

Baggage: A New Thing

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[0 : 00] Well, good morning. I can barely hear you so far back. There's a little pastoral shot. Welcome here for this Sunday, January 15th. My name is Kent Dixon. It's my joy to be the lead pastor here. And last week, we started a three-week sermon series called Baggage. So for people who do sermon series math, one, two, three. So we're a third, 66% done. So we recognize that the start of a new year is the perfect time to make positive changes in our habits and maybe to break out of some of the ruts that we've developed in our lives. But even more than seeking to create new habits, I believe we need to recognize old habits. We talked about that. And the other things in our lives that we tend to carry with us, that tend to maybe weigh us down. And so we're continuing to explore this together over the next three weeks in the sermon series, Baggage. Last week, we considered the importance of learning to, in the words of Frozen, let it go. To ask God for help to identify the negative baggage we've been carrying in our lives. To bring that baggage into the light and recognize the power that it might be holding over us. And then to ask God for help in learning to let it go. Because there are certain things in our lives that we simply need to let go of in order to grow in our walk with Christ. Let's hear the important words of Ephesians 4, 31, and 32 again. You can just listen. Get rid of all bitterness, rage, and anger, brawling, and slander, along with every form of malice. Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ, God forgave you. Some of the baggage that we carry around with us can take the form of bitterness and anger because of pain and frustration. And that could spill over into our current and future relationships and create collateral damage. And I mentioned that last Sunday. Friends, we have to let it go.

We have to choose forgiveness and repentance in order to be kind and tender-hearted and loving towards one another. So we're continuing in this three-week series today by seeking to recognize a new thing. So there are two tendencies in human nature that I've come to recognize over time. And maybe this will be relatable to you. There are people who look towards the future, always seeking to reinvent new ways of doing things, and even to leave the past behind, to move on from the past. And then there are people who crave stability and for their circumstances to remain the same in their lives. They prefer things to remain constant and predictable. And I don't believe either of those perspectives are wrong in any way. In fact, they have inherent benefits. Because the person who seeks change and to be continually moving forward wants momentum.

They want to maybe even, they're maybe even energized by the challenge that new or changing circumstances can bring. The hope and energy and passion that change can bring. So maybe that describes you.

[3 : 36] If it does, you're probably a close-the-book kind of person. You want to close the book on 2022. You want to move on and move forward. And you're likely excited about the new adventures that a new year can bring. So the person who seeks sameness likely is looking for stability, consistency, so that they know what to expect and how things are generally going to go. So is that you?

Then you likely cherish the experiences and memories of 2022, the memories of the past. And you hope some of those things carry over and that nothing really significantly changes. Does that make sense as well?

So it's also important to recognize some of the challenges that these two perspectives can bring. A person who is always looking to move forward may be missing out on lessons from the past. Or perhaps even the value and richness that history and tradition can bring. The lessons that we have learned can affect, can impact, can positively change our future. Sometimes the new thing, the new way, actually isn't an improvement at all. And it can often be a distraction.

And I've talked about before, you've heard me say it many times, that as human beings, we are wired for the next thing. We are wired to be constantly looking for the next challenge, the next adventure.

[5 : 11] And that is exactly how God wired us, how God made us to be. The challenge, the negative aspect, comes in the things that we seek. We're not seeking God, we're seeking other things and fulfillment in other things. So we need to not be too quick to move forward, so quick that we leave important things behind. The person who craves stability and sameness may also be operating out of, we need to recognize, a fear of the unknown. They may prefer how relatively safe and familiar they perceive that things used to be. And so they prefer to keep seeking to return to the way things were, maybe even reminiscing about the good old days. We've all heard that expression. And so for someone who's wired that way, a common phrase for them may be, we've never done it this way before. Or we've always done it this way. So again, this person may be operating out of fear, fear of the unknown, resistance to change, and that can be often a comfort-based perspective. So how does all of this, these two ways of looking at our lives, how does it factor into our relationship with God and what he wants to do in and through us?

Well, many people are unwilling to experience the new things God is trying to do in and through you because of the baggage that may keep you longing for the past. When we wonder what if or if only, I believe we rob ourselves of the fresh work that God is seeking to do in us. The things that can take place that God will do that we can't even begin to imagine. Listen to these wise words from Isaiah 43, 18 and 19. Prophet Isaiah says, Forget the former things. Do not dwell on the past. See, I am doing a new thing. Now it springs up. Do you not perceive it? I am making a way in the wilderness and streams in the wasteland. Isaiah 43, 18 and 19.

Have you ever seen a movie or heard a story about someone who is constantly referencing a point in their past? The good old days. The anecdotal high school quarterback who relives his state championship, winning a touchdown that he threw Friday and he's reminiscing at a local bar. That may come to mind.

What about the past? What is it about the past that keeps our attention? Even as time continues to march forward into the future, what is the attraction of the past? Well, to be fair, haven't we all at some point, certainly during the pandemic, wanted things to go back to how they used to be? I have not had a normal, a pastoral friend of mine laughed and said, what is normal in pastoral ministry? But I said, I don't think I've had a normal year yet. If I can stop cutting myself and now that I'm ordained and maybe we can move forward, Pastor Kent. But God is still challenging me with things. So what about the good old days seemed more, sorry, what about the good old days when things seemed more simple? When life wasn't so complicated? Can you perceive that to be the good old days? There's a comedian that I like who, he said, are you longing for the good old days? He said, these are the good old days. We've never had it better than we have. Sure, we have a pandemic. But he said, things are better now than they were. You've just forgotten. So maybe the past is attractive because it's perceived to be more safe than the present.

[9 : 20] Have you ever thought of it that way? We know the past. We've just been there, right? We know the past. It's familiar. It's comforting. We can return there. But we can also become stuck there.

There aren't going to be any painful surprises when we look backwards, right? The pain that you had in the past, you've already been through. You already know it. And even if your history has been horrible, at least you know what happened. Does that make sense? The future is largely unknown to us.

Sorry, completely unknown. How about that? So obviously the problem with that mindset is that you can't really move forward if you're living in the past. So today we're going to talk about leaving the past baggage behind us for better or worse and moving confidently into the present reality of God's provision for us. Leave the past in the past.

Now don't mishear me. I'm not saying the past has no value. And we'll explore that a bit more. The former things referred to in the passage we just heard from Isaiah could very well relate to the exodus from Egypt or some other point in Israel's history. The former things the prophet Isaiah refers to. So listen to Pharaoh's words to the nation of Israel in Exodus 12, verse 31.

During the night, Pharaoh summoned Moses and Aaron and said, Up! Leave my people, you and the Israelites. Go worship the Lord as you requested.

[11 : 12] So at this point in history, the Israelites were being granted freedom from 400 years of slavery to the Egyptians. So it's hard to imagine, I think, what people were feeling as they packed up their homes, packed up their families, their livestock, all their belongings, and started walking off into the wilderness towards God's promised land for them.

And it's even more difficult to imagine that they would want to go back to their lives of slavery and servitude. But as we know, that's exactly what they eventually wanted.

Oh, this plan isn't what we wanted. This plan is uncomfortable. This plan is too hard. Lord, we want to go back. Look, wandering through the wilderness was hard.

It was different from what they were used to. And many of them still just wanted to return to the way things used to be. Does that sound familiar at all in your life?

Don't think for a moment that you and I are any different from our distant Israelite relatives. In fact, listen to the encouragement Paul gives to the Galatian church in Galatians 5, verse 1.

[12 : 32] It is for freedom that Christ has set us free. Stand firm then, Paul says, and do not let yourselves be burdened again by a yoke of slavery.

On some level, Paul is saying, leave the past in the past and stand firm in your newfound freedom. Don't go back to the way things used to be, Paul is encouraging.

So what if God has something new for you? New for us as a church going forward? What if the new thing springs up right in front of you, but you miss it because you're staring intently into the past?

Jesus addressed this beautifully in Luke 9, verse 62, when he says, these are hard words, no one who puts a hand to the plow and looks back is fit for service in the kingdom of God.

Hard words. But what he's getting at there is that the best is yet to come. So our family is going to Disneyland for a family vacation.

[13 : 45] And I have friends that they would rather be boiled in oil than go to Disneyland. That is not us. We are that crazy. So we're going back to Disneyland for a family vacation at the end of January and into early February.

And so, obviously, we're going back. We've been there before. We have many fun memories there that have been built over the years. Both Michelle and I went there as kids with our families.

We went there. So we were children there. We went there together. We're just as crazy as part of our honeymoon. We're the weirdos. Then we've been on three trips since our kids were born and since they've been growing up.

And you may immediately think, wow, they're richer than I thought. But we won a trip. We saved for a long time for another trip. Saved for a long time for this trip. So, and we now have two young adults who can pay their own way.

Yes! So as many of you can relate, time with extended family over the Christmas season isn't all that relaxing. Can I get an amen sometimes?

[14 : 55] Thank you. So we're really looking forward to this trip, honestly. And we're looking forward to building new memories. But we're also excited about, we're anticipating what is to come.

What will be different? What will be new? The new track that we can lay down in our lives. Friends, as believers, we can look forward to an eternity in paradise with God.

With Jesus. With all the saints who went before us. And I know you can probably all think of people that you just can't wait to see again.

This is why John 14 verse 2 reminds us to fix our eyes on Jesus. The pioneer and perfecter of our faith.

Who set the example. He set the example. And he went before us. And the book of John also tells us that Jesus has prepared a room for us.

[15 : 56] A room for you and for me in his father's house. The same excitement you may feel, we may feel about this trip. About a travel destination.

About a visit with family or friends. Some other special occasion in your life. It should pale in comparison to the excitement that you feel. To the anticipation that you feel.

Over an eternity in heaven's paradise. With Jesus. And yet still, here I am back again. Many of us are trapped.

Many of us are carrying baggage and bogged down by this life. By looking behind us.

Ever heard the expression that there's a reason why your rear view mirror is significantly smaller than your windshield? Because it's more important to be looking ahead than behind you.

[16:58] My encouragement today is similar to last week. Let it go and move forward. Because God has got this.

I promise you. Life is an adventure full of twists and surprises. And yet at the same time, we have the eternal assurance of where we will end up.

Can you recognize that? It's going to be okay. The future is not a dangerous, scary place. It's one that is rich in possibilities and full of God's promises to us.

The future is a place where God has already been. It's a place where he is waiting for us right now. And where our future is secure in him.

My friends, live today like a person who is excited for and anticipating the most epic travel adventure of their life. Live like the best is yet to come, even when you can't see it.

[18:09] Walk by faith, as scripture tells us. Not by sight. The truth is, it's far easier to trust God and believe he'll do something new and good in your life if you can see a blueprint of what that's going to look like.

Right? Lord, I'll do this. I'll follow you. But I just need, just give me a teaser. Just give me a hint of how this is going to go. Not many people will just blindly wander out on an adventure without knowing where they're going.

That's why Google Maps is a thing. And yet, on some level, that's what the life of faith, that's what the journey of faith in God is all about.

We simply cannot be in control all the time. In fact, we probably control even less than we may perceive that we do. We can't stop other people's choices from impacting our lives.

That's impossible. We can't insulate ourselves from every potentially bad or damaging situation that's going to happen to us. But we do get to choose whether or not to take those things on as baggage.

[19:30] And we do get to choose every day to move forward, even if the path ahead is unknown to us. You can turn to 2 Corinthians 5, and I will read for us.

For we know, there's a lot here, so I'll unpack the chunk afterwards. For we know that if the earthly tent we live in is destroyed, we have a building from God, an eternal house in heaven, not built by human hands.

Meanwhile, we groan, longing to be clothed instead with our heavenly dwelling. Because we are clothed, we will not be found naked. For while we are in this tent, we groan and are burdened, because we do not wish to be unclothed, but to be clothed instead with our heavenly dwelling. So that is what is mortal may be swallowed up by life. Now the one who has fashioned us for this very purpose is God, who has given us the Spirit as a deposit, guaranteeing what is to come. Therefore, we are always confident and know that as long as we are at home in the body, we are away from the Lord, for we live by faith, not by sight.

[20:58] So as I noted, that's a long passage, and Paul is saying a lot there. But what I want to highlight is the idea that this, this place, this vessel, is not our home.

And while we are here, while we are in the circumstances in which we find ourselves, we long to be truly home in that sense with the Lord.

Paul talks about the Spirit being given to us as a guarantee and a promise of the eternal life that is to come. And this is the way, my friends, that God designed it.

So, we trust Him. We trust, we must trust, that the best is yet to come. Because we walk, we are called to walk by faith, not by sight.

There is no roadmap of the future coming. We need to trust, and we need to move forward. Last week, we considered the fact that we need to trust Jesus.

[22:08] But here's another challenge for all of us. I also believe we need to believe Jesus. In spite of our past, in spite of our trauma, our pain, our disappointment, we all bear those things.

In spite of the unknown adventure the future holds here on earth. Friends, God has never said, I am making all things exactly the same.

He never said, I am making all things as joyless and difficult as possible for you. He never said, I'm going to do everything exactly the way I've done it in the past.

God has promised us that He is making all things new. Period. And that means moving forward.

It means changing for the better. It means learning from, but not hanging on to, the past. Friends, God is doing new things.

[23 : 19] He wants to do new things in our lives. He has something for us here in the present, and He will have again in the future.

Don't allow yourself to become stuck and bogged down in the past. Let go of the way things were and what was, and be open to the way they are, and to seek what still lies ahead.

Keep an eye out for the work of God in your life, doing new things. Choose to walk forward into the future, safe in the freedom that you have in and through Jesus Christ.

My friends, let go of the baggage of the past, and travel light. Amen.