

JESUS

Laughed



*His Life and Times Between the Lines
A New Telling of an Old Classic*

The Gospel Dude

Jesus Laughed

His Life and Times Between the Lines

A New Telling of an Old Classic

Told in Contemporary Prose
by Peyton Burkhart

Published by
TheGospelDude.Com

© 2019 The Gospel Dude

All rights reserved and are governed by copyright laws. Reproduction requires written permission. Brief isolated quotes permitted when full title is properly referenced. Registered with Library of Congress # 8022307891.

Source material: Gospels of the King James New Testament (public domain). Text is enhanced beyond the narration recorded in scripture. It is the intellectual property of and solely created by Peyton Burkhart.

Dedicated to Sparrow

**Muddy trail, sticky feet,
rolling stone lost between,
Dali landscapes and wilted dreams,
dusting hope and the will to sing.
Fresh winds blow, Sparrow.
Take to wing.**

Foreword

What's up with *Jesus Laughed*, the so-called new version of the Gospel? Where did it actually come from? First, trash all offbeat rumors about its origin. No, it was not among the Dead Sea Scrolls, a forgotten manuscript at last translated. It didn't wash up on the coastline of Greece corked inside an ancient wine bottle. Nor was it sold by an antiquities dealer at a street bazaar in Tangiers, Morocco, a black-market score by a lucky tourist.

No, the source is none of those. It is the story of Jesus though, true to the telling of other Gospels as recorded by eye-witnesses Matthew and John. It's

steady on with Luke and Mark, historians of the first generation of Christians. But it wasn't translated by Ivy League scholars, nor is it an authorized version edited by seminary theologians. An ordinary guy, a regular peanut butter and jelly dude, rendered the account in common words and arranged the sequence of events as they actually happened.

Younger generations kind of know the story, but mostly through vague, half-familiar customs. Easter and Christmas are somehow connected, right? And the uninformed of no particular knotting, the open minded, forward thinker? Many would profit by reviewing the account as well.

The text includes extra details, fleshing out the cultural and historical world of century one. When helpful, explanations are added. Conversations are overheard, lines read between, character reactions enhanced, and footnotes placed in the telling. It's a story about "The Story." Given all that, Gospel Dude is attempting to inspire curiosity. Walk through the parted waters, Sparrow, start here.

That is the why. As for the who... the Gospel Dude.

Categorically speaking, the word "dude" is used in a collective sense. Guys, gals, teens and tweens,

brothers and sisters, millennials, boomers, X's and Z's – techie-preppie-hippie-jock, little bud-princess-cowboy-pops – all y'all, this is for you. Step out of the shadows. Lead foot that DeLorean. Star Trek back 2,000 years. Consider the account for yourself.

The word dude also implies personality traits of a certain whimsical charm. What attributes make up such a person? Blended parts altar boy, Cub Scout, little league shortstop, student council member, he dug Buddy Holly and Chuck Berry in high school. Mix random philosophies of 60's culture and you find a dropping out, Woodstock going, purple haze inhaling protégé of Bob Dylan and John Lennon. One expanded worldview later and he looked more like Sergeant Pepper than Richie Cunningham.

Maybe he went to Vietnam, hitch-hiked around Europe, tried meditation, read Hesse, *I Ching* and Thoreau before reaching an epiphany of Jesus. Mellowing over the years, he became a tradesman and married late. There was nitty-gritty along the way, but he hung with the Savior and stayed upright through every storm.

He still can't hear Elvis without breaking into the Memphis shuffle – a sock footed boogie – as long as nobody's watching. A night school degree and 30-year mortgage later, his 1.93 kids went to college and

settled into professional careers. His ears hurt when hearing BS and he doesn't hesitate to mute the sound as needed. Through it all he never gave up the idealistic notion of a better world, an exodus back to Eden as it were. Learning to filter out extraneous noise, he realizes the only true visionary who backs up the message with an answer is Jesus.

Sure, he's getting senior discounts now, but properly noted, a dude is multi-generational. He's not restricted by any given age. Every decade has a version. The world changes. Society, politics, music, fashion, all contribute to the prototype (or standard model if you prefer). A dude can roll with it all. He's good that way. It's one of his more noble traits.

Now, he's wondering how to find common ground, to point others true north. He prays for a circle where people stand hand-in-hand strengthened by a spiritual force, believing the Prince of Peace can refresh the atmosphere. That's intuitive knowledge everyone's hip to.

Wait, really? In case you dropped the connection on that point, there's an easy answer; with two basic reasons. Some haven't caught on yet. Some just don't want to acknowledge a moral authority above themselves. Key to this discovery is letting down defenses. You know, the flimsy little excuses

propped up by irrational thinking that fall over from the lightest puff of logic. Whoa, jump back, Jack. Gotcha.

So, here's a clue moving forward—the operative word is found in an old Youngbloods' song. "*Come on people now, smile on your brother, everybody get together, try to...*" Well, I trust you know how the chorus goes from there. After all, there's a little "dude" in all of us.

Just a quick heads up, you will be tested on this material. Read on, Sparrow. There's a free gift inside.

Jesus Laughed:

His Life and Times Between the Lines

CHAPTER 1

The Word God (John 1:1-5)

Before time, the Word existed. In union with God and very much God, the Word God at the beginning. By expressing the Word, God created everything. Whatever He thought and imagined came to be when He spoke. It was the first cause, the whole universe front to back.

The vital force of God's presence gave life to the highest order of creation. Physical beings – personal in nature – reflected His image and enjoyed His divine friendship. God placed a light within each one, a source to guide their behavior.

So bright, it lighted dark corners, revealing poisonous things people attempted to hide from God. Still, it shined. Many tried to push it down and wouldn't recognize its value, that it was the essence of God.

A Plan Set in Motion (Luke 1:5-25)

For thousands of years, God pointed people toward the light. They drifted away from the source, cold and indifferent. At just the right time God intervened, putting a radical plan into play.

Against that backdrop, a baby boy was born by miraculous means. His parents Zachariah and Elizabeth lived in a remote country at the crossroads of Europe, Africa and Asia trade routes. Waters of a great sea bordered its western coastline.

Known as Judea, it was a small country full of vineyards, grazing sheep, farmers, merchants, and fishermen. Date palms, olive trees and grain fields dotted rocky hills where small villages were populated by the offspring of a common Hebrew ancestor.

However, Judea was under control of a powerful empire. Rome, the dominant nation of the age, occupied the country with military troops. Though it was once prominent under mighty kings of its own, and prophets of God, people of the land suffered poverty and enslavement under Roman occupation.

Living in accord with divine commands, Zachariah and Elizabeth were careful to obey their consciences before God. But they had no children and were too old to reproduce. Serving as a priest in the Jewish religious tradition, Zachariah went into the inner sanctuary of a temple built to honor God. He took incense to burn as an offering.

Suddenly, an angel appeared. Zachariah froze with fear.

The angel said, "Zachariah, you've found grace in God's eyes. You and Elizabeth have prayed for a son. God grants your request. When he's born, call him John."

Zachariah stood flabbergasted.

"Don't doubt. Be joyful, dance in the streets. Your son will be greatly used of the Most-High," the angel said. "He won't drink wine, not ever a drop, and the second he's born the Holy Spirit will fill him. Zachariah, are you listening? He'll turn the hearts of many, even stubborn people, back to God."

“How can I believe such a story?” Zachariah asked. “I'm old, too old, and my wife, she's old too. Both of us are dried up. We can't have children.”

The angel said, “I'm Gabriel, here with great news. But you doubt. Why, Zachariah? Angels don't come along, willy-nilly, every day. Since you don't believe, you won't be able to talk until after your son is born. Mark my words. What I've said will come true.”

People outside the temple wondered what was taking so long. Had Zachariah dropped dead? When he came out and couldn't speak, everyone assumed he'd seen a vision. He went home and before long he and Elizabeth conceived. Their childless state was put right. Imagine their joy. To bring a child into the world was considered a special blessing. And such a child he would be.

CHAPTER 2

Big Surprise (Luke 1:25-28)

Gabriel had more work to do. God sent him to Nazareth, a tiny village in the northern hill country, where he appeared to a young virgin named Mary. She was engaged to marry a local carpenter called Joseph who was birthed in the royal line of David, the principal king in Israel's historic dynasty.

Mary was busy with some domestic chore when Gabriel appeared.

“Hello, Mary. Greetings. God reaches out to you. Your spirit and grace are beautiful qualities. The Lord is with you.”

Mary had no clue what was going on, her thoughts a scramble.

“Don't be afraid, Mary. Get ready for a shocker. You'll become pregnant and have a son. Name Him Jesus. God has big plans for Him. He'll reign on King David's throne. As God's own Son, He will rule forever, a never-ending kingdom.”

Stuck on a technicality, Mary objected. “How in the world will that happen? I've never even slept with a man.”

Gabriel answered, “No need for a man. The Holy Spirit will conceive the child by the power of God's will. He will be holy, the Son of God. And guess what? Your cousin Elizabeth is having a son too. She's six months pregnant. With God, nothing is impossible.”

“Wow. Amazing. Well, I'm just a young maiden, willing to serve God,” Mary said. “Let His will be done.”

Mission accomplished, zip, Gabriel was out of there.

Baby Dances (Luke 1:39-58)

Mary hit the road, up and out of town to visit Elizabeth. Reaching her house, she called out.

Elizabeth heard the greeting, and the baby inside her jumped for joy. She sang out: "Hello, Mary, the most blessed woman ever. My Lord's mother visits me. Even the baby dances in my belly." She spoke this without hearing the story yet, inspired words given by God.

Mary answered, "This is the biggest news ever, straight off the God press. I'm singing with joy. Can you believe it's me? God washes me with holy waves of grace. He promised this, remember? His mighty power crushing the blowhards, all the slave drivers and evil hordes knocked off their horses. The poor and starving are eating a banquet feast now. His chosen people, generations born of Abraham's seed will feel mercy rain, buckets full of it."

The two women, giddy with good fortune, hung out for weeks, rejoicing over God's call on their lives. Then Mary went home.

Dreamland (Matthew 1:19-25, Isaiah 6:14)

Back in Nazareth, while working in his wood shop, Joseph wondered where his fiancée had gone. Coming back to town, Mary looked pregnant. Joseph knew it wasn't his child. He puzzled about ways to

call off the wedding, not wanting Mary to be publicly humiliated. He was a kind, soft spoken man, careful not to gossip or mistreat others.

That night, God spoke to him in a dream. The Lord's angel said, "Joseph, go ahead and get married. Mary's pregnancy is a God sign. The Holy Spirit made her pregnant. It was spontaneous, no sex involved. When He's born, name the boy Jesus, 'God Saves.' That's what the name means. He will save people everywhere from their sins. Remember the prophecy? The one about a virgin giving birth? Here it is, God with us. Emmanuel."

Joseph woke up. The dream settled it. He married Mary. Being devoted and respectful, he kept his hands to himself until after Jesus was born and weaned.

CHAPTER 3

John Arrives (Luke 1:57-79)

In Elizabeth's town, a celebration started, a foot stomping party. The promised son arrived. All her family and friends joined in. When eight days old, according to custom, the baby boy was taken to be circumcised. Family in tow, the parents called on the local expert for the best results. But a dispute broke

out. They couldn't decide on a name. Most expected him to be named Zachariah, to honor the father.

Zachariah still couldn't speak. But he took a piece of papyrus and wrote, "His name is John." Suddenly, his voice returned. In full force Zachariah praised God. News spread through the town and country. "God is up to something," was the buzz on the street.

Then Zachariah, filled with inspiration, prophesied over his son.

"Praise to God, the Lord of Israel. Freedom, salvation, power showing up in a humble family. He promised a new baby. He delivered. Our enemies better look out now. He told our forefather Abraham about the rescue. We'll be free to worship Him, free from the shackles.

"And my son, little John, you will announce the promised one. Call out in the desert, cry in the wilderness, and shout on byways the message of salvation and forgiveness for sins. A new day of God's mercy in upon us. Darkness is on the way out. Death is chased out of town by the sunrise of God. Peace is at the door."

No Vacancy (Luke 2:1-7)

At the time, Caesar Augustus, Emperor of Rome, ordered a head count of every person living in the empire. To make it more difficult, everyone had to

go to their ancestor's hometown. For Joseph, a descendant of David, that meant pack up Mary, so pregnant she could barely move, and journey from northern Nazareth to the southern town of Bethlehem.

Not just a hassle to travel, but when they got there, all rentals and boarding places were full. No rooms anywhere. With Mary ready to give birth, Joseph moved some livestock out of the corner stall of a barn and spread clean straw in a feed trough. There, in the arms of Joseph, Mary birthed a son.

The Incarnation (John 1:14)

And the Word God became flesh, an infant child. Fully humbled by taking human form, it was a mystery like no other, a beginning that would divide time. This unique connection between God and the human race was God's shining moment, the first masterpiece in a majestic plan.

Promise Spoken (Luke 2:8-20)

Nearby, in the hills around Bethlehem, shepherds guarded flocks of sheep. All was quiet, the sheep bedded down for the night. Suddenly, an explosion of light. God's glory flashed bright, and there stood an angel. The shepherds were freaked, and the sheep scattered, taking off for higher ground.

“Settle down,” the angel said. “You shouldn't be afraid. I bring joyful news to the whole world. The Savior is born, the promised Messiah, born right here in Bethlehem. Go see for yourself. He's wrapped in baby clothes, sleeping in a feed trough.”

Joining the angel, a choir of angels appeared and sang praise to God. “Glory in heaven, glory and peace on earth. Join in people, sing praise.”

The angels finished singing and flew back to heaven. Excited shepherds hurried to see what the angel was talking about. They found Joseph, Mary and baby Jesus in the barn just like the angel said. The truth sank in. They believed the infant was God's Son, the promised Messiah. They told everyone about the baby and singing angels. Impressed, all who heard about it believed.

CHAPTER 4

Purpose Revealed (Luke 2:21-38)

When eight days old, Jesus was circumcised. After a short time of healing, a purification so called, Joseph and Mary went to the temple in Jerusalem and dedicated Him to God. They offered two doves as a sacrifice. This was done according to the tradition of Moses (an ancient Hebrew leader who received Ten Commandments from God, a moral

code which established the Jewish faith). In his view, every first-born male should be offered as holy to God.

During the dedication, Simeon, a man who hung out in the Temple praying all the time, took notice and got excited about Jesus. He was in touch with God. So in touch, the Holy Spirit inspired him to believe he wouldn't die until he saw the Messiah.

Simeon, well on in years, took Jesus and lifted Him toward Heaven. "God, let me die in peace. I've seen your promise fulfilled. The light of salvation is here. I see it. Everyone sees it. God's light shown to His people, shown to Greeks and Romans, to people and tribes of the world. All behold His glory!"

Mary and Joseph stood speechless, the words striking them dumb. Simeon blessed them and told Mary of coming glory and sorrow. "Your child will bring the light of understanding to Gentiles and express God's majesty to the chosen. He will possess wisdom to read the souls of people like an open book. But He also will face widespread rejection. So too your own heart will feel the piercing of a sword."

A homeless woman named Anna, known as a prophetess, stood near. Over 90 years of age, she never left the Temple. She fasted, she prayed, she praised God day and night. "This is the one," she

said of Jesus. "He'll lead this nation, this city to freedom."

CHAPTER 5

Wise Men Calling (Matthew 2:1-15)

To announce the birth of Jesus, God placed a bright star in the sky as a signal. It drew the attention of wise men learned in the arts of science and natural phenomenon. Living in a distant land to the east, three of them solved the mystery of the star.

"A king is born. The King of the Jews. Let's go find the newborn baby, and take gifts to His Royal Highness. It's right we should worship Him. The star tells us so." All agreed and they followed the star on a road trip to Jerusalem.

Once they reached the city they asked around. "Where can we find the baby prince, the King of the Jews?" Word of their arrival reached the ears of Herod, a puppet governor of Judea set up by Rome.

Alarm bells went off. As ruler of the region, the threat of a new king terrified him. He consulted with Temple priests to learn the location of Messiah's birth. Herod tricked the three men into trusting him.

"Oh, yes, the newborn king. He's in Bethlehem," Herod said. "Have a look around and when you find Him, let me know. It's time I paid my respects too."

The three set off again, guided by the star to the place Jesus lived. Overcome with awe, they bowed and worshiped Jesus, opening gifts of gold, incense and fragrant oils. Mary and Joseph wondered, "What's all this leading up to?" They couldn't imagine what lay ahead.

Before the wise men started back, a dream warned them not to tell Herod where to find Jesus. Realizing the danger to themselves and the baby, they secretly booked out of town and headed back to their country. They discussed the decision. "Good thing we left. We could've been killed, and Jesus too."

The warnings kept coming. An angel appeared to Joseph in a dream and told him to pack up and leave. "Herod has egg on his face. He's flipped out and wants to kill Jesus. Take Mary and Jesus and hide out in Egypt until it's safe. When you come back, your return will fulfill an ancient prophecy, 'My Son will come out of Egypt.' Wait and see. It all works out."

Herod's Scheme (Matthew 2:16-23)

Hacked to the max, Herod commanded his soldiers to kill every baby boy in Bethlehem under two years old. He feared the newborn king would grow up and take over. The mass murder was so cruel, Jeremiah, an ancient prophet spoke of it. "Screams of grief fill the land. Deep pain breaks the

hearts of mothers who find no comfort. Their infant sons are dead. So many slaughtered.”

Years later, after Herod died, Joseph had another angelic dream. This time the angel said, “Go back to your homeland. Take Jesus and Mary and go. The one trying to kill the boy is dead.”

Hearing Herod's son was now ruler, Joseph wouldn't go to Bethlehem. He didn't want to be anywhere near that ol' jackal or his bloody offspring. Instead, Joseph headed north to the region of Galilee to live in Nazareth.

CHAPTER 6

Another Road Trip (Luke 2:41-52)

During Passover, a yearly festival celebrating Hebrew liberation from slavery in Egypt, Joseph, Mary and Jesus went to Jerusalem for the party. That year Jesus was twelve. After all the festivities, Mary and Joseph started back in the company of others from Nazareth, a real sizable crowd. They didn't see Jesus anywhere but assumed He was hanging out with friends. When He missed supper, they looked around but couldn't find Him.

Back to Jerusalem they went. For three days they looked, high, low and in between. Finally, they

found Him in the Temple. Jesus sat among the religious leaders. The center of attention, He asked deep questions. "Is the afterlife meant to reward or fulfill the redeemed?"

Rabbis and teachers debated. They were divided in their answers.

"Both," Jesus said. A murmur of awe spread through the onlookers who gathered to hear the boy wonder.

"He speaks in riddles," said a priest. "Ask Him a question He doesn't know."

"A riddle you want?" asked Jesus. "Okay, try this one. Who will kill the albatross, the ancient sailors' curse, who will see the dying child, and empty out his purse?"

A befuddled cluster of onlookers discussed the meaning. One Rabbi answered, "The elected high priest."

"No," said Jesus. "Who is everyone. A watchman we all should be."

To hide their embarrassment, the leaders picked at broken straws to criticize Jesus. "Who is this upstart, teaching us? A lad is all, poorly clad."

Mary pushed through the crowd and yanked Him away, scolding, "Jesus, you worried us to death. Why, son? We looked everywhere."

“I'm sorry, mother. But no need to worry. I'm in God's care.” Jesus pointed around the Temple court. “You should have looked here first. I feel right at home in my Father's house.”

They didn't catch on and missed the point completely, that he spoke of God as His Father.

Returning to Nazareth, Jesus obeyed his parents. He grew up healthy and strong, with a sharp mind. Mary pondered all the unusual things He did and said. Neighbors thought well of Him too. He never stole figs from any of their trees, nor spoke of the young maidens with vulgar language. Everyone said, “He's such fine Jewish boy.”

Click on the Blue Book Link Star to purchase the complete *Jesus Laughed: His Life and Times Between the Lines Gospel*.

Available as an e-book from Amazon:
down load to any devise.