

Comedy in Church

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Preacher: Rev. Murdo M Campbell

- [0 : 0 0] Well, if we could, with the Lord's help and the Lord's enabling this morning, if we could turn back to that portion of Scripture that we read. 1 Samuel chapter 5.
- 1 Samuel chapter 5, page 228 in the Pew Bible, or the church Bible. And we're going to look at the whole chapter, but if we just read again at verse 1.
- 1 Samuel chapter 5, verse 1. When the Philistines captured the ark of God, they brought it from Ebenezer to Ashdod.
- Then the Philistines took the ark of God and brought it into the house of Dagon, and set it up beside Dagon. And so on.
- I'm sure we're all familiar with the saying, laughter is good for the soul, or laughter is the best medicine.
- [1 : 0 3] I'm not sure I would agree with the former that laughter is good for the soul, because there's only one thing that's good for your soul, and that's the Lord. But I would definitely agree with the latter, that laughter is the best medicine.
- Laughter is the best medicine. And I'd agree with it, because it's actually taken from the Bible. The book of Proverbs tells us that a cheerful heart is a good medicine.
- A cheerful heart is a good medicine. So laughter is the best medicine. Laughter is, it's good for you, as we're saying that to the children. And I was reading an article recently in relation to the health benefits of laughing.
- And it said that children, as children, we used to laugh hundreds of times a day. But as adults, life tends to be more serious, and laughter more infrequent.
- And yet laughter strengthens our immune system. Laughter boosts our mood. It diminishes pain. And it protects from the damaging effects of stress. Nothing, the article says, nothing works faster and more dependably to bring your mind and body back into a balance than a good laugh.
- [2 : 1 5] Because humor lightens your burdens, inspires hopes, connects you to others, and keeps you grounded, focused, and alert. Laughter also helps you to release anger and forgive sooner.
- So laughter is the best medicine. In more recent studies, laughter is even said to burn calories. It's said to be good for your heart muscles.
- And it's also said to help you live longer. I'm not sure how true that is, but I'm sure it sounds very, very good. And as many of you know, I love a good laugh.
- I was saying that to the children this morning. We love a good laugh, and I love laughing. And although I always get criticized for my laugh, people say my laugh is like a hyena laughing, which I'm not very happy about.
- But anyway, laughing is good for you. And it's good to have a laugh. And I love laughing. I love having a good joke, or watching a good comedian, or watching a good comedy.

- [3 : 17] But as you know, when it comes to comedians, there are some very funny comedians, and there are also some very filthy comedians. But you know, as we look at this passage this morning in 1 Samuel 5, I don't know, when I read it, it raised the question in my mind. If laughter is a good medicine that's endorsed and encouraged in the Bible, then is it okay to laugh in church? And, well, I've seen you all laughing in church already this morning. Now, I'm not saying that my role and responsibility as a preacher is to act like a clown and tell jokes from a pulpit, because it's not. My role is not to entertain you. My role as a preacher is to encourage us to express our worship to God. But I believe that church should be the best place that we come to on a Sunday morning. Church should be a place that we want to come to. I want you all to come. I want you all to want to come to church and enjoy coming to church, because church should be the place where we live life with one another, where we love one another, and where we also laugh with one another. And I say that, and when I say this, I say this reverently as to what I'm going to say about this passage today, but I also say it realistically. Because what we see in this passage, 1 Samuel 5, is that when the Lord went to the church of the Philistines, He laughed.
- [4 : 48] When the Lord went to the church of the Philistines, He laughed. Because what you see in this chapter, and what we're going to see, is that that day in church, or those couple of days, there was comedy in church, and there was chaos after church. There was comedy in church, and chaos after church. So first of all, we see comedy in church. Comedy in church. Can you believe it? Look at verse 1. When the Philistines captured the ark of God, they brought it from Ebenezer to Ashtod. Then the Philistines took the ark of God and brought it into the house of Dagon, and set it up beside Dagon. And when the people of Ashtod rose early the next day, behold, Dagon had fallen face down on the ground before the ark of the Lord. So they took Dagon and put him back in his place. Now, as you can see, and as you'd expect, the narrative of chapter 5, it just picks up where it left off last time, when we're looking at chapter 4.
- [5 : 52] In the previous chapter, chapter 3 even, we saw that Samuel was called to be a prophet. He was called to be a prophet to faithfully and fearlessly preach and proclaim the Lord's message. And the Lord's message was actually a solemn message, a message of defeat, disaster, and death. A message of defeat, disaster, and death. And that's what we saw in chapter 4. The Israelites were defeated by the Philistines. The ark of the covenant was captured by the Philistines, which was a disaster. And then there was lots and lots of death. There was 34,000 soldiers killed on the field of battle. And also the priests died too. Those corrupt clergy, Hophni and Phinehas, as well as the 98-year-old priest, Eli. He was also killed. The Lord's message to the people of Israel was a solemn message. It was one that would end in defeat, disaster, and death. And with such a solemn message, and with so much sorrow in chapter 4, we see that the stress of that situation, it sent Phinehas, one of the priest's wives, he sent his wife into early labor.
- [7 : 03] And as this mourning mother, you read it towards the end of chapter 4, as she gives birth to her son, her dying words were, call his name Ichabod, because the glory has departed.

Call his name Ichabod, because the glory has departed. And now when we come to chapter 5, we see where the glory departed to. Because we read there in verse 1, when the Philistines captured the ark of God, they brought it from Ebenezer to Ashdod.

Ebenezer was the location of the battlefield, where the Israelites had been defeated by the Philistines. But Ashdod was one of the five cities of the Philistines.

Those five cities, they were known as the Pentapolis. The Pentapolis, the five cities of the Philistines. And when you consider where these five cities of the Philistines were, we're actually very familiar with where they were, for all the wrong reasons.

The Pentapolis of the Philistines was actually located in the southwest coast of Israel. It was in the region of the Gaza Strip, which we're all familiar with at the moment with the news.

[8 : 20] In fact, one of the cities of the Philistines was Gaza City. There was another four cities that I mentioned in this chapter, and other chapters. The city of Gath, Ekron, Ashkelon, and where the ark went, Ashdod.

And as we read, Ashdod was where the Philistines, they carried the ark of the covenant and set it down in the temple of Dagon. Literally, it's not the temple.

You could say it's the house of Dagon, or even the church of Dagon, because it's the place where Dagon resided. It's the place where Dagon was worshipped every morning and every evening by the Philistines.

Now, when you consider Dagon, who this Philistine god was, he was known throughout the ancient world as the father of the gods. Dagon was known as the father of the gods.

He was even said to be the father of the Canaanite god, Baal. And we've heard of Baal because he appears later in the Old Testament. Dagon was the national god of the Philistines.

[9 : 25] And he was a national god because he promised prosperity to all his worshippers. And the interesting thing about Dagon was that because the Pentapolis, because these five cities of the Philistines, because they were all coastal cities, all seaside cities, much of their prosperity would have come from the sea or even trading overseas.

In fact, the name Dagon is Hebrew for fish. The name Dagon is Hebrew for fish. Which is why Dagon, if you ever see a picture of Dagon or if you look up Dagon, he's pictured like a merman.

A merman. I'm sure we're all familiar with the children's Disney movie, The Little Mermaid, where the main characters, they're half human and they're half fish. The upper body is all human.

The lower half is like they have a fin. And that's what Dagon looked like. He was a merman. He was half man and half fish. But the thing about the Ark of the Covenant being placed beside this Philistine god, Dagon, the Ark of the Covenant, it wasn't an idol.

It wasn't like Dagon. Although the Israelites had used the Ark of the Covenant like a lucky charm taking it into the battlefield, the Ark of the Covenant wasn't an idol that was worshipped. The Ark of the Covenant was always a symbol of God's presence.

[10 : 51] It was always a symbol of God's power amongst His people because that's where the glory cloud of the Lord dwelt. It was wherever the Ark of the Covenant was to be found.

God's presence was to be seen. And another film, I suppose, the 1980s Indiana Jones film, Raiders of the Lost Ark, that would give you an idea of what the Ark of the Covenant sort of looked like.

It was this golden box that was, you could say, a meter, over a meter long by half a meter wide and half a meter high. It was a holy box.

It was a box that symbolized and signified God's presence and God's power amongst His people. But the reason the Ark of the...

the reason the Philistines placed the Ark of the Covenant beside Dagon, in Dagon's church, in Dagon's temple, the reason the Ark of the Covenant was taken into the church was to mock God and to make fun of the God of Israel.

[11 : 57] The Philistines wanted to mock the God of Israel because they had defeated the Israelites. They had defeated them on the field of battle in the previous chapter. And so they wanted to show the God of Israel that Dagon, or the God of Israel, was no match for Dagon.

And the Philistines, they proudly placed Dagon to overlook and overshadow the Ark of the Covenant beside Dagon in his church.

But the comedy in church was what happened in verse 3. We read that, and when the people of Ashdod rose early the next day, behold, stop and look at this.

That's what the word behold means. Stop and look at this. Stop and think about this. Dagon had fallen face down on the ground before the Ark of the Lord. So they took Dagon and put him back in his place.

The Philistines, as we said, they had proudly placed and positioned the Ark of the Covenant right beside Dagon because they wanted to mock God. They wanted to mock the God of Israel whom they thought was no match for Dagon.

[13 : 08] But when the Philistines went to church the following morning to worship Dagon at their morning service, you could say there was comedy in church. Dagon was no longer in his place of prominence.

He was no longer proudly overlooking and overshadowing the Ark of the Covenant. No, we're told there that Dagon was prostrate in worship before the Ark of the Covenant. Dagon had fallen over before the Ark of the Covenant.

It was a comedy scene in church. But it wasn't Dagon who was laughing. The Lord was laughing. The Lord was laughing.

And as I said, and I say this reverently and also, but also realistically, because what we see here is actually very serious, very solemn, very sobering scene. And what makes it even more sobering and serious and solemn is that instead of the Philistines walking into church that morning and seeing Dagon face down in front of the Ark of the Covenant, instead of realizing and registering that the Lord was speaking to them, the Philistines just ignored what the Lord was saying.

They ignored that the Lord was speaking to them at all. And they rush in. We read that they went in, they took Dagon and put him back into his place.

[14 : 29] They put him back onto his perch. They rush in and put Dagon back onto the perch and place of prominence so he'll once again be overshadowing and overlooking the Ark of the Covenant.

They ignored the fact that God was speaking to them. Do you see that? The Philistines, they went into church and they ignored the fact that God was speaking to them.

And you look at it and you think, well, there are so many people still like that. They rush in on a Sunday morning and they rush out again. They come into church, they ease their conscience, they tick the box, I was here Sunday morning, 4th of February, and then they go home, they put their idol back onto its perch and its place of prominence and they carry on with their week.

They just ignore what the Lord is speaking and saying to them in church. My friend, it's so solemn. I hope you're not ignoring what the Lord is speaking and saying to you in church today because He's speaking to you from His Word.

Then you read verse 4. When they rose early the next morning, behold, Dagon had fallen face down on the ground before the Ark of the Lord. And the head of Dagon and both His hands were lying cut off on the threshold.

[16 : 02] Only the trunk of Dagon was left to Him. So the following day, the whole sorry saga is repeated again. The following day, the Philistines, they go to church to worship Dagon.

They go to their morning service. Once again, they walk into church, they see Dagon. He's fallen from his perch, from his place of prominence and pride and he's lying prostrate on the floor in worship before the Ark of the Covenant.

But this time, we're told that Dagon's hands and his head were severed, which immediately symbolizes that his power, his hands, it's his power and his position, his head, has been severed from him.

There was comedy in church. It was a comedy scene in Dagon's church. But it's not Dagon who was laughing. The Lord was laughing. The Lord was laughing.

As we said to the children, God doesn't laugh at jokes. God laughs when people make fun of Him. God laughs when people reject Him and refuse to follow Him. God laughs when we choose to worship idols instead of Him.

[17 : 13] And God laughs because He knows that He will have the last laugh. One day we will all know the truth about God and the reality of eternity.

And that's why this chapter is so solemn, so sobering. We've been reminded here that we will one day all know the reality, the truth. We hear the truth from the Bible.

We might question it or wonder about it or even reject it completely. But one day we will all know the truth and the reality of eternity. Because our Bible tells us it's appointed unto man once to die and after that the judgment and that we must all stand before the judgment seat of Christ and give an account.

And I'm not afraid to tell you that because it's the truth. And one day we will all find out that that's the truth whether you believe what I say or not.

And you know that's why God laughs. God laughs because those who mock him and make fun of him they'll find out one day. He laughs at those who reject him and ridicule him.

[18 : 22] He laughs at those who claim and confess that they have the same power and the same position as him. And you know sometimes that statement doesn't sit well with us. It probably doesn't sit well with me either.

The thought of God laughing at someone. But that's what our Bible says. Psalm 37 tells us that the Lord laughs at the wicked because he sees that his day is coming.

It's a solemn verse. The Lord laughs at the wicked because he sees that his day is coming. It's what we're singing in Psalm 2. That when the gods of this world or when the people of this world when they proudly claim and confess that they have prominent positions and power in life over other people he in heaven sits shall laugh the Lord shall scorn them all.

It doesn't sit well with us does it? And yet this is what the Bible says. He in heaven sits shall laugh the Lord shall scorn them all. And although this is a comedy scene where the Lord is laughing in Dagon's church as we said it's very serious very solemn very sobering because we are being reminded here as we were singing in our opening item of praise in Psalm 96 we are being reminded here in 1 Samuel 5 all the other gods are idols dumb which blinded nations fear but our God is the Lord by whom the heavens created were.

And this is what our catechism teaches us. This is what our Bible teaches us. That there is but one only the living and true God. There is but one only the living and true God.

[20 : 10] Therefore the only God to be worshipped is this God. There's only one God to worship and there's only one way to be saved.

There is only one God to worship and only one way to be saved. And my friend it won't be news to you for me to say that Jesus Christ is the only way to be saved.

Because Jesus has declared to us in the gospel he says I am the way the truth and the life no one no one comes to the Father except through me.

And of course many people they don't like that exclusive claim that Jesus is the only way of salvation. they'll say well it doesn't matter what you really believe does it?

As long as you're sincere. It doesn't matter what religion you are as long as you're sincere. Because at the end of the day all that matters is that well that you're a good person and a good neighbor and you have good morals and you're sincere about what you believe.

[21 : 22] I hope nobody thinks like that this morning. Because the truth is you can be sincere but sincerely wrong.

You can be sincere but sincerely wrong. And that's what's emphasized in this passage. The Philistines they were sincere in their worship. They were sincere in their commitment to their God Dagon.

So sincere that they overlooked the fact that he was found prostrate before the Ark of the Covenant. They were so sincere that they just wanted to pick him up put him back on his perch and worship him once again.

They wanted to overlook all these mistakes and all these mysterious events. They were sincere but they were sincerely wrong. They were sincere but sincerely wrong.

And when you reject the God of the Bible in church you know it's no laughing matter. It's no laughing matter. Do you know why? So we see in this chapter it leads to chaos after church.

[22 : 27] That's what we see secondly chaos after church. There was comedy in church but then there was chaos after church. There was chaos after church. Look at verse 6. Look at verse 6.

the hand of the Lord was heavy against the people of Ashdod and he terrified and afflicted them with tumour both in Ashdod and its territory. And when the men of Ashdod saw how things were they said the ark of the God of Israel must not remain with us for his hand is hard against us and against Dagon our God.

So they sent and gathered together all the lords of the Philistines and said what shall we do with the ark of the God of Israel? They answered let the ark of the God of Israel be brought round to Gath.

So they brought the ark of the God of Israel there. You know one of the things about living with little boys in the house and now there are four little boys in the house but the three little boys who talk a lot what they talk about is their well what they laugh at is lots of different things but most of the time what they laugh at is body humour and whatever it is whether it's sights sounds or smells it makes them laugh.

And as you know as we said this chapter is a comedy scene and he in heaven sits shall laugh. The Lord is laughing at Dagon's church. He's laughing at Dagon's congregation.

[23 : 55] He's laughing at their commitment to Dagon to the point and as I said I say this reverently but also realistically to the point that there's body humour. There's body humour.

It's actually very solemn, sobering and serious what's happening here because as I say there's body humour because we read there in verse 6 the hand of the Lord was heavy against the people of Ashdod.

He terrified and afflicted them with tumours both in Ashdod and its territory. So there's body humour there because the tumours that broke out in the Philistines were found to be in a particular place on the body.

Now the ESV it's very polite it just uses the word tumour. If you're using the authorised version it says that the Philistines had emeralds in their secret parts.

But if you translate directly from the Hebrew which is what the Old Testament was written in it uses the very clear and very colourful word hemorrhoids.

[25 : 02] That's the word that's used. Now I don't think I need to give you a detailed description I'm sure you don't want a detailed description either of what hemorrhoids are and where they are to be found. But although it brings a smile to your face it was no laughing matter.

The Philistines they were afflicted with hemorrhoids. The hand of the Lord we're told was heavy upon them. The hand of the Lord was heavy upon them. That word heavy is repeated again and again throughout the chapter.

The word heavy it's a very important word very interesting word because it's the same word that's used throughout the Old Testament to describe God's glory. When God's glory is revealed to the Philistines his hand is heavy on them and when his hand is heavy on them it terrifies them.

And you look at chapter 4 into chapter 5. Ichabod had taken place. The glory had departed from Israel and it came to the Philistines. It came to the city of Ashdod but when God's glory was revealed to the Philistines it terrified them.

They were terrified. The hand of the Lord was heavy against the people of Ashdod and he terrified and afflicted them with tumors both in Ashdod and its territory.

[26 : 18] And you know I think we forget this. I think we forget how holy God is. And I think we forget that God hates sin.

The Philistines were afflicted with hemorrhoids because the hand of the Lord was against him. They were being shown how holy God is and how much God hates sin.

And he hates when we worship idols instead of him. He hates when we put someone or something in first place when he should be there. When we looked at the commandments number one is number one because God needs to be number one.

Number two is number two because God is not number two. And so when God's glory is revealed here it terrifies the Philistines. And what this chapter is showing us is that it's not only a comedy scene where God is laughing.

It's a very serious and solemn and sobering scene because even though the Philistines are discovering now that Dagon their fish God is a dead and dumb idol even though they are seeing that he's dead and dumb the Philistines remain committed to Dagon and reject the Lord.

[27 : 40] They know the truth but they reject the truth and they remain committed to Dagon and follow him.

Look at verse seven. When the men of Ashdod saw how things were they said the ark of the God of Israel must not remain with us. So instead of worshipping him they said he must not remain with us for his hand is hard against us and against Dagon our God.

So despite the fact that Dagon was revealed in church as a dead and dumb idol the Philistines still regard Dagon as our God. Dagon our God.

Dagon our God. Their response was that they refused and rejected the Lord. And what did they do? The ark must not remain with us.

Get him away from here. The ark of the God of Israel must not remain with us. And so the people in the Philistine city of Ashdod were told that they send the ark of the covenant to one of the other five Philistine cities.

- [28 : 44] They send it first to Gath. You read there in verse 8 and 9. And then they send it on to Ekron because the same thing happens. They send they pass the buck one to another. From one city to the next city to the next city. The hand of the Lord was heavy upon them. They were all afflicted and affected with hemorrhoids. God's glory was being revealed. His holiness was being displayed. And they said no we do not want this. it terrified them. And every time they refused and rejected the Lord they saw the power of the Lord and they pushed it away.
- They saw the power of the Lord and they pushed it away. I'll say it again. They saw the power of the Lord and they pushed it away. You fast forward a few thousand years to Jesus' day.
- Jesus demonstrates the glory of God. He displays the glory of God through all his miracles. Through raising the dead, healing the sick, giving the blind their sight, making the deaf hear, the lame walk.
- [29 : 57] He displays the glory of God through all his miracles and then also through all his messages where he preaches the gospel of the kingdom to people. And even though the crowds see the power of God and they see the glory of God through Jesus, they push him away.
- They push him away. And they kept pushing Jesus away until they were all chanting away with him. Crucify him.
- Crucify him. They kept pushing him away. They saw the power of the Lord and they pushed him away.
- And that's what the Philistines did too. What about you? What about you? Are you still pushing Jesus away?
- Are you still pushing Jesus away? It's great to be in church. Great to be here. I love seeing you. But are you still pushing Jesus away?
- [31 : 06] It's no laughing matter. Because you know that God is holy. You know that God hates sin. More than that, you've seen the glory of God being displayed and demonstrated in the lives of his people.
- You've heard the testimony of Christians. Some of you love hearing the testimony of Christians. You've seen the change take place in their lives. You've heard the good news of the gospel week by week.
- You hear all about Jesus as the savior of sinners. You're encouraged and exhorted to come to Christ for salvation. You hear it all week by week and yet you refuse Jesus.
- You reject Jesus. You push him away. I want my Dagon. You pass him off to other people. You say, well, that's okay for you, Murdo.
- It's okay for you if that's what you want. It's not for me. I don't want Jesus in my life. Not today. Not just now. I'm too busy.
- [32 : 16] I've got a home and a family. I've got work. I'm busy. Maybe when I'm older. Maybe when I've had my fun. Maybe when I'm unwell. Maybe when I'm on my deathbed. Maybe, maybe, maybe.
- But my friend, maybe tomorrow. Maybe too late. Maybe tomorrow. Maybe too late.
- That's why the Bible is so loving. And it says to us so lovingly, come now.
- Because now is the accepted time. today. Oh, today is the day of salvation.
- You leave your Dagon today. And you worship the Lord and follow only him. May the Lord bless these thoughts to us.

[33 : 21] Let us pray. O Lord, our gracious God, we give thanks for reminding us in these passages, hidden in the Old Testament, that there are a God who still calls us to repent, who calls us to see our sin, but also to see the wonder of Jesus as our Savior.

And Lord, that we would not push him away, that we would not pass him off to someone else or to something else, but that we would truly seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, knowing then that all other things will be added unto us.

Bless thy truth to us, we plead, all that the seed that is sown, that it would find lodgment in hearts, that they would respond in faith and obedience to God's word and to God himself.

Bless us then, we pray. Bless our time together in fellowship after the service, we pray, Lord, that even as we eat and drink, we would do it all to the glory of God. Keep us then, we pray, go before us, we ask, for we ask it in Jesus' name and for his sake.

Amen. We're going to bring our service to a conclusion by singing the words of Psalm 2.

[34 : 43] We're singing in the Sing Psalms version. We're singing the second half of that Psalm 2. We're picking up where we left off at verse 7 and we're singing down to the end of the Psalm.

Psalm 2, it's on page 2 in the blue psalm book, so it'll be easy to find. Psalm 2 on page 2, we're singing from verse 7. As we said, this is all about Jesus.

Psalm 2 is quoted in the New Testament and it's always quoted in reference to Jesus, that we're not to mock him because the one in heaven laughs at the fact that anybody would mock him, but we're to surrender our lives to him because he is God's son.

He is the king. Verse 7, the king then solemnly declares, I will proclaim the Lord's decree. Today your father I've become, you are my son, he said to me.

Ask me and for heritage, I'll give you nations near and far. You'll break them with an iron rod, and smash them like a potter's jar. Now therefore kings through wisdom find, you judges of the earth, give ear.

[35 : 55] With reverence come and serve the Lord, bow down with joy and trembling fear. Pay homage to the royal son, lest you in wrath a cider thrust, for swiftly can his anger blaze.

Blessed are all who in him trust. Sing these verses of Psalm 2 to God's praise. King and soul have declared shall we proclaim the Lord's decree.

To your father I've become, you are my son, he said to me.

Ask me and for your heritage I'll keep you nations yield and fire.

you'll bring them with a light on wood and smash them like a potter's jar.

[37 : 38] heart. Now there, poor kings, through wisdom find new churches of the earth give the earth.

With where it's come must serve the Lord, but down with joy and trembling fear.

be homage to the royal son, lest you in both aside our thirst, or swiftly cut his hunger blaze, blessed are all who will with him throng.

Grace of all.