

WAY TO SHILOH

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A Soul Set Free – Psalm 124

Psalm 124

7 Our soul is escaped as a bird out of the snare of the fowlers: the snare is broken, and we are escaped.

8 Our help is in the name of the LORD, who made heaven and earth.

In this psalm the Bible gives a wonderful picture lesson of salvation and of the great kindness of God to men and women. It speaks of a bird that has been caught in a snare. The psalm refers to "our soul.....as a bird" and so we have an indication that the bird will represent our situation and need. Men and women are described as being caught as this bird was.

First of all it is held fast and unable to escape. It cannot move very far, if at all. It is deprived of its freedom and has no choice other than to remain where it is. When we think of birds we naturally think of their ability to fly, but a bird caught in a snare is tied to the earth. It is unable to do what it was designed for, it is completely restricted and even if it flaps its wings it will still be tethered to the earth, all its struggles will make no difference. It is still alive but it now has a limited life, the miserable life of a captive. It will hardly be able to feed, even if there may be some seed or fruit within reach it will have no thought of eating. Furthermore it is now very vulnerable and exposed to other predators, as well as to the hot sun and uncertain weather conditions, and then the darkness and cold of night. Snares are very cruel as the wire or metal bites into the flesh of the victim. The bird is no doubt hurt and in pain, it may have broken a leg or a wing as it frantically tried to escape, but no matter what it does it is held fast and truly trapped.

We can begin to see our own captivity here. We are not caught by a snare but are held in the grip of sin. By nature we rebel against the laws of our Creator and find that we cannot and will not obey Him. Furthermore because of our sins we are cut off from knowing His blessing and help in our lives. Like the bird we live a very limited life unable to live as God intended and we become spiritually starved and malnourished. We are also exposed to many harmful influences and the uncertainties of this short life.

The fowler who set the snare is absent in this picture. He will only call to check later and perhaps not for some days. When he sees that a bird has been caught he will quickly despatch it and take it away in his bag. The fowler has no heart or thought for the bird, he does not care about its sufferings and terrors. He has no regard for its feelings or rights or its painful injuries.

What of the snare itself? These are usually made of wire or other traps are made with metal jaws operated by a powerful spring which snaps the toothed jaws shut onto the leg of the victim. Whatever type it is utterly beyond the bird's strength to open it and to free itself. In some snares the more the bird struggles the tighter they become causing painful wounds and even broken bones.

As this applies to us, not only are we all trapped and caught and held in bondage to our sins but sin injures and harms us even as the snare cuts into the birds flesh. Our characters and personalities become weaker and more perverted. No matter how much we try to change our ways we find that sin has us in its grip just as the snare holds the bird. Even though our consciences warn us that we are breaking God's laws in what we think and what we say and do we are unable to obey. We are in the grasp of this world and all its false gods and its self-centred beliefs. We are also in bondage to death - the fowler will return to collect his quarry - death will come to claim all of us in due time.

The birds life is wasted while trapped. It cannot fly with other birds but is alone and cut off from freedom. It is held at ground level and has no view of the landscape around. We can see ourselves in this picture also before we know God's blessing. While we are in bondage to sin we cannot see life's real meaning and purpose, we too scratch around on the earth involved in this life's affairs. We are unaware of the full purpose of the human soul and life and what we were really made to be. Our lives are really quite short and there is much suffering and heartache with only some passing pleasures and happiness along the way.

When the snare is broken the bird escapes instantly! It does not wait and has no desire to stay in the place in which it suffered so much. It flies away on eager wings. It climbs into the sky with exhilaration, relief and joy. This is the message of the gospel. If we are set free from our bondage to sins we will no longer be slaves to it, we will be released from Satan's grasp, we will be beyond his reach. When we are set free we will begin to live as we were made to by our Creator. We will be able to relate to God and know answered prayer and fatherly guidance from Him. He will give us a new view and understanding of life and of His plans for this world. As we read His word our minds will be enlightened and we will be able to think clearly and have great peace in our souls. He will heal us from the wounds of sin and we will be spiritually fed. We can rise above our previous lives as the bird arose from its captivity.

The great thing about this picture is that the snare was broken and the bird escaped. But how did this happen and who broke the snare? It was not the fowler as he planned to keep the bird. It was not the bird which was too weak. We only need to look at the next verse in this psalm [v 8] to understand how this happened:

"Our help is in the name of the Lord Who made heaven and earth"

It is God Himself who breaks the snare. The Lord Jesus Christ, when He died on the cross, broke the snare of sin and guilt for those who believe in Him. When He was here on earth he spoke of Himself as the One who would bring liberty to the captives and set at liberty those who were oppressed [Luke 4.18]. He is a mighty Saviour and no power of sin or of the devil is too great for Him to overcome as He paid the price in full and rose again from the dead to demonstrate and declare this victory over sin and death. Unlike the fowler who does not care for the life of the birds he traps, the Lord Jesus Christ looks on us with compassion and sympathy, even though we have rebelled against Him, and have become caught and entangled in sin. The psalm also reminds us that He made the heavens and the earth - who is there more qualified to trust?

In closing, remember that the bird in the picture was completely helpless. It could do nothing at all to release or save itself. The only thing it could do was cry out. We too must cry out to God with all our hearts, to ask Him to forgive us all our sins, past, present and future because the Lord Jesus Christ has died for us. We cannot save ourselves or remove the record of our guilt. The Bible assures us that He will hear if we cry out sincerely and earnestly, He has a heart full of love and compassion and He will come to our aid. He will break the snare and set us free and we will experience the greatest escape of our lives and He will ensure we are never in the grip of sin again.

"As from the snare with broken hasp, the bird escapes on eager wings,
The soul set free from Satan's grasp bursts forth to freedom, mounts and sings"

John Ryland [1753 – 1825]