

# Humor in the Synoptic Gospels

# ← BROAD VIEW OF HUMOR →

## ← NARROW VIEW →

### **Non-tendentious**

- Irony
- Befuddling stories
- Paradox
- Incongruity
- Exaggeration
- Absurdity

### **Tendentious**

- Ridicule
- Sarcasm
- Satire
- Acerbic rhetoric
- Derogatory epithets



# Plain style

simple constructions,

familiar words, short sentences;

promotes clarity and vividness,

brevity

- Word repetition
- Alliteration: the occurrence of the same letter or sound at the beginning of adjacent or closely connected words.
- Onomatopoeia: a word that sounds like the noise it describes. Examples: **boing, gargle, clap, zap, and pitter-patter**

**Mark 7 5:23**

Plain Style

**Matthew 21:23-44**

Forceful Style

# Forceful style

conveys anger with a biting and passionate tones

- Inference rather clarity of plain style
- Invective used to express blame, intended to offend or hurt
- Asking questions promotes confusion in opponents which forces them to implicate themselves



**Luke**

Elegant Style

# Elegant style

Charm.

Ranges from refined types (witty dicta) to derisive types (sarcasm). Produces varied reactions from lighthearted pleasure to terror provoking fear.

Expresses humor with more linguistic and rhetorical finesse and charm, but it isn't all lightheartedness or pleasantries.

- **Assonance**
- **Alliteration:** repetition of the sound of a vowel or diphthong in nonrhyming stressed syllables near enough to each other for the echo to be discernible (e.g., penitence, reticence ). Use of assonance creates the sound of despair.
- **Rapid succession of humorous proverbs**
- **Hyperbole:** exaggeration, creates charm

# Luke 3:19-20

But Herod the ruler, who had been rebuked by him because of Herodias, his brother's wife, and because of all the evil things that Herod had done, added to them all by shutting up John in prison.

Assonance

19 ὁ δὲ Ἡρώδης ὁ τετραάρχης, ἐλεγχόμενος  
ὑπ' αὐτοῦ περὶ Ἡρωδιάδος τῆς γυναικὸς  
τοῦ ἀδελφοῦ αὐτοῦ καὶ περὶ πάντων ὧν  
ἐποίησεν πονηρῶν ὁ Ἡρώδης,  
20 προσέθηκεν καὶ τοῦτο ἐπὶ πᾶσιν, καὶ  
κατέκλεισεν τὸν Ἰωάννην ἐν φυλακῇ.

# Luke 11:18-19a

If Satan also is divided against himself, how will his kingdom [ἐκβάλλω] stand?— for you say that I cast out the demons by Beelzebul. 19 Now if I cast out the demons by Beelzebul, by whom do your exorcists cast them out?

# Luke 6:39-41

He also told them a parable: “Can a blind person guide a blind person? Will not both fall into a pit? 40 A disciple is not above the teacher, but every disciple who is fully qualified will be like the teacher. 41 Why do you see the speck in your neighbor’s eye but do not notice the log in your own eye?”

# Luke 11:42

“But woe to you Pharisees! For you tithe mint and rue and herbs of all kinds and neglect justice and the love of God; it is these you ought to have practiced, without neglecting the others.”



# Luke 11:11-12

“Is there anyone among you who, if your child asked for a fish, would give a snake instead of a fish? Or if the child asked for an egg, would give a scorpion?”

# Luke 18:2-5

<sup>2</sup> [Jesus] said, “In a certain city there was a judge who neither feared God nor had respect for people. <sup>3</sup> In that city there was a widow who kept coming to him and saying, ‘Grant me justice against my accuser.’ <sup>4</sup> For a while he refused, but later he said to himself, ‘Though I have no fear of God and no respect for anyone, <sup>5</sup> yet because this widow keeps bothering me, I will grant her justice, so that she may not wear me out by continually coming.’”