

# Packing the Right Baggage

## Mark 6:7-13

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Grace, mercy and peace be to you from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

The text for today’s message is from the 6<sup>th</sup> Chapter of the Gospel of Mark:

Calling the Twelve to him, he sent them out two by two and gave them authority over evil spirits.

These were his instructions: "Take nothing for the journey except a staff -- no bread, no bag, no money in your belts. Wear sandals but not an extra tunic. Whenever you enter a house, stay there until you leave that town. And if any place will not welcome you or listen to you, shake the dust off your feet when you leave, as a testimony against them."

They went out and preached that people should repent. They drove out many demons and anointed many sick people with oil and healed them. <sup>1</sup>

Preparing for a business trip can be a worrisome experience, particularly if you are new to a company or if you haven’t traveled much.

Have I brought the right clothes? What if the weather changes while I’m there, will I be prepared? What if I need to stay a few extra days? What if the airline loses my luggage? What if the business meeting I’m being sent to conduct doesn’t go as

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<sup>1</sup> Mark 6:7-13

planned? Moreover, the boss usually deals with these customers, what are they going to think of me?

In today's text, we find Jesus sending out the Twelve, two by two, on their first "business trip"... in this case to preach the gospel and heal the sick in the towns of the Galilee.

Jesus first instructed them to pack lightly...very lightly. No food, no money, and no extra clothes.

Now for today's experienced traveler, these restrictions could be seen as somewhat harsh, though the principle of packing lightly is certainly one that we can relate to. For instance, if, when you travel by air, you reduce what you bring to the point that you need only carry-on luggage, it's easier to avoid losing it or having it stolen during the journey. There's also the advantage of not having to wait to pick it up when your flight touches down; you can immediately proceed to your accommodations.

The fact that you've brought less with you, gives you less to worry about, which frees you to focus on the business which you are supposed to attend to.

Clearly, Jesus wanted the focus of the Apostles to be on their mission, not on worries related to their wardrobe and on the transportation and care of their luggage.

Jesus also noted that the disciples should stay in one place when they entered a town, not moving about looking to upgrade their accommodations or have a change of scenery.

This one is probably easier for most modern travelers to understand, as moving around from place to place within the same city is distracting and time consuming, considering the hassle involved in clearing out one hotel room, checking out, traveling to the new location, checking in, and unpacking. Add to that, the fact that you generally need to check out of your old hotel earlier than you are able to check

in to your new one, means that you also have to carry around your luggage in the interim.

Once again, Jesus was trying to simplify the physical conditions of His disciples' journey, so that their focus was kept on the important mission which he sent them on.

Now while our Lord's specific advice to the Twelve regarding the physical preparations for an evangelistic journey may not be directly relevant to us today, clearly the principles behind those specifics can serve as a helpful guide if we are ever called upon to travel for some missionary endeavor. Just ask Sandy and Gabi as they prepare for our upcoming trip to Berens River.<sup>2</sup>

But when we consider our everyday evangelistic efforts, we often have to worry less about the excess physical baggage that we might be tempted to carry with us, than we do about the excess emotional baggage that we tend to burden ourselves with, before we even leave our front door.

Fear of failure and rejection, and feelings of inadequacy are all baggage that often keep us from undertaking even the smallest of evangelistic journeys, be they across the street to visit a neighbor, or to our phones to call up a friend or family member.

Regarding our fears of rejection, we can look to the example of children. When we ask them to do something simple, like invite a friend to Sunday School, they often do it naturally, without concern or consideration of the outcome. We have no idea how many of their friends they actually invite, but we can suspect that it is more than actually accept. When their message is rejected by one friend (and that message can be as simple as an invitation, it doesn't need to be a detailed presentation of the complete doctrines of the Christian Church), they just move on to the next friend.

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<sup>2</sup> Trip to Berens River, MB, Canada with LAMP (Lutheran Association of Missionaries and Pilots)  
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We adults often stumble by making things more complicated than they need to be, which leaves us feeling as though we are trying to “close a deal”, rather than merely “plant a seed”. When we take the approach of making a “sales pitch”, we place the responsibility of success on ourselves, and forget that it is God whose work will ultimately decide the outcome of any of our evangelistic activities.

John records Jesus as saying, “No one comes to Me unless my Father who sent Me draws him”.<sup>3</sup> Thus, we need to leave the matter in God’s hands, and focus on simply presenting the message that we are asked to deliver.

The knowledge of God’s role in the matter, frees us from worrying about achieving an immediate result. We are then less likely to make a forceful, “over-the-top” presentation of the Gospel message... a method which is far more likely to generate the blunt and forceful rejection which we so fear, especially from our close friends and family.

Such aggressive presentations tend to put the focus more on the messenger than on the message. If the message is then rejected, it will naturally lead the messenger to feel personally rejected.

If we present our message with gentleness and respect, as Peter instructed us<sup>4</sup>, and remember that changing people’s hearts is God’s business, we really don’t need to worry much about the worst case scenario of a stinging personal rejection.

As for failure, Jesus told the Apostles to shake the dust off of their feet if they weren’t well received in one city, presumably as they left to visit another. He didn’t tell them to berate themselves for failing to “succeed” in converting the entire town. In fact, he explained to them on several occasions that it was quite likely that the message that they were to bring would be rejected by the inhabitants. When this happened, those rejecting the message were not merely rejecting the Apostles; they were rejecting Jesus Himself and His Father who sent Him!

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<sup>3</sup> John 6:44

<sup>4</sup> 1 Peter 3:15

Therefore, while “failure” is in this sense is a very serious matter; it is an infinitely more serious matter for those who reject the message, than for those whom faithfully deliver it.

Ultimately, if we use the possibility of failure as an excuse for neglecting our duty to reach out with the Gospel message, we are perilously close to the attitude of the wicked servant in the parable of the talents<sup>5</sup>, who, if we’ll recall, had his talent, which he kept hidden for safekeeping, taken away from him when the King returned.

Regarding our concerns over the adequacy of our training and general abilities, let’s consider the example of Amos in today’s Old Testament reading. In it, Amaziah, the priest of Bethel, was angry about what Amos had prophesied about Israel, and its King, Jeroboam. Amaziah demanded that Amos, whom he thought was a “professional” prophet, stop prophesying, leave Israel and return to Judah.

In response, Amos says, ‘I was neither a prophet nor a prophet’s son, but I was a shepherd, and I also took care of sycamore-fig trees. But the Lord took me from tending the flock and said to me, “Go, and prophesy to my people Israel.”’<sup>6</sup>

Amos then, was a mere shepherd and caretaker of an orchard before he was “taken” from his flock and told to go and prophesy.

What about the Apostles? Surely they were well educated men with years of extensive study of the Scriptures to their credit. To the contrary, Jesus summoned several of them right out of their fishing boats<sup>7</sup>, one he took from his tax-collecting booth<sup>8</sup>.

Clearly then, we who have considerably more education than most of those God has used to proclaim His Word, who are in many cases older and have more life

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<sup>5</sup> Matthew 25:14-30

<sup>6</sup> Amos 7:14-15

<sup>7</sup> Mark 1:16-20

<sup>8</sup> Mark 2:13

experience than the Apostles had when they were first sent, and who have ready access to the Scriptures for personal study, have little to offer in the way of excuses regarding our personal inadequacies.

If God can use unsophisticated shepherds, fishermen and tax collectors to get His message out to the world, surely he can use us as well.

However beyond our fears of rejection and failure, and of our sense that we lack the natural ability to go into the world as witnesses to Christ's work, there is possibly an even heavier and uglier bit of baggage that prevents us from taking up our task.

Perhaps we feel inadequate because of our own sins, and wonder how we can have credibility with anyone when talking about spiritual matters, particularly when we need to preach the Law and call people to repentance.

If this is the case, then we need to recognize that just as we as Christians are simultaneously justified and sinful, we are also simultaneously both missionaries and a mission field.

When plagued with doubts of our worthiness, we need to return to the foot of the Cross, to return to the Word which teaches us about the forgiveness won for us at Calvary by the willing sacrifice of Jesus.

Far from preventing us from being credible witnesses to the world, the humility which the knowledge of our sinfulness has brought us, and the love, which we, who have been forgiven much, feel toward the God who first loved us, make us ideally suited to the task of telling others the good news.

Friends, we have all that we need to tell others the message that he has given us to tell: His command, His mercy, and the faith given to us by Him.

The important baggage we ought to take with us in our daily mission isn't what we carry on the outside, and it isn't the emotional burdens which we need to leave

behind; it is what we already have on the inside, the sure knowledge, born of faith, that we have been redeemed by the grace of a loving God, who wishes for us to share that knowledge with others.

May God grant to each of us, the courage, the strength and the desire to reach out to the world with the vital message of repentance of sins and redemption through Christ; carrying only what we need... the hope, the joy, and the love which have come to us through the salvation we have received by the work of our Lord Jesus. Amen.