pray and ask, believe that you have received them, and they shall be yours!*
- Here is the illusion that Satan sets up: These promises don't really work!
  - God said that all things work together for good—but the wicked are the ones that seem to prosper while the righteous are afflicted!  
(Why is it that the godly Christian who never smoked a day in his life is the one afflicted with cancer and the wicked go untouched?)
  - God said He would supply all our needs—why are the wicked so prosperous and the believer so needy?  
(Look at reality—usually wicked are the rich and Christians are poor)
- My theology says one thing—and my experience says another thing!
- How am I as a Christian supposed to respond when I see this contradiction?
- How do I avoid being misled by Satan's spiritual illusion?
- How do I make what I believe match up with what I am experiencing?

## I. God's Reminder: 37:1 (Proverbs 24)

*Do not fret because of evildoers, Be not envious toward wrongdoers.*

- God knew that we would respond to Satan's illusion in 1 of 3 ways so He specifically deals with each one of them.

### A. Do not Fret: 37:1 (Proverbs 24:19)

- **Fret:** To become hot—irritated—agitated—frustrated—ANGRY!
- Illust: Some very interesting example of this word in Scripture:
  - Balaam—called by King Balack, the enemy of God's people to put a curse on the Israelites. (Tried everything else—only way to curse)
    - \* Balaam prayed and God said no—King offered money—Balaam kept pestering God and finally he persuaded himself that God had finally given permission to go!
    - \* On the way—already convicted in his heart—a bit fearful—trying to persuade himself that it really was God's will (like some of you)—all of a sudden the donkey stops—goes off into the field—Balaam gets **irritated** and whacks it with his staff!
    - \* A little bit later the donkey sees the angle again and swerves into the wall and crushes Balaam's foot! Now he has progressed beyond irritation—He is agitated and frustrated—whacks it again—harder!
    - \* Third time—Donkey falls to the ground and throws Balaam!
    - \* At this point Balaam has developed our word to the fullness of its meaning—He is mad—red-hot angry! He loses his temper!
    - \* Balaam kicks it—coaxes it—curses it—finally gets so frustrated that he beats it 3x with his staff and the donkey sits up and speaks to him—Hey! Why are you beating me 3 times? Balaam is too angry and frustrated that he doesn't stop to think that the donkey has just spoken to him—he retorts—I am beating you because you are mocking me by refusing to go on—you're just lucky this staff isn't a sword because if it were I would kill you!
- God is saying—When you see the wicked prosper—and you will—you need to watch out! Satan has created an illusion designed to mislead you!
- Don't let their apparent prosperity cause you to become irritated and frustrated—and then downright angry!
- Don't get hot about the prosperity of the wicked—it will lead you to wrong actions!

### B. Do not Envy: 37:1

- Envy—to become jealous—to want what they have!
- They can live as they please and nothing seems to happen!
- God says—don't envy wrongdoers!
- Satan makes a life of sin so attractive! It is an illusion designed to mislead the believer and make him want that same kind of "freedom"
- Some of you here are envious of the lifestyle of the unsaved.
- They do certain things and don't get caught—nothing happens to them—drink, cheat on their wives, watch filthy movies, cheat on their taxes, hedge on their time card—and they make it seem so attractive!
- God says—don't desire or envy that kind of a lifestyle!

### C. Do not Participate: Prov 24:1

*Do not be envious of evil men, nor desire to be with them!*

- A third response that Christians often have to Satan’s illusion is a desire to participate in that which seems too good and exciting!
- If you get angry about the injustice of the situation that appears to be happening before you—then it won’t be long until you are envious.
- When you start to envy the lifestyle of the wicked—it won’t be long until you desire to be with them and participate in their practices!
- God says—STOP! DON’T GET ANGRY—DON’T GET ENVIOUS—AND WHATEVER YOU DO—DON’T PARTICIPATE IN THEIR PRACTICE! DON’T EVEN DESIRE TO BE WITH THEM! STAY AWAY!!

Trans: Why shouldn’t I get angry, envious, or become a participant?

## II. God’s Reasons: 37:2

*For they will wither quickly like the grass, and fade like the green herb.*

- God answers by delineating three sobering reasons why you and I should not get caught up in Satan’s illusion by becoming angry, envious, or participants in the apparent prosperity of the wicked.

### A. Their Practice is Wicked: Prov 24:2

*For their heart studieth destruction and their lips talk of mischief.*

- Heart—entire inner man
- Studieth—to devise, think up, scheme
- Destruction—violence
- Mischief—trouble
- Another translation: *For their minds devise00think up—scheme—violence and their lips talk of trouble!*

### B. Their Future is Bleak: Prov 24:19-20

*Fret not thyself because of evil men, neither be thou envious at the wicked; For there shall be no reward to the evil man; the candle of the wicked shall be put out!*

- *For there will be no future for the evil man; the lamp of the wicked shall be put out!*
- There is absolutely no future ahead for them—Don’t envy this!

### C. Their End is Destruction: Prov 24:20

*The lamp of the wicked shall be put out!*

- *Psalm 37 puts it this way (vs 9-10) For evildoers will be cut off, But those that wait for the Lord, they will inherit the land. Yet a little while and the wicked man will be no more; And you will look carefully for his place, and he will not be there. (Vs 35-40)*

Trans: Well what can I do to sustain myself through this illusion?

## III. God’s Requirements and Rewards: 37-3-11

- God reminds the godly man that the apparent prosperity of the wicked is nothing more than an illusion created by Satan to mislead the Christian and take him away from the place of God’s blessing!
- God exposes the emptiness of Satan’s illusion by reminding the believer of three great spiritual truths or rewards and the requirements for obtaining them!
- Here is how you are to respond when you see the apparent prosperity of the wicked! (If you are not enjoying these benefits—then maybe you are not meeting the requirements)

### A. Remember that God Satisfies of the Godly: 37:3-4

*Trust in the Lord and do good; Dwell in the land and cultivate faithfulness. Delight yourself in the Lord; and He will give you the desires of your heart.*

1. **The Promise:** He will give you the desires of your heart!
2. **The Conditions:**

- **Trust in the Lord and do good:**
  - Believe what God has said and act accordingly—please the Lord!
  - Some of you become angry at the unfairness of your circumstance and you engage in sinful attitudes or activities.
- **Dwell in the Land and cultivate faithfulness:**
  - Don't envy the situation and circumstance of the sinner
  - You continue to faithfully do what God has called you to do!
  - Cultivate—hard work—cultivate faithfulness to the Lord no matter what others seem to have!
- **Delight yourself in the Lord:**
  - Stop desiring and envying the pleasure of the wicked
  - Start making God the object of your desires!

**B. Remember that God promises Security to the Godly: 37:5-6**

*Commit your way to the Lord, Trust also in Him, and He will do it. And He will bring forth your righteousness as the light, and your judgment as the noonday.*

- **Commit:** literally to roll—roll your burdens your lot in life upon the Lord's shoulders instead of on your own.
- **Trust:** have confidence—believe what God has said!
  - God has promised to supply all your needs according to His riches in glory—roll your burdens on Him and believe!
  - God has promised to answer your prayers—roll then on God and believe!
- God has promised that if you will roll your burdens on Him and believe what He has said—THEN HE WILL DO IT!
- Preacher—I have rolled my burdens on the Lord and I have prayed-
  - But He hasn't come through! Problem: We roll our burdens on the Lord and then run around trying to figure out ways to solve them ourselves.
  - Illust: Young man trying to get in Med School. Asked me to help. I called registrar and the Dean of the School—they got busy. Meanwhile—he called the president of the school who called these men and got all over them! As a result—I was scolded!
  - We do that to God—instead of leaving our problems with God—when it gets down to the wire—we don't have faith—day before the bill is due—hours before the deadline for an event to occur we panic and take back the problem instead of leaving it with God! THIS REVEALS SOMETHING VERY SIGNIFICANT—WE REALLY DON'T BELIEVE THAT God IS GOING TO COME THROUGH!

**C. Remember that God guarantees the Stability of the Godly: 37-7-11**

*Rest in the Lord and wait patiently for Him; Do not fret because of him who prospers in his way, because of the man who carries out wicked schemes.*

*Cease from anger, and forsake wrath; Do not fret, it leads only to evildoing.*

*For evildoers will be cut off, but those who wait for the Lord, they will inherit the land.*

*Yet a little while and the wicked man will be no more; And you will look carefully for his place, and he will not be there.*

*But the humble will inherit the land, and will delight themselves in abundant prosperity!*

**1. Promise:** righteous/humble will inherit the land and will delight themselves in abundant prosperity. (stability)

**2. Conditions:**

- **Rest** in the Lord: literally—to be still—to be quiet.  
“Resignation—a quiet mind which rests on God, renouncing all self-help—and submits to the will of God!”

- Wait patiently: calm, quiet patience that is content to let God be God!
  - Many of us wait—but we are not still or quiet—we are frantically trying to do everything in our power to work out the situation to our advantage!
  - Many of us wait—but our wait is certainly not patient!
  - Little boy waiting for school to get out—frustrated—wiggly
  - Husband waiting for his wife—sighs, groans, grumbles
  - That is how many of us wait on God!

### Conclusion:

- How do you make your theology fit your experience?
- How do you see through Satan's optical illusion?
- By refusing to get angry, envious, or becoming a participant!
- By trusting God and doing good!
- By cultivating faithful obedience to his life!
- By determining to roll your burdens upon His shoulders and patiently waiting for Him to solve them without your help!
- Why should we do this? Because God makes 2 specific promises!
  1. He will reward the righteous!
  2. He will judge the wicked!
- Illust: Remember I told you about MGM? Backstage tour—saw some houses that were absolutely gorgeous! Very expensive looking!
- When we turned and went down the next street we saw the backs of those fabulous homes—just frames—nothing more than an empty shell!
- That is exactly what some of you here are desiring!
- You desperately want what the wicked seem to enjoy—but when you finally get it you will find that it is nothing more than an illusion—an empty shell!
  
- Rich man showing his wealth to an old Scottish preacher—“What do you think about all of this wealth preacher?” Preacher remarked—“It sure makes it hard to die!”
- This is what he was saying—This is the only heaven that you will ever know—this is as good as it is ever going to get for you!
- For the believer—this world with all that it has to offer is the only hell that we will ever know!
  
- David puts it this way:
 

*I have seen a violent, wicked man spreading himself like a luxuriant tree in its native soil. Then he passed away, and lo, he was no more; I sought for him, but he could not be found! Mark the blameless man, and behold the upright; for the man of peace will have a posterity.*

*But the transgressors will be altogether destroyed; the posterity of the wicked will be cut off.*

*But the salvation of the righteous is from the Lord; He is their strength in time of trouble. And the Lord helps them and delivers them; He delivers them from the wicked and saves them, because they take refuge in him!*
- Where are you taking refuge? In the Lord—or in the Illusion?