

## The Gospel of Luke in the Light of Hosea 11:4

The Gospel of Luke is particular among the four Gospels in portraying the love of God toward typical sinners, who are helpless to save themselves. In this Gospel we read of the good Samaritan, who was journeying and came to one who had been robbed, beaten, and left half dead, whom a priest and Levite had passed by (10:25-37). Although Samaritans were a people rejected by the Jews, this Samaritan “was moved with compassion” for the man. This Gospel also unveils God’s seeking love in the parables of the shepherd, who left the ninety-nine sheep to go after the one who was lost; the woman, who lit a lamp to search diligently for one small, lost, silver coin until she found it; and the father, who waited for the return of his wayward son, and “while he was still a long way off...saw him and was moved with compassion, and he ran and fell on his neck and kissed him affectionately” (15:1-32). In this Gospel we read of the Savior’s love for the tax collector Zaccheus, whose small stature made it impossible for him to see the Lord Jesus (19:1-10). Yet the Lord came to Zaccheus and chose to lodge at his house that very day, bringing to him His dynamic salvation. This Gospel also records that even as He died on the cross, the Lord had compassion on the repentant criminal dying beside Him, assuring him that “today you shall be with Me in Paradise” (23:39-43). These cases, unique to the Gospel of Luke, show us the love of God toward the sinner.

In Luke the gospel message is also presented in a particular way. The Lord Jesus proclaimed the New Testament jubilee as the fulfillment of the type of the year of jubilee, which was a year for release from all indebtedness and slavery and for the return of every man to his inheritance in the land. When the Lord returned to Galilee after His temptation in the wilderness, He began His ministry by reading from the prophet Isaiah:

THE GOSPEL IS A PROCLAMATION THAT A TIME HAS COME FOR ALL MEN TO BE RELEASED FROM SLAVERY IN ALL ITS FORMS—POVERTY, BLINDNESS, CAPTIVITY, OPPRESSION, AND DEATH—AND TO RETURN TO THE ENJOYMENT OF THEIR INHERITANCE.

The Spirit of the Lord is upon Me, because He has anointed Me to announce the gospel to the poor; He has sent Me to proclaim release to the captives, and recovery of sight to the blind, to send away in release those who are oppressed, to proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord, the year of jubilee. (Luke 4:18-19)

Then He said to the people, “Today this Scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing,” and they “marveled at the words of grace proceeding out of His mouth” (vv. 21-22). Through Adam’s fall man lost the enjoyment of his inheritance and fell into the debt of sin, ultimately selling himself into slavery in the world under its ruler Satan. The gospel is a proclamation that a time has come for all men to be released from slavery in all its forms—poverty, blindness, captivity, oppression, and death—and to return to the enjoyment of their inheritance. This is vividly portrayed in the Gospel of Luke by gospel messages, gospel parables, and gospel cases that are not presented in the other Gospels. In His ministry as recorded in Luke, the Lord forgave the sinful woman of her sins (debts) (7:36-50), He caused the woman who was bent double to stand erect (13:10-17), He restored the sight of a blind man in Jericho (18:35-43), He released a covetous man from the hold of material possessions (19:1-10), He restored alive to a widow her only son who had died (7:11-17), and He portrayed God’s salvation as a great banquet that a man gave and was so eager for others to enjoy that he sent his slaves out to seek and compel men to come (14:15-24). The New Testament jubilee is the defining principle of the Savior’s gospel ministry in the Gospel of Luke.

God’s unfailing love for sinners and the jubilee are composed together in the prophecy of Hosea. In this book, even though the children of Israel had turned away from God and gone after idols as a harlot, God still

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speaks of His love for them, reminding them of how He loved them when He called them out of Egypt (11:1). He declares, "I drew them with cords of a man, / With bands of love; / And I was to them like those / Who lift off the yoke on their jaws; / And I gently caused them to eat" (v. 4). The first part of the verse reveals that in order for God's love to draw us, He needs to love us with cords of a man, that is, on the level of man. Although God's everlasting love is unchanging and subduing, in order to be prevailing in relation to man, He needs the cords of a man.

**M**oreover, while it is true that God loved with cords of a man to a certain degree in the Old Testament, it was not until Christ came that the cords of a man were present in full. Hosea's word indicates that for God to reach man in love, He needed to become a man in order to have cords of a man. The second part of the verse reveals that God releases man from slavery ("lift off the yoke") and then causes man to enjoy the divine life ("gently caused them to eat"). In the Old Testament, Egypt was the house of slavery for the children of Israel. God lifted off the yoke on their jaw by delivering them from Egypt. Then He brought them into the wilderness, where the main thing that they did was to feed on the heavenly life supply of manna and to drink from the cleft rock (Exo. 5:1; 16:1—17:7). Eventually, the Lord brought the children of Israel into the land of Canaan for their possession, in which their fullest enjoyment of the riches of the land was by their eating (Deut. 8:6-10). The experience of the children of Israel was a type of God's full salvation in the New Testament. The release of God's people from slavery and the enjoyment of the life supply spoken of by Hosea were fulfilled in reality by the New Testament jubilee.

Although Hosea's word in 11:4 is brief, it contains the crucial significances of the two aspects of God's love for sinners and the jubilee in the Gospel of Luke. In what follows, we will consider the entire Gospel in the light of this word.

### **The Cords of a Man, the Bands of Love**

As we have seen, the fact that God draws us with cords of a man indicates that He loves us with His divine love and yet not on the level of divinity but on the level of humanity. Whereas the religious impulse in man aspires to worship the God who is high and lofty, the Bible here reveals that God condescends in order to contact man on man's level. In other words, God does not expect man to do anything to reach Him; God Himself comes down to man by becoming a man. This is the meaning of incarnation, and this has great drawing power.

Watchman Nee was impressed with this fact once when he was recovering from an illness. He was virtually alone, hardly seeing anyone all day. Although he was a quiet

person by nature, after a while, he began to feel lonely. He relates how he attempted to seek some company:

One day after lunch I went to take a nap. There was a balcony outside my bedroom window. When I woke up, I saw some little creatures gathering around the balcony. Bits of my meal had been dropped there, and the birds were busily chirping around them. As they hopped around, they chirped and made many cheerful noises. I said to myself, "All right. Since I cannot find any human beings, I will try to make friends with these little birds."

I rose up and went out to greet them. But in an instant they all flew away. An idea came to me. I took some of the leftover rice and began to arrange it in rows, with only a few grains in the first row and gradually increased them towards the entrance of the doorway. I hid behind the door and watched them coming. Soon they gathered around again. I said to myself, "This is my chance." I walked out and began to make friends with them. But the minute they saw me, they all scattered. Some perched on the branches of the tree across the balcony and stared at me, as if trying to determine what my intention was. Every time I approached them, they flew away, and every time I walked away, they came back. This went on a number of times.

I wanted to preach to the birds. I wanted to tell them, "Little birds, I have no special intention in doing this. This is winter on the mountain, and food is scarce. I have enough food with me, and I just want to share it with you. Please be at peace and come down. I only ask that as you eat, I can sit among you. I want to listen to your songs and watch you playing. Come. Let us be friends." But the birds would not come. They did not understand me. I had to give up.

Later I had a certain realization within. I began to preach to myself. I said, "This body of mine is too big. If I could shrink from five feet eleven inches to the size of a bird, and even change myself into a bird, they would not be alarmed by my presence. I could then tell them my heart's intention, and we could spend the winter on the mountain Lu-shan together."

We have a similar problem today. If God remained God, we could never understand Him. If He talked to us in His language, we would be altogether lost. If God wants to reveal Himself through speaking and have fellowship with man, He must shrink Himself to such a degree that He and we are the same. Only then would He be able to speak to us and tell us of Himself and of the mysteries of the universe. Only then would we be able to understand Him. (32-33)

To contact man, to speak to him and fellowship with him,

God “must shrink Himself to such a degree that He and we are the same”! Only then can His love, which is everlasting and unchanging, reach us in a way that will draw us.

The two phrases *CORDS OF A MAN* and *BANDS OF LOVE* are in apposition. These cords and bands have different segments, each of which involves the humanity of Christ. These segments refer to the steps that God’s love took in His salvation to reach us and include Christ’s birth, human living, death, resurrection, and ascension. In the Gospel of Luke these five aspects are all present, and through them the crucial and excellent significance of God becoming a man is conveyed.

The Savior’s birth was of and with the Spirit of God. Luke 1:35 says, “The angel answered and said to [Mary], The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore also the holy thing which is born will be called the Son of God.” The Holy Spirit also acted in the birth of John the Baptist (vv. 13-15), yet in John’s case, although he was filled with the Holy Spirit from birth, he was still only man. In contrast to this, the conception within the womb of the virgin Mary resulted in the birth of a human child who was the Son of God. Matthew 1:18 and 20 tell us that Mary “was found to be with child of the Holy Spirit” and that “that which has been begotten in her is of the Holy Spirit.” The birth of the Lord Jesus was a birth by the Spirit essentially, involving not only the human essence but also the divine essence, producing a child who was both God and man, a God-man. A note to Luke 1:35 in the Recovery Version says,

Such a conception of the Holy Spirit in the human virgin, accomplished with the divine and human essences, constituted a mingling of the divine nature with the human nature, which produced a God-man, One who is both the complete God and the perfect man, possessing the divine nature and the human nature distinctly, without a third nature being produced. This is the most wonderful and most excellent person of Jesus, who is Jehovah the Savior. (Note 2)

This birth by the Spirit essentially made the Lord Jesus a God-man of two essences with two natures mingled together so that He could be the Man-Savior.

Because the man Jesus was also God, His human living bore a distinction far beyond any other human life. The character of His human life is one certain proof that He was not just a man but also God. Watchman Nee observes that for a man to be God,

this man must bear a moral standard that is far above that of all other human beings. He must have God’s holiness, and his life must bear the mark of God’s righteousness. For example, if I became a bird and lived in exactly the same way as other birds, without showing them anything extraordinary, I could not convince them that I was actually a man. If God is to become a man, His moral behavior must be of the highest quality. This is the only way that we could identify Him as God. (34)

The Gospel of Luke, while it is the Gospel of the Man-Savior, proves that this man was God by the fact that He lived a life of the highest standard of morality.

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The highest standard of morality is a morality in which the highest human virtues in character are enriched by the divine attributes that are bountiful and immeasurable. Regardless of how fine one’s human virtues are, they are finite. When tested to the uttermost, they

will be exhausted and fail, because they are subject to the limitation of humanity. However, the divine attributes are eternal, thus unlimited and unbreakable. In case after case in Luke’s Gospel we see the highest standard of morality in the Lord Jesus’ human life. Consider, for example, Luke chapter 7. Here, there is the case of the Lord’s raising a dead man, a case unique in its misery, due to the fact that the dead man was the only son of a widow. The Savior’s compassion also was unique in His loving sympathy:

In His tender mercy He offered His power of resurrection to raise the widow’s son from death, without being asked to do so. This indicates His unique commission, which was to come to save lost sinners (19:10), and shows the high standard of His morality, as a Man-Savior, in saving sinners. (Recovery Version, 7:13, note 1)

In the case of the woman who was a sinner in Luke 7:36-50, the Lord showed the self-righteous Pharisee, Simon, who considered the woman’s debt of sin but not his own, that both of them were sinners and that He had forgiven

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them both already. The fact that the woman loved much, much more than Simon, proved that she had been forgiven much. The Lord's tender care in this instance and the previous one, together with His power to raise the dead and His authority to forgive sins, reveals the highest standard of His morality "as the unique characteristic of this Gospel" (v. 48, note 1).

**I**n no other place in this Gospel is the Lord Jesus' highest standard of morality more manifest than in the parable of the good Samaritan in chapter 10. In this parable a man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and he fell into the hands of robbers, who stripped him and beat him, leaving him half dead. By coincidence, first a priest and later a Levite were going down on the same road. They saw him and yet both passed him by on the opposite side of the road. Then a Samaritan came along, and when he saw him, he was moved with compassion. He came to him, treated his wounds with oil and wine, bound them, and then placed the man on his own donkey. He brought the man to an inn and took care of him. The next day, before he departed, he gave the innkeeper two denarii to look after the man, promising to pay all additional expenses needed for the man's recovery when he returned.

To the lawyer who had asked the question, "Who is my neighbor that I should love as myself?" the Lord Jesus spoke the parable and said, "Go, and you do likewise." If the lawyer had waited and considered for a moment, he would have realized that he was totally unable to reach the standard of morality that the Lord's interpretation of loving one's neighbor required. Perhaps he might have responded, like those in 18:26, "Then who can be saved?" to which the Lord would have replied, "The things that are impossible with men are possible with God" (v. 27). The highest standard of morality is a life that is impossible to man; it is a life that is possible only *with God*.

In this parable the man who was robbed, stripped, beaten, and left half dead refers to all of us who seek to be justified under law, including the self-justifying lawyer. The robbers are the legalistic teachers of the law (John 10:1). These misuse the law to rob and strip the lawkeeper (1 Cor. 15:56), ministering the killing commandment in the law (beat him) to render him spiritually dead (Rom. 7:9-11, 13). Those who should care for God's people by teaching them the law of God (the priest) and by helping them in their worship of God (the Levite) are unable to render any help, because they themselves are "going down" on the same road. Fearing that they too may fall into the robbers' hands and suffer the same fate, they pass by on the other side. However, one whom we previously despised and rejected comes to us. He is the Lord Jesus Himself, the Man-Savior, who

apparently is a layman of low estate. He was despised and slandered as a low and mean Samaritan by the Pharisees and lawyers (John 8:48; 4:9), including the lawyer whom He was speaking to here. The Samaritan's reaction to the man's pitiful situation portrays God's divine love, in the cords of a man, toward sinners:

Such a Man-Savior, in His lost-one-seeking and sinner-saving ministry journey (19:10), came down to the place where the wounded victim of the Judaistic robbers lay in his miserable and dying condition. When He saw him, He was moved with compassion in His humanity with His divinity and rendered him tender healing and saving care, fully meeting his urgent need (vv. 34-35). (Recovery Version, Luke 10:33, note 1)

The Samaritan's care for the man in this parable (vv. 34-35) demonstrates to the uttermost the Lord Jesus' high standard of morality in His saving grace toward us. His care in His humanity is deeply merciful and tender, and simultaneously, in His divinity, bountiful and abundant in meeting our need as sinners condemned under the law. In these verses there are seven aspects to this care:

(1) He bound up his wounds—healing him; (2) He poured oil and wine on his wounds—giving him the Holy Spirit and the divine life (Matt. 9:17 and note 1; John 2:9 and note 1); (3) He placed him on his own beast (a donkey)—carrying him by lowly means in a lowly way (Zech. 9:9); (4) He brought him to an inn—bringing him to the church; (5) He took care of him—taking care of him through the church; (6) He paid the inn for him—blessing the church on his behalf; (7) He said that he would repay at his return whatever the inn spent—declaring that whatever the church spends in this age on one who is saved by the Lord will be repaid at the Savior's coming back. (Recovery Version, Luke 10:34, note 1)

**H**ence, through this parable the Savior intended to help the lawyer, who sought to be justified by himself, to know that he was condemned to death under the law and was unable to take care of himself, much less to love others. The Man-Savior, who was God incarnated as a man, would love him with cords of a man in His humanity and with His divinity and render to him full salvation.

The Lord's death, resurrection, and ascension recorded in the Gospel of Luke all have the drawing power of the cords of a man, the bands of love. His death was in His humanity with His divinity to obtain an eternal redemption for man (23:42-43; Heb. 9:12) and to release His infinite, divine life into man as the fire to burn on the earth (Luke 12:49-50). His resurrection was God's vindication of the God-man Jesus and His work, His success in all His achievements, and His victory over the



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universal enemy of God who had instigated the representatives of all humankind to crucify Him (23:38; John 19:19-22). Furthermore, His ascension was God's exaltation of the Man-Savior,

which made Him the Christ of God and the Lord of all (Acts 2:36) that He might carry out His heavenly ministry on the earth as the all-inclusive Spirit poured out from the heavens upon His Body, which is constituted of His believers (Acts 2:4, 17-18), as recorded by Luke in his further writing, the Acts. (Recovery Version, Luke 24:51, note 1)

### Lifting Off the Yoke and Gently Causing to Eat

The lifting off of the yoke of slavery and gently causing to eat in Hosea corresponds to the jubilee unveiled in Luke, which has two aspects: release and restoration. This is seen in the type of the year of jubilee in Leviticus 25:10. This ordinance was given to the children of Israel before they entered into the land of Canaan, which God was giving them as their inheritance. The ordinance of the year of jubilee provided for the possibility that some of the people would become poor, lose their inheritance in the land through indebtedness, and even lose their freedom by selling themselves into slavery. Therefore, every fifty years there would be a jubilee. In that year every man would be released from slavery, and all the land that had been sold would be returned to the original owners, allowing every man to return to his possession and to his family. This year was to be announced by the sounding of a ram's horn as a trumpet on the Day of Expiation in the preceding year (v. 9). Centuries later, the prophet Isaiah prophesied that the Servant of Jehovah would be anointed with the Spirit to proclaim liberty and the acceptable year of Jehovah, the year of jubilee (Isa. 61:1-2). This indicated that the children of Israel still needed a jubilee, and this jubilee would be brought to them by the coming Messiah. When the Lord Jesus began His ministry in the Gospel of Luke, He read this prophecy of Isaiah and declared that it had been fulfilled by His coming. The entire New Testament age, as the age of grace, is the year of jubilee (Luke 4:18-21).

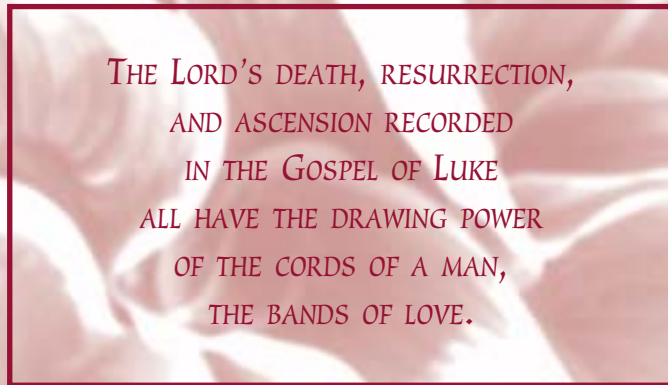
**T**he principle of the jubilee governs all of Luke's account of the Lord Jesus' ministry from chapter 4 through chapter 19. This includes the Lord's warning

concerning the reward and discipline in the coming age, because the Lord's coming again at the end of the present age of grace will usher in the kingdom as the further fulfillment of the year of jubilee (12:35-48). In the early cases to which the Lord ministered His salvation, He released captives from the bondage of demons, sickness, leprosy (signifying rebellion), paralysis, and death (4:31—9:43). He also fed the five thousand and taught concerning prayer related to the life supply of food (9:10-17; 11:5-13). Later, however, it becomes apparent, in the Lord's teaching in Luke, that what binds man the most is covetousness, the bondage of desiring and acquiring material possessions for ourselves. In 12:13-21 the Lord warns against storing up treasure for ourselves and not being rich toward God. In verses 22 through 34 He teaches us not to be anxious for our life but, rather, to sell our possessions and give alms. In 14:15-24 material possessions are the main reason men decline God's

invitation to salvation. In 16:1-13 He teaches us prudence in dealing with money, warning us that mammon (money) is unrighteous and that we cannot serve both God and mammon. In verses 19 through 31 He warns us concerning pursuing wealth with the case of the rich man and Lazarus. In 17:31-32 we are warned that attachment to material possessions will cause

us to suffer judgment like Lot's wife. The case of the rich young ruler in 18:18-30 shows that material possessions may cause us to miss the inheritance of eternal life in the coming kingdom. Moreover, the final case in the Savior's ministry in Luke is that of Zaccheus, a tax collector who was completely under the dominion of material possessions. The Lord's dynamic salvation came to him, fully releasing him from this slavery into the enjoyment of the jubilee. Zaccheus declared to the Lord, "Behold, the half of my possessions, Lord, I give to the poor, and if I have taken anything from anyone by false accusation, I restore four times as much" (19:8).

**H**owever, the three parables in Luke 15 most completely portray the application of the year of jubilee to fallen man. These three parables—the shepherd seeking the lost sheep, the woman seeking the lost coin, and the father welcoming back the prodigal son—set forth three aspects of the Triune God's saving love toward lost sinners. The Son as the Shepherd went into the world (the wilderness) to seek one lost sinner (the sheep that had strayed) until He found him; the Spirit as a woman lit a



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lamp (the word of God—Psa. 119:105, 130) and sought carefully within the repentant sinner (sweeping the house for the lost silver coin) until He found him; and the Father as the father of the prodigal son made ready the best robe and the fattened calf in anticipation of the sinner's return.

**T**he first two parables establish the principle of the sinner's loss of the inheritance, but the third describes this in detail. The younger son asked the father for his share of the inheritance and left the father's house for a distant country, where he squandered it by living dissolutely. This aptly depicts the covetousness that the Lord warns against. When the son had spent everything, a severe famine occurred, and he began to be in need. He had no choice but to join himself to one of the citizens of that country, who sent him to feed hogs, and he longed to eat the hogs' food. No doubt, he was in bondage in the world, under its ruler Satan. In time he came to himself and said, "How many of my father's hired servants abound in bread, but I am perishing here in famine! I will rise up and go to my father" (vv. 17-18). Although it seems that he came to this realization himself, he actually did so because of the Spirit's enlightening and searching within him. As the son approached his father's house, the father, who saw him while he was still a long way off, ran and kissed him affectionately. He ordered the best robe to be brought and put on his son, a ring to be put on his hand, and sandals to be put on his feet. This completed the son's full recovery and release from the slavery that he had been in. The robe, the ring, and the sandals all indicated that he was a free man.

However, the jubilee has a further aspect, namely, the return to the inheritance. Although the son was free, how could he be satisfied while he was still hungry? The father, however, had prepared the fattened calf, which he ordered to be slaughtered so that all could eat and enjoy. This completed the freed son's return to his inheritance. The robe and the fattened calf represent the two aspects of God's complete salvation: the robe signifies Christ as the God-satisfying righteousness to cover the penitent sinner (Jer. 23:6; 1 Cor. 1:30; cf. Isa. 61:10; Zech. 3:4); the calf signifies the rich Christ, killed on the cross, for the believers' enjoyment (Eph. 3:8). The robe is the outward, objective aspect of God's salvation, and the fattened calf is the inward, subjective aspect:

Christ as our righteousness is our salvation outwardly; Christ as our life for our enjoyment is our salvation inwardly. The best robe enabled the prodigal son to meet his father's requirements and satisfy his father, and the fattened calf satisfied the son's hunger. Hence, the father and the son could be merry together. (Recovery Version, Luke 15:23, note 1)

The son's enjoyment of the fattened calf in the father's

house points us to the ultimate purpose of the jubilee, which is for the saved sinners to enjoy the riches of Christ, who is the embodiment of the Triune God, by eating Him (John 6:57). Eating is a metabolic process whereby what we eat becomes assimilated and constituted into us. As Hosea 11:4 indicates, God's intention does not end with releasing us from bondage. The removal of the yoke from our jaw is so that He may gently cause us to eat. God's heart, therefore, is expressed in the father's declaration: "Let us eat and be merry" (Luke 15:23). By eating Him, we become Him (John 6:57; 2 Cor. 3:18; 1 John 3:2). Through incarnation, God became a man to be the same as we are; through our eating of Him, we become God, in life and in nature but not in the Godhead. This is God's complete salvation, and this is the New Testament jubilee.

### Conclusion

The prophecy in Hosea 11:4 is a key to understanding the intrinsic elements with which the Gospel of Luke is composed. In Luke we see that God loved us with the cords of a man. This required first that God would be incarnated as a man. Through the Lord Jesus' birth, the divine essence was mingled with the human essence, divinity with humanity. This issued in a human living, the morality of which far surpassed anything that had been seen among mankind before. The Lord Jesus lived a life of the highest standard of morality. Furthermore, His death in His humanity with His divinity, His victorious resurrection, and His ascension as a man into glory were all segments of the cords of a man that have great drawing power (Rom. 5:8; John 12:32; 14:19-20; 2 Cor. 5:14; Acts 7:56, cf. v. 58 and 9:1-9). However, God's intention was not merely to live a life that expressed His love to man through the cords of a man. This life was for the New Testament jubilee, because it is a life that frees man from all bondage and restores man to his inheritance, which is Christ, the embodiment of the Triune God, as our portion (Col. 1:12, 19; 2:6, 9). Our enjoyment of the Triune God in Christ as our possession in the Father's house is the purpose of the jubilee and the consummation of God's full salvation. By the New Testament jubilee of grace, God lifts off the yoke from our jaw and gently causes us to eat. The sweetness of Hosea's prophecy is joyously fulfilled in the Gospel of Luke by the feasting in God's salvation.

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