



HUMOR

Part 2 of Religion Saves

Pastor Mark Driscoll | January 13, 2008

You're listening to "Religion Saves and Nine Other Misconceptions", a sermon series in which Pastor Mark Driscoll answers nine controversial questions about Jesus and Christianity. The following is a presentation of Mars Hill Church in Seattle. For more audio and video content, please visit marshillchurch.org.

Well, howdy, Mars Hill. Good to see you all. We are doing a series, "Religion Saves and Nine Other Misconceptions." Tonight we're doing humor. It's gonna be fun. And I'll tell you how we ended up with this series. Normally, we go right through books of the Bible. But as I was teaching through I Corinthians a while back, I realized that that church had written a lot of questions to their pastor, Paul, and then his letter was a series of answers to their questions.

So, I thought, "Well, wouldn't it be fun to do that in our own day?" So, we posted on the Web site. We got 893 questions. Most of them were terrible. Some were pretty good.

(Laughter)

We got five-and-a-half thousand comments. About half of them were, "That's not nice, don't say that." And then we have 343,000 votes. And we've taken the top nine questions, and we're doing them as this "Religion Saves" series, up until Easter.

Last week we dealt with the number nine question, birth control, where I showed you the Richard Simmons photo, if you don't remember.

(Laughter)

That was the highlight. This week, we're doing question number eight, which is humor. Next week, we'll do question number seven, which is predestination – why does God choose some people for Heaven and not others?

Additionally, the following week we'll do question number six, which was sort of a grab-bag question for me – what part of Christianity do I still find most difficult to believe?

After that, question number five, which is sexual sin. How do you overcome sexual sin? Question number four, faith in works. Do we save ourselves? Does God save us? Do we work together with God? How does that work?

After that, question number three, we'll deal with dating and courting and dorting. All of those together. And then number two, the emerging Church. And question number one will be worship and the regulative principle.

As always, we're audio and video capturing everything. It's all online for free. But you get what you pay for. You could find it at – that was supposed to be funny. You guys are gonna be a rough crowd.

(Laughter)

And one other thing I'll make note of, at our 8:30 p.m. service, the final service of the day, we allow people who come to do text message questions.

Last week, we did it for the first time. It went well. So, we've taken that, put the answers to the questions that I have no idea what's coming, just answer 'em on the fly after six, seven hours of preaching. So, it gets a little exciting. We put those online as well. And you can find those at marshillchurch.org and at YouTube.

So, that being said, we'll get to the question in just a moment. But I'll share with you tonight's lovely T-shirt. It was sent to me by a podcaster. It says, "God, save me from your followers."

(Laughter)

So, this is a good one. I like this one a lot. People send me shirts. I get 'em from all over the world. If you send one, make it a large, not in a pastel color, and I don't wear used clothing, that's gross.

(Laughter)

So – “it’s vintage.” No, it’s used. Somebody else sweated in it. That’s weird. I won’t do that. So, I’ll go ahead and pray, and we’ll get to work on tonight’s question. Good to have you all with us. And I’m looking forward to it.

Father God, I thank you that I get to teach the Bible at Mars Hill Church. I thank you because I have as much or more freedom and as much or more fun than any other preacher in the world.

God, as we study tonight, we come, acknowledging we are sinners. And as sinners, we do some silly things. We believe and say some silly things. And God, I pray by your grace, we would not overlook all of the rich, comedic material in our lives. That we’d learn to laugh with you and laugh at ourselves, grateful that our righteousness is a gift from Jesus, and as a result, we should take him seriously, but not ourselves.

So, God, as we study, we ask for your Holy Spirit to lead us and guide us as we ask for a good sense of humor, in Jesus’ name, amen.

Well, here’s the question that people voted on: “Why do you” – meaning me – you’ll notice this is all very personal. Apparently, some people got their feelings hurt. I always say there’s two kind of people, people that have been offended by me, and people that don’t listen to me.

(Laughter)

Those are the two categories. “Why do you make jokes” – well, because it’s funny – “about Mormon missionaries, homosexuals, trench coat wearers” (which, if you put those together, that would be funny – like a gay, trench-coat wearing, Mormon kid on a bike, that would be hilarious) –

(Laughter)

“– single men” (well, why not? They’re so silly), “vegans, emo kids, and then expect these groups to come to know God in the same sermon?” Well, the truth is, we are trying to put the fun back into fundamentalism.

(Laughter)

That is our secondary mission, in addition to pointing to Jesus. So, I do make fun of all kinds of people. I make fun of rappers with grills and spinner rims, and girlfriends in clear heels who make their living one dollar bill at a time. I make fun of indie rockers, who drive little mopeds and wear all black and smoke American Spirit cigarettes and wear those little pants with the really close, brought-in pegged legs, like the ‘80s girl pants.

(Laughter)

You guys are so cute.

(Laughter)

I make fun of homeschoolers. I make fun of home school moms who wear denim jumpers.

(Laughter)

And it’s like a uniform. I also make fun of public schoolers. And that’s the easiest, ‘cause they can’t spell, so they won’t blog about it.

(Laughter)

I make fun of all kind – I make fun of Calvinists. I make fun of Arminians. I also like to make fun of vegans, but vegans take it very seriously. Every time I promote bacon, which I do often, ‘cause I love bacon – bacon’s wonderful. And then the vegans get really upset. Like I had a guy not too long ago come to me and say, “You cannot promote bacon.”

(Laughter)

I said, “Why not?” He said, “You will die if you eat bacon.”

(Laughter)

I said, “I know. I will die and go to Heaven full of bacon.”

(Laughter)

“That’s awesome. What’s wrong with that? I believe in the resurrection of the dead. I’ll be fine.” So, we do have a lot of fun. And of course we make fun of Mormons. How can you not make fun of a religion that when you get saved, they give you under britches?

(Laughter)

I mean, that’s funny. I tried so hard this week online to order a pair of Mormon sacred under britches. They’re like a onesie with a trap door. They’re awesome.

(Laughter)

I’m not even making this up. But they’re so serious about it, you can’t find a pair. So, I was unable to locate a pair. I was gonna wear them over my

jeans and T-shirt.

(Laughter)

And if you can – I mean, we tried. And you need like a special card to get ‘em from the Temple, and we tried all kind of stuff, no success. If you have one, send it to me, and maybe I could use it in a future sermon, thank you Jesus.

(Laughter)

Anyways, we do tend to have a lot of fun at Mars Hill, and if you’re new, this is kinda how we do it. The question is, is it biblical? Does the Bible have any humorous parts? Is there any comedy in there? I’ll start by quoting the Dictionary of Biblical Imagery; it’s a great theological resource.

It says this, “The Bible is predominantly a serious rather than a funny book. Yet, it would distort the Bible to suppress the humor that is present, arranged on a continuum that ranges from the least intellectual,” – think slapstick humor, Three Stooges, Beavis and Butthead, Johnny Knoxville, or not, but those are examples – “to the most intellectual irony and word play.” Right? That would be British comedy.

(Laughter)

Some of you are like, “I don’t get British comedy.” That’s ‘cause, apparently, they’re very smart and subtle. Think Stephen Colbert, think Jon Stewart, a little more thoughtful comedy. We could say that the humor of the Bible tends toward the subtle.

It goes on to say that the whole Bible is in one sense a comical arrangement. “The overall plot of the Bible is a U-shaped comic plot. The action begins with a perfect world inhabited by perfect people. It descends into the misery of fallen history. It ends with a new world of total happiness and the conquest of evil.

“The book of Revelation is the story of the happy ending, par excellence, as a conquering hero,” – that’s Jesus – “defeats evil, marries a bride” – that’s the Church – “and lives happily ever after in a palace glittering with jewels. The Bible uses the word laugh, laughter, and derivatives thereof more than 200 times. It uses the word joy and derivatives thereof more than 40 times.”

And what has happened, sadly, is that the Bible has been too often handled by religious people, who take thick coats of varnish and lacquer over the Bible, and take out all of the humanity and the silly stories of what people, sinners, do like us on the earth. And the result is that Ecclesiastes 3:4 is overlooked, which says, “There is a time to laugh.” That there is a time to laugh.

And the Bible is filled with points at which we must laugh. The Bible includes comedy in forms such as situational comedy – we’ll deal with these tonight – satire, sarcasm, irony, and whole books of the Bible, such as Amos, are funny. They’re comedic in nature. Very little is written on this theologically.

One pastor, named Douglas Wilson, has written an interesting book called A Serrated Edge. I think it’s A Trinitarian Defense of Skylarking, is what he calls the subtitle, and here is what he says, that usually biblical and Christian comedy attacks religious people. ‘Cause here’s the problem with religious people, they’re just too serious. They’re just furrowed brow, pointy finger, all dressed up, judgmental – they’re just no fun at all.

And so, the best thing you could do is make fun of them, because they’re a joke. And they don’t know that.

(Laughter)

But they’re hilarious, and making fun of them does two things: It helps them come to repentance, seeing that they’re a joke, and it helps other people who would follow them, because they’re so convincing because they’re so committed to not follow in their foolish lifestyle.

So he says, “Rightly, the Prophet Jeremiah attacked idolaters. The Lord Jesus attacks the self-righteous Pharisees. The Apostle Paul attacked the Judaizers. Irenaeus attacked the Gnostics, and Luther attacked the Papists.”

We’ll start with the Old Testament. Does the Bible have any humor in it, or is that just not appropriate for religion? We’ll start in Genesis, the book of beginnings, where all things begin, including good comedy. And the book starts fairly early on with a guy marrying his sister, which is really funny. Unless you’re from Kentucky, and then it’s a little too close to home.

(Laughter)

But it is kind of peculiar. And then it moves along. God floods the earth, kills everyone except for a family headed by a man named Noah. They climb into an ark. Upon exiting the ark in Genesis 9, there’s this really funny little story where Noah gets drunk and passes out naked in his tent. I mean, the whole book is a hillbilly redneck saga, par excellence. It’s like all of Genesis takes place in a trailer park. It’s absolutely mesmerizing.

I preached the book a while back. If you were here, you know it’s filled with redneck comedy. And Noah gets drunk, passes out naked in his tent, like a hillbilly redneck on vacation. And when I see – I see a guy, not with a tent, but blue tarps. I see a guy in swim trunks and cowboy boots, drunk on moonshine with a John Deere cap, sitting around playing Texas hold’em with his uncle daddy, eating Hot Pockets. That’s just how I see it.

(Laughter)

Or, like that. That’s kinda how I see Noah.

(Laughter)

That's kinda how I see Noah. It is kinda funny that after God kills everyone, the one righteous guy gets drunk, passes out naked in his tent, obviously with a NASCAR tank top on.

(Laughter)

Moving right along through Genesis, we then get to a guy named Jacob. His name means trickster. He's a con man. And so he goes to this well in Genesis 25, and there is a beautiful young lady named Rachel. He's really interested in her. So he does this Herculean feat, taking the lid off of the well so she could have water.

Normally, this would take a whole host of men. But he sort of shows up, stretches out, gets on his tank top, oils himself up like a body builder, "[Groan] There you go, baby, fresh water."

(Laughter)

Let's her into the well, and then he rushes up and kisses her, like he just won the Nextel Cup and he's on the stage with the trophy girl. So then she brings him home to meet her daddy, who is named Laban. And this guy is an absolute varsity con man.

And so much of the ensuing chapters of Genesis is Laban tricking the trickster all the way to the point where he makes Jacob work for seven years to marry the lovely Rachel. He gets married, wakes up the next morning, rolls over, and he's not sleeping, living, married to Rachel, but instead, lazy-eyed Leah.

(Laughter)

True story.

[Scream] He just freaks out. You kinda hear Homer Simpson just explode from the Bible. "Doh!" And what happens is, he was supposed to marry Rachel, but the trickster dad swapped out women on the trickster, so he married lazy-eyed Leah, the sister. Had to work another seven years to marry Rachel. The whole thing is a comic ruse.

It's subtle irony. And if you continue in the Old Testament, then you get to the book of Exodus, where Moses goes up on the mountain to talk to God, get the Ten Commandments. While he's gone, he left Aaron in charge, the first priest, his dear brother, to watch over the people. He takes all the plunder and gold and jewelry from Egypt. They melt it down and they create a what? A golden calf.

They parade around it in worship, and Aaron tells them, "Worship this idol. This is the god who delivered you from Egypt. Moses is up on the mountain with God. God tells him, "Look, you better go down there. People have lost their minds. It's going really bad."

He comes down. He goes to Aaron, and you gotta get the subtlety in this. He goes to Aaron and says, "Aaron, what happened? There's a huge, golden idol." Here are Aaron's exact words from Exodus 32:24, quote, "Uh, they gave it to me, and I threw it in the fire, and out came this calf."

(Laughter)

Right? It's like a dad walking in on his high school daughter with her boyfriend, and they got no clothes on, and they're like, "We don't know what happened. We were talking, and all our clothes fell off. I got no idea. We're victims."

(Laughter)

"The belt's defective."

(Laughter)

I mean, it just – it's funny. The Bible also includes something that The Dictionary of Biblical Imagery calls scatological humor. I've been accused of this, and it's biblical. Scatological humor, for those of you who are in public school, like, "Scatological?" Poopie comedy, that's what it is, scatological humor. And I'll give you a couple examples of scatological humor in the Old Testament.

One is with two guys, Eglon and Ehud. You remember this? How many of you remember the story? It's in Judges 3. It says that there's a guy, his name's Ehud. He's a left-handed, southpaw assassin. All right? He's Jack Bauer. It's what he is. He could kill anybody.

And so, he decides he's gonna go and he's gonna kill King Eglon, who is called, quote, this is what your Bible says, a very fat man, end quote.

(Laughter)

"That's not funny." It is. Maybe you need to hit the treadmill, but it's still funny.

(Laughter)

He's a very fat man. So, he goes in, the left-handed assassin does, to the very fat king, and says, "I want you to release all your security detail, I need to meet with you in private. I have a word from the Lord." So everybody leaves, and he pulls out a sword, and he stabs the king right in the middle, and the

Bible says he was so fat, that the fat covered the whole sword and went all the way up the guys arm who stabbed him. That's a lot of fat.

(Laughter)

Right? Some of you are like, "That's gross." And kinda funny. Kinda Monty Python funny, if you think about it.

(Laughter)

It kind of sounds like a Monty Python skit. And what happens then is he hit an intestine, and slit the intestine. And when you hit the intestine, what comes out? All the feces. And it just poured out of this very fat man, which means there's a lot in there.

(Laughter)

Now what happens is, the left-handed assassin, the southpaw assassin, he escapes. And the security detail for the king are outside of his chambers, and they start smelling something really funky, 'cause he slit an intestine. And they don't know that he got killed. They think, instead, he's having like a bad chalupa post experience. You know what I'm talking about?

(Laughter)

"Oh, it's Taco Bell. Just give him a while, he'll be all right." And they wait, and wait, and wait, but the scent is so bad, eventually they break in and they see the king dead, and his intestines just emptied themselves all over the floor. And it's kinda funny, unless, of course, you're the king.

(Laughter)

If you move on to Ezekiel 4, there's another occasion for scatological humor. This is one of the more peculiar conversations in the Bible. I'm not even making this up. Ezekiel 4, God comes to Ezekiel and says this, "I want you to go to the bathroom, and I want you to stack up all your feces, and I want you to cook over it."

(Laughter)

That's different. Right? I mean, you'd all agree with me. You're like, "I didn't get that in Sunday School as a kid. That was not my memory verse." Yeah, they skipped that one.

(Laughter)

'Cause they know you'd go home and poop and light it on fire, and tell your mom, "I'm biblical."

(Laughter)

"I got a verse." So then Ezekiel starts – this is so funny. Ezekiel starts negotiating with God. Now, I would have argued for takeout.

(Laughter)

Or I would have argued for wood. Here's what Ezekiel says, "Uh, God, instead of my feces, can I cook over cow feces?"

(Laughter)

God's like, "Yeah, I'm cool with that." So, that's the compromise. What a weird negotiation.

(Laughter)

I would like to negotiate what kind of feces we cook over.

(Laughter)

[Chuckle] Is it just me, or that's different. Right? I mean – okay. Fine.

(Laughter)

I'm having fun. Tough crowd. We'll keep going on. Oh, here's one of my favorites – Elijah. God loved this guy so much, he took him right up to Heaven. He didn't even taste death. Enoch and Elijah, the only two guys in the Bible didn't taste death. God loved him so much, he took him right to Heaven.

Here's the situation. There was a cult in that day, a false religion. They worshipped a god called Baal. Okay? So these prophets of Baal are against the prophets of God, and they're outnumbering and absolutely opposing the prophets of God.

So, they set up the equivalent of an Old Testament octagon. And what happens is the prophets of Baal show up, and little Elijah shows up to defend the God of the Bible, and they're gonna have a God showdown, right there.

And here's what he says in I Kings 18. Elijah says this, or we read, rather, "And at noon, Elijah mocked them." And this is a big deal. This is Pay per View. There's live blogging, and the media's there. And he gets up and he mocks their god, and he mocks their religion. And you don't think that's a

big deal, but imagine a Muslim who's down on his prayer cloth, or on his rug praying to Mecca. You come up and make fun of him. Or a Buddhist who's got his heel behind his ear to pray.

(Laughter)

You're like, "Doesn't that hurt? What is it? Are you like an antenna?" I mean, you know, make a little fun with 'em. And at noon, Elijah mocked them, saying, "Cry aloud, for he is a god. Either he is musing, or he is reliving himself."

(Laughter)

"Oh, I know why your god can't show up and fight my God. He's sitting on his throne."

(Laughter)

"He's on the toilet. He'll be here later. It's a real bummer when your god eats cheese and gets all bound up like that. It makes him late for appointments." He's mocking their religion. That's what he does.

How about this one in Isaiah 44 – that's funny. God mocks this guy who gets a piece of wood – he gets a log, and he decides, this half is good for fire wood, and since I got an A in wood shop, I'll carve this half into a god that I can worship. And God mocks this guy, like "Wow, what great skill. I mean, only a real genius would know which half of the log was firewood, and which half was god." I mean, it's just – it's a total mockery.

How about this one. Have you guys read the book of Job? There's some funny stuff in Job. I mean, not if you're Job.

(Laughter)

But there's some funny stuff. Right? He – his kids die. He loses everything. He breaks out with sores. He's sitting there scratching his, you know, itchy body with shards of clay. The only person that doesn't die is his wife, and that wasn't really a gift. She's no help, "Curse God and die." "Thanks, baby, that's huge. That's a great help. Thanks, Barnabas. What an encouragement you are."

And what happens is, his buddies, who I think are first-year Bible college students keep showing up, wanting to debate systematic theology with him. And if you don't get the irony, you miss the point of Job. It calls them his friends and his comforters. [Chuckle]

(Laughter)

And these guys have Kevorkian bedside manner. They're not comforting at all. And then the book near the conclusion – I think it has a funny part, where God shows up in Job 38 and says to Job, 'cause Job's getting a little whiney at this point, "Gird your loins. I'm gonna talk to you like a man." Which literally means, "Put a cup on." And that's God. God's telling a guy, "I'm gonna kick you right in the middle. You got about 30 seconds to get that cup on." And then he goes into a series of 80 questions about science, beginning with, "Where were you when I laid the foundations of the earth?"

And Job's like, "I got it. I tap out, tap out, tap out." He taps out right there. Very smart. And the whole thing is a little bit ironic and sarcastic.

How about the book of Proverbs. Any of you seen that occasionally Proverbs makes fun of people? How about the sluggard, which is a guy who is an image bearer, but is devolving, going backward on the evolutionary chart to being a slug. That's what a sluggard is. It's just a lazy guy. We call 'em single white guys who live with their mom in their pajamas, sleep between Star Wars sheets, and blog about how the world should be as part of the Pajama Hadeen – sluggard.

(Laughter)

Sluggard. It says this about the sluggard in Proverbs 19:24, "The sluggard buries his hand in the dish and will not even raise it to his mouth." It's mocking a guy, who's sitting there watching the Sci-Fi channel all day, 'cause it's the Trekkie marathon, and he's got a bowl of guac and a bowl of chips. And he takes the chip and puts it in the guac, and just doesn't have quite the ambition to get it to his mouth.

(Laughter)

That guy. The guy who's so lazy, he orders pizza and leaves the door unlocked, and when the delivery boy comes, he's like, "Come in," 'cause he's too lazy to get up and go to the door to get the meal. That guy.

It also mocks the sluggard in Proverbs 22:13, and that is the guy who's a sluggard, but he's always got a good reason. He's very creative with his excuses. The sluggard says, "There's a lion outside. I shall be killed in the streets." This is the equivalent of a musician who's living with his girlfriend, freeloading off his girlfriend. Every day she wakes him up at the crack of noon and says, "Why don't you go get a job?" And he says, "There's terrorists out there. I could die."

(Laughter)

What do you call a musician without a girlfriend? Homeless.

(Laughter)

Moving right along. Oh, that's funny. In the morning they're all like, "Ha-ha-ha." You're all like, "I play guitar. That not funny."

(Laughter)

Yes, it is. Yes, it is. [Chuckle] Does it – ladies, have you read Proverbs to see that it also makes fun of some women? ‘Cause it does. What does it say that the nagging wife is like? A dripping faucet. Which would be really funny, if she was nagging because the faucet was dripping and the husband wasn’t fixing it. That would be super funny.

(Laughter)

Unless you’re the husband. And it also says in Proverbs, “It’s better to live” – where, men? – “than in a house with a quarrelsome, contentious, nagging wife.” On the roof.

(Laughter)

And just think of that. Can you imagine driving home tonight, and you’re going through the neighborhood, and you see a bunch of tents up on the roof of all the houses in your neighborhood. And guys out there with Coleman lanterns, cooking hotdogs, and playing Texas hold’em in folding chairs. Say, “What happened?” “Just being biblical, brother.”

(Laughter)

“Just being biblical. She’s driving me nuts.”

(Laughter)

How about this one, Proverbs 11:22, “Like a gold ring in a pig’s snout is a beautiful woman without discretion.” A beautiful woman with no modesty, decency, or propriety is like a pig with jewelry. All right? It’s just not fitting.

And I say this all the time, but so many single guys come to Mars Hill with a gal, and I often ask the question, “Okay, so why are you dating her?” And the answer is, “She’s hot.” My answer is always, “So’s Hell.” Think it through. Think it through. Think it through. Run, Forrest, run.

(Laughter)

Can she read? Does she have a Bible? Has she finished rehab? You gotta do your homework.

(Laughter)

“Does he do this all the time?” “Yes, that’s why they have the security.”

(Laughter)

All right. [Chuckle] It says repeatedly in the Bible that God mocks people. I’ll give you three examples, Psalm 37:13, “The Lord laughs at the wicked, for he sees their day is coming.” Psalm 2:4, “He who sits in the heavens laughs. The Lord holds them in derision.” And Psalm 59:8, “But you, oh, Lord, laugh at them. You hold all the nations in derision.”

All right, Old Testament, God made fun of people. New Testament, is there any source or reason or example of comedy, humor in the New Testament? Sure. We’ll start in Colossians 4:6, “Let your speech always be gracious, seasoned with salt, so you may know how to answer each person.” Some people, you gotta talk real gracious. Some people, kinda salty is what they need.

~~Right? One guy is saying I (Christians) Everything is jacked up. Alternative lifestyle. I don’t know what the problem is. We’ll give ‘em a float in the parade.”~~

(Laughter)

Come on. I get paid the same either way. I don’t care. [Chuckle] I mean, we need the seats. So anyways, we’ll free some up. Anyways, they’re also getting drunk at communion. They got all kinds of jacked-up problems. So, Paul pays them a backhanded comment in I Corinthians 1:4. He says, “I praise God for all the grace he’s given you.” Which at first, they’re like, “Thanks. Hey – that’s not nice.” It’s like saying, “You’re smart for a dumb guy.” You’re like, “Hey.” Because you only get grace when you sin, so the more grace you get, the more sin you’ve got. “I don’t get it.” I know. We’ll pray for ya.

(Laughter)

How about this one. There’s two funny occasions where people get locked out of church. One is Acts 12, where Peter gets locked outside of a church prayer meeting. So, I think it’s funny. Like, [Knock, Knock, Knock] “Hey, guys? Come on. I wrote the Bible. I’m good at this. Let me in to pray.”

(Laughter)

The other one’s Revelation 3:20, which everyone jacks up, “Behold, I stand at the door and knock,” says Jesus, “and if you’ll answer, I’ll come in and eat with you.” And every evangelist with the alter call at the rally says, “And today, Jesus is knocking at the door of your heart.” No he’s – that’s not what it’s talking about. It’s a church that’s having a potluck, and won’t let Jesus come to it. So he’s outside trying to break in and knocking on the door, “Hey, it’s me, Jesus. You might of read my book. Can I come in and have some food?” Jesus gets locked out of the potluck.

And it's kind of a funny picture, but the truth is, some churches in the effort to be tolerant and diverse and inclusive of everyone don't have room for Jesus because he and the lesbian Buddhist pastor don't see eye to eye on stuff.

(Laughter)

How about this one, Galatians 5. This one's the best. This one's the best. Now, what happens in Galatians is this. There's a church in a town called Galatia, and they've been infiltrated by some false teachers called Judaisers, who say to go to Heaven you need to believe in Jesus and be circumcised – obviously, if you're a male. Okay?

Circumcision began with Abraham, who though he was a very old man, circumcised himself. Which is funny, unless you're Abraham.

(Laughter)

At circumcision, "You want me to what? To go to Heaven? I mean, is it nice? Is it worth it?"

(Laughter)

Circumcision, for those of you who don't know, is where you take the male appendage and you cut some skin off. You notice all the guys are like, "I don't like where this is going. I don't care what the point is, this is not funny. Move right along." It is funny. We'll get there.

So, what happens is, they're saying Jesus plus equals salvation. Jesus taught, and Paul echoes, that Jesus plus anything ruins everything, 'cause all you need is Jesus. Not any religious work. Not any effort of your own self. Not any good thing you do. It's all the good that Jesus does for you. It's gifted righteousness, not earned righteousness, like religion teaches.

And so what happens is, this church is divided. There are Gentiles who are not circumcised. There are Judaisers who are. And they're fighting over whether or not you have to be circumcised. And I'm even not sure how they check this. Right?

(Laughter)

Just the whole [Chuckle] – you know what I'm saying? It's like, who enforces this? What poor deacon drew the small straw and got this job?

(Laughter)

And so what happens is Paul writes a letter to the church, and they all get together, and the pastor reads it. And it's sort of tense in the air, and the Jews and the Gentiles are divided. And here's what he says in Galatians 5:11, 12, "But if, brothers, I still preach circumcision, why am I still being persecuted. In that case, the offense of the cross has been removed. I wish those who unsettle you would emasculate themselves." This is a cut-off-your-pickle joke.

(Laughter)

This is Lorena Bobbittism. That's what it is. Doh! Every guy's like, "No, come on, man." Okay, now here's what he's saying. He's – it's a reductio ad absurdum. It's a logical argument where he's saying, "Well, if you think you guys are really holy 'cause you cut a little skin off your pickle, well, then, just go varsity, big boy, and cut the whole thing off and be super-duper holy."

(Laughter)

Now, this being read in a church by the pastor, when this is the debated issue, I'm sure all the Judaisers were like, "That is not funny. I am not eating a hot dog ever again, just in protest."

(Laughter)

And I'm sure the Gentiles are like, "That's funny. Give us more of those. How long is this letter? We gonna do this again?" And he's making fun of religious people who take themselves seriously and take God too lightly, and wanna add things to Jesus that are not appropriate.

Some of you would say, "But I thought we were supposed to be loving. That doesn't seem very loving." What is very funny, and you could check this in Galatians 5, in the next few verses after the cut-off-your-pickle joke, what he says is, "We are to love one another like Jesus commanded."

They're like, "What? Cut off your pickle, and I love you." You know, it's a very – but what this means is, we need to define love biblically, not by Hallmark. And also, it's not just love for those who are religious, it's love for those who would be tempted to follow them. And by making fun of religious people, we show them what a joke they are. And additionally, we discourage others from following in their example.

That leads to perhaps the most important point. Was Jesus funny? Did Jesus have a sense of humor, or was he more like Spock? Was he just always serious and logical, walking around with syllogisms. You know? Is that how Jesus was?

And if you think about it, Jesus' job before beginning his public ministry was as a carpenter. He's a construction worker. He's hanging out with fishermen and blue collar guys for three years. Much of their life is spent walking around and camping. And I don't know about you guys, but you tend to get 12 blue collar guys together, and eventually somebody's pulling a finger, somebody's telling a joke.

You know what I'm talking about? To be fully human, Jesus would have had to have had a sense of humor. But the sense of humor that Jesus had is often totally overlooked. One man who does not see Jesus as funny is a man named G. K. Chesterton. He's a great author.

He wrote an amazing book called *Orthodoxy*, but he ends that book with this statement, "There was some one thing that was far too great for God to show us when he walked upon the earth, and I have sometimes fancied that it was his mirth." He says, "You know, as we read the Bible, we learn a lot about Jesus. The one thing we don't see him do is laugh or tell a joke."

The creeds even follow this, like the Nicene and Apostle's creed, they say that Jesus Christ was born of the Virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, and died. They say nothing about his life. They just skip his life on the earth as a fully God, fully man person altogether.

Additionally, others have followed in that example, and it includes early films like the 1927 film, *King of Kings*, one of the first movies made about Jesus, by Cecil B. DeMille, who was a devout Christian, but in that movie, Jesus comes off super human, like he has an aura, a glow about him. Like he's radioactive. Like he lived in Hanford or something for too long.

And you could tell it's Jesus in the movie. You're like, "Oh, which one's Jesus?" "Well, the glowing one. The one who's glowing." But that's not how Jesus really looked. "He had no beauty or majesty in him. Nothing in his appearance that we would be attracted to him," Isaiah the prophet declares. But that picture of Jesus sort of floating around, just telling syllogisms, stroking his beard, imitating Spock, and glowing like a night light is sort of the predominant thinking that has led to much misunderstanding about Jesus' humor.

There are now 17,000 books about Jesus in the Library of Congress, and insofar as I have found, there's only one about Jesus' sense of humor. It's a great understudied aspect of Christian theology. It's called *The Humor of Christ*. It's by Elton Trueblood. It's a great little book. He's actually a good author. But it's almost – well, it's more than 40 years old. So, it's been a while.

Here's what he says, "There are numerous passages which are practically incomprehensible when regarded as sober prose, but which are luminous" – they're illuminated – "once we become liberated from the gratuitous assumption that Christ never joked. Once we realize that Christ was not always engaged in pious talk, we have made an enormous step on the road to understanding."

He goes on to say elsewhere, "Christ laughed, and he expected others to laugh. A misguided piety has made us fear that acceptance of his obvious wit and humor would somehow be mildly blasphemous, or sacrilegious." I get accused of this all the time.

Religion, we think, is serious business. Right? Think pointed finger. Think furrowed brow. Think serious religious types. Some of you left those churches, that's why you're at Mars Hill. Religion, we think, is serious business, and serious business is incompatible with banter.

The Dictionary of Biblical Imagery likewise says, "If there is a single person within the pages of the Bible that we can consider to be a humorist, it is without a doubt Jesus. Jesus was a master of word play, irony, and satire, often with an element of humor intermixed.

Here's why we miss sometimes the humor of Jesus and the funny parts in the Gospels. One, we become overly familiar. Sometimes you have heard the Bible story so often, you kind of miss the crazy, shocking, funny, human, earthy, silly parts of it. Secondly, the centerpiece of Christian theology is the death of Jesus on the cross, where God substituted himself and died to pay the penalty for our sins, so that we might have salvation.

But that can so dominate, that Jesus' life is again seen little more as not sinning to prepare himself to die, not living as a human being with friends and a sense of humor. And you know what, as you read the Bible, Jesus gets invited to a lot of parties, weddings, house parties, meals. His critics accused him of being a drunkard, a glutton, and a friend of sinners, which is untrue.

He didn't drink too much. He didn't eat too much. And his friends were pretty crazy, but he's still friends with crazy people like me, and we're all grateful that Jesus is willing to hang out with people as jacked up as we are.

And the religious people couldn't understand. They're like, "You know what? All the sinners invite him to their house to have dinner and be their friend. There must be something wrong with him." No, maybe he was really fun to hang out with. Maybe the true mark of a Christian is someone you would eat chicken wings with and shoot pool with, or throw darts with, or go to the game with – not just if they can exegete the Greek text and beat you in Bible Jeopardy like some Sunday School jerk, perhaps.

(Laughter)

I would offer that as a prayer request. But maybe the true mark of a mature Christian is someone that is actually kinda fun to hang out with. Now, they love God, and they love you, and they tell the truth. But Jesus was that guy; people loved to hang out with him. And we tend to overlook that because religious people tend not to focus on it.

And thirdly, there's cultural distance between the days of Jesus, 2,000 years ago, and our present culture. And how many of you have learned that culture is really the container for comedy? How many of you have watched British comedy and you're like, "I don't know what is so funny." Well, it's 'cause British people have a different culture, and how many of you have been to another country, and everybody's laughing, and you're like, "Ha-ha, I don't know what we're talking about," 'cause it's a different culture context?

Well, that being said, we will now explore Jesus and his sense of humor. I'll give you three examples with Jesus' teaching. First, there is an occasion in Matthew 16 where Peter comes to him, and Jesus says, "Who do you think that I am?" Peter says, "I think that you are the Christ, the Son of God." And he says, "You are now going to be called Rocky." Right? Names him the rock.

Now, the Catholic Church didn't get the joke, so we ended up with the Papacy instead of a good laugh. And they thought that the point was that Peter was the rock on which the Church's foundation is built. The foundation of the Church, the rock, is not Peter, it's Jesus, and his confession that Jesus is the Christ. Because just a little bit later in Matthew 16, he also looks at Peter and says, "Get behind me, Satan." Right?

(Laughter)

And they never say that. "The foundation of the Church is Satan." No.

(Laughter)

And what happens a little while later is that when a young woman comes up to Peter, when Jesus is going to be crucified, and says, "Do you know Jesus?" He says, "I never met the guy." Totally denies him. He's not the rock. He's a little, itty-bitty pebble that Jesus is kind of making fun of.

It's like walking up to a really skinny, little computer programmer guy and going, "What's up, tough guy?" He's like, "Nothing." It's kind of funny. Calls him Rocky. He's not a rock. He's very unstable.

Secondly, there is an occasion where Jesus says, "Before we judge someone, we should take the" – what? – "out of our own eye?" The plank, right? If you look at somebody and they got a little speck of dust in their eye, and you got a plank in your eye, you're supposed to deal with your own thing before you deal with their thing. It's an issue of sin and hypocrisy.

Jesus was a carpenter, and so he used this analogy. I'll give you an analogy. Here's what he's talking about. Just so you could see it even 2,000 years removed. I'll close my eye, so don't poke it out. But let's say there's a guy over here with – let's say a little bit of – let's say a toothpick in his eye. And you're the guy saying, "Dude, seriously, you gotta deal with that."

(Laughter)

[Applause]

"It's embarrassing. I mean, you're making a bad witness. People are talking about it, and you're totally oblivious to the fact that you have this obvious issue you need to deal with." It's kinda funny. I got sawdust in my eye. Prophetic. Okay.

Now, how about this one. How many of you have read that section in the Bible where Jesus says, "It is easier for a camel to pass through the eye of a needle, than it is for a rich man to enter into the Kingdom of Heaven"? And the Bible commentators, in an effort to treat the Bible seriously, which I appreciate, they miss the joke.

So, some of you may have heard this interpretation. "Well, there was a place in the wall in Jerusalem that they had a little, itty-bitty door, and that a camel could get down on his hind quarters and shimmy through like he's a marine in boot camp. And if he shimmed through the hole in the wall, then he could get to the other side."

Like a camel shimmies.

(Laughter)

You ever seen a camel who shimmies? You ever seen a camel drop down on all fours? It'd be like, "Look what I can do." They can't do it. It doesn't work. And if he shimmies through to the other side, then they call that the Eye of the Needle. There you go. That fixes it."

No, it doesn't. It's a joke. It's funny. I'll show ya. Here's a needle, and what he's saying is, "It is easier for a camel to pass through the eye of a needle than it is for a rich man to enter the Kingdom of Heaven."

(Laughter)

Thank you. We were recently voted the second most innovative church in America.

(Laughter)

[Applause]

This is why. The cardboard is the new cutting edge. And some of you are like, "It's not gonna fit."

(Laughter)

Yes, you got the joke. And it's still kinda funny, right? Like, you're like, "Well, what if we start here? No. What if we start here. Nope. What if we start in the middle. I think it's too big." Yeah, it is too big. That's the point. It's a joke. It's actually still kind of funny 2,000 years later. Right? You get it? It's kinda funny. I'll leave the camel, cause I like the camel. It's a Seattle camel, all white – hasn't seen the sun since September.

(Laughter)

Jesus' favorite target is religious people. Right? Now, this is because Jesus and religion are different. We are OCD about Jesus, and we're not very big on religions. And we do believe that the Bible is altogether true, and we're big on the Bible.

But what we see in the Bible is Jesus makes fun of religious people, because they take themselves so seriously. They judge others. They overlook their own folly. And furthermore, they like to think that their righteousness is of their own doing, by being so serious, rather than a gift of God so that they could lighten up a little bit.

So, Jesus says of the Pharisees, the religious folks, that they're – well, that they're a bag of snakes. He tells 'em that. And he says that their mom shagged the devil.

(Laughter)

I think it's in John 8. He says, "Your father is the devil," which means, "Your mom shagged the devil," to paraphrase Austin Powers. And if you're a serious, devout, religious type, well, that's not very funny. Like you're one of those Mormon boys in a clean, pressed shirt, riding your bike to Hell. Like that's not very funny for you.

(Laughter)

Some of you are like, "That was funny, but I don't know if I should laugh."

(Laughter)

You should. He made fun of the way religious people pray. In Matthew 6:6 – you're like, "You can't make fun of the way religious people pray." Sure you can. Matthew 6:6, "When you pray, do not pray like the hypocrites. They love to stand and pray in the synagogues and the street corners, that they may be seen by others."

Some of you have had this religious uncle, and when he comes over for Thanksgiving, you just say, "Come on," 'cause he always has to stand up, "Oh, let me bless the food." You're like, "Oh, gosh."

(Laughter)

"This is gonna be an hour of King James English." "Lord God, we beseech thee on behalf of the bird."

(Laughter)

"We thank you for the bird, and may the bird nourish us, that we might go forth to do works of service pleasing to you," and you're sitting there as a kid, going, "This is taking forever. Give me the knife, I'm gonna shiv Uncle John and cut that turkey."

(Laughter)

He makes fun of the way religious people fast. [Chuckle] Says it this way in Matthew 6:16, "When you fast, do not look gloomy like the hypocrites, for they disfigure their faces, that their fasting may be seen by others." Here's what they do.

(Laughter)

You all look like super models. You're like, "Oh, are you okay?" "I'm fasting for the Lord. I love the Lord. I worship the Lord. I serve the Lord. I belong to the Lord. I honor the Lord. And I'm not eating this year for the Lord."

(Laughter)

How about this one. He makes fun of the way they tithe. You say, "Tithing isn't funny." It can be. He says this in Matthew 23:23, "Woe to you Scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you tithe mint and dill and cumin and have neglected the weightier matter of the law – justice and mercy and faithfulness."

What he says is this, "You guys are tithing out of your spice rack." They're so serious, these religious people. Ten percent. "Okay, Lord, here's 10 percent of my money, and okay, 9 peppercorns for me, 1 for the Lord; 9 mint leaves, 1 for the Lord." They show up at church, "Okay, God, here's your money, and [Quick Puff] here's a tenth of all my cinnamon, it's yours. I love you."

(Laughter)

Like, you guys have OCD. You guys are freaks. And you're jerks. You're no fun. You're not nice to people. Yeah, you tithe out of your spice rack, but you're not any fun, and you're not very pleasant.

Additionally, he makes fun of the way they lead others. Well, you wanna make fun of a religious person, mock the religious leader and those who are following. Then run for your life.

(Laughter)

But Matthew 15:14 says it this way, "Jesus says, 'They are blind guides. And the blind lead the blind, both fall into a pit.' What he's saying is this, and you gotta see this. Like you're in a new city and you wanna see it, so you say, "I'm gonna sign up for one of those guided tours." You get on the bus, and you got a blind tour guide. Like there's a blind tour guide saying, "Off to our right, I have no idea."

(Laughter)

“And off to our left, I got nothing for ya.”

(Laughter)

“Moving along, I see utter darkness, and I have no idea where we’re going.”

(Laughter)

What he’s saying is religious leaders, they can’t point out anything, and they can’t take you anywhere, ‘cause they’re totally blind to the truth. And Jesus makes fun of religious people.

And do you think religious people ever get offended? [Chuckle] Oh, yeah, they totally do. And it’s funny, because in Matthew 15:10-14, the disciples come to Jesus and they ask him this very peculiar question, “Do you know that the Pharisees are offended?” “Really? I said their mom shagged the devil. I made fun of their tithing. Really? They’re offended? Shocking.”

And they are offended, and Jesus does offend. And one of the great, or perhaps the only post-modern sin is to offend anyone, because after all, there is no truth, just perspective. And your religion, if it works for you, it’s good for you. But you can’t say that one is right and one is wrong. And you can’t say that any perspective is right, because we have our own opinion. And I went to college, and I know what I’m talking about, because that’s what the grad student said after he got done smoking a lot of weed.”

Look, I know how this works. And Jesus offends people. He says, “That’s wrong. That’s not right. That’s crazy. That’s a silly idea. I love ya, but that religious or philosophical perspective is just nonsense.” And Jesus says this in Matthew 11:6, “Blessed is the one who is not offended by me.”

Now, some were offended by Jesus, and they murdered him. We worship a guy who got killed, so you know somebody was upset. And Jesus says, “Blessed are they who are not offended by me.” Say, “How do I not be offended by Jesus?” Let me tell you, here’s the secret: Repent of sin. Because here’s the truth, we’re all Pharisees. We all are.

Some of us are religious Pharisees, some are Spiritual Pharisees. Some are just moral Pharisees. Political Pharisees. Recycling Pharisees.

(Laughter)

Right? We think we’re better than everyone else because we know how it should be done, and we do it that way, and those who don’t, we make fun of them. We may make fun behind their back, with our friends, blog about them, send anonymous e-mails. You know, take on an online identity and fire away.

But the truth is, the only way to not be offended by Jesus is to understand that, “You know what? We’re all Pharisees to varying degrees and in varying ways.” We’re all self-righteous. We’re proud. We’re judgmental. We’re hypocritical. And the only way to not be offended by Jesus is to repent of our own religion. To repent of our own self-righteousness. To repent of our own holier-than-thou attitudes. And then to have a good laugh with Jesus, oftentimes at our own expense.

I will close with some recommendations on why I think humor is helpful in general, and why it’s helpful at Mars Hill Church. First, we want to be like Jesus, and Jesus was funny, and people laughed with him, and he laughed at them. And to be a Christian means you need to be sanctified in your sense of humor.

Number two, it defeats religion. Religious people who take themselves seriously, if you just enter into a very serious argument, it just goes nowhere. But if you make fun of them, they totally freak out, and it’s funny.

(Laughter)

It just is. Because it’s a weapon against religion – irony and sarcasm and satire. And that’s why every culture has it’s comedians. And that’s why they are revolutionaries.

Number three, people take themselves too seriously, and God too lightly. They just do. So many people take themselves so seriously. Their political party, their cause, their issue, their agenda, their morality – they take themselves way too seriously. And sometimes they take God way too lightly.

I mean, we have churches in this city and around the country where the pastors don’t believe in Jesus, the Bible is a myth, but God forbid you show up with a hat, ‘cause that’s disrespectful, and the gay usher will escort you out.

(Laughter)

It’s just like, “What, nobody thinks this is funny?” It’s crazy. We take certain things so seriously, and God so lightly.

Number four, some things are just a joke. And if you treat them seriously, you’re gonna give them credence, which you don’t want to do. They’re just a joke. I was debating with a guy recently. He said, “I don’t believe in God.” I said, “Where do you think everything came from.” He said, “It made itself.” [Chuckle] I was like, “Seriously, you want me to respond to that? Like how does nothing make everything? That [Whistle] – you mean, come on, man. I mean, like if I came home and found a new TV and seven kids, I’d be like, ‘Wow. Nothing did this.’”

(Laughter)

Silly. Proverbs 14:13, “Even in laughter,” – point number five – “the heart may ache, and at the end of joy may be grief.” Here’s the point. Just because someone is laughing or has a good sense of humor, it doesn’t mean they’re not grieving. It doesn’t mean they’re not sorrowful. It doesn’t mean that they don’t have a heart. It doesn’t mean that they don’t have compassion.

People grieve differently. And it’s religious people who think that we all should feel the same way, and that we should sort of express our feelings in the same way. I’ll give you an example. A buddy of mine, years ago, he was dying of cancer. He was in the hospital, lost all his hair. I went to visit him. You know, it’s sad, and I’m thinking, “Oh, man, this is horrible, and I don’t know what I’m supposed to say.”

And I go to him, and I said, “Dude, honestly, man. How you doin’?” And he said, “It’s awesome, man. Now that I’ve lost all my hair, I save a ton on shampoo.”

(Laughter)

I’m just like, “What the heck?” And it’s not that he’s not grieving. It’s not that he’s not mourning. It’s not that he’s not sad in his heart. But what he believes is, “Jesus died for my sin. I’m gonna – even if I die, I’ll go to be with him. There is the resurrection of the dead. I’ll get a new body without cancer. And my new body will have hair. And you know what? In the middle of it all, I’m gonna make a few jokes, ‘cause that’s how I get through it.”

And religious people don’t allow that. “Oh, you’re not serious. You’re not reverent.” Sure I am, but I also believe that God is a good God, and sometimes all you can do is laugh through your tears.

Point number six, Nehemiah 8:10 says, “The joy of the Lord is your strength.” People who don’t laugh enough, they’re weak. Their relationships are weak. We laugh a lot at the Driscoll home. I don’t mock my wife. I don’t mock my kids. Just so you know. But I am kind of a silly dad, and I believe that going to the gym will make your body strong, and laughing a lot will make your soul strong.

The joy of the Lord is your strength. It makes you spiritually strong to learn to laugh a little bit. I laugh all the time with my kids. I actually have a ton of fun with my wife and my kids. One of the things that attracted me to Grace, she laughed at my jokes and thought I was funny. Even when I wasn’t. I crack her up all the time.

My 2-year-old son, Gideon, I call him Good-Guy Gid. Two of his first words that he put together were “Silly daddy.”

(Laughter)

‘Cause we’re always having – we just have a lot of fun at my house. And I believe the joy of the Lord is our strength, and it’s cheaper than meds.

(Laughter)

Number seven, it heightens all your other passions. It’s the person who can’t laugh, who can’t grieve, who can’t mourn – it’s the person who’s emotionally constrained, “Oh, I don’t want to laugh. I don’t want to cry. I don’t want to feel.” You know what? Our God is a passionate God. He hates and he loves. He weeps and he laughs. Our God has the full range of his emotions, and we’re made in his image and likeness, and Jesus was the perfect man. And emotion and passion is good, providing it is cultivated in a healthy way.

And if you can laugh, then you’ll also be able to grieve appropriately. That’s why the Bible says, “We are to rejoice with those who rejoice, and we are to mourn with those who mourn, and we are to experience the full breadth of human emotion.”

And number eight, it is missiological. I Corinthians 9, the Apostle Paul says, “To the weak I became weak. To the strong I became strong. I have become all things to all people so that by all means I might win to Jesus as many as possible. I do this all for the sake of the Gospel, that I may share in its blessings.”

What Paul is saying is, “I look at the culture, and I do whatever is most effective to point people to Jesus.” We live in one of the least church-ed cities in the United States of America. People drive by churches, could give a rip about Jesus, the Bible, and Christianity.

And they wake up in the morning, and they listen to comedic, talk-radio banter on the way to work. While they’re at work, supposed to be working, you know this is what you do – download little funny clips from YouTube. Right? And then on the way home, listen to more comedic banter talk radio. Come home, watch a sitcom. Before you go to bed, watch Jay Leno, David Letterman, Jon Stewart, Stephen Colbert, maybe something off of Comedy Central, Mind of Mencia, a standup comic. That’s the average person.

Comedy is the language that people speak. For me to be a good missionary, I need to tell a few jokes. If I’m gonna get up for an hour every service, every week, for my whole life, and yell about sin and grace and Jesus, occasionally I need to give you a comic reprieve, a few jokes, entertain a little bit.

And if it means I need to be a fool for Christ, I’m cool with that. Because at the end of the day, my name really doesn’t mean anything, but the name of Jesus means everything. And in the city where everybody ignores church and Jesus, if I could just kinda be a fruitcake, and people show up, like, “This guy’s nuts. You gotta come see him.” And people come. And they meet Jesus ‘cause I’m talking about him, then I say, “Praise be to God. I’ll be a fool for Christ. I’m cool with that.”

And at the end of day, people say, "But it's gonna turn people away." We are one of the fastest growing churches in one of the least churching cities in America. And you know who tends to come here more than pretty much anywhere else in the country? Young, white guys in their 20s that I make fun of more furiously than anyone.

(Laughter)

Right? You guys who live at your mom's house and sleep between Star Wars sheets. I mean, you guys are awesome. And the reason I make fun of you is 'cause I love you, and they know that under it all is love, and I'm just the big brother, givin' 'em a wedgie for Jesus. That's my job.

(Laughter)

[Applause]

Perhaps, in conclusion, here are a few things I would tell you to sanctify your sense of humor. One, never mock God! Don't make fun of God. God's great, doesn't sin, isn't a fool, doesn't make mistakes. Don't mock God. Mock other religions and their false perspective of God, but don't mock the real God.

Number two, don't mock everyone. Right? Don't mock everyone. If someone's a victim of a terrible crime or abuse, don't mock them. In addition, don't mock your spouse. Don't do that. Don't mock your kids. That's cruel. Don't mock your mother. Don't. You say, "She's a huge source of material."

(Laughter)

Look, I know, but let it go.

(Laughter)

But now your dad – mock him. I mean, he's ridiculous, right?

(Laughter)

And he can handle it. He's got pants up to here and one eyebrow. I mean, let him have it.

(Laughter)

Don't mock all the time. Right? Don't always be telling a joke, can't take anything serious. I'll give you an example. When I preached the Christ on the Cross series about the murder of Jesus, I don't think in 12 weeks I told one joke. I don't remember telling one joke, 'cause it's not funny. We murdered God. It's real serious.

I've got a book comin' out next month called Vintage Jesus. It's filled with all kinds of comedy and jokes and I think it's hilarious. Next October, I've got another book, Death by Love, coming out. There's not one joke in there. There's nothing funny in there. It's really serious. I'm not always funny. It depends on what I'm trying to communicate, and we need to have wisdom that way.

Number four, heed wise counsel. Right? If your parents; your friends; somebody who's godly, a pastor or community leader, says, "That's gross, that's not funny. That's just wrong, knock it off. You're being stupid," then listen. 'Cause what's funny to you may not be working. Take it from someone's who's been picketed.

(Laughter)

Number five, keep looking for the line. But here's the problem. Everyone has the line of propriety at a different place. I preach to you guys, the line's in one place. Goes out to the campuses, line's in another place. Goes out on the Internet, the line's in a totally different place. It's crazy. I'll preach on rednecks and make fun of rednecks, and you guys are like, "Ha-ha-ha," and then I get some sort of rebuke in crayon from Kentucky.

(Laughter)

Everybody's got the line in a different place. Number six, again, laugh at yourself. You are the best source of the greatest comedic material. Tell stories about silly things you've said, done, believed, "Gosh, you won't believe what I did." I mean, laugh at yourself. Let others laugh at yourself. Have a little fun with yourself because you are a joke.

(Laughter)

Number seven, know who to mock. Psalm 1 says, "Don't sit in the seat of the mockers." So you gotta – the mocker's the one who mocks everybody. You don't mock everybody. You gotta be very Spirit led in your mockery.

(Laughter)

Right? You gotta – don't mock the person who loves and is serving Jesus. Right? Don't mock Billy Graham; he's great – guys like that. You know, the self-righteous, religious guy, the person who takes himself too seriously. You got to be strategic in who you mock.

And number eight, know when to mock. Proverbs 26:4, “Answer not a fool according to his folly, lest you be like him. Answer a fool according to his folly, lest he be wise in his own eyes.” You say, “What does that mean? That sounds like some sort of Zen statement that would come in a fortune cookie, “Do not rebuke the fool. Rebuke the fool, grasshopper.”

(Laughter)

Like, “What the heck? I don’t get that.” Here’s what he’s saying. If someone is hardhearted, religious, and difficult, if you mock them, they’re just gonna bait you into a fight. It’s gonna get ugly. You’re going to descend to their level. The flame-throwing blogerdom will ensue, and it’s not a good witness.

But additionally, there are other people who think way too highly of themselves, and the result is they need to be taken down a few notches, so feel free to take a shot at them. It’s a discernment issue.

I would say this, as well, I believe there are two kinds of people – people that I’ve offended, and people who have never heard of me. I believe those are the primary categories to which I’m speaking tonight, and what I would say is this, if I have offended you in the past, today, maybe in a minute I’ll get to you.

If I missed ya, I apologize for overlooking ya. I don’t mean to discriminate. Or in the future if you come and I happen to offend, I would ask you before you feed your offense to ask yourself this question, “Why am I offended? Why am I offended?”

And if you’re offended because I’ve sinned, then honestly, I would ask your forgiveness. I am a sinner. I have crossed the line. I do cross the line, and I ask your forgiveness if I have sinned.

But if you are offended because I’ve hit a nerve, if you are offended because that’s your issue, it’s fun to laugh at the other guys, but wait, I hit your sense of pride or self-righteousness or religion or holier-than-thouism, or dearly belovedism, then I would ask you not to feed your offense, but to repent of your sin. And to join me and have a good laugh at your own expense.

That your righteousness comes from faith in Jesus, not of your own works, and that you don’t need to defend yourself all the time, because in the end, loving Jesus is what it’s all about.

I will close with this quote from my dear friend, Charles Haddon Spurgeon. He’s a dead reformed Baptist preacher. He was an eccentric guy, weird sense of humor, quirky, passionate, had tons of critics. But he wrote a little book called Eccentric Preachers that I read this week. It’s out of print, but I took three sections of the book and put them together, and I’ll read them for you, because I think it really expresses the heart of what I’m trying to articulate.

He says, quote, “Many hearers lose much blessing” – that would be you, Mars Hill – “through criticizing too much and meditating too little. And many more incur great sin by calumniating those who live for the good of others. True pastors have enough of care and travail without being burdened by undeserved and useless fault finding.

“We have something better to do than to be forever answering every malignant or frivolous slander, which is set afloat to injure us. There are tender, loving spirits, pastors who feel the trial very keenly and are sadly hindered in brave service by cruel assaults. The rougher and stronger among us, those preachers with thicker hide laugh at those who ridicule us. But upon others, the effect is very sorrowful.

“As ministers, we are very far from being perfect,” – and I would wholeheartedly agree with that – “but many of us are doing our best, and we are grieved that the minds of our people should be more directed to our impersonal perfections than our divine message.” I always say, “I stand on a stage so you can take better aim.”

“Filled with the same spirit of contrariety, the men of this world still depreciate the ministers whom God sends them, and profess that they would gladly listen if different preachers could be found. Nothing can please them. Their cavils are dealt out with heedless universality. Cephas, or Peter, is too blunt. Apollos is too flowery. Paul is too argumentative. Timothy is too young. James is too severe. John is too gentle.

“Well, then, let each servant of God tell his message in his own way.” I love that line. “Well, then, let each servant of God tell his message in his own way. To his own Master” – that would be Jesus – “he shall stand or fall. Judge the preacher if you like, but do remember that there is something better to be done than that. Namely, to get all the good you can out of him, and pray his Master to put more good into him.”

Here’s my heart, Mars Hill. I love ya. We started this church with a handful of people when I was 25 years of age. I know I am one quirky, weird guy. And I’m willing to be a fool for Christ. And I hope that I can be as weird as possible so as many people come and they stop looking at me ‘cause I’m pointing to Jesus, and they receive the forgiveness of sin and eternal life that he gives.

I absolutely in my heart of hearts love this church. And I have a lot of fun being a Christian. I have a lot of fun being a preacher. I have a lot of fun pastoring this church. It’s actually a great joy for me, even sometimes in the midst of the tears. And I would ask your forgiveness for those times when I fail you, but I would ask you to do me a favor and take as much good out of me as you can.

I work hard. Take as much from instruction as you possibly can, ‘cause that’s all I really care about. And pray that God by his grace would give me more wisdom to teach well, and that God would put more into me, as my brother Spurgeon says, so that you could take more out of me. I love ya. I appreciate ya, and I’m gonna pray for ya, if that’s okay.

Lord Jesus, I thank you so much for Mars Hill Church. God, this is a wonderful place that I love with all my heart. God, this is like a child that has been born and grown up and I've had the privilege of, in some ways, participating along with others to see this church become what it is, and by your grace to see it become, ultimately, what you would have it to be.

God, I love this city. This city takes itself so seriously, and takes you so lightly. I pray that our humor would be prophetic in nature, and that it would have a purpose of ripping away religion and self-righteous pride in pointing to Jesus.

And, God, I thank you that I get to teach here. I love it. I have fun. I thank you that we get to laugh in this church. Not at you, but at ourselves and one another. We repent of all being Pharisees. We thank you Lord Jesus for gift righteousness and for free love.

And, Lord Jesus, it is my prayer that you would pour much into me, and that the people who come would take much out of me, in Jesus' name, amen.