

# JOHNS CREEK UNITED METHODIST CHURCH

## Take Only What You need

Sunday, September 8

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How many of you took a vacation this summer? Now, how many of you travel light?

I remember observing a young couple in an airport a few years ago. I was at baggage claim waiting for my luggage to appear. The husband was standing there impatiently with one small carryon bag hanging around his shoulder, waiting for his wife's luggage.

I couldn't help but chuckle as I watched the dutiful husband with great effort pick up three large suitcases from the luggage belt. He dragged them onto a luggage cart and began to roll it out with his wife. He must have seen the grin on my face because as he passed me he said, "3 days. We were only in Atlanta 3 days and this is her luggage!" She playfully slapped him on the shoulder and said, "Well, I have a hard time figuring out what to wear so I just bring a bunch of outfits. What's wrong with that?"

Some of us can't help but carry a lot with us. We recognize this whenever we move. What's the most common question we ask when we move? "How did I accumulate so much stuff?" I get it. Whenever I move I think, "Did my belongings reproduce and give birth? Where did all this stuff come from? It keeps multiplying!"

A ministry colleague has a wife who is a flight attendant for a major airline. One day she watched as a passenger overloaded with bags tried to stuff his belongings in the overhead bin of the plane. Finally, she informed him that he would have to check the oversized luggage.

"When I fly other airlines," he said irritably, "I don't have this problem."

My wife smiled, "When you fly other airlines, I don't have this problem either."

Carrying a lot of baggage can create many problems in life, and I am not only referring to suitcases or stuff. I am also referring to emotional and spiritual baggage. Most of us over pack in life.

We weigh ourselves down with issues and wear out the people around us. Do you feel weighted down by all the baggage you are carrying? It could be grief, guilt, worry, anxiety, shame, jealousy, anger, pride, or resentment. It is hard to enjoy life and be at peace lugging all that stuff around isn't it?

Wouldn't it be great to be free of all the baggage you are dragging around? Today I am going to show you how.

Some of you may find that hard to believe. Maybe you have tried for years to let go of all your baggage but you can't bring yourself to do it. Perhaps you are thinking, "Really Charley, one little sermon is going to do it for me?" Yep. Because in all your struggles with your baggage you've held on to one thought, one idea that keeps you from letting your baggage go.

Some of us get up every morning and over pack our hearts with baggage. Some of you have been doing it so long it is simply habit. You are worried sick about your children and you think, "I must worry all the time so I will be more prepared when something happens." You are bitter about how your loved one treated you several years ago and ever since you have your guard up all the time. You feel so ashamed about something you did and you think if you carry that shame around long enough you will earn forgiveness and mercy.

For years you have been carrying this junk around and it has not only affected you, but it has had a huge impact on your relationships. Have you ever considered the impact that excess baggage has on relationships?

I read about a powerful drama that makes this point really well. In his book *Traveling Light*, Max Lucado writes, "A wedding is reenacted in which we hear the thoughts of the bride and groom. The groom enters, laden with luggage. A bag dangles from every appendage. And each bag is labeled: guilt, anger, arrogance, insecurities. This fellow is loaded. As he stands at the altar, the

audience hears him thinking, Finally, a woman who will help me carry all my burdens. She's so strong, so stable, so . . .

"As his thoughts continue, hers begin. She enters, wearing a wedding gown but, like her fiancé, covered with luggage. Pulling a hanging bag, shouldering a carry-on, hauling a makeup kit, paper sack—everything you could imagine and everything labeled. She has her own bags: prejudice, loneliness, disappointments. And her expectations? Listen to what she is thinking: Just a few more minutes and I've got me a man. No more counselors. No more group sessions. So long, discouragement and worry. I won't be seeing you anymore. He's going to fix me. Finally they stand at the altar, lost in a mountain of luggage. They smile their way through the ceremony, but when given the invitation to kiss each other, they can't. How do you embrace someone if your arms are full of bags?"

Some of you carry so much baggage that you are unable to have healthy relationships. Your marriage suffers. Your friendships suffer. It is time to do something about it. Some of you actually showed up to worship today with a lot of baggage. Your heart feels heavy and your soul is tired. It is good you brought it with you today because this message is going to set you free from it.

I want to help set all of us free today by taking a look at one of the most beloved passages in the Bible – the 23<sup>rd</sup> Psalm. There are two verses phrases in the Psalm that have the power to set us free from what we are lugging around. One of them is verse 3: "***He restores my soul.***"

Now remember David was a shepherd. He wrote this psalm out of his own knowledge as a shepherd. The background of this phrase is life changing. Carolyn Gibson writes, "From time to time a shepherd is required to restore his sheep for sheep have a tendency to get 'cast down.' Phillip Keller, in his book, *A Shepherd Looks at Psalm 23*, describes what happens when a sheep is cast down. It finds itself on its back, all four legs straight up in the air, and unable to get back up. The attentive shepherd will set it back on its feet, massaging life back into its limbs. The shepherd restores the sheep.

"What causes the sheep to become cast down in the first place? Most often it's because they have too much wool! The sheep's fleece becomes very long, heavily matted with mud and burrs and

other debris so that it is weighed down with its own wool, rendered totally helpless and useless.

"Sheep do not enjoy being sheared, but it must be done and when it is over, there is a great relief. There is no longer the threat of being cast down and there is pleasure in being set free from the hot, heavy coat. Set free to follow the shepherd once again" ("Traveling Light").

That's what God wants to do for you today. He wants to shear you of all the heavy wool that is weighing you down. He wants to take from you all the things that have you stuck in the mire of life. Jesus gives us this invitation in Matthew 11:28: "***Come to me, all of you who are weary and carry heavy burdens, and I will give you rest.***"

Here is the message that will see you free today. You ready? **Letting go of your baggage means trusting God with burdens you are not supposed to carry.**

You see, so many of us carry all this baggage around because somehow we think we are supposed to be carrying it. We feel obligated to carry it. We think it is our job. We feel guilty if we are not lugging it around. Where does it say in the Bible that we are supposed to lug our burdens around? I have never read it. Instead the Bible tells us over and over again to give our worries and cares to God. Not only because God wants us to be at peace, but God also wants to use us! God wants to use you! But how can he if you are exhausted, if you are lugging around a bunch of stuff?

So how do we let our baggage go? Well that leads to another powerful image in the 23<sup>rd</sup> Psalm. It is verse 2: "***He leads me beside still waters.***" If we want to be set free from our baggage, to be sheared of our heavy wool we have to be still. God can't do it unless we are still before him. He can only lead us when we are still.

A pastor tells about a woman in his congregation. She is one of those overcommitted types, always frantically busy, never stopping to catch her breath. "I'm too busy" is her constant cry. The pastor finally asked the woman, "How do you ever expect God to get hold of you if you never stand still?" It's a good question. And maybe an essential question for you this morning.

It is only when we are still that God can lead us. You see a lot of our baggage revolves around worry and anxiety. That's why we can't sit still. But when we finally take the moment to be still before

God he can lead us. Twice in the 23<sup>rd</sup> Psalm it says, “God leads us.”

Once again Lucado puts it so poignantly: “God leads us. That means God isn’t behind me, yelling, ‘Go!’ He is ahead of us saying, ‘Come!’ He is in front, clearing the path, cutting the brush, showing the way. Just before the curve, he says, ‘Turn here.’ Prior to the rise, he motions, ‘Step up here.’ Standing next to the rocks, he warns, ‘Watch your step here.’ He leads us. He tells us what we need to know when we need to know it” (*Traveling Light*).

This is what Hebrews 4:16 says: “***We will find grace to help us when we need it***” (Heb. 4: 16 NLT, emphasis mine).

Lucado compares God’s help to the way a father gives plane tickets to his family. When Lucado travels with his kids, he will carry all their tickets in his satchel. When the moment comes to board the plane, he stands between the attendant and the child. As each daughter passes, he places a ticket in her hand. She, in turn, gives the ticket to the attendant. “Each one receives the ticket in the nick of time. God will do the same for you. He places himself between you and the need. And at the right time, he gives you the ticket...God leads us. God will do the right thing at the right time. And what a difference that makes. Since I know his provision is timely, I can let go all my worries, all my baggage and enjoy the present” (*Traveling Light*). This is exactly what Jesus tells us to do. Take a look:

***“Give your entire attention to what God is doing right now, and don’t get worked up about what mayor may not happen tomorrow. God will help you deal with whatever hard things come up when the time comes” -Matthew 6: 34 MSG***

Lucado writes, “That last phrase is worthy of your highlighter: ‘when the time comes.’ ‘I don’t know what I’ll do if my husband dies.’ You will, when the time comes. ‘When my children leave the house, I don’t think I can take it.’ It won’t be easy, but strength will arrive when the time comes.” I don’t know how I am going to.... You will when the time comes...

*Letting go of your baggage means trusting God with burdens you are not supposed to carry.* It means meeting today’s problems with today’s strength and giving the rest to God.

“The story is told of a man on an African

safari deep in the jungle. The guide before him had a machete and was whacking away the tall weeds and thick underbrush. The traveler, wearied and hot, asked in frustration, ‘Where are we? Do you know where you are taking me? Where is the path?’ The seasoned guide stopped and looked back at the man and replied, ‘I am the way.’

“We ask the same questions, don’t we? We ask God, ‘Where are you taking me? Where is the path?’ And he, like the guide, doesn’t tell us. Oh, he may give us a hint or two, but that’s all. If he did, would we understand? Would we comprehend our location? No, like the traveler, we are unacquainted with this jungle. So rather than give us an answer, Jesus gives us a far greater gift. He gives us himself” (Lucado).

God’s got this. God’s got your back.

Let me give you one powerful verse of scripture to take with you each day to remind you to allow God to lead you:

***You can throw the whole weight of your anxieties upon him, for you are his personal concern.***

**-1<sup>st</sup> Peter 5:7**

Whatever baggage you are carrying today, whatever it is, just give it to God and trust that he will work everything out for the best. Now notice it says “Throw.” That is the actual Greek word in the text. I like that because throwing means you get rid of it completely. You “chuck” it to God. You are free of it. It doesn’t belong to you anymore. Now this doesn’t mean we just sit around and do nothing. We do have a part to play but part is obedience. When the time is right God will give us the wisdom and power needed to do what we need to do (adevotion.org, “Throw Your Cares on the Lord”).

To help you “chuck” your baggage to God I encourage you to write down all of your baggage on a piece of paper and then throw it into the trash. Just throw it away, and as you throw it visualize that you are throwing it over to God.

In her song titled “Trust His Heart,” singer songwriter Babbie Mason puts it this way: “God is too wise to be mistaken; God is too good to be unkind. So when you don’t understand, when you don’t see His plan, when you can’t trace His hand, trust His heart.”

Trust God’s heart. He knows you are tired and worn out, carrying baggage you don’t need to carry. Don’t you think you have been carrying it

long enough? Isn't it time to let God have it? He is waiting for you to throw it all over to him. You can trust him. God's got this.

*Light*. It was an excellent resource for me as I prepared this sermon. 

-I am grateful for Max Lucado's book *Traveling*



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