

David J. Bennett, "The humor of Christ: A different methodological approach", *Humor* 24–3 (2011), 349–356

Summarized by Dr. Kareen Seidler

Did Jesus ever laugh? David J. Bennett tries to answer this question with a scientific approach.

The common opinion is: Nowhere in the Bible can we read that Jesus laughed. So he didn't. However, Bennett wittily suggests: "The New Testament does not describe Jesus emptying his bladder either, but we do not make the conclusion that because it does not say that He did, then He must not have." (350). Some scholars believe that humour can indeed be found in descriptions of Jesus's life and in his parables. One only needs to look for it. For instance, irony could be read into his famous statement "it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God" (Matthew 19:24).

In his study, Bennett proceeded as follows: he let people who identified themselves as Christians fill out a humour questionnaire. Such tests are often used to determine people's humour style. The participants of the study were to decide which sentences could most readily be applied to Jesus.

Of the 100 sentences in the questionnaire, the following five were deemed as most descriptive of Jesus:

- Has a good sense of humor.
- Has the ability to tell long complex anecdotes successfully.
- Has an infectious laugh that starts others laughing.
- Maintains group morale through humor.
- Finds intellectual word play enjoyable.

And these five were considered as least applicable to Jesus:

- Is scornful, laughs "at" others, rather than "with" them.
- Has a reputation for indulging in coarse or vulgar humor.
- Jokes about other's imperfections.
- Pokes fun at the naïve or unsophisticated.
- Occasionally makes humorous remarks betraying a streak of cruelty.

The humour style of Jesus Christ was, perhaps somewhat unsurprisingly, described as "socially warm" (354), led by good will and leading to social interaction. His humour is "reflective" (354), that is to say he easily finds humour in his (or other people's) doings and in everyday life. Jesus further has a "competent" humour style: he can easily tell anecdotes and has "an active wit" (351). He avoids "macabre, sexual, and scatological modes of humor" (351). He enjoys benign, friendly humour which stimulates the mind and does not hurt anyone.

Of course, Bennett, admits, this study does by no means definitely answer the question it poses. Yet it seems that Christians see Jesus as someone who had a very human characteristic when he walked on earth: a sense of humour.