

SERMON FOR OCTOBER 11, 2020

TEXT: ZECHARIAH 9: 11-12

THEME: COVENANT BLOOD

As for you also, because of the blood of my covenant with you,

I will set your prisoners free from the waterless pit.

12 Return to your stronghold, O prisoners of hope;

today I declare that I will restore to you double.

In the name of Jesus:

The state of Arizona is known for many things: the Grand Canyon, it's hot and dry climate, and deserts to name a few. It is also a state that is known for it's empty mine shafts. In the state of Arizona, there are approximately 100,000 empty mine shafts. Empty mine shafts are quite a problem in Arizona, as the state has two employees designated with the task of finding the abandoned mines. If not located and covered up, these mine shafts pose a risk to people, who have been known to have fallen unsuspectedly into the shafts, causing injury and even death.

It wasn't a mine shaft that is recorded in the book of Genesis, but rather an empty well. A pit without water. Imagine a 17 year old teenager stuck in the pit, his ankles tied, his hands bound, his eyes wet from tears. His voice is hoarse from crying, his brothers sit down to eat and drink all while he is stuck in this waterless pit, crying out: "Let me out!"

If this sounds like a story that you might watch on reality tv, it isn't. It is a story in the Bible, the book of Genesis, it is the story of Joseph, a 17 year old captured by his brothers while they were 60 miles away from home. There "they stripped him of his robe, the robe of many colors that he wore. And they took him and threw him into a waterless pit." Stripped, took, and threw. Into a waterless pit. No love loss there.

Joseph had no clue. It wasn't as if he woke up that morning and thought: "I had better pack food and extra clothes because I am about to be thrown into a waterless pit." This turn of events came as a complete surprise.

We all know about complete surprises, now, don't we? On January 1 of this year, as a virus was spreading in China, none of us had any idea that March would bring about the closings of schools, businesses, offices, and churches. We were in the beginning of a Pandemic. And today, over 7 million Americans have been diagnosed with Covid and over 200,000 have died. It is like we have been stripped, taken, and thrown into a waterless pit.

But God has a Word for us. He says: "I will set your prisoners free from the waterless pit." (Zechariah 9:11). In a time when we all have felt like prisoners, for that is what it feels like when we are in a Pandemic, we have felt as if we are prisoners to fear, despair, dread, boredom, and death.

So Zechariah tells us God's Good News, that God will free the prisoners from the waterless pit. When Zechariah writes about the waterless pit, he is referring back to Joseph. In fact, throughout the book of Zechariah the prophets makes mention and alludes to many things that have been written elsewhere in the Old Testament, especially the prophets Isaiah and Jeremiah. One Old Testament scholar has suggested that Zechariah is like a commentary on the prophets Isaiah and Jeremiah. And so, when Zechariah writes of the waterless pit, he intentionally connects us to Joseph, in the pit, frantic, desperate, a prisoner screaming: "Let me out!"

Who wants to stay stuck in a waterless pit? In hopeless despair? Anxious about the future and troubled about the past? You know who wants you to stay stuck, the Evil One, Satan himself. Satan wants you to be miserable in the pit of despair, he wants to lock us up and throw away the key. He wants us to think that the waterless pit is our permanent home.

And so Zechariah writes: "Return to your stronghold, prisoners of hope" (v 12). We may be prisoners, but we aren't prisoners of despair, we have hope! We are prisoners of hope.

Biblical hope isn't knocking on wood, hoping things will get better. Biblical hope isn't hoping that we will catch a lucky break, Biblical hope isn't

wishful thinking that things can't get any worse. Biblical hope is the confidence in God's covenant blood.

We have hope because, as Zechariah writes: "of the blood of my covenant with you." (v11). When we are stuck in a bottomless pit, Someone from up there hears our cries for help and comes down to rescue us. That Someone who comes is God and He comes with His covenant blood.

The book of Exodus is the only other place in the Old Testament where covenant and blood appear together. Moses writes (Ex. 24: 8) "behold the blood of the covenant which the Lord cut with you." God rescues His people with covenant blood. Passover blood. Shed blood. Cleansing blood. Jesus' blood.

Many people think that God is out to get them. God isn't out to get anyone. He isn't a vengeful judge, a traffic cop in hiding just waiting to pounce and give you a ticket for what you have done wrong. God is our Savior, who rescues us with covenant blood!

Does covenant blood sound vaguely familiar? It should. Covenant blood is what Jesus gives you in Holy Communion: "This is My blood of the covenant." In these words Jesus gives Himself, His blood, for you. After the Last Supper, Jesus leads His disciples to the Garden of Gethsemane where Jesus sweat great drops of blood. After His arrest Jesus is bound and taken to Annas, and high

priest, where He beaten, mocked, scourged and whipped almost to the point of death. Then Jesus is led on the way to the cross, where Roman soldiers stretch Jesus out on a cross and hammer nails into His flesh, blood splattering everywhere. His possessions were gambled away. Even His Father turned away from His Son, forsaking Him on the cross. All Jesus had left was His blood, covenant blood.

Christ's covenant blood sets us free from the condemnation of our sin; free from the pain of our past; free from the worry over our future. The blood of Christ sets us free. And all who believe in Jesus will have the certainty of freedom over sin, Satan and death as Jesus raises up everyone who believes in Him to everlasting life.

The freedom that God gives is rich and abundant. Zechariah tell us that "even today I am declaring that I will restore you two fold." (V12). For Jesus comes to give life and give it in abundance. Not sometime, or next time, but this time, today! Today is the day of salvation. Today is when God gives to you life overflowing.

So whatever happened to Joseph? Twenty years later, the roles were reversed. Joseph was in power and his brothers were not. His brothers came to him in fear, thinking that this would be the perfect time for Joseph to exact revenge. Did he? No he didn't. Instead, he forgave them, he forgave them

abundantly, saying: "You meant it for evil but God meant it for good!" That isn't someone speaking who is stuck in a waterless pit. Those are the words of someone who has been freed. And you too are free! Free to live and love others from God's perspective. Forgiving as God has forgiven you. And how does this all happen? It is all because of Covenant blood, it is all because of Jesus, in whom we have forgiveness, and life abundant! Amen