

# A Sermon for DaySpring

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**“Sometimes You Have to Laugh”**

Genesis 18: 1-15

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I've never been a real fan of church billboards... those kind with the removable letters. I'm never convinced we're helping the cause by using them. The gospel story gets confused or shrunk down by some of them. Like with that one back in March that said during Holy Week, **“Christ is risen”... “Go Lady Bears.”**

You just have to be careful with church marques. Things can get misread. Like that one that said... **“Bertha Belch, a missionary from Africa, speaking tonight. Come tonight and hear Bertha Belch all the way from Africa.”**

**Sunday morning's sermon: “Jesus walks on the water.” Sunday night's sermon: “Searching for Jesus.”**

Announcements can be misread... I saw one once where this church had been showing the Jesus film (remember that movie back in the 70s?) and all it said was, **“Jesus ends Thursday.”**

Some churches don't use it as an announcement board... it's a conduit for pithy wisdom. But that's dangerous too... One billboard said... **“Smile at someone who is hard to love. Say “hell” to someone who doesn't care much about you.”**

Of course the same problems can arise in church bulletins...

**“Ladies, don't forget the rummage sale. It's a chance to get rid of those things not worth keeping around the house. Don't forget your husbands.”**

**“The peacemaking meeting scheduled for today has been cancelled due to a conflict.”**

**“Barbara remains in the hospital and needs blood donors for more transfusions. She is also having trouble sleeping and requests tapes of Pastor Jack's sermons.”**

See... you know that's a serious announcement... but sometimes you just have to laugh... in church especially. Ever got tickled in a church service? Ever seen an entire congregation get tickled and try not to be?

I was 19 working as a youth intern for the summer at First Baptist Church in Houston when our pastor John Bisagno decided it would be a good idea to have an outdoor crusade in a football stadium... in July. (Yeah, we were all real excited about it.)

John had been a traveling evangelists for years and had the football stadium thing down and wanted to try it in Houston, so we did.

And they did it up big time... World's Largest Pizza party for the youth... Kids night where they had give aways... The Imperials were there... Larry Gatlan... Evie, All sorts of special musicians... then Brother John, as they called him, would preach and he'd get with it in true football stadium crusade form.

One night he was particularly fiery... “preachin’ about backsliding Baptists”... and “how some Christians don’t really serve the Lord and are just there for what they can get out of it.” John was really working up a sweat and going at it and he was yelling... and what he meant to say... yell... proclaim was....

**“Now some of you Christians all you want to do is sit in the shade.”** Only that’s not what he yelled. He misplaced a consonant when he yelled “sit in the hade.” He yelled the other words... and then he caught himself... paused and said, **“Uh... ah... I mean sit in the shade.”**

Ten thousand people bent over because sometimes you have to laugh... How can you not laugh? It’s not like you choose to laugh... like you’re sitting there listening to John Bisagno preaching about “back sliddin’” and he uses a four letter word describing what he thinks some Christians want to do in the “shade.” And then you say to yourself, **“I think I’m going to laugh at that.”** Your body and being just laugh.

If something is incongruent... like an evangelist cussing at you during a sermon... you have to laugh.

There are just some things that are funny and our body will not let them pass, we laugh.

Ever laughed so hard with someone that you thought you were going to be sick? I remember driving in Houston one time on the way back to work from lunch with two friends and we got to laughing so hard about something, that the guy driving had to stop. And we stopped on the access road to highway 59... he got out to lose his lunch and we got out to laugh at him. We couldn’t stop. We were bent over; painful with laughter... cars driving by... people looking at us. He was bent over throwing up and all three of us were bent over laughing.

You can’t not laugh sometimes... you have to. Laughter is the most real thing there is. You can’t fake it... There’s nothing worse than having to fake laugh... and everyone knows it. When someone tells you one that’s not really funny but it’s the polite thing to do to laugh.

Like with those Biblical jokes. They’re not really funny but you feel like a good Christian ought to laugh. Here let’s try it... Everyone fake laugh with me.

Q. Who was the greatest financier in the Bible?

A. Noah. He was floating his stock while everyone else was in liquidation.

Q. Who was the greatest female financier in the Bible?

A. Pharaoh's daughter. She went down to the bank of the Nile and drew out a little prophet.

Q. What kind of man was Boaz before he got married?

A. Ruth-less.

Q. Who was the greatest comedian in the Bible?

A. Samson. He brought the house down.

Q. How did Adam and Eve feel when expelled from the Garden of Eden?

A. They were really put out.

You don't have to laugh at those jokes... but sometimes you have to... you can't stop yourself. If something is so incongruent or so tellingly prophetic... you laugh... when something is impossible.

Did you hear the one about the old Jewish man who found a bottle and when he picked it up and Genie popped out and told him that he'd grant him one wish. He thought about it for a few moments and then pulled out a map of the holy land moved his hand across it lovingly and said, **"Yah, der has been such pain here in dis place... I wish that everyone who lives here could all live in peace."**

The Genie sighed, and said, **"I'm sorry, that's just beyond even me... the conflict is too deep and too old and too complicated. I'm afraid I can't grant you that wish... Is there something else."**

The old man exhaled... and his eyes glanced upstairs... he smiled a romantic smile and said, **"Well, my wife Ulga and I are very old, 90 years, old... I would like to have one last passionate, romantic evening ... that's my wish."**

The Genie paused and said, **"Let's have another look at that map."**

Sometimes you have to laugh. Sarah laughed... not because she wanted to laugh but because what was said was funny. **"This time next year, Sarah's going to be breast feeding."**

She overhears it and her body betrays what she believes... **"That ain't happnin'"** And before you fuss at her for her lack of faith... as if you wouldn't have laughed... know this... that on the previous page, in chapter 17, Abraham hears the same message and falls on his face (the text says) laughing.

He's doubled over... laughter will do that and there's no choice about it.

I was playing golf with a good friend a few years back and he told me a true story about his honeymoon while we were standing on the 9<sup>th</sup> tee box... it knocked me down. I was laughing so hard I had to lay down on my back. Needless to say, I shanked my drive.

That's what Abraham is doing... he knows that's impossible and it is impossible... so he's on his face, laughing... Sarah just laughs to herself. She hears... overhears the prediction... she pictures Abraham in all his glory at 100... and giggles inside herself.

The stranger bearing this impossible news, knows she laughed... and looks at Abraham who's trying to keep a straight face in front of his guests... It's impolite apparently in the Middle East to bust a gut laughing at something your guest says...

**What's she laughing about... She laughed.**

Sarah responds... **"Did not."**

**"Did too!"**

**Why are you laughing... and thinking this is impossible? Is anything really impossible for God?** Of course, the stranger knows how they would answer that... **"Is anything impossible... Yeah... like having a baby when you went through menopause half a century ago."**

That's what we think when we're faced with what is beyond us... and our body will betray us by our belly laugh... or maybe the tears on our cheeks.

The story... the entire biblical story hinges on this question, **“Is there anything impossible for God?”** The fact that Sarah laughs... and that Abraham laughs... and that you would laugh... or cry... says something about what we've known and what we know and the way the world is.

The bible is full of folks giggling at the thought of God working outside what we think can be true.

Moses, stammering, stuttering, Moses is told to go preach to Pharaoh.

Samuel anoints a little boy, David, as king. It's a funny site... you'd have to laugh... freckled faced, snotty-nosed, slingshot sticking out of his back pocket. This is Opie getting anointed.

The Savior of the World, showing up from backwoods Nazareth...

God saving the world in a way that makes thinking people laugh.

**“A god, hurting for humanity, preposterous.”**

And yet this story... this big story... keeps inviting us beyond our laughter and our tears to faith. **And if there's no room for laughter there is no need for faith.** That's part of why this narrative about Sarah and Abraham laughing is so important... being that they're held up as the epitome of faithfulness and all.

They're a mix, just like you are.

Two parts laughter and one part faith.

For every **“Thy will be done”** there's a **“you gotta be kidding me.”**

The real test of faith and faithfulness is not how they responded in the moment. The body just reacts... They laughed at the joke that an heir could be born. The real evidence of their faith, is what happened that night.

The strangers left, they both giggled their way through the day... and occasionally scratched their heads and smiled... laughed some more... wondered... **“Is anything really impossible for God?”** They had their doubts...

... But that night... after Abraham had bathed, he found himself putting on his best looking robe... and he put a little extra oil in his hair... and dowsed himself with a little Egyptian Ode. Sarah was still giggling when she cooked Abraham's favorite meal... barbequed goat with a side of roasted potatoes, and candied figs for desert. She also lit some extra candles... and gave the servants the night off.

They had their doubts... but Abraham went down to the wine cellar and picked out one of his best bottles any way. He put his walker aside... and sauntered into the tent as debonair as a 99 year old could be... he was singing what he could remember of their song... **“The way you look tonight... the way you dum di dum... the way you gum your food... it really puts me in the mood.”**

Faith isn't the absence of doubt... or laughter... or tears. It is what you do in spite of all the good reasons to doubt... or laugh or cry. So, Sarah, laugh all you need to but don't forget to put on a little perfume and see what God might do if you danced with your husband tonight.

**Is anything really impossible?** The answer is no... The world you live in is mysterious and sacred. And the God you have is mysterious and active... involved with you and with this creation and with history. That's the truth, even though we have plenty of reason to doubt it... and, perhaps, do at times.

And you see your own limitations... your barrenness... your reality.

And you see the circumstances of the world and it's brokenness.

And it's hard to believe...

but... you just never know, as the bible says, "When a shoot is going to come up out of dry ground."

Or when God is going to do something like dying for the likes of you and me and then working with us while he turns us into the likes of Jesus.

It's hard to have faith when situations are impossible. But you never know when God's going to use you to heal a work place full of pain and division... just because you decide to trust God and to be faithful—and do what Jesus tells us to do.

You never know what God will do with your faithfulness.

Could your limitations be the very thing God uses?

Could your dead-end wind up a doorway?

Could your cynical giggling become laughter of joy?

Hey, did you hear the one about the little church in Waco... that decided to change the world? Did a little spark of doubt pop up? Come on, you laughed inside... did too. Sometimes you have to laugh. That's okay, it is impossible... laughable and absurd to think such big thoughts... but really, is anything—anything--impossible with God?

The answer is **no**.