Baggage - Part 2

# Letting Go

## (Philippians 3:12-14)

We are continuing our message series called Baggage and I want to encourage you to live free and travel light, because it’s amazing as we go through life just how much stuff we end up accumulating. And so, what I want to talk to you about today is Letting Go, putting down the stuff that holds us back, the baggage that weighs us down, so that we can live a life that would be honoring to God. Our goal today is to learn to let go of the past and take hold of the future, unpacking that baggage, closing the door to the negative voices of the past, and embracing the truth of God in the present.

The problem is that everything around us, everything in our culture shouts just the opposite. We are told that we need to talk about our baggage, we need counseling, we need to rehearse it, reminiscing about the failures, the hurts, and the offenses. Even the media tells us not to forget, to stew over it, to get back up and take revenge in some form of premeditated act. Society in general teaches us to compromise God’s standards, trying to impress, trying to measure up, trying to conform so that we fit in. And so many of us have spent all of our lives accumulating all this emotional baggage, burdens and addictions, discontent and depressed, because now we are loaded down with all this stuff. In fact, some of you may feel like you’re stuck, you’re trapped under the weight, and so I want to encourage you to let go of the past and take hold of your future; because your calling is too great and your God is too good to waste your time on stuff that won’t last.

As we turn to the Word of God, I want to show you an interesting moment in the life of Israel. It was just about 3,500 years ago, the people of God were in bondage, enslaved by Egypt, and so they cried out in desperation, because when you’re beaten, you’re forced to work, and you’re not getting paid for your troubles, it’ll make you cry out to God. And so, they cried out for deliverance, not because God had promised them a better life, but they cried out because their situation forced them to cry out. The Bible says in Exodus chapter 2 that…

“God heard their groaning, and he remembered his covenant with Abraham, with Isaac and with Jacob” (Exodus 2:24).

You see, when you find yourself in a difficult situation, it makes you seek God like never before, and he’s going to hear your prayer, and he’s going to draw you out.

Israel suddenly found themselves in a place of wilderness, they’d been in a season of captivity, when suddenly they’re released and now they’re free. They’ve gone from slavery to wilderness, slavery to survival, and so now they find themselves in a season of survival. But it’s not like they didn’t have anything, because before they left the Lord told them to ask their neighbors for articles of silver and gold and for clothing. And so, when they came out of Egypt, the Lord caused the Egyptians to look favorably on the Israelites giving them whatever they asked for and so they stripped the Egyptians of their wealth (Exodus 12:36).

Israel learned how to survive in the wilderness, but the problem with the wilderness was that now they’re on God’s welfare program. They’d gone from slavery to survival, but now God is feeding them, and they’ve became complacent because they’ve got just enough. They’re doing better than they were, they’re better than they used to be, and so now they plateau. They’ve became complacent because they no longer have Pharaoh breathing down their neck. And so, they’re no longer crying out to God, they’re not fasting and praying like they did in Egypt, because now they don’t even have to work and they’re getting fed.

Life was okay, they’re making it, they’re surviving, and the Lord said to them in Deuteronomy chapter 1,

“You’ve stayed long enough at this mountain. Break camp and advance into the hill country… go to all the neighboring peoples… in the mountains, in the western foothills, in the Negev and along the coast, to the land of the Canaanites and to Lebanon, as far as the great river… See, I have given you this land. Go in and take possession of the land that the Lord swore he would give to your fathers — to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob — and to their descendants after them" (Deuteronomy 1:6-8).

And so, God told them that it was time to move out, they’d been at this mountain long enough, because God didn’t get them out of Egypt just because life was unbearable; he got them out of Egypt because he swore to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, and to Israel, to their descendants after them, to bring them into a land flowing with milk and honey. And so, they’ve been camped around the mountain, they’re eating, they’re singing, they’re worshiping and enjoying God’s presence and provision, but they’ve become complacent. They didn’t have a desire to go any further because everything was okay, and so God reminds them of his promise to their fathers and his promise creates a new hunger within them.

You see, God’s Word doesn’t make people passive, God’s Word gives you a fervency deep inside, an urgency to move, because God’s Word is liberating, God’s word sets you free. And so, they have all these great promises of God, life is okay right now, but they’re letting go, leaving it behind, and pressing forward to the promise. And his promise is that you would be the head and not the tail, that God is for you and not against you, that you will soar with wings like an eagle, and that you are more than a conqueror.

And I’m telling you that as an introduction, because of the likeness to the early church. We’ve been studying out of the book of Acts for several weeks now, the church has grown, but now it begins to experience growing pains. Many had become complacent, because they were just happy to be together, worshiping and praying, but it became very difficult for the apostles to minister to everybody. And it was at that time that opposition came from the Jews and one of the disciples, a deacon named Stephen was performing great wonders and miraculous signs among the people, but none of these Jews could stand up against the wisdom or by the Spirit by whom Stephen spoke.

And so, the Bible says at the end of Acts chapter 6, this opposition stirred up the people, seized Stephen and produced false witnesses who testified against him. In chapter 7 they dragged him out of the city and stoned him, accusing him of speaking words of blasphemy against God. And in Acts chapter 8, the Bible tells us,

“Saul was there, giving approval to his death. On that day a great persecution broke out against the church at Jerusalem, and all except the apostles were scattered throughout Judea and Samaria” (Acts 8:1).

In the words of God to Israel, “You’ve stayed long enough at this mountain. Break camp and advance!”

The time had come, it was time for the church to move out, the salt was now leaving Jerusalem, because it was intended to be spread all over Judea and Samaria. You see, persecution does to the church what wind does to seed; it scatters it and produces an even greater harvest. The Bible tells us,

“Those who had been scattered preached the word wherever they went” (Acts 8:4).

Those believers were God’s seed, and it was that persecution that allowed them to be scattered so that they could bear much fruit.

These were the growing pains, these were difficult times, and the Bible says it was Saul who was there giving approval to the death of Stephen, the first martyr of the church. It was Saul who would encounter Jesus Christ on the road to Damascus and be converted to Christianity. Saul, who is now renamed the apostle Paul wrote,

“We know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose” (Romans 8:28).

In other words, you may not like it, you may not have asked for it, but even though you can’t change your past, God can change your future. And so, the apostle Paul knew firsthand that our past doesn’t always stay in our past. Until you deal with it at the cross of Jesus Christ and close the door on it the past has visitation privileges.

There are some of you who woke up today and you hoped things would be different, but the past didn’t stay in your past, the baggage that you left behind without a forwarding address showed up on your doorstep. And if there’s anybody who understands what that’s like, it’s the apostle Paul, he knew what it’s like to be haunted by guilt, he knew what it’s like to persecute the church, harming good people, and even mistakenly taking innocent lives. And so, for those of you who think that everything in your life has to be perfect before you can serve God, I want you to know that God has a way of using ordinary, broken, wounded, hurting people for the sake of the gospel.

You see, even though we can’t go back to it, our past continues to haunt us, reminding us of what we’ve done. That’s why it’s so important to remember the words of Jesus in Matthew chapter 11, verse 28. He said,

“Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest.”

And so, we need to accept his invitation, we need to give our baggage to Jesus, letting it go, because if we don’t our spiritual enemy will use it against us. Not only will the devil remind you of what you’ve done and what you haven’t done, but he will tell you that what you’ve done is unforgivable and you’re unlovable. He’ll tell you if people really knew what you were struggling with, what you said to your friend or your spouse, if people really knew they wouldn’t love you.

And so, our spiritual enemy wants us to believe that God could never use a person like you or I because of what we’ve done, but the Bible tells us to demolish arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God,

“Taking captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ” (2 Corinthians 10:5).

And so, we’ve got to bring our baggage to Jesus, letting it go, letting go of the past, so that we’re able to take hold of the future that God has for us.

The good news is that Jesus doesn’t leave us holding the bag, holding onto our past, but instead he comes to set us free when we need him the most. We know that because that’s what he did with the apostle Paul. He told Ananias to lay his hands on Saul, praying so that he may receive his sight, and he did but it wasn’t without some resistance. And what I mean is some resistance from Ananias because he replied,

"Lord, I have heard many reports about this man and all the harm he has done to your saints in Jerusalem. And he has come here with authority from the chief priests to arrest all who call on your name.” But listen to what the Lord said to Ananias, "Go! This man is my chosen instrument to carry my name before the Gentiles and their kings and before the people of Israel. I will show him how much he must suffer for my name” (Acts 9:13-16).

In other words, God is far more concerned with your future than your past, he’s far more concerned about what you’re going to do than what you did. And so, how do we let go of our baggage when we can’t change the past? Well, the first thing we need to do is close the door on the past so that the enemy can’t continue to speak lies to you. And the most effective way to do that is by confessing our sins, the Bible tells us,

“If we confess our sins, God is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness” (1 John 1:9).

And so, the apostle doesn’t say deal with it, hide it, bear the weight of it, or even you should be ashamed of yourself, but he simply says, “If you confess your sins, God is faithful and just and will forgive you.” In other words, God’s grace is bigger than our sins, and so our standing with God is determined by our relationship with Christ and not by the rules that we’ve broken.

Some of you’ve been struggling with the baggage of something that you did five, ten, or fifteen years ago, and you would do well to give yourself the same grace that God has extended to you through Jesus Christ. You see, the power of your past was broken when Jesus died on the cross, and so you simply need to make the decision to close the door to those lies that you continue to hear, because you’re not what you’ve done, you are who God says you are.

And today, if you’ve put your faith in Jesus Christ, you’re forgiven, you’re loved, and you are a child of God. That’s what the Bible says in John chapter 1,

“To all who received him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God” (John 1:12).

And so, when you’re a child, when you’re a son or a daughter, your relationship is not based on the rules that you broke, it’s based on the relationship that you have with the parent. Today there are some of you that need to close the door to the lies of the enemy, letting go of the past so that you can take hold of your future.

When we respond to Jesus’ invitation to

“Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened” (Matthew 11:28).

When we respond to him in faith, receiving his grace, he saves us from our past so that we can step into the future that he has for us. You’re not what you’ve done, but you are who God says you are, you’re his child, forgiven, and loved. And so, God doesn’t just save you from something, he saves you for something, and that is to be his witness. No matter who you are God can use you to show the love of Jesus to people just like you. People who live where you live, work where you work, shop where you shop, or play where you play. The only qualification to be used by God is the presence of the Holy Spirit in your life.

Now, up to this point we’ve talked a lot about Paul’s past, Paul’s failures, Paul rejecting Christ, Paul killing Christians, but that’s not the point of this message series. It’s not about what Paul has done in the past, it’s not about Paul’s baggage, it’s about what Jesus Christ has done for us on the cross. And it’s so important that we’re able to see what God is doing, because when we look at our past from the right perspective, we don’t see our failures, but we see God’s faithfulness in our lives.

You see, the apostle Paul knew that he was a sinner, he struggled with the fact that he persecuted those who believed that Jesus was the promised Messiah. In fact, he said this to the Corinthians,

“I am the least of the apostles and do not even deserve to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God” (1 Corinthians 15:9).

But the most important thing when he looked at his past wasn’t how he could’ve been so blind, it wasn’t to see how bad he was, but to see how good God is.

Today, I don’t know what’s in your past, I don’t know what kind of baggage you’re carrying, but I do know what God wants to do in your future. And I believe he wants to write the story of what Jesus Christ has done in your life, what he’s doing, and what he wants to do through you. The Bible tells us in Revelation chapter 12, that the apostle John heard a hymn of praise uttered by a loud voice in heaven. The heavens were rejoicing because of the devil’s defeat and the proclamation was made in verse 11 saying,

“They overcame him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony; they did not love their lives so much as to shrink from death” (Revelation 12:11).

And so, it’s the believer’s testimony to the finished work of Jesus Christ that counts more than all the accusations of the devil before the throne of God.

The question I have for you today is what is your testimony going to be about? Is it going to be all about you, about your past and what you’ve done, or is it going to be about what Jesus Christ has done for you? My prayer is that we would be a church that tells the story of what Jesus Christ has done, because he is the center of our lives.

I love the way the apostle Paul says it in Philippians chapter 3. In verse 12 he says,

“Not that I have already obtained all this, or have already been made perfect, but I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me. Brothers, I do not consider myself yet to have taken hold of it. But one thing I do: Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus” (Philippians 3:12-14).

You see, when you’re in Christ, your identity is not found in what you’ve done, it’s not found in your past, but when you’re his, you’re called to let go of the baggage, to live free and travel light, because you’ve been forgiven.

And today God is speaking to some of you, he’s breaking through all of your excuses, he’s tearing down every monument you have built of “I can’t or “I didn’t” and he’s encouraging you not to settle on a life that’s less than what he created you to be. In fact, regardless of what you did or didn’t do, or what you’ve been through, he still wants to use you. That’s what’s so exciting about following God, it’s not about you and I, it’s all about him and his power and his glory.

The question I want to ask you today is will you trust him with your baggage, letting go of the past and taking hold of the future? You see, it’s not a question about whether God will show up, because he’s always shown up, he’s always been faithful, but will you trust him with your future? That’s when the real test begins, when you’re about to step out, and you feel unworthy and unable, but that’s exactly the kind of person that God wants to use.

I pray that many of you have eyes to see things you didn’t see before, ears to hear things that haven’t been said, and hearts that are broken by things that break the heart of God. I pray that you would live with a keen awareness of where you are and where you are supposed to be, because we’re living in the last days. I pray that that awareness makes you uncomfortable and gives you a holy discontent, even breeding a fervent desire for more of the things of God. I’m talking about when the Word of God begins to create a gap between the present reality and your future potential. Because when you begin to feel that the only way to overcome that gap, is to realize that it’s the same way you overcome the gap between your past and where you are today. It’s crying out to God in prayer.

And so, as we go to God in prayer, I want to remind you that you can’t change the past, but God can change your future. You are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works which he prepared in advance for you to do. And so, let’s press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of us, forgetting what is behind, and straining toward what is ahead. Let’s pray.

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