

2-12-23 Sermon#6 Laughter

Let's pray.

Last week we shared Matthew 18:1-3 – The Greatest in the Kingdom of Heaven:

18 At that time the disciples came to Jesus and asked, "Who, then, is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?"² He called a little child to him, and placed the child among them.³ And he said: "Truly I tell you, unless you change and become like little children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven."⁴ Therefore, whoever takes the lowly position of this child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven.⁵ And whoever welcomes one such child in my name welcomes me.

When I think about children, one thing that comes to mind is the joy of laughter. I was thinking about when I was in elementary school. Valentine's day was a time that boys and girls would do some really silly things. In some really awkward ways, we got to think about a girl or boy that we thought was special. Everyone in the class got a little card from us, but usually there was one person that we had a crush on. We wanted to make sure they got something special.

You may remember those little candy hearts with writing on them. We would look at every one of them and try to find just the right one for our favorite.

The Little Rascals was a real popular show when I was a kid, and the re-make was so funny. You may remember Alfalfa. He was always trying to woo Darla and all of his "He-Man-Woman-Hating" friends would attempt to sabotage the relationship. In the remake, the story begins with Spanky, president of the "He-Man Woman-Haters Club". He was with many school-aged boys from around the neighborhood and his best friend, Alfalfa, had been chosen as the driver for the club's prize-winning go-kart, "The Blur" However, when the announcement is made for the driver, Alfalfa is nowhere to be found. The members catch him in the company of Darla – "a girl!" He isn't like his friends because he's in love with her, and unfortunately threatens the very existence of their "boys only" club. The members try their hardest to break them apart, eventually causing their beloved clubhouse to burn down. Darla is mistakenly led to believe that Alfalfa feels ashamed of her, so she turns her attentions to Waldo, the new rich kid whose father is an oil tycoon.

Yesterday, I was hanging out with one of my favorite counselors, and I couldn't help but smile. Nathan, my 8-year old grandson was sharing about an upcoming dance, and he really wanted to invite this little girl, but another boy beat him to it, and the little girl already said yes to that boy. For some reason that was really on his mind, and he's trying to think of plan "B". Like Alfalfa being smitten by Darla, it seems like this is the same with Nathan. Having that giddiness and joy in our hearts towards someone is fun.

Becoming a Christian and living for God doesn't have to be serious all the time.

This week, on Wednesday night, we're going to start a study on the book of Ecclesiastes. One of the challenging points is to understand why it says we should eat, drink and be merry. God is telling us that He wants us to have pleasure, but not in a sinful way.

When we find Christ, we have to face the truth about our sins, and as we read how much Christians are persecuted, it really doesn't seem like a joyful thing. Christians are a minority, and we have to face a world of hate and enmity with God.

We've been looking at how important it is to know God's promises, and we've been trying to find ways to make natural God conversations as a part of our lives.

Last Christmas we lit the Advent candles. For me, it brought tremendous joy. We focused on hope, peace, joy, and love during the four Sundays, and I hope all of you got happiness from that time.

One promise from God is eternity in heaven. Can we have a slice of heaven on earth? Are we in a love affair with Jesus?

Taking God to the lost or creating natural God conversations isn't something that most people intentionally practice, but we can find joy and a little laughter in our walk with Christ.

When people go on vacation, they usually look forward to just getting away from all the day-to-day living. We look forward to seeing new things, and we try to visit places that bring laughter and joy into our days.

We go back to being like a child.

One study I read said that young children, on average, have 300 good belly laughs each day. A typical adult, on the other hand, only experiences 10 per week!

That's scary!

In Proverbs 17:22 it says,

A cheerful heart is good medicine, but a crushed spirit dries up the bones.

Proverbs 12:25 says,

Anxiety weighs down the heart, but a kind word cheers it up.

Proverbs 15:13 says,

A happy heart makes the face cheerful, but heartache crushes the spirit.

If we really took seriously our responsibility to laugh and enjoy life more, maybe our medical bills would decrease! According to medical research, here are just a few personal benefits of laughter:

- Your heart and lungs are stimulated.
- Lower blood pressure.
- You breathe better and it increases your oxygen.
- Stress hormones in your body decrease.
- Gives your body a good workout and burns 78 times more calories as you would by standing still.
- Keeps your brain alert and helps you retain more information.

It's easy to see why the joy of the Lord is not just the strength of our spirit, it's the strength of our mind and body too.

James 1:2 says,

² Consider it pure joy, my brothers and sisters,^[a] whenever you face trials of many kinds.

This is meant for every circumstance. It's for our own physical, mental, and spiritual protection.

I also found this: The Bonding of Laughter.

You've probably heard people say, "Families that pray together, stay together." But what about families that laugh together?

- Families that laugh together enjoy each other more.
- Families that laugh together feel a greater sense of unity and belonging.
- Families that laugh together are building bridges for better relationships!
- Families that laugh together learn to adjust better to life's demands.

When we are laughing together as a family, it's like a slice of heaven on earth.

For Trish and me, when our children were young, we use to have such a great time at our evening meal. Our son Derek always did something to get us laughing. He would get Morgan laughing, and that would lead to everyone else getting into it. Of course, I would have to act all serious, but I couldn't help but laugh myself. Laughing together as individuals and as families is nothing but positive action in an often negative world.

One story that I'd like to share is about when Derek went with me...

Does God have a sense of humor? Does He want us to have joy?

In Nehemiah 8:9-12 after Ezra read the book of the law of Moses, it says,

⁹ Then Nehemiah the governor, Ezra the priest and teacher of the Law, and the Levites who were instructing the people said to them all, “This day is holy to the Lord your God. Do not mourn or weep.” For all the people had been weeping as they listened to the words of the Law. ¹⁰ Nehemiah said, “Go and enjoy choice food and sweet drinks, and send some to those who have nothing prepared. This day is holy to our Lord. Do not grieve, for the joy of the Lord is your strength.” ¹¹ The Levites calmed all the people, saying, “Be still, for this is a holy day. Do not grieve.” ¹² Then all the people went away to eat and drink, to send portions of food and to celebrate with great joy, because they now understood the words that had been made known to them.

When I think about how it says the joy of the Lord is our strength – spirit, soul, and body – it brings a smile to my face.

In an article written by a Dr. Jackson it adds, “There is an anointing that comes from joy that strengthens you when there is no strength.” Laughing from an overflow of joy in the Spirit has tremendous spiritual benefit. When you laugh, you defy the devil’s ability to bring sadness, fear, or despair into your life. You laugh at his lack of authority.

In Proverbs 31, it refers to a wife of noble character and in verse 25 it says,

She is clothed with strength and dignity; she can laugh at the days to come.

Instead of dreading the future, we can “laugh at the days to come”. Dr. Jackson goes on to say that “The best source of laughter is overflowing joy that comes from an intimate relationship with Jesus Christ.” Joy is a big part of pushing the reset button on emotional trauma, but you have to operate it by faith.

One way to do so is through laughter. When you choose to laugh, you choose the joy of the Lord, and that decision positively affects our spirit, soul, and body.

It’s who we are really meant to be in Christ. Laughter is part of emotional healing. Whenever you start to feel sad, despondent, or depressed, make yourself laugh. It is taught that our body doesn’t know whether we are laughing spontaneously or if we were forcing ourselves to laugh.

The benefit is the same either way!

Joy and laughter come into our lives when we let God be God! In the beginning everything God created was good. And laughter was a gift, created before the fall.

Garrison Keillor said, “Some people think it’s difficult to be a Christian and to laugh”, but he thinks it’s the other way around. “God writes a lot of comedy – it’s just that He has so many bad actors.”

For the Christian, the comic spirit is one of new life, feasting, banqueting, eating, drinking, and playing. This paradise is regained where heaven is described to be like a wedding feast or a sumptuous banquet. Laughter, like music, percolates as thanksgiving and praise. Our enjoyment

bubbles up and overflows with gratitude. Our rejoicing should be robust and spontaneous. In fact, our praise is verbal laughter.

Example: Whenever a husband praises his wife or a wife her husband, that praise completes and consummates the joy. Saying that was a good meal or talking while we go for a walk or when the evening comes, brings us joy. The praise is a blessed reminder of our love and laughter.

The ultimate laughter caused from joy is found in reunion. Think of what happens when you unexpectedly see someone you love. This can make us laugh for no particular reason other than seeing them. It's about being reunited.

So our great reunion with God Himself, in heaven, conjures up images of a fun and festive wedding feast, a giant banquet.

Let's pray.