

## **Introduction**

I'd like to begin by complementing the jokes that Marty told earlier with three statements. The first statement is taken from an accident report. The driver told the police, "**I pulled away from the side of the road, glanced at my mother-in-law, and headed over the embankment.**" I assume that was misspeak, not an actual cause and effect description of what happened. The second statement is something Erma Bombeck said, "**Lord, if you can't make me thin, then make my friends fat.**" The third statement is Winston Churchill's. A political opponent, Lady Astor, said: "**Winston, if you were my husband I would flavor your coffee with poison.**" To which he quickly replied: "**Madam, if I were your husband, I would drink it.**"

Some of you laughed at those statements and I'd make two observations in that regard. First, as the Greek philosopher Aristotle pointed out, human beings are the only creatures who laugh. Second, the human beings who laugh the most are friends of God. Life is for them a laughing matter and that's what I'm going to preach about today.

## **Abraham, Sarah, and God Laughed**

The narratives Timothy read are fascinating. In Genesis 17:15-19, God told Abraham that his wife Sarah and he would bear a son, who would be the ancestor of a great nation. Verse 17 records his reaction. He fell on his face and "**died laughing**" as we say it now. In 18:9-15, Sarah did the same. She overheard God repeat that Abraham and she would bear a son the very next year, and according to verse 13, laughed, just as Abraham had. It was the natural laughter of disbelief on their parts – like our laughter if someone told us the Browns would win the Super Bowl. 17:17 reveals what the joke was. They were both ready for geriatrics, he being 100 years old and she 90.

But Abraham and Sarah changed their tune in 21:6. After their son was born, she joyfully declared that God had made laughter for her and

everyone who knew her. How many of you remember what you did when your first child was born? We can deduce from 21:6 what Abraham and Sarah did. They laughed. But it wasn't the laughter of disbelief as it had been before. It was the laughter of blessing and joy instead.

That explains why God did what He did in 17:15. He memorialized Abraham and Sarah's laughter by giving their son his name, Isaac. Does anyone know what the name Isaac means? It means, "**he laughs.**" It was a constant reminder that God had transformed their laughter of disbelief into the laughter of blessing and joy.

But I suspect it was meant to convey His laughter as well. Laughter is one of the ways that human beings are in His image. It's like something that He Himself does. He, in His own way, laughs and did I'm sure when Isaac was born.

### **Life Is a Laughing Matter**

That teaches us one of the neglected truths of Scripture. 2 Chronicles 20:7 and Isaiah 41:8 call Abraham the "**friend of God.**" So, the truth is that life is a laughing matter to friends of God. That doesn't mean it isn't serious to them. The opposite of seriousness isn't humor. It's triviality. Friends of God recognize and embrace the seriousness of life. But they also recognize and embrace the objective humor that's inherent in it. They're people who laugh, regularly and heartily.

Examples abound. Francis of Assisi and his followers, for instance, were called "**the court jesters of God.**" They were the most fun loving people on earth. America's preacher, Charles Spurgeon was the same way. He said that his favorite sound was laughter and often roared with it from the pulpit. Then there's the giant intellect C.S. Lewis. In his book about Lewis, *Surprised by Laughter*, Terry Lindvall describes him this way: "**He was a man of laughter and surprises, of jokes and joy . . . one bright and compelling feature we can see sparkling in his sunlight and dancing in his moonlight, is laughter.**"

There's a reason those friends of God laughed so much. One of the

fruits of the Spirit is joy. Joy is a state of being that the Holy Spirit creates in friends of God. It has an accompanying set of emotions, two of which are happiness and delight. Those emotions in turn express themselves in various ways, the primary of which is laughter. The more joyful people are, the more they laugh. Which is why those friends of God laughed so much. It was because they were so joyful.

Just as Jesus was. We can infer something about Him. He laughed more than anyone who has ever lived. He was a perfect person, the only one who has ever who had all the fruits of the Holy Spirit to their highest possible degree. He was more joyful, therefore, than anyone. And since the more joyful people are, the more they laugh, He also laughed more than anyone. Bruce Marchiano describes Him correctly this way in his book *In the Footsteps of Jesus*: **"Yes, Jesus laughed! Jesus smiled wider and laughed heartier than any human being who has ever walked the planet."**

We see then that life was a laughing matter to Jesus and those friends of God. And you know what? It should be to us as well. We should laugh as they did - regularly and heartily. Now, since laughter is ultimately an expression of joy, and since joy is the work of the Holy Spirit, it's the work of the Holy Spirit that makes life a laughing matter. But as is usually so, we have a part to play in His work. In this case, our part is to do four things.

### **Quit Taking Ourselves So Seriously**

The first is to lighten up and quit taking ourselves so seriously.

I'd like to compare two words, **"humor"** and **"humble."** Notice the common letters - **"h-u-m."** That shows that humor and humble share a common etymological root, **"h-u-m-u-s."** Ancients considered humus to be the rich dark soil from which God made man. So, the origins of both words are buried in the basic elements of the earth.

That implies that the things themselves, humor and humility, are linked. The jovial and creative friend of God, G. K. Chesterton explained

how they are, **“Laughing has the sort of humanity which has always something of humility.”** Which is exactly why the proud don’t laugh. Laughter is too undignified and they’re too self-important for them to do it. Only the truly humble are at home in the kingdom of divine laughter.

If you and I are the kind of persons who don’t laugh, the problem might be that we’re too proud to. If that’s the case, we need to be humble. We need to lighten up and quit taking ourselves so seriously.

## **Have Fun**

A second thing we do to make life a laughing matter is to have fun. The laughter of fun emanates from our being creatures of the earth. As such, we’re sensitive to sight, sound, smell, taste, and touch. And it’s in experiencing those sensitivities that we have fun. Our world really is a marvel. Consequently, there are countless opportunities to indulge our senses in wholesome and healthy ways that make us laugh.

So, let’s look for and take advantage of those opportunities. Let’s keep our senses open to the sights, sounds, smells, tastes, and touches that make us laugh. We can laugh from the rush of speed and wind, from the splashing of cold-bracing water, from hugging and being hugged, from hearing the pop of a cheek, and so on.

My wife took me to the Antiques in the Woods festival last week. We were in line at a food stand when I saw a little boy by it throwing the little pebbles at a paper cup. He was pretending the cup was a tank and he was shooting it. I suggested though what I thought was a better use for it: **“Get a hand full of pebbles and pour it on the cup. It’ll sound like a machine gun if you do.”** That’s what he did and the sound was so neat that we both laughed when we heard it.

On another occasion, I bathed my dog Isaac and then put him on the ground. He began shaking off the water of course and it splashed all over my grandsons and me – and we had a good laugh that it did.

The fun of fun is that it’s wholesale on this planet. Anyone who keeps his or her senses open to the amazing world we live in will have it.

## Joke Around

There's a third thing we do to make life a laughing matter. Joke around. Jokes are about the incongruities, oddities, and superficial sufferings of life. To joke around means to recognize, appreciate, and act on those things. Unless we're proud, it makes us laugh when we do.

Sometimes, someone in my Sunday school class, I won't say who (Robert Queen), sets up the stand I use to teach higher than I am tall or lower than my waist. Yes, I'm oddly short I admit it, which is what makes it such a good joke.

Joking around is a vital component of fellowship. As Victor Borge astutely observed, "**Laughter is the shortest distance between two people.**" Consider a profound observation in that regard. Joking around, along with the laughter it creates, is one of the first things to go when people are at odds with each other. The genuinely shared laughter of joking around is one of the surest ways for human beings to come together and break the stalemates of life. That makes it a critical part of the supernatural community that the Holy Spirit Himself creates.

## Enjoy Whatever Life Sends Us

We make life a laughing matter by doing a fourth thing. Enjoy whatever life sends us. Whatever life sends us means natural things like rain, hum drum things like going to sleep and getting up, unexpected things like the wind blowing our hat off, unpleasant things like getting splashed with mud, inconvenient things like waiting for our soup to cool, repetitive things like kissing our spouse, and so on.

Ordinary things like those can be one of our best sources of laughter. Children understand that well. That is one of their most appealing qualities in fact – the ability to enjoy whatever life sends them. They see the extraordinary possibilities in the ordinary things life offers. That explains why they laugh so much. Research shows that children through pre-school age laugh approximately 300 times a day.

But adults don't. It isn't only our teeth, hair, and figures we lose as

we get older. It's the laughter of childhood as well. According to *Psychology Today* magazine, the average American adult laughs 15 times a day. Compare the figures yourself – 300 times a day to 15.

That's why we need to start seeing things with the eyes of a child. Start grasping the extraordinary possibilities in the ordinary things life sends us. Does waking up in the morning, for instance, excite you and make you laugh? It did G.K. Chesterton. Listen to what he wrote about waking up: **"We have been dissolved into darkness as we shall be dissolved into dust; our very selves, so far as we know, have been wiped out of the world of living things; and we have been raised alive like Lazarus, and found all our limbs and senses altered, with the coming of the day."** I'm sure that Mary, Martha, Lazarus, and even Jesus himself laughed when He raised him from the dead. So did Chesterton, for the same reasons, when he awakened in the morning.

Be like children and Chesterton. Enjoy whatever life sends you.

## **Conclusion**

So that's our part in the Holy Spirit's work. First, lighten up and quit taking ourselves so seriously. Second, have fun. Third, joke around. And fourth, enjoy whatever life sends us. We need to work with the Holy Spirit in making our life a laughing matter.

Notice I said, "need to."

Charles Spurgeon explained why. He said that laughter makes our load lighter and our Christianity brighter. Teresa of Avila agreed. She said that he or she who laughs, lasts. It's true. A joyful laughing Christian is a contented and contagious Christian.

In addition to that, our laughter pleases God. Martin Luther said it well, **"It is pleasing to the dear God whenever you rejoice or laugh from the bottom of your heart."**

That leaves us then with one of the great ironies of our existence. We make life a serious matter when we make it a laughing matter.

## Joke

A Baptist preacher and his wife decided to get a new dog. But knowing their congregation, they also knew that it had to be a Baptist dog.

So they visited one kennel after another explaining they needed a Baptist dog until finally, they found one.

The owner brought the dog to the pastor and his wife and showed them what it could do. "Fetch the Bible," he commanded. The dog bounded to a bookshelf, scrutinized the books, located the Bible, and brought it back to the owner. "Now find Psalm 23," he commanded. And it did. Then John 3:16. And it did.

Impressed, the pastor and his wife purchased the dog.

Several days later, they invited the elders from their church to see their Baptist dog and showed off what he could do – the same things he had done at the kennel.

The elders were impressed. But then one of them asked, "Can he do regular tricks too?" "I haven't tried yet," the pastor implied.

So, he pointed his finger at the dog and gave a regular command, "Heel." Whereupon the dog jumped up on a chair, placed one paw on the pastor's forehead, and began to howl.

The pastor looked at his wife in shock and declared, "Oh no! He's Pentecostal."

## Joke

His company gave a man named Bob a free ticket to the Super Bowl. When he arrived at the stadium though, he found that his seat was in the last row in the farthest corner of the stadium - closer to the Goodyear Blimp than the field.

But about halfway through the first quarter, Bob noticed an empty seat 10 rows off the field, right on the 50-yard line. So he decided to take a chance. He made his way through the stadium, walked right by the security guards in that area, and arrived at the seat.

"Excuse me sir, is anyone sitting here," he asked the man next to it. "No," he replied, whereupon Bob sat down.

Overjoyed with his seat but wondering how it could possibly be available, he inquired of the man, "This is incredible! Who in their right mind would have a seat like this at the Super Bowl and not use it?"

To which the man answered: "Well, actually, it belongs to me. I was supposed to come with my wife, but she died. In fact, this is the first Super Bowl we haven't sat here together since we got married in 1967."

"Wow, that's really sad," Bob responded, "But still, couldn't you find someone like a relative or close friend to take the seat?"

"No," the man replied, "They're all at the funeral."

