

The Last Laugh

by Vance Havner

The Bible teaches that God has the last laugh, and that His people can have joy and laughter in the midst of adversity by trusting in His plan and purposes.

Duration: 28:01

Topics: "Judgment Day"

Description

In this sermon, the preacher reflects on the power of God's message and the certainty of His plan. He encourages listeners who may feel discouraged or ineffective, reminding them that even if their efforts seem small, they are part of God's purpose. The preacher emphasizes the importance of being touched by God and having a personal experience with Him. He also urges believers to view the world through God's perspective and to rely on prayer and watchfulness in the face of worldly challenges. The sermon references biblical stories, such as Jesus healing the blind, and encourages listeners to have faith and persevere in their relationship with God.

Transcript

With me about a subject that I never heard anybody preach about, I don't know whether I can or not, but it's intriguing because there's a lot of it in the Bible, the last laugh. And I read from Psalm 2, Why do the heathen rage and the people imagine a vain thing? The kings of the earth set themselves, and the rulers take counsel together against the Lord and against his anointed, saying, Let us break their bands of thunder and cast away their cords from us. He that sitteth in the heavens shall laugh, and the Lord shall have them in derision.

There is a great deal in this book about laughter, more than you'd think. We do not ordinarily associate the Bible with it, but although we bind the Bible in black, there's not only good cheer, but there's laughter in it of all kinds. We make much of the fact that it's not recorded that our Lord ever laughed.

I think we try to prove too much by that. There are different kinds of laughter in this book for different reasons. The innocent laughter of children, the wholesome laughter of pure joy, good laughter and bad, the laughter of the wicked.

Ecclesiastes 7.6 says, The laughter of fools is like the crackling of thorns under a pot. What an apt description that is. It makes a lot of noise and doesn't last long.

And then, to sinners, let your laughter be turned to mourning. James 4.9. When Hezekiah called the people to repentance and revival, they laughed his messengers to scorn. When Nehemiah and his helpers were trying to rebuild the walls, we read, they laughed us to scorn.

When Jesus stood in the house of Jairus, they laughed him to scorn. And when Paul spoke of that, and some mocked him. There is the laughter of the world.

America is laughing itself to death today. The highest paid folks in practically any business are the comedians, the funny boys. And you hear the laughter of the world everywhere.

I live in motels, and I start down to get my supper, and I have to go by the bar whether I like to or not, and I hear the laughter. And what a holler, crackling of thorns under the pot it is as I go by. The world is trying to forget its trials and tribulations by laughing them off.

I heard of a man who went to a doctor one time and said, I want you to do something for me, I'm on the verge of a nervous breakdown, I think. Oh, the doctor said, you need to brace up, you need to laugh. Go down to the theater, Grimaldi is down there, the great clown, and everybody is holding their sides, laughing.

He said, you don't understand, doctor, I am Grimaldi. So you don't laugh at all. We live in a laughing world, trying to hide its sin and its shame and its guilt and its heartache and its boredom.

Then there is the laughter of the Christians. Sometimes we laugh too much at the wrong thing, but even when we weep, we shall one day laugh when we see the cause of Christ's triumph and truth vindicated. I turn to the 52nd Psalm, and this was written to evil people.

Why boastest thou thyself in mischief, O mighty man? The goodness of God endureth continually. Thy tongue devises mischiefs like a sharp razor working deceitfully. Thou lovest evil more than good, and lying rather than to speak righteousness.

Thou lovest all devouring words, O thou deceitful tongue. God shall likewise destroy thee forever. He shall take thee away and put thee out of thy dwelling place and root thee out of the land of the living.

The righteous also shall see and fear and shall laugh at him. Then in Luke 6, our Lord said in verse 21, Blessed are ye that weep now, for ye shall laugh. Then he turns right around in verse 25 and says, Woe unto you that laugh now, for ye shall weep.

Everything is going to be changed one of these days. The last laugh will be ours, if we are God's people, because the last laugh will be God's. And there is the laughter of the Almighty, Psalm 37.

Speaking of these wicked folks again, the wicked plotteth against the just, and gnasheth upon him with his teeth. Verse 13, The Lord shall laugh at him, for he seeth that his day is coming. Then in Psalm 59, David is praying for deliverance from the wicked.

He had a lot of trouble with the wicked. And finally it says in verse 8, That thou, O Lord, shalt laugh at them, thou shalt have all the heathen in derision. Mr. Khrushchev came over here some years ago, you remember.

And among the things he said was, he quoted the old adage, He who laughs last, laughs best. Now, Mr. Khrushchev read his Bible in earlier years, and I'm afraid he forgot who has the last laugh. It won't be

Khrushchev.

He's gone and he's discovered that by now, and it won't be Communism. God will have the last laugh, because when we belong to him and his cause, we're on the winning side. I think of the man who walked along the ocean beach and watched it.

I never tire of watching the little waves come in and they advance and then they recede. Next time they get a little further and then they recede. And so they go, and I find myself saying with the poet who wrote it in a matchless way, O changeless sea, thy message in changing sprays cast.

Within God's plan of progress it matters not at last how wide the shores of evil, how strong the reefs of sin. The wave may be defeated, but the tide is sure to win. Ah, my friend, if you're discouraged this morning because your poor little wave has played out and you feel like you've been so ineffective, listen! Your little wave may fail, but if you are part of the plan and the purpose of Almighty God, the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the Lord.

As the waters cover the sea, the tide is going to win. I'd like to ask you this morning, are you part of that tide? Now, down in Alabama they have a football team that calls itself the Crimson Tide, and I say to myself a lot because I know everybody knows about that team, I say, I'm talking about another Crimson Tide. I'm talking about one that started on Calvary.

And that tide is certain to win. O changeless sea, that's one thing, and the changing spray is something else. All things work together for good to them who are in that purpose of God.

What happens to the wave is more or less incidental. It's the tide that matters. And that reminds me of something I saw on a church bulletin board the other day.

The lowest ebb is the turn of the tide. Now, you think that went over. You know that's true.

When it gets lowest, that means, look out, the tide is coming. You may be going through a time right now of low ebb. Sometimes God brings us to such a time, and then he sends in the tide.

Darkest hours just before dawn, they used to say. You can't get this many people together without some low ebb folks here this morning. They're down.

If you'll look to the Lord and your case over to him, the tide will come in. And it takes usually the lowest ebb to do it. Woodrow Wilson said in his last years, I'd rather fail in a cause that will one day succeed, than succeed in a cause that will one day fail.

So the Christian can be glad in the face of all that happens, knowing that God has the last laugh. In Acts 4, the early church was beset by the powers that be. They were having a rough time of it.

They reminded God of this same 2 Psalm. They said, in effect, Lord, remember thy word unto thy servants in which thou hast chosen to trust. They didn't quote it, but I'm sure that's what in their hearts them in, that they did quote the 2 Psalm.

They said, Lord, you know what you said in that 2 Psalm. We're counting on you, and we want more boldness. Now, that's what got them in trouble the first time.

And here they are praying for more of the same thing that got them into the trouble they were already in. I'm afraid if it were us today, we'd say, Lord, help me to be a little more diplomatic next time. Maybe I said it the wrong way.

Maybe I rub them the wrong way. Lord, help me to be a diplomat instead of a messenger. Not them.

You find that word boldness 3 times in Acts 4. Verse 13, when they saw the boldness of Peter and John, they took knowledge of them that had been with Jesus. Boldness seen by the world. Verse 29, the church prayed, Grant unto thy servants that with all boldness they may speak thy word.

Boldness sought by the church. And then finally in verse 31, we read that the boldness came. They spake the word of God with boldness supplied by the Spirit.

Ah, there's a great recipe. Seen by the world, sought by the church, supplied by the Spirit. That's the only way you get real boldness.

If ever Christians and churches were beset by the powers of darkness, it is now. If ever the heathen raged and the people imagined a vain thing, if ever the kings of earth stood up and the rulers were gathered against the Lord and his Christ, it is now. The living Bible puts Psalm 2 to this way.

A summit conference of the nations has been called to plot against the Lord and his Messiah Christ, the King. Over in the 17th chapter of Luke, you have some of the signs of our Lord's return, and I think we ought to read right on into the 18th, or not read all that portion, but God gives us a catalog of the marks of the last days, verses 26 to 30 in chapter 18. He tells us what it will be like before he comes back.

It will be as it was in the days of Noah and as it was in the days of Lot. You are very familiar with that passage. The thing that stands out in it is one of the signs will be worldliness.

Why do I say that when I read here all of these characteristics of the last days? Well, what is worldliness? As it was in the days of Noah and Lot, they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, buying and selling, planting and building. What's wrong with that? Nothing, if you keep it in the right place. But if you make that the main thing in your life and live for that, just those things, and that's what most people are living for, that's worldliness.

That's being taken up in the spirit of this age. You listen to people talk anytime in hotel lobbies or wherever, and I'll guarantee you that 90 percent of the conversation is about eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, buying and selling, planting and building. Anytime you own a tribe, that's what it is, because that's their life.

And when a man is occupied with the things of this age, although some of them may be good things in themselves, if he does so to neglect of God, he's just as worldly as some young blade on a dance floor at two in the morning. It's being taken up with the spirit of this age, and that covers a lot more than smoking and gambling, although certainly it includes them. This is a day of secularism.

They used to call it worldliness. Even the preachers don't call it worldliness much anymore. They call it secularism.

That's another word. People don't know what that means, and that lets the preacher off the hook. He can call it secularism.

Somebody has said secularism is the practice of the absence of God. That's a pretty good definition. Notice these folks in the days of Noah and Lot.

It doesn't say they were gambling and drinking liquor and doing all those terrible things. They were just going about normal pursuits without God, and knew not. Then corruption.

In verse 37, they said, Where, Lord, is all this going to be? And he said, Wheresoever the body is, thither will the eagles, the vultures, be gathered together. Not an eagle. Eagles don't feed on carrion.

This is vultures, as Job has in mind, where the slain are, there is she. This world gets so rotten every once in a while that God has to send the vultures of judgment. It happened with Noah's day, with Sodom.

Sodom was so vile and such a corrupt, festering sore that God cauterized it, burned it out. The Canaanites, the fall of Jerusalem, the French Revolution, so corrupt the earth is now that if it weren't for the presence of God's people, the salt of the earth, you might as well try to dam up Niagara Falls with toothpicks as to keep back the flood tides of anarchy that sweep this world. And my Lord didn't say, the Bible doesn't say, as it was in the days of Solomon.

Those were days of wealth and prosperity, but as the days of Sodom. And so it is today. The carcass is being prepared for the vultures.

Time magazine carried an article a couple of years ago, a vulture got out of its cage in the Washington Zoo, the biggest kind of vulture a griffon from over in the old country. Got out and flew around a while all over Washington. I don't know whether they ever caught it or not, never did read.

May have alighted on the Capitol. But I read over in Revelation that God's going to call on the vultures one of these days. And I saw an angel standing in the sun and he cried with a loud voice saying, to all the fowls that fly in the midst of heaven, come and gather yourselves together into the supper of the great God.

Corruption and then faithlessness. When the son of man cometh, shall he find faith on the earth? Spurgeon says it will be so rare that there'll seem to be none. Bishop Riles says it'll be as rare as when only eight were saved in the ark and only four in Sodom.

And Gladstone, England's great prime minister said in his day, the more I look out on the world, I find myself thinking of that verse, when the son of man cometh, shall he find faith on the earth? There are scoffers, of course, who say he isn't coming, there aren't any signs. And every time you see a fellow who says there aren't any signs, you've seen another sign. He's one of them himself.

And you need not be surprised, my Christian friends, that in these last days you will be beset by strange maladies of the body and the mind. You will be the target of the powers of darkness. The devil is out to disable the body and deceive the mind and discourage the spirit.

He tells sinners that they're safe, and he tells Christians that they're lost, and he gets everybody upset and an unexplainable tiredness. I've never preached to as many tired people in all my life as I have in the last ten years. With all these labor-saving devices, I think that's what's done it, maybe.

We're worn out. And you try to read the Bible, and I tell me you didn't have that trouble with television. But when you try to read the Bible, doesn't it happen again and again, it looks like the devil pulls a wind of

shade down over it, and you don't know what you read after you read it, and you have to start back over it all again.

We're living in times like that. And so, my Lord, in the 18th chapter of Luke, told about that unfortunate widow who came to that sour old judge and said, avenge me of my adversary. The church is a widow, and she's awaiting her Lord coming back, and she's beset by the worldliness and beset by the corruption and beset by the faithlessness.

And Jesus said, there's only one way to get through all this mess, pray and think not. Because if you don't pray, you will faint. Watch and pray.

Watch that you may pray and pray that you may watch. Now, the word here is really not avenge. The better word here is vindicate me of my adversary.

The woman wasn't asking to get even. She was asking, Lord, establish the rightness of this thing. And you're asking, God, maybe some of you, why doesn't God do something today? Martha and Mary said when Jesus got down there and he took his good time coming, they sent an SOS and it says he loved them, so he waited two days.

Now, isn't that strange? Wouldn't you have thought he'd gone down there post haste and he took his good time when he got there? They both said if you'd been here, this wouldn't have happened. They were a little out of sorts and a little impatient. When I cannot understand my Father's leading in it seems but hard and cruel faith, still I hear that gentle whisper pleading, God is working, God is faithful, wait.

And the hardest thing on earth for any of us to do is simply to wait. And you may feel like this morning, some of you saying, God, what are you up to? Why, why tarry the wheels of your chariot? The heathen are going around saying, where is your God? And then so many things that you don't understand, you begin fussing. My good wife died on September 2, 1973 at 2.15 in the morning, and I preached at 11 o'clock.

I didn't know whether I could or not, but I did. And I preached on John sending a delegation to Jesus to ask, Art thou he that should come, or do we look for another? And Jesus sent word back to him. Now, that was a mighty poor thing for John the Baptist to be saying.

He had stood there, said, this is he. Now he is saying, are you the one? Jesus said, go back and tell him I'm running on schedule. Tell him the blind are seeing, the deaf are hearing, the lame are walking, lepers are being cleansed, poor have the gospel preached.

And then he added what I preached about on that Sunday morning, the forgotten beatitude. Blessed is he whosoever shall not be offended in me. Blessed is he who never gets upset by the way I run my business.

That's what it means. And sometimes it's mighty hard to learn that lesson, but there it is. God may seem slow, beloved, but he's never late.

God started his work of redemption, and God will avenge his elect, though he wait, it says, though he bear long with them. Maybe you've been praying for somebody, and you're out of heart. You wonder what it's in use.

I think about the little old country church where I grew up, and dear old Mother Probst. I can see her yet back in those days with that old black bonnet on, standing up praying for her boys. And I don't think

anybody else prayed for them.

I think we thought not much used to pray for them, but she did. Then the years came, and I went back there, and one of them was superintendent of the Sunday school, and two of them were deacons and two grandsons in the ministry. All those years, that dear old soul was saying, Lord, avenge me of my adversary.

Don't let the devil get those boys. I claim the intervention of Almighty God. You've heard old Happy Mac.

I used to hear him at Pinebrook tell when he got saved and took off for home and got there, and his dear old mother hadn't prayed for years, and she'd turn down the covers of his bed of the night and pray, God send this boy back sometime, go up next morning. He wasn't there, and she'd put the covers back, but she'd say, Lord, I'm looking for him. And he got saved and headed for home and got there in the middle of the night, went around the back, and the door wasn't locked.

We used to pray for him to come home and lock the door. The door was not locked, and he went up there. Now, you talk about Santa Claus! My, what about it when she went up next morning? That was the answer to her prayer.

She was avenged of her adversary. Just a few days ago, one of my best friends in Greensboro died. He was head of the drama department at the University of North Carolina.

Had been there for years. They built a building, named it after him. A graduate of Harvard, a brilliant man, but a lost sinner.

All those years his wife, 45 years of it she prayed that he'd be saved, and about four years ago he got saved. He and I became buddies. We ate somewhere about every week.

He's a little older. At that time he was 81, and he said, I'm going to take you downtown and buy you some toys. We had a great time together, but he went to be with the Lord the other day, and he loved to talk about Jesus.

All of a sudden I said, what? Did you get in a revival meeting? No. Did you hear a sermon? No. Well, how did it happen? He said, God woke me up in the middle of the night and showed me what a lost old sinner I was.

And in all that time nobody had ever visited him. I found out. You mean nobody ever spoke to you about Jesus? No.

No wonder the Lord went to him, nobody else would. And if any personal work's ever done with a lot of folks, it'll have to be the Lord. But there's a man transformed, and he told me not long before he went away, he said, I've got to work fast to make up for lost time.

But God's promoted him. He's got a new job in glory. He was ready when he went over there, because for the last year or two he went everywhere, just like a child in the joy of salvation, with all that literature and all that knowledge and all that background of art.

And he used it as much as he could to the glory of God. Well, God's going to avenge those praying mothers. And the devil is not going to win the game, because my Lord's coming back one of these days to finish it up for good.

Old Dr. Henson out on the West Coast preached very faithfully. The Lord's returned some seminary students didn't agree with him. They went up to him after a certain time and said, Dr., we just can't get that out of the New Testament the way you preached it this morning.

He said, of course you can't. It's in there to stay. It is in there to stay.

I used to preach Dr. W.B. Riley in Minneapolis, what a giant of the faith. He had a friend who was a bishop who didn't see the eschatology like Riley did, and they would discuss it and discuss it, never agreed, but they were good friends. One time they hadn't seen each other in quite a while, and the bishop came up to him and said, Well, Riley, Jesus hasn't come yet.

Riley said, No, and for your sake, Bishop, I'm glad he hasn't. But he's coming back and he's going to straighten everything out, and we're not just to be waiting, we're to be watching. Donald Grey Barnhouse, who was such a great friend to me in earlier years, used to tell about Scottish fishermen off on a trip for several days, and then when they came back, their wives would always meet them down at the dock.

He came in one time and the old skipper was looking across, and he said, Well, I think most of them are there. He said, John, I see Mary over there, Henry, I see Jane, Patrick, I see Margaret, Robert, I see Elizabeth, and Alistair, I don't see Heather over there. Well, they all landed, and Alistair went up the hill, and there was a light in the window.

And she was there, and she came to the door and said, Dear, I've been waiting. Yes, he said, Honey, but you weren't watching. Now, you've got to wait for him to come, what else can you do? How about watching, with earnest expectation? You need to know your Bible and look at what's going on through God's glasses, because you can't be optimistic with a misty optic.

So go to the great optician, and let him fix you up. Jesus, the greatest eye doctor that ever came along, he gave three blind men their sights and all, one, he just touched him, you saw, and the next put mud on his eyes and let him go wash it off, and the other, he had to give him a second touch. Now, some of those, if they'd ever got together, I can imagine how they might have got into a powerful argument.

One of them would have said, Well, he just touched me, and the other one said, No, that's not the way it's done. They've got to put mud on your eyes and wash it off. And the other one said, No, you're both wrong, he has to touch you twice.

And you could have started three new denominations, the one-touch, the two-touch, and the mud treatment, all over the same thing. I don't care how your experience was couched in emotion, the main thing is, did he touch you? And are you able to say, Bless God, this morning, I once was blind, and now I see, and I see it like it is. A preacher friend of mine says that every time I hear Walter Cronkite say, and that's the way it is, I feel like saying, No, Walter, that's not the way it is, that's just the way it looks.

That's about right. And I find myself in my loneliness, and I have a lot of that these days, I find myself walking along, reciting those immoral words of James Russell Lowell. Careless seems the great avenger.

It seems sometimes that God's mighty slow moving in on this thing. Careless seems the great avenger. History's pages but record one death grapple in the darkness, twixt old systems and the Word.

Truth forever on the scaffold, wrong forever on the throne. Yet that scaffold sways the future. Now here's the way it is.

And behind the dim unknown standeth God within the shadow, keeping watch above his own.

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