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The Threefold Bondage

OF

THE SINNER.

AN ADDRESS

BY H. W. SOLTAU.

LONDON:

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ON

LUKE xiii. 10-17 ; xiv. 1-16 ; and xv.

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LUKE xiii. 10-17 ; xiv. 1-16 ; and xv.

You will easily see how very closely connected together are these three portions. And they seem to be especially given to teach us two blessed truths : first, that God has a right to claim something as his own : that He has a right to the creatures whom He values and loves. Here is a man (the ruler of the synagogue,) who virtually denies that God has a right to call anything his own, or to value anything

as dear to Himself. God claims as much right to value what is his own, as man does.

The second blessed truth brought out in these portions of Scripture is, that God's joy in saving, far exceeds the joy of the person who is saved; and that a sinner affords an occasion for God to have his own joy in salvation: he affords God an opportunity for rejoicing. These two truths we have to keep in our hearts, even as believers, that God has an inheritance, a peculiar possession in us, which He values, which He would not part with, which nothing shall wrest from Him; that He claims us as his own, as a treasure of value to Himself, as something especially precious. Besides

this, we are ministers to his joy, to his happiness. This is our blessed ministry. All the ministry of the believer, if true, is ministering to the *joy of God*. All his ways, his purposes, his actions, if rightly subject to the Spirit of God, minister to the joy of God.

We are essential to God's happiness, essential to God's joy. His happiness and his joy would be marred if those in whom He rejoices could in any wise be lost. This is a thought but little encouraged in our hearts. There is in us a mock, a hypocritical humility, a shrinking from openly avowing what we are, as saved sinners, and from delighting in what we are, as regards our value to God, as regards our place in the affections of God. Thus we lose

much blessing, and do not render to God that worship, and that praise, which would glorify Him. The happiness of the believer comes *from* God, but it goes back *to* God : it is reflected back to God, and, as it were, makes God glad.

Now let us go a little into these beautiful passages. They represent the threefold condition of the sinner. First, we have a woman bound by the devil ; next, a man with the very vital parts of his system diseased, the blood vitiated, dropsical ; and thirdly, a sheep that has wandered. Was not this the threefold condition of every one of us before salvation ? Were we not bondsmen of Satan ? vitiated as regards our heart-springs, the very life-blood, the very nature in which we

exist? Have we not all bad blood—blood that has no vitality—blood that has no spring of life in it? I am speaking metaphorically. Our *bodies* are the index of our *souls*; and when God describes the condition of a man's soul, He speaks of his body, and says, "From the sole of the foot, even unto the head, there is no soundness in it; but wounds, and bruises, and putrifying sores."

To be convinced that sin is in the world I need not look at my *soul*; I need only look at my *body*. If there be a pain or ache, a failing or spot, wrinkle or blemish in my body, what does it show? That I am a poor, corrupt, and dead sinner, passing away. And thus my body portrays what I really am within. Besides being bound

by the devil, and besides being helpless as to any springs of life within, we have been wandering sheep, we have gone astray, actual sinners in our ways.

The Lord Jesus Christ was teaching in the synagogue on the Sabbath-day, "and behold there was a woman which had a spirit of infirmity eighteen years, and was bowed together, and could in no wise lift up herself." How remarkable are the expressions used with respect to this woman. First, it is said that she "had a *spirit of infirmity*;" the Lord calls it, "*thine infirmity*." Afterwards, He says that she had been bound by Satan; and that loosing her from her infirmity was loosing her from Satan's bond (compare verses 12

and 16). The spirit of infirmity which had bent her down was from *the devil*. Our spirit of infirmity that prevents our standing upright before God, is from the devil. She could not stand upright, she had her eyes on the earth. The devil bows a man down like a beast. God made man "*upright*;" God did not make man to bow his head to the earth like the ox which eateth grass. *Satan* has effected this. He had bowed this poor woman double for eighteen years, causing her to look at nothing but the ground. Now this is the power of the god of this world.

There was a question once asked by some professors of religion of one another, "What is meant in Scripture by the word '*the world*'?" They dis-

cussed the subject, but could not come to a definition of its meaning. I believe "*the world*" may very simply be defined to be *everything* in the human heart that shuts out Christ, or *whatever* keeps Christ out from *any corner* of the heart. Whatever takes possession of the heart as the darling object which is preferred to Christ, is of the world. The poor man has his world, as well as the rich. An aged evangelist, who is still alive, and who has been preaching the gospel among the poor labouring classes for years, and has been very much blessed of God, once said, "When I preach to the poor, and speak of the world, I express it this way. The world is your pig, the world is your little garden, the

world is your Sunday coat, or your Sunday ribbon. It would be of no use for me to speak to them about the world as it is amongst the rich and great and noble." Everything that is the peculiar admiration of the heart, or that occupies it so as to keep Christ out of a portion of it, is the world. When you are exhorted to be separate from the world, look into your heart, and see what you have that keeps Christ out, or that divides your heart with Christ, or that hinders you from entire self-devotedness to Him, and set that down as the world.

Satan's power bows down the soul to the earth, and keeps the eye fixed on the ground, instead of fixed on heaven. What is man's resource against the

devil's power? *Religion!* Man thinks that his religion is to deliver him from the devil ; but it is powerless. Religion cannot unloose Satan's bond. A man may try to pray, or worship, or do whatever he thinks right ; he may have the most orthodox faith or creed, but it will not set him free from the devil's chain. This woman was in *the synagogue*—the last place one would have expected her to be in. But it had been her only resource : she knew not where else to go ; she had not heard of Jesus. Her only hope, for eighteen years, had been attendance in a place of worship. This is the only resource of many at the present day. They know that all is not right ; they are aware that they are not upright, not righteous before God.

They feel shackled, and they go to *religion*. They do not go to *Christ*: they do not go to a Living One, who has living power: but they resort to their knees; they frequent a place of worship; they adopt some form or ritual.

It is a blessed thing when a man goes on his knees before God with a full heart; it is a blessed thing for a man to worship. But if he resorts to a mere form or ceremony; if he says his prayers as a mere duty, or considers attendance at a place of worship to be a means of salvation, his conscience becomes blinded, and he is ignorant of his real state, and of God's remedy. So this woman in the synagogue was bowed down for eighteen years, and could in no wise lift

up herself. Who has power against the devil? Who can lift up himself against the devil? God alone has power. The devil is stronger than we are. We are pigmies in his hand. He can bend, and twist, and hold us, as he pleases; and he can blind us so that we are unconscious of being under his power, that we are delighted to be in his power. Satan's great power is the power of *ignorance*; he wants to keep us *ignorant*. You remember the seed which fell by the wayside was picked up by the fowls of the air; and the Lord says, in his interpretation, when any one hears, and understands not, then cometh the Wicked One, and catcheth away that which is sown. *Understand!* IGNORANCE is the devil's

power. He keeps the soul in ignorance, so that it is not aware of its condition. None are so much under his power as those who do not know it. I doubt not but that this woman thought she was only suffering from a *natural infirmity*.

“And when Jesus saw her, He called her to Him.” How blessed it is that the eye of Christ is always looking for some one on whom He may exercise his grace. In that synagogue, He looked not on the religious or the devout; He regarded not the ruler, or the leader of the devotions; but his eye lighted on that poor, wretched, doubled-up woman; and, when He saw her, He called her to Him; and when He called her, *she*

obeyed. Ah! beloved reader, there was no hesitation on her part: she obeyed. That was faith. Faith is *obedience*. Hearing and obeying, she believed: she came to Him, and He said, "Woman, thou art loosed from thine infirmity." "*Thine* infirmity!" *The devil* had bound her, yet Jesus says, "thine infirmity." How closely Satan and the flesh are linked together! How closely, in the case of Peter, when, out of mistaken affection, he said an unguarded word to Christ touching the cross, "Be it far from Thee, Lord,"—do not go to be crucified. What does the Lord say? Not "Get thee behind me, *Peter*;" not "Get thee behind me, Peter, *because Satan is in thee*;" but, "Get thee be-

hind me, SATAN.”—You are linked close together as one, and you savour “the things that be of men.” Satan and the things that be of men are almost identical: they go well together. So with this woman, “Thou art loosed from *thine* infirmity.” Afterwards the Lord says, *Satan* had *bound* her.

“He laid his hands on her, and immediately she was made straight, and glorified God.” Beloved friends, what is the first thing an UPRIGHT person will do? Who had taught her? Who had instructed her to utter praise? Was it a synagogue ritual? Did she get it out of the prayer-book of the synagogue? No; it was the spontaneous expression of her ransomed soul.

It was the song of the prisoner set at liberty. Out of her heart rose up a doxology, such as had never before been heard in the synagogue. “She was *made straight*, and she *glorified God*.” Straight people, upright people, glorify God. Those are “*upright persons*” who have had their sins forgiven. So in Ps. xxxii., those who have their sins covered are “the upright,” who, in the close of the psalm, praise God. “Be glad in the Lord and rejoice, ye righteous, and shout for joy, all ye that are *upright in heart* ;” and again, “Praise is comely for the upright” (Ps. xxxiii. 1). If you have been made straight, your life should be to the glory of God : it should be a life of praise. “In everything, by prayer and supplication, *with*

thanksgiving, let your requests be made known." Prayer is to be the leading expression of your life. Thanksgiving is to take the lead of your necessities ; for, remember, you have always more to *thank* God for, than to *ask* God for. You have already received his *best* gift.

Whatever you may want, whatever may still be lacking, know that you have already been given more than God can ever give you again. He *has* given you CHRIST. Therefore you have always more to *be thankful* for than to *pray* for.

"The ruler of the synagogue answered with indignation, because that Jesus had healed on the Sabbath-day, and said unto the people, There are six days in which men ought to work ; in

them therefore come and be healed, and not on the Sabbath-day." Only mark, friends; the ruler considered that if a person came to be healed, it was equivalent to doing a *work*. That is very singular! Is it not just the same now? Do not people think now that coming to Christ is a *work*? Do they not think that faith is a *work*? And they set themselves to do a work, and they cannot divest themselves of the impression that somehow or other salvation is a work partly their own. The ruler of the synagogue thought that if a poor woman came to be healed, she was doing a *work*. A work!

And yet, so deeply rooted in the human heart is the thought that the sinner must *do* something, that he makes faith

a work. "Oh that I could procure faith," says the sinner. "Oh that I could get faith! Oh that I could earn faith! Oh that I could get more faith!" This is making it all a work. Well, the Lord said to the ruler, "Thou hypocrite, doth not each one of you on the Sabbath loose his ox or his ass from the stall, and lead him away to watering? And ought not this woman, being a daughter of Abraham, whom Satan hath bound, lo, these eighteen years, be loosed from this bond on the Sabbath-day?" These are the thoughts of God. Has not God a right, ay, more than that, is it not necessary to God's own joy that this woman should be loosed? Is it not a fact that she belongs to God, and therefore He looses

her? You have an ox or an ass; you value your ox or ass; you do not let your ox or ass perish of thirst on the Sabbath-day. Has not God a right to love his creatures? Is God to be the only being that places no value on anything?

How remarkable ! The Lord refers to the very animals alluded to by Isaiah : “The ox knoweth his owner, and the ass his master’s crib.” The *ox* licks the hand of his master; that makes the master fond of him, besides his being of value to his master. The *ass* knoweth his master’s crib, knows where the food is to be found; that also makes the master value that animal, because he sees the animal is attached to the home. Beloved friends, is God to be

the only one who is to have no heart? Is God to be the only one in the universe to have nothing He values? This really seems to be what God is reduced to by the religion of the day, and by the thoughts of one's own natural heart. Jesus, in principle, says, "If *you* value your ox or your ass, I likewise value this woman; I have given her life, I have led her to the healing water."

The next beautiful incident which I would connect with this is in Luke xiv.

The Lord went into the house of one of the chief Pharisees to eat bread on the Sabbath-day, and they watched Him. You find a remarkable progress in evil in these Pharisees. They watched Him, next they murmur-

ed, finally they derided. Ah, they were *suspicious of Jesus!* Fancy God in the midst of human beings, and man suspecting Him! Only see what the human heart is! Here is Jesus coming and sitting down at the table in a Pharisee's house, and they *suspect* Him; they suspect that He is not a correct person in his actions; or, that He is wrong in his theology. *God* is wrong in his theology. Man knows better than God what is right! This is a specimen of the human heart. They watched Him. They knew that this blessed Jesus would certainly, if there were an opportunity, do some *illegal* thing, because a *gracious* thing. Law and grace cannot go together. As they knew the Lord Jesus was the

Gracious One, they were certain He would commit, what was in their estimation, some terrible breach of the law; and sure enough there was an action of his which was quite contrary to law, which was wholly of *grace*.

“And behold there was a certain man before Him which had the dropsy. And, Jesus answering, spake unto the lawyers and Pharisees, saying, Is it lawful to heal on the Sabbath-day?”

The state of this poor man in the dropsy was that of a person, the fountain of whose life was tainted at the spring, so that, instead of living blood, corrupt water flowed through his body. This is just a picture of our natural state of heart. No living blood, the fountain of life diseased, and the whole

of the man nothing but corruption ! Death, instead of life, circulating throughout his whole being. The Lord was confronted with this man. "There was a certain man *before Him*." What a spectacle for the Lord of life to have before Him ! Is not the same spectacle before God, even now ? As He looks down on this world, night and day, what does He behold ? Nothing but corruption, nothing but the fountain of life diseased, nothing but one mass of, as it were, living death. Marvellous that God can bear to look at us ! Marvellous that He can allow such a spectacle every instant of the twenty-four hours to remain before Him, and that He can sustain, in his long-suffering grace, a

world that presents to Him even a worse spectacle than this man. Now, the Lord, it says, took him and healed him, and let him go, and answered them. He knew what was in their hearts, and replied to their thoughts, “saying, Which of you shall have an ass or an ox fallen into a pit, and will not straightway pull him out on the Sabbath-day?”

Here is another lesson: first, we have the ox or ass *bound* in the stall; now we have the ass or the ox *fallen into a pit*,—an accident, an unavoidable accident. If you have an ass or an ox fallen into a pit, will you hesitate what to do? Will you let him flounder there in death? Beloved reader, *we* have all fallen into a pit: we have all,

by reason of our very birth into this world, fallen into a pit of helplessness, and misery, and ruin : we cannot get out, we cannot raise ourselves up. The animal may struggle, but he must be lifted out by another ; he must be taken up. So the Lord Jesus came to pull us out ; and thus the Lord exemplifies it. He says, You have possession of an ox or an ass ; if he falls into a pit, you pull him out. I have in the world poor sinners whom I love : they belong to me, I pull them out ; I came to rescue them, they are mine ; their very helplessness is their claim upon my compassion. This is the second beautiful incident.

Now look at the third. The fifteenth of Luke contains a striking contrast to

mount Sinai : “ Then drew near unto Him all the publicans and sinners for to hear Him.” That is exactly the contrary to mount Sinai. God *then* said, Keep them off ; set bounds about the mountain ; keep them at a distance. And the sound was so terrible, that even Moses said, “ I exceedingly fear and quake,” and the people “ entreated that the word should not be spoken to them any more.” Now mark the clear contrast : “ Then *drew near unto Him* all the publicans and sinners *for to hear Him.*” A contrast again between *the law* and *grace*. Instead of a mount of distance, instead of a mount of terror, instead of a mount of commandment, instead of a mount of law, we have a *table* of fel-

lowship, a close intimacy of love and friendship. The people hung upon his words, and the Pharisees murmured, saying, "This man receiveth sinners, and *eateth with them.*" Jesus encouraged the sinners to be at home with Him : He sat with them ; He dipped his hand into the same dish with them. O beloved reader, do you know this intimacy with Jesus? This is the intimacy Jesus wants to have with you. "I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with me." Remember, "I will sup with him." *First : He* will sup with you, before *you* sup with Him. This is the friendship that the Lord desires, that the Lord craves ; may I not say, that the Lord *needs* for his own heart's

satisfaction. Do you ever think the Lord needs you for his own heart's satisfaction? He needs your fellowship, He needs your love, He needs your friendship; these are what He wants, that his heart may be at rest over you. Oh that we might believe this more, respecting the blessed Lord, and the blessed God!

The Pharisees murmured, and He speaks the parable unto them. And this brings us to the other truth, namely, the joy God has in finding, in quickening, in making the dead alive again, and in restoring. Oh, the delight of the heart of God in finding a sinner! the delight in the heart of Christ! Oh, the delight God has in quickening a sinner!—the joy of

the house!—the joy of heaven! I often think we take from the blessedness of this thought, by saying, *The angels rejoice*. It is not said, “There is joy *in the angels*,” but “joy *in the presence* of the angels of God.” They get their joy from seeing God’s joy. The joy is in the house: *God* fills the house with joy, and the angels catch it. It is the Father who says, “It is meet that we should make merry and be glad.” And in one verse the Scripture saith, “joy in heaven,” and in the other, “joy in the presence of the angels of God.”

Mark, the three beautiful narratives in the fifteenth of Luke form *one* parable. It is very important to see this; and therefore never to separate the one from the other. They are only

one, as it is stated in the third verse, "He spake *this* parable." The chapter is not broken into three parables: it gives us the triple aspect of that great word of Scripture—REPENTANCE.

Repentance includes God's action, and Christ's action, and the Holy Spirit's action, upon the sinner's heart; the whole process (if we may use such a term) of salvation. There can be no salvation without repentance, because there cannot be salvation without the heart and conscience being acted upon. The heart must have a dislike to sin, and the heart must have a drawing to God; not mere *regret* for the past; that is only *remorse*. Judas had that, but he had no change of heart: he had remorse, he had regret, but not re-

pentance. It is another word in the original. Repentance is the change of mind that necessarily occurs when a man finds out he is all wrong; that he has neglected his best Friend; that he has been casting away all his happiness; that he has been really turning away from all joy, and filling his soul with misery.

In this chapter we have the action of God, and the effect of that upon the sinner's heart, beautifully linked together in three statements so as to form one parable. You find the shepherd going after the lost sheep till he finds it. There is the work of the Lord Jesus. We see Him going after the sheep, and saving it. He is not content till He finds it. He is not content

till He saves it. And when He has found it, He takes care it shall never stray into the same condition. He lays it on his shoulder, for He that has a heart to feel has also a shoulder to bear. Christ wants to have people happy with Him. He is happy Himself, and He desires to have us happy *with Him*. He delights in the joy of his people. When we see a sinner saved, Christ says, "Be happy with me, rejoice with me." "Likewise, I say, there is joy in heaven over one sinner that repenteth"—"*in heaven*," not *in the angels* only, but in the whole of heaven. The whole of heaven has a fresh spring of joy, because God has joy over the one sinner that repenteth. The word *repentance*, you see,

is here appended to the action of *the shepherd* finding the sheep. The sheep had no action of its own: the sheep was *found* and brought home.

Then, in the next place, the lost piece of money. The piece of silver could not feel; but the light strikes upon it. The light of God's Word shines upon some one who is precious to Jesus, a poor sinner hidden, like the lost piece of money, in the dust of the house. The Church, like the woman, takes the broom, the Gospel-broom, to sweep. The Lord's servants know there are precious souls, precious to Jesus, mixed up with the dirt of this world: they use the broom, and this light—the candle of the Word: they do not expect to turn the dust into silver, but they

expect to find the precious pieces in the midst of it. And the silver is found, and there is joy, because it is found: the Owner highly values it. The Lord rejoices over the lost one found; and we are told, "There is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner that repenteth." Now, the piece of money had no action of repentance; it was a dead thing. All was done by the shepherd for the sheep; all was done by the light and the woman for the piece of money.

You find in the third instance the action of Christ and the truth upon the sinner's own *soul* represented. The younger son had, in the distant country, squandered all his substance in riotous living, and then "there arose a mighty

famine in that land; and he began to be in want. And he went and joined himself to a citizen of that country; and he sent him into his fields to feed swine. And he would fain have filled his belly with the husks that the swine did eat: and no man gave unto him." If the husks would have filled his belly, he would have been satisfied with *them*; or if there had been a possibility of his obtaining help from man, he would not have turned to his father; but "no man gave unto him." "And when he came to himself"—here you find the action on the man's soul. "*He came to himself*"—that is *repentance*. A man is not properly himself as long as he is away from God, and ignorant of God: you cannot call him a man;

you cannot designate him as a proper man; he has not the right instincts of a man. The ox never forgets his owner, the ass never forgets where to find the fodder; but man, *he* does not know his owner, *he* knows not where to find his food. He has not even the intelligence of a beast, he has not the instinct of an animal. He is the most degraded being in the whole universe; there is nothing more abominable, nothing so worthless, nothing so ignorant. Even the very devils "believe and tremble:" they have more understanding than a human being.

"He came to himself." God can now recognise as real human beings you and me who believe in Him; He can recognise us as having regained the

proper standing of *creatures*. When we were lost, we had forfeited every title to the care and kindness of God, even as Creator ; but now we have not only regained the proper feelings arising from our creature-relationship to God, but we have a closer eternal relationship of children to a Father.

But we must hasten on to the main point of this beautiful story, and, indeed, to the main point of this chapter ; namely, that there is joy in the heart of God in saving a sinner. The joy in the heart of the returned prodigal is not mentioned : not a word is said about it. He is not made to express *his* happiness ; we do not hear of his uttering *his* gladness, or showing *his* merriment : there is not a word about it. He is indeed

clothed with the best robe, and has the shoes on his feet, and the ring on his finger, and feasts upon the fatted calf; he is, as it were, master of the house; the servants are all waiting on him as the lord of the house; and the father almost takes the place of a servant. But there is nothing said about the happiness of the restored sinner. Why? Because the great object of the Lord Jesus was to portray the delight and great joy of God in saving the lost. And this is “the glorious gospel of the *blessed* God”—the *happy* God: it is the same word. These are two beautiful words—“the *glorious* gospel of the *happy* God.” This glorious gospel is the rejoicing of God’s heart, the testimony of his gladness, the expression

of his heart. And, beloved, what a wretched return we give to God !

In this parable the father says the son “ was *dead*, and is *alive* again ; he was *lost*, and is *found* : ” the piece of silver was a dead piece of money, and the sheep had been lost : thus the two former parables are embodied in this. And whilst the word *repentance* is used in connection with the lost sheep and the lost piece of silver—in which there could be no action of repentance at all, but both were found and placed in safety by the diligence of another—in this parable of the younger son, when the process of soul is described, the word *repentance* is altogether omitted, and the whole of his restoration is attributed to the agency of another.

“ He was dead, and is alive again ”—some one must have quickened him ; “ he was lost, and is found ”—some one must have found him ; he did not find his way back by himself. Moreover, the very place into which the sin of the lost son had penetrated was the very place where the joy abounded. He said on his return, “ Father I have sinned *against heaven*, and *in thy sight*.” The joy sprang up *in heaven*, and *in the presence* of the angels of God. “ *In the presence* ” is the same as “ *in thy sight*,” or “ *before Thee*.”

Thus we have a complete, a beautiful, threefold description of the way of salvation, and a threefold expression of the joy in the heart of God. And what should be the re-

sult on ourselves? We should stand happy in God's joy; we should diligently search into the joy of the heart of God; we should delight ourselves in the assurance that God is really happy in saving a sinner. Oh, how blessed it is, whilst we are in this heartless world!—oh, how blessed, notwithstanding this heartless heart of ours, to have the object, *God*, to look at; One who "*is Love*," the only Being that is *love*. And as you see God's love, you will find a corresponding love springing up in your heart, because He first loved you. Love is of God. If I want to know what love is, I must look at God. Real, original love is the loving what is not to be loved: love is loving what is not lovely: love is lov-

ing what is not attractive, loving what is hateful, loving what is repulsive ;—that is *love*. *We* cannot love what is ugly, hateful, disagreeable to us. *God* does ;—that is *love*. How are we answering his love ?

Oh that we might better remember the word, “ *We love Him*, BECAUSE *He first* loved us,” BECAUSE He is love ; and that we may also remember the word, “ Herein is love, NOT that we loved God, but that He loved us.” If our affections are raised, our *walk* will be raised. As long as our affections are not turned towards God, our *walk* will be indifferent. And nothing makes the *understanding* so keen as love : love is the sharpener of the wits. If we are dull in the things

of Jesus, we have unloving hearts.
The Lord increase our love, and we
shall all understand better what we are,
and what we ought to be !



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