

Turn Away From The Cliff

By Adam R. Parchert

“For wide is the gate and broad is the road that leads to destruction, and many enter through it.” - Matthew 7:13

For thousands of years, Indigenous tribes of North America hunted buffalo through a method called a Buffalo Jump. This was really a quite ingenious method of hunting in that it took advantage of a core instinct of the Buffalo in order to kill it. First, they would select a cliff with a steep drop and an open prairie leading up to it. Then, the hunters, often disguised in bison or wolf hides, would intentionally herd the animals into a tight group and then light fires and make loud noises to stir the herd into a frenzy and provoke it to stampede. As the herd reached full speed, the leading animals had no choice but to plunge to their death over the edge of the cliff. Since bison tend to follow leaders instinctively, once a few went over, the rest followed in a chaotic, thundering rush. Once the herd had been driven over the edge, the tribe would process the animals for food, shelter, and tools. Today, you can visit one of these Buffalo Jumps in Alberta, Canada. The Head-Smashed-In Buffalo Jump was used for over 5,700 years, with tens of thousands of bison meeting their end here.

The journey towards the cliffs edge

This hunting method reminds me of Matthew 7:13, “For wide is the gate and broad is the road that leads to destruction, and many enter through it.” It is such a human tendency to follow the crowd and find comfort in going the same direction as everyone else. Throughout the entirety of the Bible, we see that a vast majority of people, if left to their own devices, tend to lead themselves to destruction. The path of Christ-centered righteousness is sadly only followed by the minority who travel the narrow path and enter through the narrow gate.

The enemy of our soul is described in scripture as a prowling, roaring lion, seeking whom to devour. Like the buffalo hunters, he takes advantage of our natural instincts as he herds us and whips us into a frenzy. And, if he has his way, drive us off the edge of the cliff to our destruction.

“The devil cannot make hell beautiful, so he makes beautiful roads that lead us there.” - Unknown.

The path to destruction often appears enticing, paved with promises of happiness, self-fulfillment, and comfort. But just as the buffalo charged forward

unaware of the fatal drop ahead, many are unknowingly rushing toward spiritual ruin.

This saddens me when I realize people I love and care about are being led to destruction. I want to warn them of the danger of the path they are on, to shake some sense into them and turn them away. But I'm filled with frustration, sadness, and anger that they seem uninterested in learning another way. It causes me to question my ability to communicate, wondering if I'm failing them.

Then, I am stirred with compassion as I recognize that most people do not consciously want to move toward their own destruction. They are likely making decisions based on what they believe is best for them at that moment. Perhaps this is being amplified by them listening to misleading information from sources that do not have their best interests at heart. This challenges me to confront my frustrations, bias, and personal preferences in order to learn to communicate the truth to them in a way that they can receive and consider. Perhaps I need to connect with them by addressing their felt needs before I begin making the case for them to see the error of their ways.

The Pull of the Herd and The Call of The Warrior

Humans are full of contradictions. On one hand, we crave independence, while, on the other hand, we find comfort in conforming to the crowd. We want to believe we are thinking for ourselves, but we are, instead, easily manipulated by the world and culture around us. Sometimes we walk alone when we should be surrounding ourselves with a healthy community. Other times, we follow the herd when we should be walking our own narrow path.

It's easy to believe we're on the right path when we see so many others moving in the same direction. "Certainly, we can't all be wrong. I must be doing the right thing because everyone else is doing it too." But the enemy thrives on self-deception. One of his greatest tricks in his arsenal is to convince people that he doesn't exist and that his ways are the right way. We see this play out when people become convinced they're on the narrow path when, in reality, they're part of the stampede toward destruction. They buy into the confusion and delusion of what the world tells them is right and wrong. These chilling words from Isaiah 5:20 shine a light on this reality, "Those who call evil good and good evil are as good as dead, who turn darkness into light and light into darkness, who turn bitter into sweet and sweet into bitter."

But knowing this isn't enough. We can't just sit in frustration, shaking our heads at the madness. We have a choice to make: do we stand by and do nothing, or do we step in and fight for the people we care about? Do we let them keep moving toward destruction, or do we find a way to reach them—lovingly, intentionally, and effectively—not with our wisdom or opinions, but with the truth of the

Gospel? If all we have to offer is ourselves, they'll walk away empty. But if we offer them Christ in us, they have real hope.

I'll be honest—my gut instinct is often to walk away, to let people live with the choices they make. It's easier to shake my head, get frustrated, and move on. But when I push past my cynicism, when I step into their shoes and try to understand why they're making the choices they're making, even if I entirely disagree, something shifts. My compassion rises, and I trade my frustrations for a warrior's determination and a righteous anger.

Jesus modeled this righteous anger in a powerful way when He saw the Temple—the place where people came to seek God—turned into a marketplace filled with corruption and greed. He saw something He cherished being twisted and manipulated by the enemy, and He couldn't ignore it. He gave a powerful example of righteous anger by creating a whip of cords and clearing the temple of that which was blocking the people from God. However, it should be recognized that He took the intentional and deliberate step to make the whip of cords. The whip was not used to bring physical harm to the people, but was used to drive out animals, scatter the coins of the moneychangers, and symbolize Divine judgement. When we step into the helm of exhibiting righteous anger towards those things that deceive and mislead those we care for, we too, must be deliberate and intentional in the ways that we confront and address these situations. We must never do so to harm people, but instead to bring about God's righteousness. We must let our care for others be empowered by our faith in Jesus as we step into our God-given role as warriors for truth.

Plan and strategize

Be prayed up and prepared emotionally, spiritually, and physically.

It's going to take a lot of emotional, spiritual, and physical energy to effectively come alongside someone who is walking towards a cliff. They likely have many people walking alongside them, patting them on the back, pushing them closer and closer to the edge of the cliff, smiling and agreeing with everything they do.

Think of all you will have to do to effectively turn someone from the path they have set. First, you have to catch up with the person. Then you must convince them to stop and turn around. Then you must encourage them to move forward against the crowd of people stampeding towards the cliff. It's a lot of work and effort. There's going to be frustration along the way, and there will be moments of both sadness and victory. It's not a straight line. Those that are in a stampede towards the cliffs edge can be exceedingly difficult to turn around. Think of it from the standpoint of a stampeding herd of bison, running towards the buffalo jump. Think of how much energy and effort it would take to catch up to and stop a single bison in the midst of the stampede and encourage them to turn around

and go the opposite direction. It will only be by the divine power of God's mercy that any turn around will happen. You will be tested and challenged if you choose to step into someone's life in order to help guide them to a better path. But if you are called by Jesus to mount this mission, you will be given the strength and sustenance needed.

Know your role in the grand scheme of things.

It's not your job to save people from running over the cliff's edge. It is your role to share the truth Jesus has for you to share. To live day by day, being accountable to do the things that matter to God. An important step in achieving this is to practice self-awareness. You need to be careful that your own personal bias, triggers, and values are not coloring and influencing the advice you give to people. If you are just in this to make sure people are living the way you think they should live, then you should keep your mouth silent. The people in your life do not need more of you and your opinions as much as they need more of Jesus and His truth. It is imperative to stay close to the Word of God and stay away from your opinions and prescriptions for success.

Simplicity is the key. If you share what Jesus wants you to share, and they choose to take a different path, then you have done all you can do. You have done your part. You are the messenger of salvation, you are not the one who gives it. On the flip side, if you do lovingly share with them what Jesus wants you to share, and they do choose a better path, then don't throw your shoulder out of joint patting yourself on the back. It's not your power that turned them around, it was the love and grace of Jesus. Ultimately, we are the messengers. We are not the message. And ultimately, if people make a life change because they want to please us, then is this really the life change you are hoping for. Let humility guide you. Speak to them as a fellow broken person, sharing your hopes that they'll change their path.

In Conclusion

The pull and rush of this world is strong and pervasive. It can feel like we and those we care for are in the middle of an ancient Buffalo run, pushing forward with the crowd, uncertain of what is coming next. The good news is that if you have accepted and embraced the grace and mercy of salvation through Jesus Christ, you will have an opportunity to walk the narrow path and invite others to do the same. Having once been part of the stampede ourselves, we now will have perspective to help others turn back. Meditate on these words from Galatians 6:9, "Let us not grow weary in doing good, for at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up."

Remember, you may be in a unique position in another person's life to be the only one that cares for them enough to speak the truth to them. Don't take that

responsibility lightly. Don't wait around for somebody else to do it. Because if not you, then who?

May Christ be the heartbeat of the journey...

About the author:

Adam R. Parchert holds a Bachelor of Arts in Biblical Studies from Central Bible College, Springfield, Missouri. He has provided pastoral leadership in various capacities since 1996. From 2012 to 2021, Adam founded and led a suburban Chicago church. In addition, he runs a small business while actively involved in his local church and the Christian non-profit organization, The Crucible Project. www.TheCrucibleProject.org