

## **Faith is Not a “Carry On” Flight Matthew**

Open with the following skit.

### **Skit**

#### **May I Check That For You?**

This skit is designed to get people to think about the extent of God's forgiveness, and whether or not they have accepted God's forgiveness in every area of their life. This skit does not make the application. It merely illustrates the issue. The application will have to be made in the sermon, or some other means.

#### **Characters:**

Burdened Traveler - Though burdened by his baggage, he has grown attached to

it and is defensive of it. Airport Worker - A sincerely helpful worker who wants to ease the traveller's burden.

*The scene opens with the Burdened Traveler struggling to drag many pieces of luggage across the stage. He has a couple of pieces on each arm, one slung over his shoulder, and even one in his mouth. As he drags this baggage across the stage grunts and groans can be heard by the audience. After the audience has had a few moments to witness the Traveler's struggles, the helpful Airport worker rushes to the man's side*

**Airport Worker** *(In a very pleasant tone)*

Excuse me sir, let me help you with those.

**Burdened Traveler** *(Spitting out the bag in his mouth)*

What?

**Airport Worker**

Let me help you take your bags to the counter. We can check those in for you. There's no need for you to drag around all this baggage.

**Burdened Traveler**

Oh no, that's not necessary. There's a lot of baggage here. And it's quite heavy. I don't really want to bother you with it. It's more than you want to handle.

**Airport Worker**

It's okay. This is why we're here. We're prepared for any sort of baggage you may have. In fact, you wouldn't believe some of the stuff we've had go through here. Taking your baggage won't be any problem at all.

**Burdened Traveler**

That is very kind of you, but I'm afraid you don't understand. My baggage stinks really bad. You don't really want it.

**Airport Worker**

Huh?

**Burdened Traveler** (*Reaching inside his bag*)

You see I have this meat log (*pulls out long meat log from bag, The Airport Worker acts like something stinks really bad*). My grandfather gave this to me for Christmas.. .20 years ago.

**Airport Worker**

Why'd you keep it?

**Burdened Traveler**

Well, he died two days later. I couldn't bear to eat it. It sort of became a family heirloom.

**Airport Worker**

We can take very good care of it sir. We'll wrap it in plastic and put it in a padded container.

**Burdened Traveler**

I certainly appreciate the gesture, but I just can't let go. It's my baggage, and I've been dragging it around now for a really long time. I know it's heavy, but I grown accustomed to it. I just don't know what I'd do without it.

**Airport Worker**

Okay, It is your baggage.

*The Airport worker leaves the stage, as the Burdened Traveler continues to drag his baggage.*

Whoa! We've all been there, haven't we- dragging all that luggage through the airport, wondering just how many bricks our wife packed in there. Our flight leaves in 20 minutes and there's a long line at the counter. Or how about hauling all those bags up four flights of stairs because the elevator is out of order. Then you have to drag all 17 pieces across eight lanes of traffic from the parking garage to the terminal.

I remember one time we had landed, picked up our bags. There was my suitcase, Teresa's suitcase, Alyssa's bag, diaper bag, the carry-on bag, Alyssa's car seat, and her stroller. Our car was parked about three miles away. Beads of sweat were rolling down my forehead and hanging from my nose. They itched something awful, but I didn't have a free hand to wipe them away. And then I saw the most beautiful sight ever witnessed by human eyes. A light shone down from heaven and there it was: an unclaimed luggage cart, left out in the open, one that you didn't have to pay \$5.00 to rent. My burden was lifted, my baggage had been taken.

### **Spiritual Baggage**

You know, though, that there are many who are dragging around heavy baggage, not through the airport, but through life. There are some here this morning carrying

baggage, and it's baggage you don't need to carry. You carry around this baggage; it's heavy, it's burdensome, it slows you down, it keeps you from reaching your potential, and from living life to its fullest, and all the while there is someone who will take that baggage, who will lift that burden from you. Jesus will take your baggage. But you think it's too awful, too heavy, too much, or maybe you've just grown too attached to it.

Some of you haven't yet come to Jesus because of your baggage. You let your baggage keep you from receiving the gift of Salvation that is freely offered to you. Some of you are already Christians, but you're still carrying around baggage. You haven't given it all to Jesus. You are missing on some of the blessings and joys of the Christian life, because you still cling to the past, and won't let Jesus have it. You hang on to the baggage.

But Jesus not only wants to be Lord of your future, He wants to be the Lord of your past as well. When Jesus died on the cross, He paid the freight for all of your baggage. You don't have to carry it with you. There is no baggage too heavy, too much, or too awful that the cross of Jesus cannot take for you.

## **Introduction to Matthew**

This brings me to someone I'd like you to meet. His name is Matthew. He was one of our Lord's apostles. Like the others, He was hand-picked by our Savior to be a member of His history changing mission. The very first gospel, the very first book in the N.T. bears his name as the Holy Spirit inspired him to pen these profound words. He wrote his biography of Jesus from the perspective of Jesus is the Jewish Messiah. He wrote for a Jewish audience.

Outside of this, we know next to nothing of Matthew's life as an apostle. Most of what we know about Matthew, is who he was before he followed Jesus.

### **A Man Called Levi**

That brings me to someone else I'd like you to meet. His name is Levi. Here was a man that carried a tremendous amount of baggage. No one would have been foolish enough to think that Levi could ever do the job of a Matthew.

You see, Levi was an outcast, a traitor, a betrayer of his people. At least that's how his neighbors saw him. Levi was a tax collector. Don't think of an IRS agent. No matter how much we dislike taxes and the IRS, if that's what you think of, you are painting far too kind of a picture.

He was a collaborator with Rome. Rome controlled Levi's home country by forceful military occupation. Crushing

taxes were collected from Israel under the threat of prison and military reprisal.

To collect these taxes, Rome relied on the help of Jewish collaborators. These tax collectors were to collect a certain amount for Rome, and whatever they could collect above and beyond what Rome required, they could keep for themselves. They did not receive a salary or set commission. They were simply permitted to take for themselves what they wanted. As a result, most tax collectors were unscrupulous, unethical, manipulative thieves.

Unsurprisingly, they were hated and feared. Good, patriotic citizens regarded guys like Levi as the worst of “sinners”—worse than idol worshipping pagans. Levi wasn’t allowed to worship at the temple. It was believed that to associate yourself with such a tax collector polluted your own spiritual purity. None of his fellow Jews wanted to hang out with him, except for other Jews with bad reputations. He was an outcast with lots of money. He was viewed kind of like we would a drug dealer or a pimp. The only people impressed by him were other drug dealers and pimps or those that wanted to be.

Guys like Levi were known for throwing these grand parties where all the other tax collectors, drug dealers and pimps

would show up. These bashes were known for their immorality and drunkenness.

### **Calling of Levi**

Levi certainly had baggage. Lots of baggage. Just look at it: dishonesty, greed, theft, betrayer of his neighbors, a religious outcast, an associate the depraved and immoral. How could Jesus ever pick such a man? But listen to what we read in Mark 2:13-17:

*Once again Jesus went out beside the lake. A large crowd came to him, and he began to teach them. As he walked along, he saw Levi son of Alphaeus sitting at the tax collector's booth. "Follow me," Jesus told him, and Levi got up and followed him.*

*While Jesus was having dinner at Levi's house, many tax collectors and "sinners" were eating with him and his disciples, for there were many who followed him. When the teachers of the law who were Pharisees saw him eating with the "sinners" and tax collectors, they asked his disciples: "Why does he eat with tax collectors and sinners'?" On hearing this, Jesus said to them, "It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick. I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners. Mark 2:13-17*

You see, Jesus wasn't turned off by all of Levi's baggage. Jesus wasn't scared of it. He wasn't embarrassed to take it. Jesus grabbed that baggage, picked it up, and said to Levi, "Come



follow me. I won't let your baggage hold you back. I won't let your baggage keep you from becoming who you ought to be."

### **A Man with a New Name**

With no more baggage to hold him back, Levi became a new man. Both Mark and Luke use Matthew's old name, "*Levi*" to refer to him before following Jesus. However, after becoming a disciple, he was called by his new name, "*Matthew*."

Name changes aren't unusual in the Bible. Abram became Abraham. Simon became Peter. These names changes can reflect a new identity or a new mission from God. This may very well be the case with Matthew. The name Matthew means "The gift of Yahweh," and in the Christian community, Levi would forever be known as Matthew. This man who betrayed his own people and was hated by them, became the one who to tell them the good news of their Messiah who came to save them.

Jesus took Matthew's baggage, and you know what? He can take your baggage too. I don't care what it is. I don't care how much, how heavy, how old, how new, or how bad. Jesus can take it. There are some common types of baggage that people are dragging around today. This is baggage Jesus can take, if you would just give it to Him.

1. **Relationships - Woman at the well Jn. 4:17 had 5 husbands (Cake Topper)**

More than half of all American kids see their parents breakup. 40% of kids are raised without their fathers. Psalm 68:5 says that God is *“A father to the fatherless, a defender of widows.”*

2. **Career - Moses Ex. 2 - left a life of royalty (Monopoly)**

How about Moses? A Hebrew baby meant to be killed at birth. Born in secret. And then raised as the son of Pharaoh. Royal privilege and the best education in the world and of course all the expectations that went along with that. For 40 years he was trained to live the royal life, until one day he witnesses an Egyptian beating a fellow Jew and Moses takes the law into his own hands and acts as judge, jury, and executioner. The next 40 years Moses spends in self-imposed exile as a sheep-herder. About the time most of us would be well on our way to retirement, God then calls Moses to a new career – Leading his people out of captivity.

3. **Education - Peter & John -Acts 4:13 “unlearned & illiterate (Text Books)**

Did you drop out of school? Never finished your degree? Never started that degree, and now you think it will never happen? You will never measure up. You will never become what you could be. Let me introduce you to James and John. In Acts 4, they are arrested for teaching about Jesus at the temple. They are dragged before the Sanhedrin, the Jewish Ruling Council. These are 70 of the most powerful, smartest men in all of Israel.

And these two guys make a bold and powerful defense of their faith. Listen to verse 13,

*“When they saw the courage of Peter and John and realized that they were unschooled, ordinary men, they were astonished and they took note that these men had been with Jesus.”*

They were uneducated. They were just fishermen, and yet Jesus called them, and used them to change the world.

#### 4. **Financial - Zacchaeus**

Whether you have a lot of money or a very little, a failed career or a very successful business, a lot of us carry financial baggage. Sometimes it’s that we spent our whole lives climbing to the top of the ladder only to discover that it was leaning against the wrong building.

I’d like you to meet another tax collector. His name was Zacchaeus. He was a chief tax collector. That means all the other tax collectors reported to him. He got a slice of everyone else’s pie, and Luke 19:2 describes him as very wealthy. Long story short– Jesus invites himself to dinner at Zacchaeus’ house and completely rearranged Zacchaeus’ financial priorities. Luke 19:8 says,

*8 But Zacchaeus stood up and said to the Lord, “Look, Lord! Here and now I give half of my possessions to the poor, and if I have cheated anybody out of anything, I will pay back four times the amount.”*

## 5. **Moral - - David -adultery (Lingerie)**

This is the bag we never talk about, especially at church, but if you could physically see everyone's baggage here this morning, guess what? You'd see a lot of these. Many of us have made decisions in the moment that have had far reached effect long after that moment.

When I think of how God deals with moral baggage, I think of King David in the Bible. David seduced another man's wife. In modern terms, this was definitely a "me too" moment, because as king, David definitely used his power and position over a woman who had little control. Then David had her husband killed to cover his crime.

When confronted by the prophet Nathan, David confessed his guilt and repented of his sin. Nathan says in 2 Samuel 12, "*The LORD has taken away your sin.*" David writes the most beautiful Psalm of repentance in Psalm 51 which have become the lifeline of all who carry moral baggage.

*Cleanse me with hyssop, and I will be clean;  
wash me, and I will be whiter than snow.*

*8 Let me hear joy and gladness;  
let the bones you have crushed rejoice.*

*9 Hide your face from my sins  
and blot out all my iniquity.*

This is what God can do with all your baggage.

**Conclusion:**

I want to take you to one other passage of scripture, Heb. 11. This is one of the better known chapters in the Bible. It is known as the "*Faith Hall of Fame*." It lists many of the great heroes of the O.T. and how they displayed remarkable faith in God. Yet there is another way we could look at this list. We could call it the "*Hall of Baggage*." You see these people not only demonstrated tremendous faith, but they are also guilty of tremendous sin. These people had lots of baggage. Yet God took that baggage and used them anyway.

Just look at these names. Noah: he got drunk and naked; Abraham: he lied, exposed his wife to great danger, and he turned tail and ran from where God wanted him. Jacob: he cheated his brother and deceived his dad. Moses murdered an Egyptian, was the master of excuses, and took credit for God's work. Rahab was prostitute, yet she is in the genealogy of Jesus. You know what? Your name can be added to this list. Do you have baggage this morning? The Check-in counter is open.