

The Snare of the Fowler

by Roy Hession

The snare of sin holds us captive, but God's love and redemption through Christ break the snare and set us free.

Duration: 36:11

Scripture: Psalm 124:7, Romans 6:7-22, 1 Corinthians 15:56

Topics: "Snare"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker uses the analogy of a bird caught in a snare to illustrate the predicament of Israel and humanity as a whole. The bird represents humanity, trapped in the snare of sin and unable to free itself. However, there is hope as a passerby, symbolizing Jesus, reaches down and breaks the snare, setting the bird free. The speaker emphasizes that the law, which promises life if obeyed, actually brings death because no one can fully keep it. Instead, Jesus came to redeem those under the law, offering adoption into God's family. This redemption was accomplished through Jesus becoming a curse for us, as stated in Galatians 3:13.

Transcript

Now, I want to turn to you, turn you to Psalm 124, verse 7, a wonderful verse. I wonder, have you heard it before? Have you heard anybody speak on it? It's a lovely verse. Psalm 124.

It's the testimony of persecuted and opposed Israel, who proved the help of the Lord. And their testimony expresses ours too. 124, verse 7. Our soul is escaped as a bird out of the snare of the fowler.

The snare is broken, and we are escaped. Now, I'm not a countenance. I'm a plain, straightforward townie.

And I don't quite know what poachers do, for this is a verse about poachers. But I do know that they do, used to, and perhaps still do, lay snares to catch game, which they shouldn't catch. And very often the snare is in the form of a wire which is in a loop.

And somehow or other, the unwary bird is enticed into this loop. And as it moves and catches its leg on it, the loop tightens. And the more it struggles, the more it tightens.

And that bird is caught. Its leg is bleeding. And there it remains, struggling and struggling, until either it is found and caught by the poacher, or it dies.

And this is the situation which Israel said they found themselves in. Like a bird caught in a snare, unable to get free. But this verse tells us, gives us a picture of a passer-by, who sees this pathetic bird struggling for its life.

And he reaches down a kindly hand, and he breaks the snare. And the bird escapes. What a wonderful relief for that bird.

And the psalmist says that Israel's experience is that they were like that. Our soul is escaped out of the snare of the fowler, out of the poacher. The snare is broken, and we are escaped.

And I believe this is not only illustrative of Israel's experience years ago, but it surely is the testimony of the soul that's been set free from the Lord Jesus. It pictures a soul struggling under the power of sin, caught in the snare of sin. And the harder it tries, the more it gets entangled.

Until that soul is brought to complete despair. And then the kindly hand of the Lord Jesus from heaven reaches down and breaks that snare. And that soul is set free and says, my soul is escaped as a bird out of the snare of the fowler.

The snare that held me is broken, and I am escaped. I believe that this, the subject that this verse would introduce us to, is what I may call freedom from sin. And this is one of the great things that the Lord Jesus in the Gospel prophesied to men, freedom from sin.

If you will turn to Romans 6 and have it open on your knee, I want you to look at this phrase. It occurs three times in this great chapter, Romans 6. Verse 7. He that is dead, or he that hath died, is freed from sin. The snare is broken, and this man's escaped.

He's freed from that which ensnared him. He's freed from sin. And then in verse 18, you get the next step on.

Being then made free from sin, what happens? He became the slaves of righteousness, gladly and happily. And then in verse 22, a further stage. And now being made free from sin, and become the slaves of God, you have your fruit unto holiness, and the end everlasting life, further consequences from being made free from sin.

Before we think of being made free from sin, let's see that which enslaves us. This verse of the bird, as I say, pictures for us a Christian or a non-Christian, matters not who, under the power of sin. Grippled by it, and unable to get free.

Now what do you conceive to be the power of sin? When you say that a man's under the power of sin, what do you envisage? Do you mean a man with a number of bad habits which he can't stop? He vows to be different and can't? And he keeps on committing certain sins? Is it only then that a man is said to be under the power of sin? I don't think so. You can be under the dominion of sin. You can be under the power of a certain sin, and not be committing it every day at all.

Indeed, we've only got to commit a certain sin once in our lives, and to be under the dominion of that sin for years to come. Because the power of sin, as I see it, does not lie in its ability to fascinate us, and to form itself into a habit. That is the least of its power.

It does that. The basis of the power of sin over man lies in its guilt. Sin always leaves the entail of guilt.

A heart that condemns you. A conscience that represses you. And the passage of time does nothing to remove that guilt.

I've often used the illustration, I use it again, of the cup of coffee, which you had before you go to bed, we'll say. And you're too tired at home to wash it up that night, so you leave it. In the morning, there's the cup.

The coffee's gone. But the stain is there, always there, quite simple. I'll leave that for a day or two.

But the passage of a day or two has done nothing to remove the stain. You can leave it a week or a month, but the stain is still there. You haven't got to be forever putting new coffee in and drinking it and leaving further stain.

That one stain remains. And so it is with us. This is what the hymn writers, how they describe guilt.

How right our hymn writers are so often. The stain talks about sinners losing their guilty stain. What does that picture? Why guilt? The sense of reproach, the accusing heart, the accusing conscience.

And you don't have to be repeating a sin to be under its power in that sense. There may be some things that happened years ago, or happened fairly recently. Maybe you're not repeating them.

But you're under their power. To this very day, if only because of their guilt. If only because there's a heart that isn't quite at peace about them.

If only because there are certain things in your life about which you don't want anybody to ask you awkward questions. Toplady, who wrote the famous hymn, Rock of Ages, says, It saved me from sin's guilt and power. And I suppose he thought that sin's guilt was one thing, and sin's power was another.

Well, who am I really to take issue with such a man as he? But I don't think that's correct. The power of sin lies basically in its guilt. And that's a bigger power.

Forgetting it doesn't do away with it. Trying to be better does nothing to remove it. And this is a soul here, in the snare of the fowler.

It doesn't mean to say he's still committing those sins again and again. He doesn't need to, to be caught. And there may be things in our lives, all of us, of one sort, larger or smaller matters.

And your heart accuses you. Your conscience reproves you. And even if that isn't a very acute experience, there's a vague sense of wrong.

And you'd only need to ask God the reason, and he would itemise. Sin after sin after sin. And we are in that condition, under the dominion of sin.

Now, when we're in that condition, what is the thing we normally would do? When a man feels himself out of touch with God, and uneasy, and in that condition. Why, the normal thing is to try to be better. To turn over a new leaf.

To embrace higher standards in his Christian life. To perhaps give more time to prayer, and that sort of thing. To improve.

In other words, the natural thing then, is to apply to what Paul calls in his epistles, the law. That is, the moral standard. And if I can approximate to those moral standards, if I can become a better Christian, and

a more earnest worker, then I shall be happy and free once again.

But actually, the law, the moral standards which we seek to embrace, only strengthen sin's power over it. You can see that if you have it established in your thinking, that the power of sin is its guilt. Right, I say, I want to be different.

I'm going to come up to this standard or that. Fine, if you do. But what if you fail to, and you are going to fail to? Then you've just got so much more about which to be condemned.

And you've found you've played more into the hands of sin by your vows and consecrations than you ever did before. If you don't feel bad about yourself, it is you haven't tried hard enough. Let a person really try, and face up to the demands of God, and he will very soon find he's more under the power of sin than he was before he tried.

That's exactly what Paul found in Romans 7, if you like to turn over to it. He says in verse 10, the commandment which was ordained to life, I found to be unto death. Do you understand that? The commandment which promised me life if I could keep it, I found to be unto death because I failed to keep it.

The law pronounces a blessing on the man that will come up to it, demands. But it cannot but pronounce a curse upon the sinner who fails to. And the next result of my attempts to measure up, if I'm sensitive enough to realise it, is that I thought more under the power of sin than I ever did when I was careless.

In other words, as the bird tries to pull itself out of the wire, it gets tighter and tighter and tighter. I've seen a picture of a great elephant that was caught in such a snare, and as it tried to pull itself out of this wire, it must have been a huge cable. It bit itself more and more into its limb, and ultimately the picture showed us that great beast dead.

And that's exactly the effect that our attempts to be distant, to use the doctrinal word, the law, has upon us. And this is what Paul meant in 1 Corinthians 15 when he said, the strength of sin is the law. If you like to look at it there, 1 Corinthians 15 verse 56.

The sting of death is sin, and the strength of sin is the law. What gives sin strength? What gives it its ability to accuse us? Why, the very standards we've espoused as Christians. And he says, look, do you remember what you promised? Do you know the sort of person you should be as a Christian? Do you remember what you said to God at Cleveland? Now look at you.

It were better not to have made a promise than having made it fail, because you just play into the hands of the power of sin the more. And so here's this poor bird caught in the snare of the fowler. And the more you try to get out, the more surely you are in.

I remember years ago we had in our garden a rat trap. It wasn't a snare like this, but I suppose something similar. But this illustrates my point rather well, I hope.

This was a wire rat trap. And it had an entrance into this big square thing, through a sort of funneled entrance. It was broad, at the beginning they got very narrow, and inside there was some food.

And the rat, in its anxiety to get the food, would squeeze through the entrance. But having got in, it couldn't get out. And having got into sin, the plight of the sinner is he cannot get out.

You and I have a limitless power to commit sin. When it comes to the commitment of sin, every one of us are giants. But having committed sin, having done what we have done, we have got no power at all to extricate ourselves from the plight in which we are.

That is what is meant in Romans 5 when it says, when we were yet without strength, Christ died for the ungodly. Without strength, all the revised versions put it, when we were yet helpless. You and I are not only sinners, but we're helpless sinners.

We've got ourselves in a position, and try as you will, you can't get back. You can't get right. You've got in, but you can't get out.

This is the sinner's plight. And inasmuch as we're all sinners, this in measure is the plight of every one of us who as yet has not found this wonderful grace of God adapted to a need like that. But back of all this situation is, of course, Satan.

This is a situation which, of course, he engineers. He delights in this because it gives him his opportunity to do his great work which is accusing the brethren. He is the great one who having got you to fall, and got you into that predicament, then begins to tell you what a rotter you are, and how hopeless the situation is, and you can never get right.

He's called the accuser of the brethren. And this is the reason why the devil gets us to sin. It isn't merely that he wants you to do something unethical, or something beastly, or something bad-tempered, or to manifest a wrong spirit to somebody.

He's glad to see that happen, he likes to see all the misery it causes. But his main purpose is to give himself the opportunity on those sins to build his superstructure of accusation. And that can go on over years, and be added to by every other further phase.

Indeed, that superstructure can blot out the sun from our sight. Very often, the superstructure which Satan builds is out of all proportion to the foundational wickedness. That's his purpose in getting men to sin.

In order that he may say, I've got you now. And there's no way out. And if you think there is a way, he magnifies what seem to be the conditions of getting out, so much that you feel you just cannot make it.

I've known people who said, I can't get right with God. There have been people in Clevedon, in past years, they know they're wrong, they know they ought to get back to God, but they say, I just can't. And I'm thinking of one case because the necessary steps of restitution, and apology, and confession, seem to be to them so enormous that they just couldn't face it.

They got in to that trap, but they just couldn't get out. Some years ago, I remember there being with us a certain Christian leader and his wife. And she came under great conviction of sin, although she was a minister's wife.

And I remember it bringing down on the fan, seeing her there in such agony of soul, that she was almost writhing there, in agony of mind, on the fan. She says, I can't get back. I can't get right.

Oh, what a fine time the devil had with that poor soul. The reason was quite simple. Since girlhood days, she'd been a secret kleptomaniac.

And her greatest joy was to visit Woolworth's or some such store and take things off. And she'd been doing that for years, secretly, right up to coming to Clevedon, yet she was a converted woman. Could speak of the Lord most sweetly.

And you know, she never saw that to be sin, until one day at least. And then she said, well, how can I get back? How can I put it right? What will happen when I tell my husband? What will happen when I go to whoever I need to go to? Poor soul, her soul was snared in the snare of the Father. And said, I can't get right.

And that is an outstanding thing. Many a one said, I can't get back. I can't make it.

That's exactly what the devil wants us to believe. So here is the picture of a bird in the snare of the Father. And the harder it tries, the tighter that snare becomes.

Well, has God an answer for this? Of course He has. And this situation, whenever we're in it in any degree, and it hasn't got to be major matters, all sorts of things you feel you can't find your way out of, this situation doesn't make Him loathous. But if you will, it evokes His love for us.

You know He loves the sinner, wildly the sinner, as a sinner. You and I as much love when our performance is bad as when it's good. And there's many a verse that says that the Lord is the one who looks down from heaven and hears the sighing of the prisoner.

There's a story told of Richard Cur de Leon, who on the way back from one of his crusades was captured by an alien power somewhere in Europe and never came back. And he was incarcerated in some European castle. And England longed to have their king back.

They were willing to pay any ransom to get him back, but they didn't know where he was. And he had a friend, can't remember his name, his court musician, and Richard court, Blondin was it? Yes, and Richard Cur de Leon loved music. And his court musician travelled Europe, and outside every castle he sang Richard Cur de Leon's favourite song.

There's no result. Until one day, from within a certain castle, he heard an answering voice singing it with him. What a picture of the Lord Jesus, who'd come to find captive those who snared him.

And do you know what England did? To get their king back, they paid an absolutely colossal ransom. They'd almost beggared the country for the time. Although their king was in prison, he was still loved.

And they sought him. And Jesus is coming around us these days, singing a song of freedom, the song of a soul set free, as the choir have sung to him. I wonder if he hears any little faint desire on your part? Maybe you've given up hope, you've despaired, I can't be any different.

But that's only Satan who tells you that. Yes, I like to think in this story of the bird, a kindly hand reached out, and broke the snare, and set the bird free. And the great hand of God has stretched itself down into this world where we're all in this condition, in one degree or another.

And in the Lord Jesus, he's broken the snare, and made us free. What is the snare? Sin, and that which gives sin its power, the law. And how has this great emancipation been accomplished for us? Listen, if you will, from Galatians 4, verse 4. But when the fullness of the time was come, God sent forth his Son, made of a woman, made under the law, to redeem them that were under the law, that we might receive the

adoption of sons.

And in the previous chapter, listen to this. Christ, verse 13, chapter 3, has redeemed us from the curse of the law being made a curse for us. For it is written, cursed is everyone that hangeth on a tree.

As I said, the law cannot but pronounce a curse on the man who fails to attain its standards. Therefore, every one of us is under the curse. And the law can condemn every one of us, every Christian among us it can, if we stand on that ground.

But the Lord Jesus has robbed sin and the law of its power to condemn it, in that he became a curse for us. That's why the Jews said he died on a tree. The Romans said he died on a cross.

That was their form of punishment. But the Jews said, oh no, it's a tree. And about seven times in the New Testament, he said he died on a tree.

And that's because in Old Testament times, if a man was stoned to death, they were then, as an example, to hang his body on a tree because it was understood in the Old Testament that everybody who hung on a tree was accursed of God. And they want people to see that such a wrongdoer was accursed of God. And Jesus hung on a tree.

Thou hast fulfilled the law. And we are justified. Ours is the blessing, thine the curse.

We live, for thou hast died. And I believe some of us are seeing a new meaning in Talmud and in the blood of Jesus and in the cross. That there, Jesus, on our behalf, exhausted the curse for us.

So there's none for us. And the simple fact is this, that sin and the law and the devil have lost their power to condemn the sinner. Did you but know it.

Did I but know it. The snare that's got me has already been broken by the hand of grace. And every bird can go out free.

Very quickly, would you look at Romans 6 again? Look at those three references to free from sin. He that is dead is freed from sin. What was that unsavoury case that doctor had up on those terrible immoral charges? And the judge was about to decide on the sentence, which was obviously a foregone conclusion, when he committed suicide, and the sentence never passed.

For he that is dead is freed from all such legal penalties. And this verse says he that has died is freed from sin. Freed from sin in this sense.

Not free from sin's solicitation. Far from it. You may still be solicited to sin.

But free from its guilt, its ability to condemn you. But you say, I'm not dead. Oh yes, you are in God's sight.

Because the Lord Jesus died for us. I mean to say if I owe a debt and can't pay it and somebody else pays it for me, I get the receipt, and in the eyes of a creditor, it is as if I'm paying the debt. And I'm free.

And that's what God wants us to understand. That God accounts you to have already paid the utmost of your sin and mine, we have, in His beloved Son. We sang the other night that wonderful hymn, O Christ, what burdens bow thy head? And I must read you that, because I know no better exposition of this point than these words.

Let me just read you those words. For me, Lord Jesus, thou hast died, and I have died in thee. Thou art risen, my bands are all untied, and now I live in thee.

Now I know if you're like me, you've puzzled over Romans 6, you think that they're dying to sin is some extraordinary thing that has to take place in you. The acme of sanctification, as I see it, is nothing to do with that, personally. It is.

He that's died, is freed from sin. In the Lord Jesus, I've died to sin's condemnation, it cannot go on condemning me. The snare's broken then.

And when it says reckon yourselves to be dead indeed to sin, dead indeed to the accusations of sin. Because it's all over. And He's risen, and my debt's being paid.

Oh, I know there are moral attitudes that take up consistent with that, towards sin, but basically, that's what I see it to mean. After all, Jesus is in Romans 6 said to have died to sin. Likewise, you died to sin.

Does it mean that Jesus died to sin's solicitations, and thereafter He couldn't be tempted? He was never alive to sin's solicitations. It couldn't mean that. What did it mean? What does it mean when it says He that in that He died, He died unto sin once.

But having done the work, He couldn't be condemned again. There was enough for the whole universe. Died to it, in the same way you and I are asked to take the same step back with regard to our sins and our doubt.

And then it goes on. He that is dead is freed from sin, then the next result is, verse 18, being made free from sin in this way, you become slaves of righteousness. He that's forgiven loves much.

And you become the willing slave of the one who's reached down and broken the snare. And you don't want to go on with the things that grieve and hurt him. This is God's great motive for holiness.

Simply that He that's forgiven much loves much, and He that loves much wants to walk in the ways of holiness. This is why the way of grace achieves holiness in a way that the way of law never does. And then in the third stage, verse 22, it's a perfect argument, being now made free from sin, and also slaves to God, there's fruit.

And this is God's way of holiness. The way of being forgiven much, and that continually. Therefore I love much, and gladly make myself His slave.

And fruit of holiness and sweetness and grace appears on our lives. And so it says, Jesus has broken the snare to set us free, and has robbed the power of sin, robbed sin of its power to condemn us. And it's useful.

Sin and Satan have lost, as an old hymn says of Wesley, their mortal power. The snare is broken, and the bird is escaped. But, if we confess our sins, not if we hide them.

Grace only is operative when I take the sinner's place desperately and specifically. That says to somebody, that's my problem. I fear what that's going to mean.

That's why somebody says, I can't get right with God. In some cases, the devil can magnify the necessary restitution so much that you feel, I could never make it. What use for Jesus to have died and made the

way of life, if I can't taste it.

I only want to tell you two stories as I close. I want to complete the story of that one who was rising on the sands in such misery of mind. I said to her, you know, can you stay another week? I think you need to hear more of what God is saying.

And we were able to find a bed for her. Her husband had to return home and she stayed for another week. Not everybody knew her condition, very few.

I was amazed at the way in which God directed the ministry. Every message it seemed in that week was grace for sinners, the grace of God for sinners, the grace of God for sinners. It came from every conceivable angle, every speaker.

And from the platform I sometimes watched her. And I saw the strain begin to go from her face. I began to see peace come.

The day came when I saw joy. Why that's for me. I'm loved as a sinner, I'm forgiven as a sinner, I'm welcomed back as a sinner.

Just because I am a sinner. And Jesus loved me and gave himself for me. And she found her way back to God.

Such an easy way. There's a way back to God from the dark paths of sin, the door that is opened and you may go in. And then without any difficulty, she found herself sharing the whole dark story with a dear friend in the conference, another friend who knew her well and her whole family.

And then it was made clear to her, as to putting it right, she was to let Jesus lead her. She had got peace. She was ransomed, healed, restored, forgiven.

Now, in the light of that grace, God would show her what she had to do. Sometimes the devil can accuse a naggy to take specific actions in some costly case. The day came when that husband failed in a certain matter and he was very, very humble before God.

And his wife took her place alongside her and said, and I'm in the tomb, in a deeper way than you are, steeper than me, yes. And he said, and he was able to see her, my soul is absorbed to the bone out of the snare of a fowler. The snare is broken and I'm escaped.

My friend, Victor Monagorum, in India, told me once how a man came to him in the council. He said, I want to tell you something, but on one condition. Will you promise me you will never tell anybody? He said, surely I will.

And he told some dark story that was on his heart. And that day, Victor led this dear man to the fountain filled with blood to Jesus. And the burden from his heart rolled away and he knew his ransom, healed, restored, forgiven.

And the next thing he did was to go to Victor and tell the folks there, he summoned the Lord and told them, do you know what I've been doing? And it all came out. The very thing. He said, you mustn't tell anybody.

When grace had reached him, he was glad to give his testimony to whosoever will. And it'll be the same with us. Someone who's got into the trap and can't get out, but listen, Jesus has come, he's broken the

snare, and the bird can escape.

Don't you let the devil tell you, you never can, you can. Don't you let him magnify excessively. Oh yes, there are steps.

Doubtless, there doubtless will be things you'll need to be put right, but not in order to get right with God, but because at the foot of the cross you've let the grace of God love you and forgive you and ransom you and set you free. And then you and I glad. We'll find ourselves doing what the devil said we never could.

And we'll be under blue skies once again. Lord Jesus, we've all had times when we felt that we were caught in the snare of a fowler. And the more we tried to get better, the tighter the sense of guilt was fastened on us.

And we've despaired. Lord, some of us have come to almost welcome that state of despair. For we've come to realize that it's always the trellis of the door.

It's that necessary exercise of heart that qualifies us for this marvelous, natural grace of God. Thank you, Lord Jesus, for breaking the snare, for robbing sin and the law and Satan of their piety and purity. Oh Lord, may we come into the good of what you've done for us on the cross.

Help us to be straight and honest with you. And Lord, may some of us know you've reached us and set us free. We ask this in thy name.

Amen.

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