

LAUGHTER

INTRO: If I were to ask you to guess which book of the Bible has the most to say about laughter, upon reflection, many of you would probably say the book of Psalms. And you'd be close. The book of Psalms is 2nd. But I suspect that most of you will be as surprised as I was to learn that the book that has the most to say about laughter is the book of Job.

READ JOB 8:20-21 (Bildad)

I. LAUGHTER IS AN IMPORTANT FACTOR OF HUMAN LIFE.

A. So far as we can determine, human beings are the only creatures that have the capacity to laugh--part of their being made in the image of God.

B. Laughter is a good test of one's character. Tell me what makes a person laugh, & I'll know more about that person than he may care to reveal.

1. If you find it extremely funny when someone is embarrassed or hurting, I know you are lacking in sympathy or empathy.
2. If you are greatly amused by filthy, smutty jokes & foul language, chances are you are less clean & pure than you might want me to assume.
3. If you can laugh at your own follies--if you can laugh with others when they are joyful in victorious living--if you can laugh when it's time to laugh & weep when it's time to weep, Eccl. 3:4, then I know that, at least to a degree, you have a pretty good grip on what is important in life.

II. THE BOOK OF JOB--AND THE BIBLE IN GENERAL--RECOGNIZES SEVERAL KINDS OF LAUGHTER.

A. There is laughter that is spontaneous--an overflow or out-growth of a heart impressed by the goodness of God. That is the laughter of our text, JOB 8:20-21.

Ps 126:1-3, When the LORD brought back the captivity of Zion, we were like those who dream. Then our mouth was filled with laughter, & our tongue with singing. Then they said among the nations, "The LORD has done great things for them." The LORD has done great things for us, & we are glad.

B. There is laughter that is an effective weapon in verbal warfare.

1. Jesus used such humor when He accused the Pharisees of straining a gnat & swallowing a camel, Matt. 23:24. "Blind guides."

2. Job's friends frequently mocked, made fun of Job's defenses.

I am one mocked by his friends... the just and blameless who is ridiculed. (Job 12:4).

Bear with me that I may speak, & after I have spoken, keep mocking. (Job 21:3).

But now they mock at me, men younger than I. (Job 30:1).

3. Zophar accused Job of mocking when he declared his purity.

Should your empty talk make men hold their peace? And when you mock, should no one rebuke you? (Job 11:3). (kidding)

4. Job, in turn, accused his friends of mocking God by their false accusations.

Will it be well when He searches you out? Or can you mock Him as one mocks a man? 13:9

C. There is laughter that eases strain & pours oil on troubled waters. In the past, Job had counseled the weary &

sought to cheer them up with good humor & good advice. Be philosophical, make the best of it.

Men listened to me & waited, & kept silence for my counsel. After I spoke they did not speak again, & my speech dropped upon them [like a refreshing shower]. And they waited for me as for the rain; & they opened their mouths wide as for the spring rain. I smiled on them when they had no confidence, & their depression did not cast down the light of my countenance. I chose out their way [for them], & sat as their chief, & dwelt like a king among his soldiers, like one who comforts mourners. (Job 29:21-25, Amplified O.T.)

D. There is the laughter of faith.

1. Eliphaz had a right idea, but made a wrong application of it.

You shall laugh at destruction & famine & you shall not be afraid of the beasts of the earth.
(Job 5:22)

2. The animals God created figuratively mock danger by being what God created them to be.

[The war horse] mocks at fear & is not frightened, (Job 39:22).

[Of leviathan:] Darts are regarded as straw; He laughs at the threat of javelins. (Job 41:29).

3. In this life, sufferings befall the innocent as well as the guilty, & God sometimes seems to be unconcerned. Faith, & deeper spirituality can help us to understand how temporary these matters are, & how unimportant they are compared to eternity.

[Job:] It is all one thing... He destroys the blameless & the wicked. If the scourge slays suddenly, He laughs at the plight of the

innocent. (Job 9:22-23). See Eccl. 9:2.

For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, is working for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory. (2 Cor. 4:17).

E. There is the laughter of vindication & victory. God & His faithful servants will have "the last laugh."

The righteous see it & are glad, & the innocent laugh at them; "Surely our adversaries are cut down, & the fire consumes their remnant." (Job 22:19-20).

III. THE RIGHT KIND OF LAUGHTER, APPROPRIATE TO THE OCCASION, IS AS GODLY AS SINGING OR PRAYING.

A. I heard of a man who bragged on his preacher: "He never says anything that makes anybody either laugh or cry." I'd say he may as well hang it up & find something else to do.

B. The right kind of laughter is a blessing to the person who laughs, & it spreads sunshine in the lives of others around him. Prov. 17:22. (merry heart...)

C. With God's help, we can laugh in the face of danger & death, that some day in a better land, we can look back upon these temporary distractions, & praise God who "will yet fill your mouth with laughing & your lips with rejoicing. Those who hate you will be clothed with shame, & the dwelling place of the wicked will come to nothing" (Job 8:21-22).

IV. I BELIEVE LUKE 6:21 SUGGESTS THERE WILL BE LAUGHTER IN HEAVEN.

Blessed are you who hunger now, For you shall be filled.
Blessed are you who weep now, For you shall laugh.

Rev 21:4, And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes; there shall be no more death, nor sorrow, nor crying. There shall be no more pain, for the former things have passed away."

Shiloh, Mexia, TX, September 17m 1995
Susquehanna, Marietta, PA, May 23, 1999
Fairfield, PA, February 25, 2001
Bethlehem, PA, April 24, 2004