

### *Did Jesus Belly Laugh?*

We've all heard that Laughter is the Best Medicine. Research is beginning to prove this old adage is true. It is shedding new light on the physiological benefits of humor and laughter on our health. Laughter reduces the levels of stress hormones in our body and increases endorphins and anti-body producing cells. Laughter is a natural high. Belly laughing works the diaphragm, the shoulders, the abs, and the heart. Laughter cleanses our bodies. Laughter is contagious. It can elevate the mood of those around you.

Laughter can fight illness.

The Archives of General Psychiatry published a research study that said optimistic elderly people who laugh and look for the good things in life lived longer than old grouchy pessimists. The British Dental Health Foundation said, "*A smile gives the same level of stimulation as eating 2000 chocolate bars.*" Call me crazy but if I ate 2000 chocolate bars I don't think I would be smiling.

The Bible is an amazing history book filled with great stories. Stories of war, birth and death, destruction, intrigue, deception, the rise and fall of kingdoms, seduction, betrayal, floods, healings, miracles, and also humor.

Sometimes the humor involves taking a scripture, rearranging the words, adding words and then creating a story or joke based on that scripture.

What's the only motorcycle found in the Bible? *David's Triumph was heard through out the land.* What two cars are found in the Bible? *Jehovah drove Adam and Eve out of the Garden in a Fury.* *The disciples were all in one Accord.* All of these jokes are taken out of context from the original scripture.

The *Life of Brian*, by Monty Python also takes scripture out of context and creates a storyline. In the movie Jesus is giving the Beatitudes to the people. On the edge of the crowd there is a group trying to listen but not able to hear. A man and his wife are arguing and creating so much noise another man jumps in to tell them that he cannot hear because of the noise. Eventually the husband and wife begin to argue with the other man as Jesus continues to speak. Finally another man jumps and tells them all to shut up because he can't hear.

**GREGORY:** *Could you be quiet, please?*

**JESUS:** *They shall have the earth...*

**GREGORY:** *What was that?*

**JESUS:** *...for their possession. How blest are those...*

**MR. CHEEKY:** *I don't know. I was too busy talking to Big Nose.*

**JESUS:** *...who hunger and thirst to see...*

**BIG NOSE:** *I think it was 'Blessed are the cheesemakers.*

**MRS. BIG NOSE:** *Ahh, what's so special about the cheesemakers?*

**GREGORY:** *Well, obviously, this is not meant to be taken literally. It refers to any manufacturers of dairy products.*

The story is taken out of the Bible and a new story is created about people who can't hear Jesus and just make up something they thought they heard. It makes me wonder how many people really couldn't hear or understand Jesus at the Sermon on the Mount and walked away with the wrong message.

Over the centuries people have sometimes learned only parts of a Biblical text and missed seeing the humor. Combine that with the serious paintings of Jesus and we come up with what seems like a gloomy Messiah.

Ancient cultures did not laugh at slapstick, sight gags, or the Three Stooges. What tickled these people were exaggerations, puzzles, and puns. Their response most of the time would be to giggle, snicker, smile, or in some cases laugh.

So where is the humor in the Gospels? In the Sermon on the Mount, in Matthew 5, Jesus talks about ethics. He says, "*If anyone would sue you and take your tunic, let him have your cloak as well.*" Scholars who study first century culture believed that people usually wore two pieces of clothing, a tunic on the outside and a cloak underneath. If this were the case, then, what Jesus would be saying is, "*And if anyone would sue you and take your tunic, let him have you underwear as well.*" People listening were probably smiling at the thought how many people could be walking around naked, just to be saved, after they lost their clothes in a lawsuit.

Jesus eats with prostitutes, tax collectors, Pharisees and legal experts, keeping his table open to everyone. He puts these people together in what He calls the Kingdom of God. What you eat and with whom you eat were key issues in drawing and maintaining public boundaries. The prostitutes and tax collectors were not people that a Pharisee associated with. These people were called *The People of the Land*, and the Pharisees were forbidden to associate with them. In Luke 15:1-10 the Pharisees were grumbling about Jesus welcoming and eating with *The People of the Land*. Jesus heard what they were saying and asked them, “*Suppose one of you has a hundred sheep and loses one of them. Does he not leave the ninety-nine in the open country and go after the lost sheep until he finds it?*” Shepherds were also considered *The People of the Land* like the prostitutes and tax collectors, and Jesus was asking the Pharisees to imagine they were one of those people. It was like saying to the Pharisees, “*Suppose one of you has a hundred prostitutes and loses one of them. Does he not leave the ninety-nine in the open country and go after the lost prostitute until he finds her?*” The Pharisees self-righteously would be on the brink of blurting out “*We are not shepherds and we are not pimps.*” This would have brought laughter to the common people at the table.

There is also a satirical cutting-edge humor in some of the parables. Luke 6:21 Jesus says, “*Blessed are you who hunger now, for you will be filled.*” We see the humor in this verse when we look at the Greek translation of the word filled *chor-tazo*. This term refers to any animals eating or feeding, in short—to pig out. This is not an elegant term used by upper class. For them it reads, “*Blessed are you who hunger now, for you will pig out.*” But the common people understood what Jesus was saying. This Beatitude may have more in common with the language of *Roseanne* than with the high drama of *PBS*.

OK, guess this one. “*Why do you look at the speck that is in your brother's eye, but do not notice the log that is in your own eye?*” Jesus had to be smiling when he told the story of a man with a log in his eye trying to take a speck out of his brother’s eye. He used this humor to get across his message that, as the writer and historian **James Tru/slow Adams** said, “*There is so much bad in the best of us and so much good in the worst of us that it ill becomes any of us to find fault with the rest of us.*”

Jesus was asked by a rich man what he must do to inherit eternal life. He asks the man if he has kept the commandments. “Yes,” says the man. Jesus tells him to sell everything and give the money to the poor. Needless to say the man went away inconsolable. Jesus says to the disciples, “*It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for someone who is rich to enter the kingdom of God.*” Have you ever wondered what a camel would look like after going through the eye of a needle? Jesus often uses hyperbole, intentional exaggeration, or drama as a way to convey his wisdom.

The disciples, who sometimes appear dumb as doorknobs, do not always understand the stories, teachings, or directions that Jesus gives them. They are not sure who this Jesus person is and exactly what he is up to. At the end of Mark 4 Jesus and his buddies take a little boat trip. They are going to the other side of the sea. They leave with other boats and as it begins to get dark a storm develops. The waves get so high that the disciples are baling water. Finally someone gets the bright idea to wake up Jesus, who is in the back of the boat sleeping on a cushion. Jesus gets up and rebukes the wind and tells the sea, “*Peace! Be still.*” Jesus asks them, “*Why are you afraid? Have you still no faith?*” The disciples, tired and wet just stand there until finally one of them says, “*Who then is this, that even the wind and the sea obey him?*” In unison they all say, “*Whoa!*” When the boat reaches the other side, in a land they have never been to before, Jesus steps out and immediately a man comes out of the tombs and runs down to meet Him. This man was the infamous “Gerasene Demoniac.” A man who lived in the tombs, a man no one could restrain with shackles or chains, and who would howl and bruise himself with stones. When this man gets to Jesus he kneels and says, “*What have you to do with me, Jesus, Son of the Most High God?*” Unlike the disciples this guy knows Jesus. He calls Jesus by name, bowing down before him and all the disciples can do is say, in unison, “*Who then is this!*” Jesus calls the evil spirit to come out and the spirit begs not to be sent out of the country. Jesus then asks the demon his name and the demon says, “*My name is Legion, for we are many.*” Now there is a herd of swine on a hillside (obviously not a Jewish community) and the demon asks to be sent into the swine. In the land of the unclean there is an unclean demon asking to be relocated into unclean animals that travel in a herd. I’ve never heard of pigs in a herd. You know the

disciples are still on the boat? Jesus sends the demon into the herd of swine and then the swine run off the cliff into the water and they all drown. The swineherds run off and tell the people what happened. Swineherds? What the heck is that, an oxymoron? The demon is gone and the people of the land ask Jesus to leave, not to stay and get rid of other demons, but leave. But the man who had the demon wants to go with Jesus, but Jesus tells the man to stay and tell everyone what God has done for him. But instead, the man tells everyone what Jesus has done for him.

Jesus tells the disciples that they are going to be wandering preachers and gives them some instructions in Mark 6:8-9. *“Take nothing for the journey except a staff—no bread, no bag, no money in your belts.”* Easy, right? Well apparently not for these guys. Twenty-six verses later, surrounded by a huge crowd of people, the disciples tell Jesus to send the people away **so they can buy themselves some food**. But Jesus turns to these bright bulbs and says, *“You give them something to eat!”* *And they said to Him, “Shall we go and spend two hundred denarii on bread and give them something to eat?”* Two hundred denarii, where did they get that money? *And He said to them, “How many loaves do you have? Go look!”* *And when they found out, they said, “Five, and two fish.”* Now didn't Jesus say no bread, no bag and no money? Yet here they are with two hundred denarii, which is like six months wages, five loaves of bread, and two stinking fish. What is up with that? Didn't they understand what wandering preachers are supposed to carry?

Two chapters later the disciples are again faced with a crowd of people, a bag lunch, and Jesus. In Mark 8:1-10, Jesus says, *“I feel compassion for the people because they have remained with me now three days and have nothing to eat. If I send them away hungry to their homes, they will faint on the way; and some of them have come from a great distance.”* Jesus had some feelings for the crowd; His disciples on the other hand are still a couple of degrees off plumb. *“Where will anyone be able to find enough bread here in this desolate place to satisfy these people?”* Call me crazy again, but if Jesus did it in chapter 6 don't you think he ought to be able to do it again in chapter 8? *And He was asking them, “How many loaves do you have?”* *And they said, “Seven.”* Again with the bread! Last time they had to go looking for the bread and now they knew who had

the extras. They still did not understand the concept of no bread, no bag, and no money in your belt.

Out of all the disciples, Peter becomes the one we can most laugh at. In Matthew 14 the disciples are in a boat and Jesus walks on the water out to them. He scares the men in the boat and says, *“Take heart, it is I; do not be afraid.”* Peter tries to also walk on the water and gets out of the boat, taking a couple of steps and notices the strong wind and begins to sink. Jesus reaches out to get him just before his fingers dip below the surface. Later in Matthew 16 Jesus asks the disciples, *“But who do you say that I am?”* Peter declares, *“You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God.”* Jesus looks at Simon Peter and says, *“You are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church.”* All the other disciples’ wonder, *“If this is the guy who sinks like a rock, how is he going to hold up a church?”* In Greek the word rock is *petra* and the name Peter is *Petros*. Elton Trueblood, in his book *“The Humor of Christ”* says, *“In our terminology, He called the fellow ‘Rocky’ and the name stuck. The paradox is obvious, for Simon was anything but stable or durable, which is what rocky things are suppose to be.”* To see that Peter is “Rocky” helps us see the humor in the parable of the sower. In Matthew 13:5-6, the seeds that fell on rocky ground sprang up quickly, (Peter often acted on impulse). Then because that soil had no depth in which the seeds could root (Peter usually had no depth of understanding or faith) the seedlings were scorched and wasted away (like Peter withered under the heat of inquiry when he denied Jesus three times after Jesus was arrested). If this was the rock on which the church was to be built, it was shaky ground. But the name “Rocky” was also a foretelling of Peter’s future strength.

So did Jesus laugh? Of course he did, he was human like us and had all the emotions we have; rage, frustration, worry, guilt, fears, embarrassment, seriousness, hate, empathy, sorrow, hurt, envy, pity, disgust, stress, sadness, loneliness, disappointment, shame, and joy.

Benediction:

Then little children were brought to Jesus for him to place his hands on them and pray for them. But the disciples rebuked those who brought them. Jesus said, "Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of heaven belongs to such as these."