

NO JOKE!

(Genesis 15:1-12, 17-18)

Intro: I would like to think that I have a sense of humor.

-Sometimes:

#Humor has a point.

#Just silly.

But there are some things that are no joke.

I. Our Scripture Lessons For Today Are No Joke.

A. Genesis 15:1-12, 17-18.

1. God appeared to Abram in a vision.
 - a. Abram was his name.
 - Before it was changed to Abraham.
 - b. Abram was lamenting the fact that he had no children.
 - Not only was infertility thought to be:
 - #Sign of divine displeasure.
 - There would be no direct heir.
 - #To inherit the family property.
 - #To carry on the family name.
 - Slave could be "adopted."
 - #To take care of the master in his old age.
 - #To give him a proper burial.
 - #To become the heir.
 - *Most interesting.
 - +Slave could inherit.
 - =At least under special circumstances.
2. God made a promise to Abram.
 - a. God took Abram outside.
 - In the vision.
 - Out of the vision.
 - b. God told Abram to count the stars.
 - If he had that many:
 - #Fingers. #Toes.
 - If he could count that far.
 - c. God said:
 - “That’s how many descendants you’re going to have.”
 - #Genesis 15:5.
 - “No slave will be your heir.”

- d. That might have seemed like a joke.
 - Abram was 100 years old.
 - #His wife Sarah was 90.
 - *Genesis 17:17.
 - We're told only later.
 - #Upon receiving the news:
 - *Abraham laughed.
 - +Genesis 17:17.
 - *Sarah laughed.
 - +Genesis 18:12-15.
 - But here:
 - #Abram is not laughing.
 - #This is no joke.
3. God is making a covenant with Abram.
- a. Covenant is usually a two-sided agreement.
 - Kind of like a contract.
 - b. But this covenant is one-sided.
 - Covenant with Moses at Mount Sinai was two-sided.
 - #God promised:
 - *Descendants.
 - *Land.
 - *Protection.
 - *To be Israel's God.
 - #Israel was expected to keep the 10 Commandments.
 - *Have no other gods.
 - *Not to take God's name in vain.
 - *Remember the Sabbath day.
 - *Etc.
 - *Etc.
 - But this covenant with Abram is one-sided.
 - #God promises:
 - *Descendants.
 - *Land.
 - +From Egypt.
 - +To the Euphrates.
 - =Furthest expanse of the Kingdom of Israel.
 - Under King Solomon.
 - #But what is expected of Abram?
 - *Nothing, really.
 - *But he believes the promise.
 - +Faith is Abram's end of the bargain.
 - +God counts Abram's faith as righteousness.
 - =St. Paul will pick up on that later.
 - Romans 4:3.

- c. But how to seal the deal?
- We might finalize a contract with:
 - #Handshake.
 - #Signatures.
 - #Notary.
 - #Company seal.
 - *Church seal.
 - God seals the deal in a rather bizarre way.
 - #Three animals were cut in two.
 - *Heifer.
 - *Female goat.
 - *Ram.
 - #Pieces were laid out on the ground.
 - *While Abram slept.
 - +Smoking fire pot.
 - +Flaming torch.
 - =Passed through the pieces.
 - #What does this mean?
 - *In English:
 - +God made a covenant.
 - =Genesis 15: 18.
 - *In Hebrew:
 - +God cut a covenant.
 - =If you think circumcision here,
 - That's part of it.
 - =But:
 - Cutting animals in two.
 - Laying the pieces on the ground.
 - Walking between the pieces.
 - =Way of saying:
 - “May this happen to me,”
 - “If I don't keep my end of the bargain.”
 - =Who is saying this?
 - Not Abram.
 - #He's asleep.
 - God is saying this.
 - #Smoking fire pot.
 - #Flaming torch.
 - *Theophany.
 - *Signs of the presence of God.
 - +Think:
 - =Smoke on Mount Sinai.
 - =Pillar of fire in the wilderness.

#God is willing to stake God's life.
*On keeping his promises.
#No joke!

B. Luke 13:31-35.

1. Herod wanted to kill Jesus.
 - a. This is the Herod (Antipas).
 - Who had John the Baptizer beheaded.
 - #Luke 9:9.
 - b. This is one of the sons of the Herod (the Great).
 - Who tried to kill the baby Jesus.
 - #Matthew 2:7-18.
 - c. This is no idle threat.
2. Does Jesus run in fear for his life?
 - a. Not at all.
 - He has work to do.
 - #Demons to cast out.
 - #People to heal.
 - #City to woo.
 - *Jerusalem.
 - b. Jesus is prepared to lay down his life.
 - To accomplish his purposes.
 - To keep God's end of the:
 - #Bargain.
 - #Covenant.
 - c. Jesus does lay down his life.
 - On the cross.
 - To keep the promises of God.
 - #No joke!

II. Life Is No Joke.

A. That Doesn't Mean We Can't Enjoy It.

1. With good humor.
2. I had a pastor colleague in St. Louis.
 - a. Who thought:
 - When we get to heaven.
 - God might ask us:
 - #"Why didn't you enjoy it more?"
 - b. That might be an issue:
 - Not for all.
 - But for some.

B. Some Of Life Is No Laughing Matter.

1. If in doubt:
 - a. Read a newspaper.
 - b. Listen to the news.
 - c. Look at how long our prayer list is.
2. Life can have its challenges.
 - a. Health.
 - b. Finances.
 - c. Relationships.
 - d. Loss.
 - e. Grief.
 - f. Moral dilemmas.
 - g. Ethical decisions.
3. *Vertical Limit*.
 - a. Movie.
 - From 2000.
 - I watched recently.
 - #About mountain climbing.
 - b. Opening scene.
 - Several teams of climbers.
 - #Ascending a sheer rock face.
 - One team.
 - #Members of the same family.
 - *Father.
 - *Son.
 - *Daughter.
 - There was a climbing accident.
 - #Climber at the top of the mountain.
 - *Slipped.
 - *Fell.
 - *Loosened the clamp.
 - +Securing the lifeline of the:
 - =Father.
 - =Son.
 - =Daughter.
 - Who were all tied into the same rope.
 - #As their clamp began to creep out of the crevice on the mt.
 - *Too much weight on the rope.
 - *Father told his son:
 - +To take his knife.
 - +To cut the rope.
 - =To let the father fall to a certain death.
 - =To save the lives of:
 - Daughter. -Son.

- *Son was caught in the middle.
 - +His father.
 - #Beneath him.
 - #Telling him to cut the rope.
 - +His sister.
 - #Above him.
 - #Telling him not to do it.
- *This is no joke.
 - +Father.
 - #Willing to sacrifice his life.
 - *To save his children.
 - +Son.
 - #Faced with the agonizing decision.
 - *To cut the rope.
 - =Let his father go.
 - *Not to cut the rope.
 - =Risk all three of them perishing.
 - #Cut the rope.
 - *Living with the consequences.
 - =Father's death.
 - =His sister's recriminations.

c. Later in the movie.

- Sister.
 - #Led a climbing expedition.
 - *Up the second highest mountain in the world.
 - +K2.
 - #There was a climbing accident.
 - *Her climbing party fell into an ice cave.
 - +They were not able to climb out of it.
- Her brother.
 - #Organized a rescue party.
 - *To try to save them.
 - +Before they ran out of:
 - =Food.
 - =Fuel.
 - =Water.
 - =Will to live.
 - #Much of the movie is about that climb.
 - *Some don't make it.
 - *But three do.
 - +Including:
 - =Brother.
 - =Woman.
 - =Old man of the mountain.

- *Older man lowered himself into the ice cave.
 - +To save the sister.
 - =Who was unable to climb out on her own.
 - +But as she was being raised up.
 - =From the ice cave.
 - =In a basket.
 - +Anchor holding the lifeline began to slip.
 - =Old man of the mountain.
 - Knowing there was too much weight on the rope.
 - #Took his knife.
 - #Cut his own rope.
 - Falling to his death.
 - So that the sister could live.

4. Life is no joke.

- a. We can't climb the heavenly mountain by ourselves.
 - Our anchors slip.
 - #Our doing.
 - *Our sin.
 - #Missteps of others.
 - We are in danger of falling to our death.
- b. We fall into a pit.
 - Ice.
 - Fire.
 - #Out of which we cannot climb.
- c. It's no joke.

C. But God Has The Last Laugh.

- 1. Walking through animal carcasses.
 - a. Cut in two.
 - b. Willing to cut his own rope.
 - To keep his promises.
 - #Not just to give:
 - *Land.
 - *Descendants.
 - To save those descendants.
 - #Sons.
 - #Daughters.
 - No joke!
- 2. Walking the way of the cross.
 - a. Jesus.
 - Cut off from his heavenly Father.
 - #“My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?”
 - *Matthew 27: 46.
 - *Mark 15: 34.

- b. Willing to cut his own rope.
 - Buried in the cave of the grave.
 - #To fulfill the covenant.
 - #To keep his end of the bargain.
 - #To save us.
 - No joke.
- 3. But God has the last laugh.
 - a. Easter morning.
 - b. Resurrection.
 - Out of the:
 - #Cave.
 - #Grave.
 - Lifelines for all.
 - #All who believe.
 - #All who trust the promises of God.
 - No joke!

Concl: Here at this altar.

- Bread and wine.
 - #Signs of:
 - *New covenant.
 - *Promises of God.
 - +Forgiveness.
 - +Life.
 - +Salvation.
- No joke!

