

LIVING WATERS NEWSLETTER

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THE LAUGHTER OF UNBELIEVERS

The word “laugh” in its various forms is used over 40 times in the Bible. Sometimes laughter is right, sometimes it is wrong. Sometimes the fool laughs and sometimes God laughs. Of the 40 times laughter is used, 22 times it refers to laughter in derision and ridicule. The things of God have always been the object of derision and ridicule by unbelievers. James tells the “friends of the world” to “be miserable and mourn and weep; let your laughter be turned into mourning, and your joy to gloom” (James 4:9). The Psalmist says: “Our enemies laugh among themselves” (Psalm 80:6) And Jesus warns: Woe to you who laugh now, for you shall mourn and weep” (Luke 6:25). The unbeliever is said to be a fool (Psalm 14:1) and “as crackling of thorn bushes under a pot, so is the laughter of a fool” (Ecc. 7:6).

Other words used in Scripture comparable to laughter are: *Scoff*: Paul, in the synagogue at Antioch quoted Habakkuk the prophet: “behold, you scoffers...for I am accomplishing a work in your days you will never believe” (Acts 13:41). *Scorn*: “I will execute judgments upon all who scorn them” (Ezk.28:26); “They burned incense on the mountains and scorned Me on the hills...”(Isa. 65:7). *Sneering*: At the crucifixion “the people stood by, looking on, and even the rulers were sneering at him.” (Luke 23:35). *Mock*: “The chief priests, scribes and elders were mocking him” (Matt. 27:41; Mark 15:31 Luke 23:11). On Pentecost some were mocking what was happening and said “these are full of new wine” (Acts 2:13). *Derision*: “For me the word of the Lord has resulted in reproach and derision all day long” (Jer. 20:8). “You will be laughed at and held in derision” (Ezek. 23:32); and *ridicule*: “...otherwise, when he has laid a foundation, and is not able to finish, all who observe it begin to ridicule him (Luke 14:29).

The most notable passage of laughter in the Scripture is the record of the laughter of Sarah and Abraham (Genesis 17:17; 18:9-15; 21:6). When God announced to Abraham that he and Sarah would have a son he was 99 years old and his wife was 90. When God told him this “Abraham fell on his face and laughed, and said in his heart, ‘will a child be born to a man who is one hundred years old? and will Sarah, who is ninety years old, bare a child?’” (Gen. 17:17). When Sarah heard the news by eavesdropping on a conversation the Lord was having with Abraham “she laughed within herself, saying, ‘after I have become old, shall I have pleasure, my lord being old also?’” (Gen. 18:12). Evidently after the truth was accepted and Isaac was born it is said of Sarah: “By faith Sarah herself received ability to conceive, even beyond the proper time of life, since she considered Him faithful who had promised...” (Heb. 11:11). Isaac was named for laughter because that name in Hebrew literally means “he will laugh.”

When Paul recounts this event, he shows the meaning to have significance to the Christian: “Therefore it was reckoned to him as righteousness. Now not for his sake only was it written that ‘it was reckoned to him,’ but for our sake also, to whom it will be reckoned, as those who believe in Him who raised Jesus our Lord

from the dead” (Rom. 4:22-24). This is further seen in verse 17 and 19: “...he believed God, who gives life to the dead...and without becoming weak in faith he contemplated his own body, now as good as dead since he was about a hundred years old, and the deadness of Sarah’s womb...” This story of Abraham and Sarah and Paul’s application is the subject of two Scriptural facts that causes laughter of unbelievers. That is: they laughed at the thought of a miraculous birth (the virgin birth) and the fact that God is a God that gives life to the dead (the resurrection). The scorn and ridicule of the virgin birth is stated very plainly by Hugh Schonfield in his multi-million copy bestseller *The Passover Plot* when he states: “There was nothing peculiar about the birth of Jesus. He was not God’s son and no Virgin Mother bore him. The church it its ancient zeal fathered a myth and became bound to it as dogma. Since Christians largely continue to suppose that their faith stands or falls by the doctrine of the deity of Christ the dogma goes on being sustained to the detriment of what is really significant about the person and contribution of Jesus.” This unbeliever’s scorn and ridicule would be laughable to the Christian were it not read by millions of people and taught in our Seminaries. There have been scores of unbelievers who mock and ridicule the scriptural teaching on the resurrection of the dead. When Paul preached the resurrection of the dead to the Athenian philosophers they called him an “idle babler” and their response was “now when they heard of the resurrection of the dead, some began to sneer”...(Acts 17:18, 32). When Paul appeared before Agrippa and mentioned the resurrection of Christ, “Festus said in a loud voice, ‘Paul you are out of your mind! Your great learning is driving you mad’” (Acts 26:23, 24). An example of modern day sneering at the resurrection by unbelievers who teach in today’s Seminaries is seen in an article by professor J. Spencer Kennard, published in *Journal of Biblical Literature* entitled *The Burial of Jesus*. He wrote: “When striped of supernaturalism the empty tomb may point to a removal of the body from the place where the women had seen it laid and its burial elsewhere. Thus when Jews spread abroad the story that the disciples of Jesus had ‘stolen’ the body, they spoke the truth.”

It is incomprehensible how such unbelievers can mock the revelation of the greatest event in the history of the world by dragging it down into a pit of the depths of unbelief. It may not be audible laughter, but it can only be described as scorn and ridicule to see such unbelievers in high ranking positions in institutions supposedly training men for the ministry of God. Yet it is equally difficult to see the neglect and disregard of the resurrection in modern churches and pulpits today. There is little thought given to the significance of the resurrection which is bypassed by the belief that immortality and eternal life is given to the Christian the moment they die. The resurrection was the central subject of Apostolic preaching. It was not a proclamation of meaningless and empty platitudes and psychological principles that characterizes much preaching in churches today. The Apostle Paul prayed that the Ephesians could know “what is the surpassing greatness of His Power toward us who believe” and this power was “in accordance with the work of the strength of His might which He brought about in Christ, when He raised him from the dead” (Eph. 1:19, 20).

The second instance of the laughter of unbelievers is found in II Chronicles 30. When the Passover feast was given to Israel, the Lord said: "You shall observe this event as an ordinance for you and your children forever...you shall keep this ordinance at its appointed time from year to year." (Exodus 12:24; 13:10). The Passover was one of the most important feasts commanded to Israel. King "Hezekiah sent to all Israel and Judah and wrote letters also to Ephraim and Manasseh, that they should come to the house of the Lord at Jerusalem to celebrate the Passover of the Lord God of Israel...and couriers went throughout all Israel and Judah with letters from the hand of the king according to the command of the king" (II Chron. 30:1, 6) The same chapter states: "So the couriers passed from city to city through the country of Ephraim and Manasseh and as far as Zebulun, but *they laughed them to scorn, and mocked them*" (verse 10). It was laughter and mockery that caused Israel to be sent into captivity for 70 years: "And the Lord, the God of their fathers, sent word to them again and again by his messengers...but they continually *mocked* the messengers of God, despised His words and *scoffed* at His prophets, until there was no remedy" (II Chron. (36:15, 16).

Although keeping the Passover feast was a direct command of God written into His word, when they were told by those who took God's Word seriously, to do what they had been commanded to do they laughed and mocked the messengers. These were tribes of Israel and of all people they should have accepted and obeyed the command of God given in His law. Many times Christians are the target of the laughter and scorn of the world, which is to be expected. But the great tragedy of our day is much laughter and scorn is directed toward messengers who take the Word of God seriously and are the subject to ridicule by other Christians who claim allegiance to the Word of God. This is nothing new. When Jesus confronted the Pharisees, who were the religious elite in that day: They "were listening to all these things and they were scoffing at him" (Luke 16:14). Some churches have as their motto "where the Scriptures speak, we speak and where the Scriptures are silent we are silent," yet they speak loudly on their pet beliefs that are never mentioned in Scripture, and are silent on some of the most important things revealed in the Word. They like to proclaim "we have no creed but Christ" yet they adhere adamantly to the Nicene and Chalcedon creeds. Any effort to call them back to the Word of God is ridiculed and becomes the subject of laughter. Today's laughter of the religious world is not so much outward and visible but it is discernible in its consequences. It is more like the laughter of Sarah who "laughed within herself" (Gen. 18:12) than like the laughter of Abraham who "fell on his face and laughed" (Gen. 17:17). One could sense a smirk if they complained that do-nuts and coffee have become more important than the Lord's Supper. To object that the sermon has become an inspirational talk and repentance and baptism have been declared unnecessary is to trigger "silent" laughter like Sarah's. If one pointed out that psalms, hymns and spiritual songs have been turned into repeated empty one syllable hip-hop words that have no scriptural meaning causes silent derision by the modern up to date church growth advocator. To point out that the minister has become the CEO in his study and a psychiatrist in the pulpit would be hilarious to seeker sensitive prospects.

Jesus endured mockery and laughter from those who rejected him as the son of God even while he was on the cross: "And the

people stood by looking on. And even the rulers were *sneering* at him...and the soldier *mocked* him: (Luke 23:35, 36).

The third account of the laughter of unbelievers is seen in the record of Jesus raising Jarius' daughter from the dead. He was a synagogue official who sent to Jesus asking him to come and heal his daughter. By the time Jesus got to his house they told him his daughter had died. "And they came to the house and he beheld a commotion and people loudly weeping and wailing...he said to them 'Why make a commotion and weep? The child has not died, but is *asleep*.' And they were *laughing* at him" (Mark 5:38, 39). This event is also recorded in Matthew 9:18-24 and Luke 8:49-56. In every passage in the New Testament where Jesus and the Apostles refer to anyone specifically as being dead they call it a *sleep*. Besides the event noted above consider the following Scriptures: Matt. 27:52: "and the tombs were open and many bodies of the saints, who had *fallen asleep* were raised." John 11:11-14: "Our friend Lazarus has *fallen asleep*; but I go that I may awaken him out of *sleep*." Acts 7:60 (Stoning of Stephen) "And having said this, he fell *asleep*." Acts 13:36: "For David, after he had served the purpose of God in his own generation, *fell asleep* and was laid among his fathers and underwent decay." I Corinthians 15: Ver. 6: "After that he appeared to more than five hundred brethren at one time, most of whom remain until now, but some have *fallen asleep*." Ver. 18: "Then those also who have *fallen asleep* in Jesus have perished." Ver. 20: "Christ...the first fruits of those who are *asleep*." Ver. 51: "Behold I show you a mystery, we shall not all *sleep* but we shall be changed." I Thessalonians 4: Ver. 13: "We do not want you to be uniformed about those who are *asleep*." Ver. 14: "For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so God will bring with him those who have *fallen asleep* in Jesus." Ver. 15: We who are alive and remain at the coming of the Lord shall not precede those who have *fallen asleep*." II Peter 3:4: "Since the Fathers *fell asleep* all continue as it was from the beginning of creation." Two passages from the Old Testament: Isa. 26: 19: "You who lie in the dust, *awake* and shout for joy." Dan. 12:2: "And many of those who *sleep* in the dust of the ground will awake, these to everlasting life, but others to disgrace and everlasting contempt."

In spite of these Scriptures if you believe death is a *sleep*, you will encounter silent laughter, mockery and ridicule. A favorite ploy is to call you a "Jehovah's Witness" and a "soul sleeper". In his monthly paper entitled *The Banner of Truth* the editor and chief writer, Fred O. Blakely, tries to refute the above Scriptures by saying the word *sleep* refers only to the body. He states concerning the death of the Christian: "As the natural body 'sleeps' in death, the released spirit exults in the Lord's presence, and partakes of joys beyond our ability to conceive. In death the saint's spirit goes to the intermediate state of Paradise where it has a disembodied relationship with Christ and spirits of the saved. Although this is far superior to anything known here by the spirits of the brethren, it still is not the ultimate joy which God has provided for his children." This quote sounds good and is the belief of many Christians, but it has no basis in Scripture. He cites neither chapter nor verse to back up what he says, perhaps because there is none. The Scriptures say nothing about an "intermediate state of the dead" and nothing about a "disembodied spirit." Like the Pharisees in Jesus' day, religious leaders still laugh when reminded that the dead are *asleep*.