

Blaming

Anxious for Nothing Series, April 13 & 14, 2024 | 2 Corinthians 4:7-18

How do you escape a trap that you have set yourself?

The phrase “Hoist with his own petard ...” means to be caught in a trap you set yourself.

The phrase, like so many good phrases, comes from Shakespeare’s plays, *Hamlet* specifically.

Hamlet’s wicked uncle wanted Hamlet dead, so he sent him on a ship to England with two supposed friends and a letter asking the king of England to kill him. Hamlet escaped from the ship after replacing the letter with one asking the king to kill the would-be assassins instead. Hamlet later said that the plotter would be “Hoist with his own petard.”

To be hoist is to be thrown through the air or to be lifted into the air.

A petard is a small bomb used to blow doors in, like a grenade.

So, to be hoist with your own petard is to be blown up by your own bomb.

It means to be caught in your own trap.¹

To be “anxious for nothing,” we will need to escape traps we set ourselves.

There are multiple mental traps we set ourselves.

When we get caught in those mental traps, we become anxious.

Blaming is our second thought trap.

Blaming is when we make someone or something exclusively responsible for our circumstances, particularly circumstances that are out of control.

I may blame myself and say that I’m stupid or bad.

I may blame you and say that you’re lazy or selfish.

Blame, ironically, makes us anxious. Pretty soon, we’re caught in our own trap.

Blaming thrives on “should” statements.

We make “should” statements when reality doesn’t meet our expectations.

We may think that “life should be different.” We don’t have what we want, we don’t have what we thought we would have, we don’t have what someone else has, and we don’t like what we have. “Life should be different.”

Sometimes we think that “you should be different.” If only you would give me what I want, if only you would do what I want, if only you would not do what I do not like, then life would be good. “You should be different.”

Sometimes we think “I should be different!” Life isn’t what we want, so we pin negative names on ourselves. We’re failures. We’re losers. We’re incompetent. If we were different, life would be better. “I should be different!”

“Should” statements trap us because they leave us feeling frustrated and angry rather than leaving us ready to act.

¹ <https://nosweatshakespeare.com/quotes/famous/hoisted-by-his-own-petard/>

Ultimately, the blaming trap causes us to forget God's goodness.

When we get caught in the blaming trap, we are ultimately saying God should be different.

God should give us a different life, make that other person different, or make me different.

Since God didn't give me a different life, make you different, or make me different, then, we conclude, God must not be good.

Sometimes we think it quietly; sometimes we say it loudly. We blame God.

This is a difficult trap to escape. How do we escape the blaming trap?

Paul could easily have gotten caught in the blaming trap.

Paul told part of his life story in 2 Corinthians 4:7-12:

But we have this treasure in jars of clay, to show that the surpassing power belongs to God and not to us. We are afflicted in every way, but not crushed; perplexed, but not driven to despair; persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed; always carrying in the body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be manifested in our bodies. For we who live are always being given over to death for Jesus' sake, so that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our mortal flesh. So death is at work in us, but life in you.

Paul had a complicated history with the church in Corinth.

Paul started the church in Corinth. Then he left to start other churches.

Quickly, trouble erupted. Paul wrote to confront the trouble.

Then Paul received word that there was conflict in Corinth, and the church had more questions. This led to Paul writing what we have in our Bibles as 1 Corinthians.

The congregation in Corinth addressed some of the issues Paul raised in his letter, but Paul found that the situation in Corinth was worse than it seemed. He made a painful visit to Corinth that went badly.

Following his painful visit, Paul sent a severe letter, hoping to handle some of the problems. It worked. Kind of. It was a tumultuous relationship.

Paul's credentials were questioned.

Paul, it seemed, was known for writing bold letters but not being so bold in person.

There were even those who questioned his theology and whether he was a true apostle.

Paul argued that God's Spirit was present with him and working through him.

Paul even argued that the Corinthians themselves validated his ministry. He introduced them to Christ and helped them to grow in Christ. In **2 Corinthians 3:2** he wrote:

You yourselves are our letter of recommendation, written on our hearts, to be known and read by all.

Imagine being constantly questioned by a church you started. That could not have been easy.

Then again, Paul's life had been difficult.

He summarized those difficulties right here in the verses that we read.

Paul gave up his earlier career and had been rejected by many of his own countrymen.

He had experienced multiple plots to take his life.
Paul had been in prison, beaten, and nearly executed.
He suffered deprivation. He was betrayed, abandoned, and vilified.
Paul had a hard life.

Paul would have had an easy time engaging in blaming, which would lead to anxious thoughts.

If I had lived that kind of life, I probably would have gone before God in prayer multiple times with blame in mind.

I would have prayed to God, "My life should be different."

I certainly would have prayed about certain people, "They should be different."

I almost certainly would have said to God, "I should be different!"

I would probably have told God, "God, YOU should be different."

But he didn't. Instead, he said that the life of Jesus was being manifested in his flesh.

How did Paul arrive at that conclusion?

Paul avoided the blaming trap with the Gospel.

Paul referred to us as having treasure in jars of clay.

Remember what Paul wrote in 2 Corinthians 4:7. We have a treasure in jars of clay.

The treasure to which Paul refers is back in **2 Corinthians 4:6**:

For God, who said, "Let light shine out of darkness," has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.

The treasure we have is the knowledge of the glory of God in Jesus. That's our treasure.

But Paul acknowledges that we have this treasure in jars of clay.

Paul is a jar of clay, meaning that he is weak and not precious. Paul doesn't hide his own weaknesses. In **2 Corinthians 12:9** Paul wrote:

But he said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness." Therefore I will boast all the more gladly of my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may rest upon me.

But this isn't just about Paul's failings as a human or his own lack of ability as an apostle.

It's the human condition. In the end, we are all just jars of clay. Look at **Genesis 2:7**:

... then the LORD God formed the man of dust from the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living creature.

We are weak vessels through which God displays his glory! That's the Gospel!

Then in 2 Corinthians 4:13-18, Paul explained his life and ministry in terms of the Gospel:

Since we have the same spirit of faith according to what has been written, "I believed, and so I spoke," we also believe, and so we also speak, knowing that he who raised the Lord Jesus will raise us also with Jesus and bring us with you into his presence. For it is all for your sake, so that as grace extends to more and more people it may increase thanksgiving, to the glory of God.

So we do not lose heart. Though our outer self is wasting away, our inner self is being renewed day by day. For this light momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal

weight of glory beyond all comparison, as we look not to the things that are seen but to the things that are unseen. For the things that are seen are transient, but the things that are unseen are eternal.

Paul explained life and ministry in terms of Resurrection.

Paul said in verse 13 that he had been given a message that he could not help but speak. However, that ministry came with risk! Some people would reject him, and he would suffer. And that rejection and suffering could lead him to ask questions. They could lead him to blame. However, Paul saw his life and ministry in terms of Resurrection. In verse 14 Paul remembered that Jesus was raised from the dead, and his ultimate destination was Resurrection. Rejection and suffering are for a season, but Resurrection is forever!

Paul also explained life and ministry in terms of Mission.

In verse 15 he noted that all of his troubles and trials led to the Gospel spreading. Grace extends to more and more people. More people come to salvation in Jesus. And when that happens, there is nothing but thanksgiving for us and glory for God. Rejection and suffering were worth it because Christ's mission went forward!

Finally, Paul explained life and ministry in terms of Sanctification.

Paul contrasted the outer self with the inner self. He acknowledged that the outer self may suffer and so waste away, but inwardly God was renewing our spirits by his presence. Then Paul contrasted affliction, which is momentary and light, with glory, which is weighty and beyond comparison. He said that the afflictions prepare us for glory. How? Is pain just inherently valuable? No. God is at work. Then Paul contrasted things that are seen with things that are unseen. The things that are seen are what we usually value and consider to be eternal and unchangeable, but Paul said that these seen things, instead, are transient. That is, they change and go away. The things that are unseen, the spiritual things, are eternal. In all of this, Paul is saying God is at work in our lives, changing us and preparing us for eternity. God is sanctifying us.

Paul kept his focus on the Gospel and God's goodness!

Paul didn't let worldly values, a worldly perspective, or a worldly narrative shape his thinking. He didn't let the problems of life and ministry make him question God's goodness. He didn't let his thought-life devolve into blaming, which would produce anxiousness. And Paul didn't let anxiousness stop his ministry or derail his life. Instead, Paul kept his attention on the Gospel. He looked at his life and ministry through the lens of the Gospel. The Gospel kept his attention focused on God's goodness. Focused on God's goodness, Paul kept living and doing ministry.

The Gospel asserts God's goodness.

Creation: God created everything because he is good.

The Gospel doesn't say that God created everything because he needed something.

Instead, God created everything (including us) out of love and goodness.

Brokenness: We rebelled, and our good God did not destroy us.

We sinned and rebelled against an all-powerful and all-sovereign God.

God was up front about the fact that the penalty for sin and disobedience was death.

However, God did not immediately wipe us out for our rebellion.

Instead, God has allowed creation to continue and has a plan to save us. That's goodness!

Jesus: Out of his goodness, Jesus redeemed us!

In Jesus, God himself died to pay the price for our sin,

In Jesus, God himself defeated death. That's goodness!

Church: God pours out his goodness on us today.

God's goodness is all around us every day.

It's like what Jesus told us to pray in the Lord's Prayer. He told us to pray and ask that God would give us our daily bread. What is that prayer all about? It's a request that God give us today everything we need to survive and thrive.

God does that. God gives us exactly what we need for each day. That's God's goodness.

Return: Out of his goodness, God will triumph!

God will finally and forever vanquish sin, death, evil, and everything that belongs to them.

Then God will remake creation perfectly and fill it with his glory.

He will give us resurrected bodies, and we will live with him forever. That's goodness!

The Gospel and God's goodness help US avoid the blaming trap.

The Gospel and God's goodness keep Joni Eareckson Tada from falling into the blaming trap.

Joni was injured in a diving accident when she was 17 years old. Her doctors told her that she would be paralyzed for her entire life. She is now a quadriplegic.

She's honest about what a difficult time she had wrapping her mind around what happened at the time. She struggled with depression and wanted to lie in bed with the lights off, alone. Forever.²

She's also honest about the difficulties she faces every day as a result of her accident. She needs someone to feed her, dress her, and help her with exercises to keep her lungs clear. She needs help with a catheter and a bed bath. She has chronic pain.³

However, she also knows how good God was to her at the time. Joni knows that her life was headed in a bad direction when she was injured. She thinks about what her life would have been like if she had stayed on the path she was on. God changed her life. God gave her a new life and an opportunity to

² <https://joniandfriends.org/about/>

³ <https://joniandfriends.org/daily-devotional/respite/>

impact many, many people through her ministry. Joni leads "Joni and Friends," a ministry to people with diverse abilities and their families.⁴

And she is focused on how good God is to her every day. Every day she wakes up and realizes that she is going to need Jesus desperately just to get through the day, but every day God in his goodness helps her to survive and to thrive!

The Gospel and God's goodness helped Paul avoided blaming and anxiousness.

Paul did not get into the habit of blaming.

Paul didn't sit around thinking, "Life should be different, you should be different, I should be different, GOD should be different."

Consequently, Paul didn't get caught in the trap of anxious thoughts.

And the trap of anxious thoughts didn't stop Paul from doing what God called him to do.

Instead, Paul focused on the Gospel of Jesus and the goodness of God.

It was the treasure in his jar of clay.

He lived in anticipation of the Resurrection, engaged in the mission Jesus gave him, and allowed God to sanctify him.

The Gospel and God's goodness can help us avoid blaming and anxiousness.

What Paul experienced and wrote applies just as much to you and me as it did to him.

We too have the treasure of the Gospel in jars of clay.

We too live in light of Jesus' Resurrection and with the hope of our own resurrections.

We too are given a great commission to go and make and multiply disciples of Jesus.

We too are being sanctified day by day as God renews us and remakes us, and makes us fit for eternity and to experience his glory forever.

We have no need to blame. We have no need to say, "Life should be different. You should be different. I should be different. GOD should be different."

The Gospel is our story, and the goodness of God is with us every single day.

Focusing on God's goodness leads us to gratitude.

Instead of blaming, we get to say "thank you."

Thank you, God, for my life.

Thank you, God, for the people around me.

Thank you, God, for who you made me to be.

Thank you, God, for who you are! You are my good, good Father!

⁴ <https://www.lifeisstory.com/podcast/joni-a-conversation-with-joni-eareckson-tada/>