

Community Church of Issaquah

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## Surprising Humor in the Bible

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Most of us view the Scriptures or the Bible as only solemn and serious history or prophecy or instruction and teaching. If we were to study it a lot more closely, we will find that there are some examples of light-heartedness or at least an interesting approach to some of the stories of those we study. Today as we prepare for our Testing and Treating experience after the message, I thought it might be interesting to tell you just five examples of stories that could bring a smile to your face. Get ready for this!

ONE:

If we were to spend much time studying the law of Moses, which is the foundation of historical Judaism, we would likely be overwhelmed with the tiny details of so many restrictions placed on these people of God. Did you know that a tattoo or a piercing are both forbidden? You likely know that eating port or shellfish are a no-no for the Israelites. But here is one interesting requirement that you likely have never heard about. Did you know that God instructed Moses to make sure that the priests wore underwear? And not just any kind of underwear. It had to cover from the waist to the thigh. Let me share a couple of verses from the book of Exodus, chapter 28 and verses 42-43:

*“Make linen undergarments as a covering for the body, reaching from the waist to the thigh. Aaron and his sons must wear them whenever they enter the tent of meeting or approach the altar to minister in the*

*Holy Place, so that they will not incur guilt and die. This is a lasting ordinance for Aaron and his descendants.”*

Now you know the history of one of the world's biggest industries. Is that a surprise to you?

TWO:

Back in the day of black and white television or at the beginning of color, there was a clever weekly series about Mr. Ed, a talking horse. You probably never wondered where the writers came up with that idea, so let me tell you. In the book of Numbers there is an interesting story about a military leader named Balaam. For some reason, he would not listen to the leading of God and set off on a mission of his own. God had clearly told Balaam and told him do not go to King Balak who wanted Balaam to curse God’s people. But Balaam won’t listen, so God decided if Balaam would listen to him, perhaps he would listen to his donkey. So God sent an angel to block the path of the donkey and only the donkey could see this. Balaam didn’t know why the donkey wouldn’t go where he wanted, he hit the donkey with his staff. Then lo and behold, the donkey begins to speak. Hear these verses from Number chapter 22 and verses 28-30:

*“Then the Lord opened the donkey’s mouth and it said to Balaam, ‘What have I done to you to make you beat me these three times?’ Balaam answered the donkey, “You have made a fool of me! If only I had a sword in my hand, I would kill you right now.” The donkey said to Balaam, “Am I not your own donkey, which you have always ridden to this day? Have I been in the habit of doing this to you?” “No,” Balaam replied.*

The fascinating part of this story is that Balaam does not seem to be at all surprised to be carrying on a conversation with a donkey. Thus, Mr.

Ed the talking horse was not at all surprising to be able to talk to us. Now if only our pets could talk, that would make life so much easier.

### THREE:

When the prophet Elijah was taken up into heaven in the chariot, his successor was Elisha. One day when Elisha was walking along the road, some boys – maybe teens or young adults – surrounded him and began to make fun of him. Do you know what they were ridiculing? Elisha had no hair. That condition doesn't seem to be a problem for us today, but evidently it was a cause for ridicule in the day of Elisha. Trying to move beyond the crowd of very disrespectful youth who had not regard for God's prophets who were surely well known everywhere. So what did Elisha do? Let me read some verses from the Second book of Kings, chapter 2 and verses 23 and 24.

*“From there Elisha went to Bethel. As he was walking along the road, some boys came out of the town and jeered at him. ‘Get out of here, Baldy!’ they said. ‘Get out of here, Baldy!’ Elisha turned around, looked at them and called down a curse on them in the name of the Lord. Then two bears came out of the woods and mauled forty-two of the boys.”*

Each time I read these verses, I chuckle thinking I can just imagine 42 boys running for their lives and trying to escape the bears. Do you think they might have regretted their actions? Truly, the Lord works in mysterious ways.

### FOUR:

There are certainly some events in the final days of Jesus that we know well and are the focus of every message during the week of Easter. We know about his entry into Jerusalem, we know about his final Seder Dinner for Passover with his disciples, we know about Judas's betrayal,

we know about the time Jesus spent in the Garden of Gethsemane before he was taken to trial before Pilate and we know about his crucifixion and resurrection. In the middle of teaching and preaching about that, I had never paid attention to one little event in all of those passages that made me surprised. It seems that when Judas led the crowd into the Garden where Christ was praying, there happened to be one disciple there who was wearing nothing more than a tiny linen garment. When the mob tried to grab this disciple, he took off running abandoning his garment. He ran into the nearby woods totally naked. Here are the two verses from the Gospel of Mark that I missed before. Listen to this. Mark chapter 14, verses 51 and 52.

*“A young man, wearing nothing but a linen garment was following Jesus. When they seized him, he fled naked, leaving his garment behind.”*

While we do not know who this young man was, many Bible scholars think it likely was John Mark himself, the one who wrote this Gospel. That might not be the topic of a sermon for Easter, but it certainly made my eyes pop open.

FIVE:

Some ministers like long sermons, other prefer shorter. I was told in my homiletics class (this is the class where you are taught how to pray) that if you couldn't make the point of your sermon in 12 to 15 minutes, you couldn't make it at all. I was also taught that the perfect sermon had 3 points and a poem. That definitely is not my style. Anyway, there's an interesting story in the book of Acts about a certain preacher named Paul. One night he was preaching a sermon that seemed to go on and on for a very long time. One of the people listening was sitting in the window and after a long time, he fell asleep and fell down the three stories to the ground. When they found him dead. Paul paused his

sermon long enough to bring the man back to life, and then went right back to his sermon, for six more hours. Here's that little story from the Book of Acts, chapter 20, verses 7 to 11.

*“On the first day of the week we came together to break bread. Paul spoke to the people and because he intended to leave the next day, kept on talking until midnight. There were many lamps in the upstairs room where we were meeting. Seated in a window was a young man named Eutychus, who was sinking into a deep sleep as Paul talked on and on. When he was sound asleep, he fell to the ground from the third story and was picked up dead. Paul went down, threw himself on the young man and put his arms around him. ‘Don’t be alarmed,’ he said. ‘He’s alive!’ Then he went upstairs again and broke bread and ate. After talking to daylight, he left.”*

So, here's my promise: I will never preach a single sermon from sunset to sunrise. Never. And to add some comfort, here in the Ministry Center, you can't fall out a window down three floors. You could only doze off and fall on the floor. But please, don't do that.

Each of these five little stories might be new to you as they were to me. Though I've read the Bible through several times, none of these popped into my brain at the time. But they remind us that even now there are things in the Scripture that might cause us to smile. I hope you did at least once today.

Now we get to the good part of the Fun-Day, your Testing for Treats. I'm going to give each of your groups 10 questions to answer. When you have put your brilliant brains together to answer them, we will see how well each group did. When I give the answers, see if you got it correct. Each time you do you'll be rewarded with the chance to dip into the Treat Bowls and help yourself. Are you ready? Here are the

questions you'll find on your clipboards. You can begin your test and I hope you get them all right.