

BAGGAGE CHECK

Easter 2018

Matthew 28:1-10 // Craig Smith

April 1, 2018

Craig // Happy Easter. So glad you are here. I know a lot of you are joining us from The Mill. We are so glad you are here. You are in the quad. We are packed out here, and that's awesome. We are -- in case you are wondering about all of the dirt you see around us, we are in the business of expanding, so hopefully next time this year, we'll have room in here for everybody in all of our services. Super excited about that, but we are glad that you are here. I don't know about you, but for me, the best part of traveling is that moment when I get to the airport and I give my bags to the nice people at baggage check and they take them and I'm free of them.

I don't feel like vacation starts until I get to that moment, right? And I'll be honest, it's also the most stressful part of the trip because I'm entirely sure they are going to take my bags. We do not pack light as a family. And so, I have had more than one experience where I put it up on the scale and watch the numbers go up, up, up, and then right over that limit, you know? And for my money, there's nothing more embarrassing than having the lady go, sorry. It's too heavy. You have to pull underwear and stuff out of your suitcase and put it in the briefcase, right? And sometimes, sometime, honestly, I'm worried that they won't take the bags because they smell bad.

Let me defend myself. I'm not saying it's a regular occurrence, but it has happened. A couple of years ago, we canoed the Buffalo River in Arkansas with my in-laws, and so we flew down there and we did that, and it was a week's trip, and it rained the entire time. So by the time we got back to the airport to go home, everything in our bags was moist and mildewed and muddy, and to be perfectly honest with you, just stank. And I knew that, and when I handed it off to the people at baggage claim he goes -- he did that little nose thing. I was like, yeah, I know, I'm sorry, and I couldn't believe he took it, but he did. It was awesome, and then there's the bags themselves. I don't have pretty bags, okay? They might have started out that way, but they are no longer in what you call pristine condition. They all have duct tape on the handles. There are random wires sticking out. All of them have at least one wonky wheel, or it's missing the wheel entirely. They have scrapes and scuffs. I have one bag that's so torn up and scraped and scuffed and stained, that people look at it, and they make a joke, like, what did you do, drag it under your car for a couple of blocks? And I have to go, yeah. That's exactly what happened to that bag.

They are not pretty. I feel like they are functional. They still do what they are supposed to do, but I always worry that when people look at them they are going to go, there's no way I'm taking that thing. There's no way that all of the stuff on the inside can possibly stay on the inside, so I always hand over my bags with a little significant fear that they are going to say, there's no way. You are going to handle that yourself, which is honestly kind of what the airlines do now anyway, right? Does anyone remember a few years ago, the airlines allowed you to pretty much check everything? Some of you won't believe this but not all that long ago, when you went on a trip, you got to take two free checked bags.

It was awesome. You could take everything on vacation. Then they are like, no, no, no. It's just going to be one free checked bag. Then it was like, no, no, no. There's not going to be any free checked bags, but you can still carry on. You can be in charge of your own stuff. There are some airlines that want to charge you for that too. They want to charge you for handling your own baggage. I avoid those airlines. I have gotten really good at packing everything that I can into a carry on bag. Sometimes they are so heavy I have a hard time getting them into the overhead bin, and I'll tell you what, I do not sit under that bin. I'm on the other side of the plane just in case we have exceeded the structural capacity of that overhead bin, and honestly, that has taken a lot of fun out of travel for me.

The whole process of hauling my heavy, smelly, ugly baggage around the airport has taken a lot of fun out of it. If it takes the fun out of airport, that same thing really takes the joy out of life, doesn't it? Because that's life. We pick up baggage along the way, don't we? And we have kind of learned the same lesson in life that the airlines have been teaching us recently. Your baggage is your burden, your problem. It's your responsibility. You just have to deal with it. It's hard because it's heavy stuff. Some of our baggage is pretty heavy, isn't it? We are carrying around a lot of things that God never intended for us to haul around. Some of it's expectations people put on us. Some of it is really unrealistic expectations we have put on ourselves. We have bought into lies about what it means to be happy, what it means to be successful, and so we are trying to gather all of those things that we believe, this is what it must be.

It begins to weigh us down. We have addictions and all kinds of stuff, and it's just heavy, and it kind of stinks. We have done some pretty nasty things to each other. We are not good to each other. We are a world full of prejudice and racism and sexism. We are jealous. We are just mean. We are unkind. We are uncaring. I mean we have a whole package of stuff, and it stinks. And the Bible is pretty blunt about it. The Bible says nobody has baggage that is Downy fresh. Writing to the church at Rome, Paul wrote this, for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God. See that's what the Bible calls all of that smelly stuff. He calls it sin. Paul says, all sinned. Nobody can go, my baggage, it's perfectly clean and

packed, no, no, no. We have all got messy, smelly stuff in there, and we have all done it. And the worst part is that the stench of or sin is actually the stench of death. Did you know that? It is. A little bit later in that same letter Paul wrote this, he said for the wages of sin is death.

Wages is an interesting word. He didn't say for the punishment of sin is death. We have the idea that we sin and God is going to punish you with this or that, but that's not what he said. He says the wages of sin is death. Wages is the natural thing you get paid for the work you do. It's the right pay for particular kinds of work. What he's really saying is that death is the natural consequence of sin. See, when we sin, we turn our backs on God, and we go I'm going to do this on my own. I'm going to walk away. The problem is that God is the author and the source of life, and when we disconnect from Him, death is the inevitable result, and not just physical death, spiritual death, eternal separation from Him in darkness. It's not His punishment. It's the natural consequence of that.

If you unplug a refrigerator, what happens is the light begins to go out and the stuff inside begins to go bad. That's just the natural consequence, and the same way when we unplug from God by our sin, which we have all done, our light begins to fade and the stuff within us begins to go bad and it stinks, and honestly, the longer we haul that heavy, smelly stuff around, the more it starts to show up on the outside, right? We get cynical. We get bitter. We get depressed. We get anxious. We get angry. It's that whole package of stuff. So the reality is that life is basically us hauling around all of the heavy, smelly, ugly stuff that we have accumulated. But what are you going to do, right? That's our baggage, and we have learned the lesson, right? Your baggage is your burden. It's not like someone is going to take it from you? It's not like there is a baggage check in life, right?

Well, it's Easter, and you are in church, so you might be a little ahead of me, and hopefully, you are. Hopefully, you are going, wait a minute, maybe there is, and I hope you are thinking that, because there is. There is someone who would love to take your baggage. There is someone who is inviting you into baggage check. His name is Jesus. This is what Jesus said. He said come to me all you who are weary and burdened. All of you who are worn out but all of this baggage you have accumulated, that you are hauling around that nobody else can ever take from you, come to me all you that are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. I'll take it away from you. I'll allow you to check your baggage with me. This is what Jesus offers.

And he's not just talk, right? He put his money where his mouth is. As Paul says the wages of sin is death, which is kind of interesting because if the wages of sin is death, what that means is that death is the result of sin, but Jesus didn't have any sin. He was unique Son of God. He lived a perfect life. He was sinless. He had no baggage of his own to pay for, so he shouldn't have died, and yet on that night that we call Good Friday almost 2,000 years ago, he died. He was beaten to within an inch of his life. He was mocked mercilessly, he was nailed to a cross and he died. Why did Jesus die if he didn't have any sin? He died because of our sin. He died because of our baggage. He clasped our baggage, our sin to himself and he said I will take care of this for you. I will pay the penalty. I will pay for your death with mine.

I'll pay for your burden with my blood, and so he died. They stuck a spear in his side to make sure he was dead, that it wasn't any kind of a trick, and they put his cold, dead body into the ground, and they rolled the stone up over it. Now, here's the thing. Anybody can say that they'll die for your sins. Anybody can say that they'll pay the fee for your baggage check. Anybody can say that, but how can we actually know that he did it? How can we know that he pulled it off? How can we know that the price is actually paid, that the baggage has already been paid for? Well, that's why we are here today, right? That's what Easter is. The reality is, he didn't just die. He also rose. After the Sabbath, at dawn on the first day of the week -- that would be our Sunday. Mary Magdalene and the other Mary, they went to look at the tomb where he had been laid. There was a violent earthquake for an angel of The Lord came down from heaven and going to the tomb, he rolled back the stone, and he sat on it. His appearance was like lightning, and his clothes were as white as snow.

The guards were so afraid of him that they shook, and they became like dead men, and the angel said to the women, do not be afraid, for I know that you are looking for Jesus who was crucified. He is not here. He is risen just as he said. Come and see the place where he lay, and then go quickly and tell his disciples he has risen from the dead, and he's going ahead of you into Galilee. There you will see him. Now I have told you. So the women hurried away from the tomb. They were afraid, yet filled with joy, and they ran to tell his disciples, and suddenly Jesus met them. Greetings, he said -- which has always struck me as just a little bit anticlimactic, right? He's back from the dead and he goes, hey -- but I don't know what you say, so he goes with it, let's just make it straightforward. Greetings. They came to him. They ran to him. They clasped his feet and they worshipped him.

Jesus said to them, do not be afraid. Go and tell my brothers to go to Galilee. There they will see me. How do we know that he actually paid for our baggage? How do we know that he atoned for our sin? Because he didn't just die. He also rose. This is not just a matter of opinion. This is not a matter of faith. Faith only comes in when we decide whether or not we are going to trust in that resurrection. The resurrection itself is a fact of history. It's not a matter of opinion. It is a fact. It is history. He is risen. Then we have this thing, if you are not familiar with it, Christians for a lot of centuries have had this thing where we proclaim the reality of the resurrection by saying he is risen, and everyone else says, he is risen indeed, because he is. And the thing that we need to understand is that the crucifixion paid it all. It's why he said, "it is finished" before he died. The crucifixion paid it all, but the resurrection proves it all. Do you understand? The resurrection is what gives us the confidence that this has actually been done, the baggage check is really open, and that there is no hidden fees.

That's the great thing about Jesus offer of baggage check, there are no hidden fees. It's a gift. That's why we call it good news because it's a

gift. That same place where Paul said for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, he went to the other side of that coin and said, and all are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus. Justified freely by his grace. Justified, think of it, it means just as if. Just as if we had never sinned. Just as if we had never done that horrible, ugly, smelly stuff, just as if we didn't accumulate any of this baggage that we actually have. He says you are justified. You are justified freely. It doesn't cost you anything. He's already paid all of the price. Justified freely by his grace. Grace means an undeserved gift. It means God loves you. Not because you have earned it. Not because you have worked your way into it, but because you are HIS, and HE looks at the burden that you bear and He says, I cannot stand that my beloved sons and daughters are struggling through life with this heavy, ugly, smelly stuff, and so by grace he came to save us.

And later on when Paul said the wages of sin is death, he gave the other side of that coin too. He said but the gift of God is eternal life. That's great. It's a free gift, and what do we do with gifts? We accept them. We just accept them. The last time I checked a bag at the airport after I pulled some underwear out and got it squared away and got my number under the thing, I expected her to take the bag away, but she didn't do that. She said before I can take it, I have a couple of questions you have to answer. I thought, here we go. She said is this your bag? I said, yeah. She said did you pack the contents? Is that your stuff in there? Oh, yeah. I understand what she was asking, but I was thinking about it afterwards, and I thought, Jesus asks a pretty similar question when we come to him to check our baggage. I mean, he calls us to come. He says come to me all who are weary and what? Burdened. Burdened with our baggage. We put it in front of him.

He goes, I got a couple of questions. The first question is this, is this your baggage? Is this your stuff? See we have to own it before we can disown it. We have to own it before we can be set free, but we can't say, well, there's some stuff in there that I really wish want, but honestly, it was my parent's fault, and it was my kid's fault, or it was my boss. There were some circumstances and -- Jesus keeps looking at you until you go, yeah, it's mine. I did it. You gotta own it, and then when we own it he says, tell me how you feel about that stuff? What he's looking for us to say is, I'm sorry for it. That's all. The Bible calls that repentance, when we turn away from God and we start out on our own, this is where sin comes in. At some moment we have to say, I don't want to live this way. I'm ashamed of what I have done, and we have to turn our back on our sin. The Bible calls that repentance, and we have to look back and go, I'm sorry for this. And we don't have to move toward God. We don't have to work our way into His good graces. We just have to go, I'm sorry for this stuff, so Jesus goes, okay. So you believe that I loved you enough to die for you and your sins? Yeah. I do.

Do you believe that I rose again from the dead three days later? I do. Yeah. He says that's great. I just got one more question, then. Will you trust me? Will you let me take your baggage? And if we can say yes, then the baggage goes away. Our sin is made white as snow, our souls wiped clean. We are justified just as if we never sinned freely by His grace. Listen, there are two kinds of people in this room today. Some of you are here today, and you have experienced the freedom and the joy that comes from checking your baggage with Jesus, and some of you have never experienced that. You are here and you are going, I'm still hauling that ugly, smelly, heavy stuff around, and if that's you, you know it's you. And I want you to understand, I want everyone to understand, doesn't matter what group you are in. Nobody is better than the other group. Nobody is better than anybody else in here, but some of you are more burdened because you are still hauling that baggage, but it doesn't have to be that way. Right here, right now, you can check all of the baggage.

And as I went through those questions that Jesus asked, if you found yourself going, I can say yes to all of those, then there is no reason not to say yes to all of those things. In fact, I'm going to ask everybody to close their eyes and bow their heads. If you are here today and you have never trust Jesus to forgive your sin, to take your baggage and your burden away from you, but if you can say yes to those questions, would you say yes to them right now? You don't have to say it out loud. You can simply say it in your heart, but if you say it sincerely to him, he will respond. Here's what you say to him. Say God, I have sinned. I have done wrong. God, I'm sorry. Jesus, I believe you died on the cross for me. Jesus, I believe you rose from the dead to prove that sin was defeated, that death was done. Jesus, I trust you. Come into my life, forgive my sin, make me clean, in Jesus name, amen.

Here's where the analogy breaks down. When you check your baggage at the airport, they just end up giving it back to you. Right? That's not how it works with Jesus. When you trust Jesus with your baggage, what happens is, it's gone for good, and in its place he gives joy and hope and peace and eternal life in a relationship with God that begins now and it goes on forever and ever. I want to ask everyone to grab this card you got when you came in. Some of you, just a moment ago, you prayed for the first time to check your baggage with Jesus and asked him to forgive your sin, and if you did that, I want to ask you to do something. I want to you to tear off that little card that says "let's connect," and I'm going to ask you to fill in a little bit of information, and then there's a box that says, I decided to trust Jesus today. What I want to ask you to do, I want to ask you to do one of three possible things with it. It's up to you to do which one you want. In a little bit, after we finish singing at the end of the service, there are going to be some people down here ready to pray with anybody, and I would love for you to go find one of those people, give them that card and say, I said yes to Jesus today.

They have a gift for you. We have a bag over here that has some materials, including a nice leather-bound Bible that we want to give you as our gift to you. So come find one of those prayer people and say, I said, yes, and they'll rejoice with you. Another option is, you can head out to the welcome center. Do the same thing. Give them the card and say, I said yes to Jesus. Third option, I don't think it's as good, but maybe it's one you are more comfortable with, drop this card in the boxes on the way out because we want to celebrate you with this decision you have made, and help you figure out what it means to live free from your burdens. Now, here's the thing, Jesus' offer to bear our burdens is not a one time offer. It's not a limited time offer. Jesus is always saying to each of us, come to me. If you are weary and burdened, come to me, and I will give you rest.

Even as people who have been forgiven of our sin, even as people that have been free from that baggage, we still have this tendency to accumulate baggage over time, and somehow feel that we have to carry that forgetting that Jesus is always and only the one who can carry it. I'm going to ask everybody to do this with that card you have in your hand, write down on that card something you are burdened by right now, something you are struggling with, something that's feeling heavy. Maybe it's a sin you are struggling with. Maybe it's a circumstance in life, I don't know, but something that's making you feel heavy and weary today. I want you to write it down, and in a moment as we continue our worship, I'm going to encourage you to do something symbolic to give that to Jesus, and that is to come up and get to one of these suitcases, and stick it in. We'll haul it away. You will never see it again, symbolically representing that this is exactly what Jesus longs to do if you will allow him to carry your burdens. So write down something. Stick it in your pocket, go home and burn it, whatever, but I think there is pretty much power in this moment of going, you know, I'm letting go of this thing right here, right now, before I walk out of these doors. Let's pray.

Jesus, thank you for all that you have done for us, that you would love us enough to die for us so we could check all of our heavy, ugly, smelly baggage with you, that's incredible. Thank you, thank you, thank you. Thank you for the freedom that we can have in you. Lord, help us to live in that freedom that we can know with certainty available because the grave is empty, because our Lord is risen, and it's in His name that we pray, amen.