

The Wreckage/Reward Principle

We've all probably heard of the "Risk/Reward Principle," which implies that the greater the risk you take, the greater the reward is likely to be. But what if the more likely choice is not between risk and reward, but between wreckage and reward? Suddenly, our choice becomes a bit more serious. And what if this choice were one that every person on earth must make?

Star Wars introduced to us the phrase "going over to the dark side." It speaks of someone who once worked for the good of humankind and, for whatever reason, switches his or her moral polarity and begins to work for the enslavement of humankind. Darth Vader is the classic example. In our Scriptures today from both 2 Peter and Jude (who, by the way, was the half-brother of Jesus), we read of the reality of both sides of this extreme principle – wreckage and reward. We begin with a look at...

I. Satan's Triple-Barbed Hook to Wreck Us

Do you like to fish? Growing up, my brother and I loved to fish. In fact, my brother was so into it, he started to make his own lures. Yeah, he actually carved some out of wood and attached hooks, and out we went. I remember I caught one fish on a lure that my brother made, and when I reeled it in, what had happened was that the hook had come out of the lure when the fish hit it, but the lure was in the fish's mouth with the hook outside locking his mouth onto the lure! I wish I had a photo of that!

So, here's a quick lesson from Fishing 101 on fish hooks: [show image of triple hook] This is a triple-barbed hook. It's three hooks attached to one fishing line. The concept is that you put some sort of bait on this or you attach this hook to a lure and you have three possibilities, rather than just one, of hooking a fish.

Satan is really good at fishing for lost souls. There's an old fishing saying that says, "Any fish will bite if you've got the right bait." But what if you could train a fish to recognize bait that has a hook on it or embedded in it? Then that fish would never get caught, would it?

That's what Peter is trying to do for all Christians. He's revealing to us three tempting baits with hooks in them that Satan uses to fish for our souls. If we're wise, we'll pay attention to what Peter, the old fisherman, says so we won't end up in the Devil's frying pan!

The first bait with a hook is **Fearlessness**. Speaking of the false teachers who dangle the bait before us, he writes:

...and especially those who indulge in the lust of defiling passion and despise authority. Bold and willful, they do not tremble as they blaspheme the glorious ones (demons), whereas angels, though greater in might and power, do not pronounce a blasphemous judgment against them before the Lord. But these (false teachers) like irrational animals... blaspheming about matters of which they are ignorant, will also be destroyed in their destruction, suffering wrong as the wage for their wrongdoing... (2 Peter 2:10 -13)

So, Peter is speaking here of the fearless arrogance of the false teachers. They're not afraid of the consequences of sin; they indulge in lustful passion, which we'll talk about later. But then he describes their fearless arrogance even concerning the spiritual authority of the dark side, the demonic world. They don't just blaspheme God, they blaspheme Satan and his demons!

To blaspheme means to show disrespect, to slander, to insult. You might ask, “Why would I respect Satan and his demons?” You don’t respect Satan or demons, you respect their power. They can take you out, or they can possess you, and you have no power to stop them unless you are filled with the Holy Spirit. Even the good angels, the warriors of God, do not disrespect the demons.

So, why would Satan let the false teachers get away with disrespecting him or his demons? Because he is a wise strategist. He’s enticing them to take his bait by fearlessly disrespecting one of his own, who will then show them what a bad day really looks like. Jesus removed demons who had taken possession of people, which means they had control of a person’s behavior and words. But He warned them to fill their lives with the Holy Spirit, or else the demons would be back. He said:

“When the unclean spirit has gone out of a person, it passes through waterless places seeking rest, and finding none it says, ‘I will return to my house from which I came.’ And when it comes, it finds the house swept and put in order. Then it goes and brings seven other spirits more evil than itself, and they enter and dwell there. And the last state of that person is worse than the first. ... “Blessed... are those who hear the word of God and keep it!” (Luke 11:24-26, 28)

Satan’s first bait, that will wreck your life if you take it, is arrogant fearlessness.

His second bait is pleasure. Going back to the middle of verse 13, Peter writes...

...suffering wrong as the wage for their wrongdoing. They count it pleasure to revel in the daytime – they are blots and blemishes, reveling in their deceptions, while they feast with you (2 Peter 2:13)

Now, Peter isn’t talking about pleasure like enjoying a friendship. He’s talking about a very strange, dark pleasure. He says that these false teachers are suffering but still they’re ‘reveling.’ If you looked at them, it would look like they’re having a really great time. They’re happy, they’re satisfied, but inside, man, they’re hurting. They’re *‘reveling in their deceptions, as they feast with you...’* They’re working hard to deceive you, but they’re working even harder to deceive themselves.

The Russian novelist, Fyodor Dostoyevsky wrote:

Lying to ourselves is more deeply ingrained than lying to others.

The Greek word translated ‘pleasure’ here is *hedonaen*, from which we get the English word ‘hedonism.’ Hedonism is the belief that pleasure is the highest good, higher than kindness, higher than love, higher than compassion. The latter Roman emperors were huge advocates of hedonism. Do you see how self-centered this is? If Jesus had believed this, where would we be? In hell or on our way there! Which is where this belief comes from. Hell will be full of hedonists. But it’s one of Satan’s most tasty and tempting baits. Every TV commercial sings the hedonist theme song, “You’re worth it! You deserve it! Couldn’t you use a little more pampering in your life right now?” Don’t take the bait! There’s a nasty, sharp hook inside.

The third Satanic bait is sexual freedom. It’s clearly related to pleasure, but it generally requires an accomplice. Satan isn’t just a good fisherman, he’s an efficient fisherman. He wants to catch two fish with one hook. Peter gives a rather complete description of the ‘sexual freedom’ advocates:

They have eyes full of adultery, insatiable for sin. They entice unsteady souls. They have hearts trained in greed. Accursed children! Forsaking the right way, they have gone astray. They have followed the way of Balaam, the son of Beor, who loved gain

from wrongdoing, but was rebuked for his own transgression; a speechless donkey spoke with human voice and restrained the prophet's madness. (2 Peter 2:14-16)

Human sexuality is a wonderful gift from God. Not only is it full of joy, but it allows two people to join God in the sacred act of creating new life. Isn't that an incredible idea? We get a small taste of the joy God felt when He created life for the first time. WOW! What a generous God to let us join Him in that joy!

However, this act that produces such joy within the boundaries God has set for it will produce equally intense pain if it is practiced OUTSIDE the boundaries God set. And let's be clear on what those boundaries are. Physical sex is only to be enjoyed between one man and one woman who are committed to one another in marriage. Any other sexual activity is out of bounds and is breaking the law of God.

Why does Peter bring up this guy, Balaam? Well, Balaam is a shady character of the Old Testament whose story is too long to retell now, but the thing he did that was so bad was that he instigated the men of Israel to participate in the worship of Baal, the god of the Moabites, which included out-of-bounds sex with Moabite women. When I say 'out-of-bounds' I mean W-A-A-A-Y out-of-bounds. This happened at a place called Peor. So, Baal Peor became synonymous with extreme sexual license. But there was another Baal that required child sacrifice, Baal Molech. Basically, there was a Baal that represented every dark and depraved side of human nature. This is what Jesus condemned when He said to the church in Pergamun:

But I have a few things against you: you have some there who hold the teaching of Balaam, who taught Balak to put a stumbling block before the sons of Israel, so that they might eat food sacrificed to idols and practice sexual immorality... Therefore, repent. If not, I will come to you soon and war against them with the sword of my mouth. (Rev. 2:14,16)

Friends, this is the resurrected Christ speaking! Any church or nation or individual who endorses sexual behavior outside the boundaries of one man and one woman in committed marriage is asking for war with Jesus. That's a war you will not win. You need to repent now.

So, those are the three pieces of bait that Peter says the Devil is using to deceive and catch human souls to join him at an eternal BBQ. This is the wreckage part of this principle.

But Jude, writing of identical issues, shows us the other side, the reward side, which I call:

II. God's Triple-Decker Dessert to Reward Us

Writing in similar fashion to Peter, Jude writes:

But you must remember, beloved, the predictions of the apostles of our Lord Jesus Christ. They said to you, "In the last time there will be scoffers, following their own ungodly passions." It is these who cause divisions, worldly people, devoid of the Spirit. (Jude 17-19)

(His letter is addressed to ...*those called, beloved in God the Father and kept for Jesus Christ*: So, he's writing to the Church, to believers, about false believers who are causing divisions in their body.)

But you, beloved, building yourselves up in your most holy faith and praying in the Holy Spirit, (now watch this!) keep yourselves in the love of God, waiting for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ that leads to eternal life. (Jude 20-21)

Jude, writing to Christians being tempted, mocked and scoffed at, says, "Hey, keep your chins up! How? With these three realities. First, '*keep yourselves in the love of God.*'" Wow! What a great place to live! Please notice that he's making a corporate suggestion. It's 'keep yourselves,' plural. This is the secret. This is the community of believers that Pastor Mark and

Pastor Chris and Pastor Brandon were talking about this past summer: the fellowship, the *koinonia* of the believers. Have you gotten yourself into a group like that yet? It's not too late. There are groups just for women, groups just for men, like Men's Fraternity, either Tuesday morning or Tuesday night. There are life-stage groups, there are mixed groups, there are geographic groups, there are children's groups and student groups, there are a million different groups. Get into one!!! Why? Because the Devil is a wolf and he's hunting for strays. Get in a group and stay there – *'keep yourselves in the love of God.'*

Secondly, the second deck of this triple-decker dessert God has for us is Jesus' Mercy.

Listen:

...waiting for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ... (v. 21)

'...waiting for the mercy...' Waiting isn't easy, is it? But have you ever experienced, have you ever tasted, the mercy of God? Do you know the dimensions of our God's mercy?

Messianic Rabbi Jonathan Cahn, writes:

The Hebrew word for mercy is *rachamin*. Some translate it as 'mercy,' but *rachamin* is not a singular noun. It's plural. It doesn't mean *mercy*, it means *mercies*. It means that God's mercy is more than mercy. God's mercy is so great, so strong, and so deep that it can't be contained in a single word. *Rachamin* means that His mercy has no end.

Now, think about this – the Hebrew word for sin is singular. So, what does that tell you?

That no matter what my sin is, no matter how great, the mercy of God is always greater. And no matter how much I've sinned, no matter how many sins I have, the mercies of God are more than my sins.

So don't ever make the mistake of thinking that you've exhausted God's mercy. You never have. You never could. And you never will. He will always have more mercies than you have sins, more than enough to cover every sin and to still have enough compassion left over to love you forever. ¹

Have you experienced the *rachamin*, the mercies of God? Sometimes you have to wait for it. After our son Adam's wife Sari died, he had to wait for God's mercy. She died in April and then came the waiting. It was so hard for everyone. In August, Adam came with his three little kneehuggers and still we could see the weight of suffering he was under. Many of you saw it yourselves. But by December, nine months of waiting later, Sarah and Caroline Metzger from this church were flying to Israel to be nannies for Adam's kids. What an incredible answer to prayer and what an act of mercy on their part and the part of their parents! Almost immediately, the kneehuggers were acting like near-normal kids again.

But then, more waiting was required. This was great temporary help, but what would the permanent life situation be? Nine more months and Adam and Adi were getting married and Adi wasn't just some 'mail-order bride.' No sir!

- Having spent years in Mozambique, the country next door to where Adam and Sari had been, she's a woman who shares Adam's passion for doing ministry in Africa.
- She's a woman who deeply loves Jesus Christ! At her bridal shower in Jerusalem, Liz met young woman after young woman who said, "I was discipled by Adi. She's the reason I follow Christ today."
- She's a woman who loves kids. Her mother Sandy told Liz that since Adi was about 12 years old she's been saying, "Mom, I don't know why but I just love other people's kids."

If you had asked Liz and me to fill out an order form for the perfect woman for Adam, we couldn't have come up with a woman with all the attributes of Adiel Shoshani Abramson. But

Adam had to wait 18 months for the *rachamin*, the mercies, the many, many mercies of God that now are still coming. How long have you been waiting? Don't give up! There's wonderful truth in an old gospel song:

*When we have exhausted our store of endurance,
When our strength has failed 'ere the day is half done.
When we've come to the end of our hoarded resources,
Our Father's good giving has only begun.
His love has no limit,
His grace has no measure,
His power has no boundary known unto men.
For out of the infinite riches in Jesus,
He giveth, and giveth, and giveth again.*²

Wait for the mercy to fall.

Finally, Jude says the top layer of this triple-decker dessert of God is that it all leads to eternal life. Do you see it? Of course it does! What else could it possibly lead to? And please note, it doesn't say eternal boredom. Have you heard the quote from Mark Twain, where Twain is quoted as saying, "You go to heaven if you want, I'm gonna stay here in Bermuda." What kind of a moron would take Bermuda, which was created by God in six days, over whatever God has been creating in heaven that He's been working on for thousands of years? I mean really! Eternity isn't just the cherry on top of this dessert, it's a whole new buffet!!!

I love, too, what Jude now offers as an almost after-thought to this passage:

And have mercy on those who doubt... (Jude 22)

Why does Jude have a heart for doubters? Because he didn't believe that his half-brother Jesus was the Son of God until after the resurrection. He knows what it feels like to be a doubter. What were you before you believed that Jesus was the Son of God?

...save others by snatching them out of the fire; to others show mercy with fear, hating even the garment stained by the flesh. (Jude 23)

Where do you see yourself in this wreckage/reward principle? Man, if you're on the wreckage side, I gotta ask; what are you doing over there? Grab on to God's grace by admitting your sinful ways, ask Him to forgive you and start living in His love, His mercy and the hope of eternal life. And if you're on the reward side of this principle, do you think you could take just a small portion of the endless mercy of God and share it with someone this week? I'm sure you can do it. How God will smile when you do. Let's pray...

¹ Jonathan Cahn, *The Book of Mysteries* (Lake Mary: FrontLine, Charisma Media/Charisma House Book Group, 2016), p. 56

² Words: Annie Johnson Flint, Music: Hubert Mitchell, 1941, Renewed 2969 by Lillenas Publishing Co.