Baggage - Part 3

# The Freedom

## (2 Corinthians 3.16-18)

We’ve been talking about recognizing the baggage, the burden, and the weight that has become almost unbearable. And today in part three of our series Baggage, I want to talk about The Freedom of giving it to Jesus. As we turn to the Word of God, the theme for this message comes from second Corinthians chapter 3, verse 17 which says,

“Where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom” (2 Corinthians 3:17).

And so, my prayer is that this message that God gave me for you today would be something that came from the heart of God and that it would help you to live closer to Jesus, walking with him, and experiencing freedom in your life as you fulfill your destiny.

If you have your Bible or if you can find one under the chair in front of you, let’s go to Numbers chapter 22. I want to share with you something from the story of a donkey that the Holy Spirit would be able to communicate to each one of us. It is an incredible story about a donkey whose birth and existence was part of God’s plan. In other words, this donkey’s life wasn’t just a coincidence, it was all part of God’s plan, and I hope that some of you will understand that if God had a plan for a donkey that he has a plan for you too.

You see, sometimes we want something to succeed so much that we fail to listen to the little voice inside of us trying to warn us by directing us on a different path. This was exactly the case of Balaam, a man of importance among the Midianites who had a reputation for being able to bring both blessing or cursing upon whoever he willed. The Bible tells us in Numbers chapter 22, that when Balak, king of Moab, saw the Israelites coming, he and all the people were terrified, and so he offered to pay Balaam very well if he would come and curse Israel.

That night God came to Balaam and told him, “You are not to curse these people, for they have been blessed.” However, Balaam could not resist the king’s offer of such great wealth to curse Israel. And so, in verse 22 as he was riding his donkey on his way to do what God had told him not to do, an angel of the Lord intervened. The Bible says,

“When the donkey saw the angel of the Lord standing in the road with a drawn sword in his hand, she turned off the road into a field.”

“Balaam beat her to get her back on the road” (Numbers 22:22-23).

And so, this quote unquote psychic beat his donkey because she was seeing more things in the Spirit than he was.

To fully appreciate the humor of this story we have to think of it from Balaam’s perspective. He was a powerful man who had been hired by a king because it was supposed that he had access to the gods. The mystic was so enticed by the wealth of the king that he flirted with riches of Balak while pretending to obey God. However, he was proved to be a fraud by a donkey who actually had more spiritual insight than he had.

Verse 24 says that Balaam continued riding his donkey in an attempt to keep his appointment with the King only to find God intervening once again. The Bible says,

“Then the angel of the Lord stood in a narrow path between two vineyards, with walls on both sides. When the donkey saw the angel of the Lord, she pressed close to the wall, crushing Balaam's foot against it. So he beat her again” before continuing on his way (Numbers 22:24-25).

In verse 26, “The angel of the Lord moved on ahead and stood in a narrow place where there was no room to turn, either to the right or to the left. When the donkey saw the angel of the Lord, she lay down under Balaam, and he was angry and beat her with his staff” (Numbers 22:26-27).

Now, the unthinkable happens because the donkey turned it’s head and the Lord opened the donkey’s mouth. In verse 28, it’s like a scene out of the movie Shrek, and to Balaam’s shock she began to speak to him,

She said, "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 I had a sword in my hand, I would kill you right now” (Numbers 22:28-29).

Not only is it amazing that the donkey was talking, but what’s even more amazing is the fact that Balaam began arguing with the donkey. In fact, I think the donkey was even winning the argument. In verse 30, 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," he said” (Numbers 22:30).

Meanwhile the angel remained standing there blocking Balaam’s path and verse 31 says,

“The Lord opened Balaam's eyes and he saw the angel of the Lord standing in the road with his sword drawn. So he bowed low and fell facedown” (Numbers 22:31).

At last, Balaam was willing to pay attention, now he was ready to listen, now he was ready to follow the leading of the Lord.

I wonder how many of you may have experienced those times where your heart is set on doing something and yet you keep hitting roadblocks. I wonder if just maybe sometimes it’s an angel of the Lord redirecting you off of the wrong path onto the right path. Or maybe there’s something, some obstacle in your life, something that is part of God’s plan that is keeping you from a greater danger that you can’t even see.

You see, just as God used a donkey to protect a want to be prophet, protecting his people Israel, he has a plan for your life as well. In fact, I hope you understand that God thought of you before there was a sparkle in your father’s eyes. You were his plan before he used your parents to bring you into the world. God thought of you and created you and you are the result of the love that he has for you. The Bible says it this way in Ephesians chapter 1, God chose us in Christ before the creation of the world (Ephesians 1:3-4).

And so, in spite of what you may have thought or what someone might’ve said, you are not a coincidence, and you are certainly not an accident. You see, you didn’t just show up one day and God created a destiny for you. The Bible says that you were created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for you to do (Ephesians 2:10). In other words, before anything came to be, God already had a plan, he already had a destiny prepared for you.

In fact, there is a famous story in Matthew chapter 21 that you may have heard many times, but you may not have seen it the way you’re going to see it today. This is the story of Jesus entrance into Jerusalem for the Passover week that illustrates his sovereign plan so precisely. In verse one Matthew tells us that,

“Jesus sent two disciples, saying to them, "Go to the village ahead of you, and at once you will find a donkey tied there, with her colt by her. Untie them and bring them to me” (Matthew 21:1-2).

I want you to see that not only did this donkey have a prophecy on his life, but when Jesus tells his disciples to go get the donkey, it was tied up, it was bound, and they had to set the donkey free. The Bible says,

“The disciples went and did as Jesus had instructed them. They brought the donkey and the colt, placed their cloaks on them, and Jesus sat on them” (Matthew 21:6-7).

I tell you that story as confirmation that God has a plan for your life, the devil may have tied you up, but that which has bound you is just another confirmation that God has plans for you. And these chains, this baggage comes in many forms, it could be insecurity, alcohol, or lust that has you tied up, but God has a plan for your life. Some of you are tied up, you’re distracted and broken, and when God wants to use you, you don’t respond because you can’t hear him.

Let me describe it to you this way, God had plans to use David to kill Goliath and that is why lions and bears were attacking him. It wasn’t that he was in a bad place or that he was a bad shepherd, but they were there because God had a plan. In the same way, before Moses came on the scene, the Pharaoh was already killing babies because the devil knew God was up to something. And so, when Moses was born his life was threatened not because he was a bad person but because the devil knew that God was planning to do something big with his life.

In the same way, when I was in high school, God called me into the ministry, but because of my fears and insecurities I was bound up like that donkey. I would even skip class so I didn’t have to stand up in front of a group of people to give a report. It wasn’t until much later in my life that God begin to untie me and start speaking life into me, reminding me that he had a plan for my life and that he was going to use me in ministry.

I want you to notice that this donkey wasn’t set free by Jesus, he sent his disciples to untie it and bring it to him. And often when God wants to set you free, he will send you a man or a woman, sometimes he will send you a mom or a dad, he will send you a sermon or a book, somebody or something in your life. And when I was in my 30s God sent a man into my life who started to untie me, helping me to believe in myself, and recognizing that God still had a plan for my life. Slowly one rope after another I was set free, and many of us are where we are today because of the people in our lives. No matter who you are, when God sets you free, he doesn’t give you a ministry, he gives you disciples, mentors, parents, or pastors.

You see, God knows that I still had a lot of ego and pride that needed to die so he sent people into my life so that they can shape my character and guide me closer toward his calling. And so, no matter whether you grew up in a home with a mother and father or not, you are the result of those people that are in your life. And even though I grew up in a home with a mother and a father, but I never sensed that I had my parent’s approval, and I craved that affirmation. Even though my father was present, we never really connected, and so I grew up longing for his affirmation, deep inside I was longing for his approval. And I don’t remember the exact timing, but it was at least a few years before my dad passed away that I recognized that God had sent my dad to be an appetizer. He was just whetting my appetite for what is to come, and it’s only our Heavenly Father who gives complete satisfaction. And so, just like going out to eat at a nice restaurant, God sent my father as an appetizer, not to make me satisfied, but to make me thirsty for the real love that never ends.

That’s why Moses pleaded with God saying, “Satisfy us in the morning with your unfailing love, that we may sing for joy and be glad all our days” (Psalms 90:13-14).

That’s what God said to the psalmist, “With long life will I satisfy him and show him my salvation (Psalms 91:16).

And today, we need to understand that God gives us just enough to create a hunger within you, a hunger for more, but the appetizer was never meant to be the meal. God will never allow anyone or anything in your life to take his place, and so he will cause people to whet your appetite for his reality so that you will seek him.

Over the years I came to expect more out of God and began looking less to my dad for what I really needed from God. I no longer needed my dad’s affirmation because God’s presence filled that void more and more. God was the main course and suddenly one day I realized I had been loosed. I had been set free and I had the freedom to come boldly into the presence of God, coming boldly as a child of God just as the book of Hebrews encourages us,

“Let us then approach the throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need” (Hebrews 4:16).

You see, God will use lesser things to whet your appetite, to create a hunger within you for more, but it’s just an appetizer so that he can introduce himself to you. So, don’t be upset if you’re still hungry, don’t leave the restaurant, don’t leave church, don’t leave God, but wait for the main course, wait for his love and affirmation. You see, God is the real meal, he is the bread of life, and it’s as you approach his throne with confidence that real freedom is found.

There are some of you who have been tied up, you’ve been distracted, maybe you’ve been turning to everyone and everything else for affirmation, but you’re still hungry, you still don’t have it. And the good news is that when you turn to the Lord, when you turn to God, you come face to face with his mercy and grace. The Bible tells us in second Corinthians chapter 3,

“Whenever anyone turns to the Lord, the veil is taken away. Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom” (2 Corinthians 3:16-17).

And suddenly, you’re not looking for the approval of others, because you’re getting your approval from God. The veil is taken away, you can see, and you recognize that you are acceptable to God through Christ and in Christ you have become the righteousness of God. This is so important because the moment you realize that Christ is all that you need, that his grace is sufficient for you, you won’t need the approval of anyone else. And so, your identity is not found in how many followers you have, but your identity is found in who you are following. True freedom is found in following the Lord Jesus Christ.

In the fifth chapter of Galatians, the apostle Paul said it this way,

“It is for freedom that Christ has set us free. Stand firm, then, and do not let yourselves be burdened again by a yoke of slavery” (Galatians 5:1).

In other words, don’t get burdened again by all that baggage, don’t allow yourself to be chained up by false expectations, but embrace the freedom that Christ died to give. You see, we have now been set free from the law of sin and death. In fact, those are the exact words of the apostle Paul in his letter to the Romans. Chapter 8, verse one says,

“Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus because through Christ Jesus the law of the Spirit of life set me free from the law of sin and death” (Romans 8:1-2).

Now, that doesn’t mean that we can sin without facing the consequences of our behavior. The apostle Paul made that point in his letter to the Corinthians saying,

"Everything is permissible for me" but not everything is beneficial…” (1 Corinthians 6:12).

And so, when we are in Christ, we are set free from trying to earn God’s favor by fulfilling the demands of the law. When we are in Christ, we have received God’s favor, we have his approval, and we are free to enjoy God, to enjoy his presence, free to worship him and live in his love. Free to approach his throne of grace and bring our needs to him. Free to discover his purpose and to fulfill his calling in our lives. We have been set free to experience transformation in his presence.

The very moment we recognize the freedom to approach God on the basis of his grace and faith, the veil is lifted, the burden is lifted, and we begin to experience the power of his transformation. That’s what the Bible tells us in second Corinthians,

“We who with unveiled faces all reflect the Lord's glory, are being transformed into his likeness with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit” (2 Corinthians 3:18).

And so, it is in recognizing that life only offers us an appetizer, that together we can seek the Lord because only he can satisfy. As we turn our faces to him, reflecting his glory, we are being transformed because he is the main course. We’re not being transformed into who we think we ought to be, or who so and so wants us to be, but we are being transformed into his image with ever-increasing glory.

Moses climbed to the top of Mount Sinai and spent time in the presence of God and the Bible says that as he came down from the mountain he was radiating with the glory of God. That principle remains the same and when you spend time in God’s presence you radiate his glory. You are transformed into his likeness and the more time you spend in his presence, the more his character is developed in you. And so, the unveiled Christian life is one that gets in the presence of God as soon as possible and stays there as long as possible.

As we close in prayer, I want you to realize that we are entering into the glory of his presence, this is the main course, because the veil has been lifted. We can see clearly and we can enter into his presence with boldness, because there is mercy and grace to help us in our time of need. We’re not coming against resistance like Balaam riding on his donkey. We’re not turning off the road into a field, we’re not pressed into a wall unable to turn to the left or to the right, but we can come into his presence as often as we want, because where the Spirit of the Lord is there is freedom (2 Corinthians 3:17). And it’s in his presence that we can experience total transformation because of his ever-increasing glory. Let’s turn to the Lord in prayer as we close.

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