

Rev. Matthew Versemann
Trinity Lutheran Church
Decatur, Illinois
Maundy Thursday
April 1st, 2021

COVENANT BLOOD

In the Name of Jesus. Amen.

Hear the Word of God from Zechariah 9,

“As for you, because of the blood of my covenant with you,
I will free your prisoners from the waterless pit.

¹² Return to your fortress, you prisoners of hope;
even now I announce that I will restore twice as much to you.”

DEAR FRIENDS IN CHRIST,



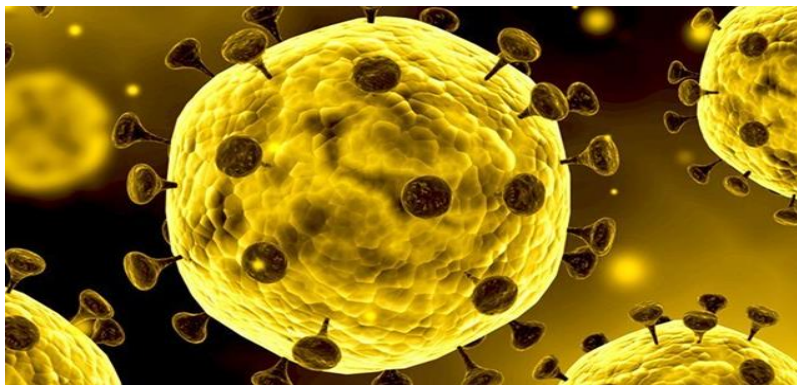
I invite you to look at this pit. It’s a deep pit. And there’s no water in it. Now envision a 17-year-old teenager stuck in this waterless pit. His hands are bound. His ankles tied. His eyes are wet from tears. His voice is hoarse from crying. His brothers – *HIS BROTHERS!* - sit down to eat and drink— all while their 17-year old brother is screaming at the top of his lungs, “Let me out!”

Genesis 37:23–24

“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*.”

It sounds like a TV reality show, doesn't it? It's not. It's a true account from God's Word. Joseph was the 17 year-old, captured by his brothers, while they were all sixty miles away from home, and their father Jacob's watchful eye. ***“They stripped Joseph of his robe, the robe of many colors that he wore. And they took him and threw him into a waterless pit.”*** Genesis 37:23–24. These are murderous verbs. Stripped. Took. Threw. *Stripped. Took. Threw.* Into a waterless pit.

Joseph didn't see this coming at all! Joseph didn't get out of bed that morning and say, “I'd better pack some extra food and water and put on padded clothing because today my brothers are going to throw me into a waterless pit.” The attack came as a complete surprise. So did ours'.



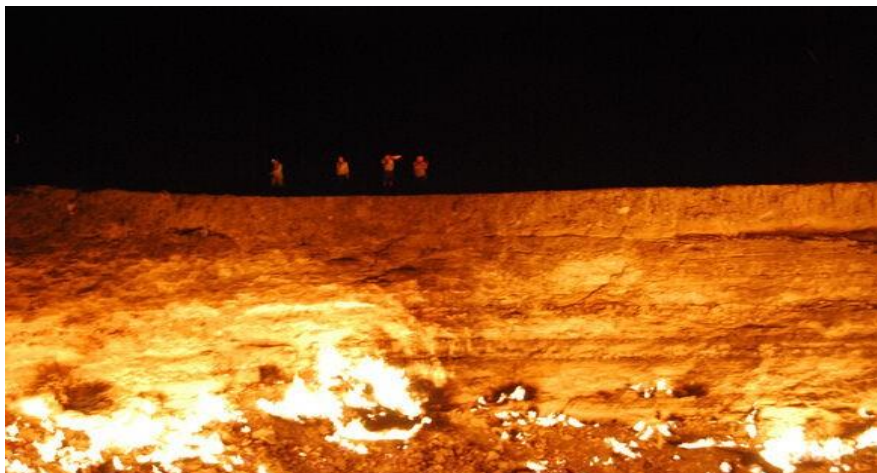
On December 31, 2019 Chinese authorities alerted the World Health Organization that a virus was spreading in Wuhan—a Chinese city of 11 million people. On January 11, a 61-year-old man in Wuhan became COVID-19's first fatality. At the time, most of us thought, “What happens in China, stays in China.” WRONG!

March, 2020, was full of madness. The NBA? Suspended. Baseball's spring training? Over. The NCAA basketball tournament? Canceled. On March 13, 2020, the stock market crashed. That same day, the United States declared a state of emergency. And today? Thousands have died of CoVid. CoVid-19 Stripped. Took. Threw our world into a waterless pit. And we cry: 'Let me out!'

Joseph's attack came completely by surprise. So did our other attack. John 10:10, "***The thief comes to steal, kill, and destroy us.***"



Where? "***(In the waterless pit of hell.)***"

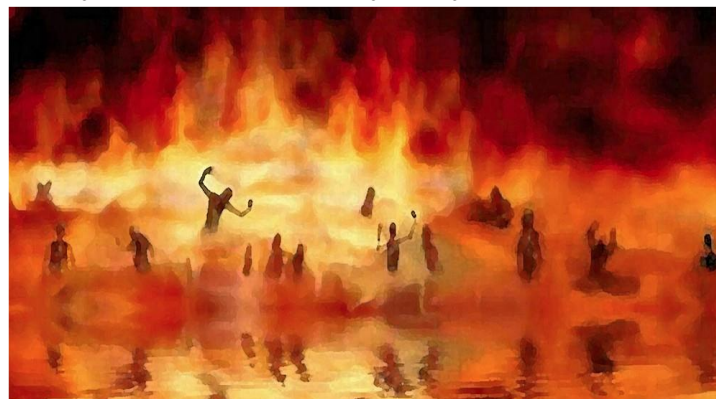


But God, through Zechariah, has something to say about those who are Stripped, Taken. And Thrown by satan into the waterless pit of hell.

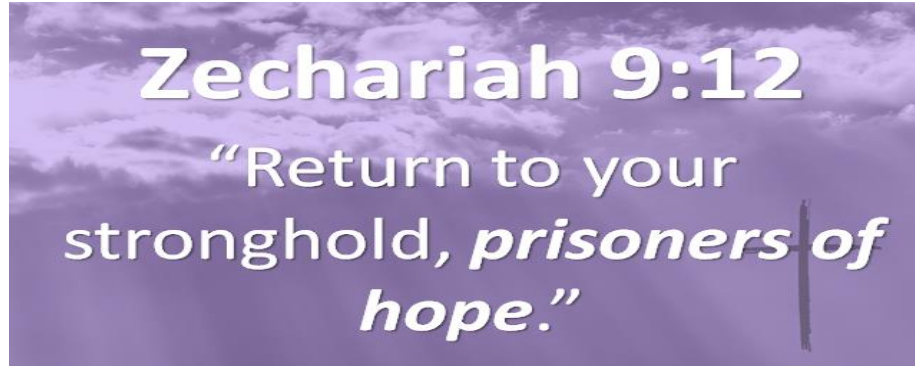


“I will set your prisoners free from the waterless pit.” Zech 9. Prisoners. That’s what a pandemic does. It makes us prisoners to fear, dread, isolation, and depression. Prisoners. That’s what the devil does. He makes us prisoners to sin, death, and hell. Zechariah is connecting us to Joseph’s plight! By using the term “waterless pit”. In the waterless pit, Joseph is frantic, desperate. screaming, a prisoner. Joseph’s story is our story Stripped. Taken. Thrown. Into the waterless pit of hell. And we cry too: ‘Let me out!’. But the devil turns a deaf ear to us!

Forget about CoVid-19 restrictions, who wants us to stay stuck in the waterless pit? Satan does. Who wants us to stay stuck in fear, dread, despair and death? Satan does. Satan wants to lock us up and throw away the key. The liar wants us to accept that our permanent home is, and always will be: THE WATERLESS PIT - called HELL. And when we believe Satan’s lies, either that there are no consequences to sin – that we can sin and we won’t die, or that God could never love or forgive us, we find ourselves bound, tied and fettered; stripped, taken, and thrown —in the waterless pit of hell - pleading for a way out! Is there any way out of the waterless pit?

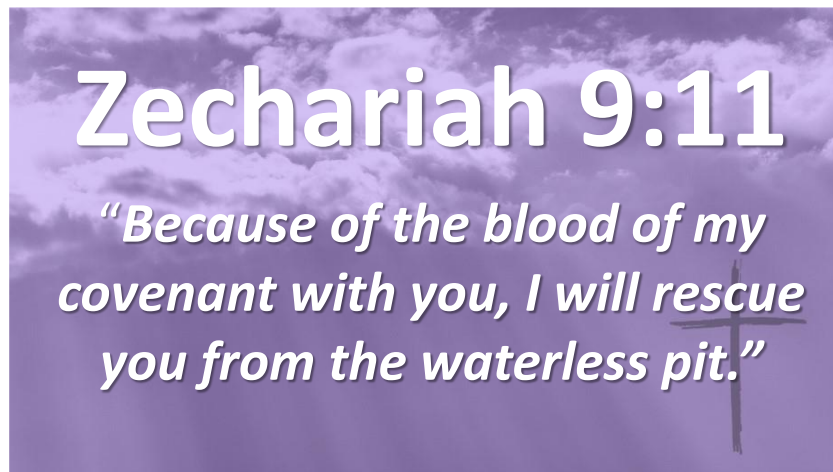


And Zechariah tells us there is a way out, “***Return to your stronghold, prisoners of hope***” Zech. 9. Did you catch that? We may be prisoners of Covid, our sins may have made us prisoners of death, the waterless pit of hell, and the devil, but we aren’t “prisoners of despair.” Zechariah doesn’t call us, “prisoners of no escape.” We *are* “prisoners of hope.” Rarely do prisoners have hope. BUT WE DO!!!!!!



Zechariah 9:12
“Return to your
stronghold, *prisoners of*
hope.”

And Biblical hope isn’t “knock on wood hope”. It isn’t, “Cross your fingers hope”. It isn’t, “Make a wish upon a star hope.” Biblical hope isn’t “*HOPES SO...HOPE!*” Biblical hope is “*KNOWS SO..HOPE!*” Biblical hope is confidence in God’s grace, and absolute trust that God has, is, and will rescue through Christ’s covenant blood.



Zechariah 9:11
“*Because of the blood of my*
covenant with you, I will rescue
you from the waterless pit.”

“***Because of the blood of my covenant with you, I will free your prisoners from the waterless pit.***’ Zech 9:11 -whether we’re trapped by CoVid, our past, sin, death, hell, or the devil, someone from outside of the pit needs to rescue us. And that someone is God. And God’s rescue plan was and is to rescue us from the waterless pit, through the covenant blood of Jesus. Since it is our sins that condemned us to the waterless pit of hell, Jesus’ forgiving blood is the key that gets us out of the waterless pit of hell.

Exodus 24:8

“Moses took the blood and threw it on the people and said, ‘Behold *the blood of the covenant* that the LORD has made with you.’”

Did you know that there are only two places in the Old Testament where the words “blood” and “covenant” appear together. They are Zechariah 9:11 and Exodus 24:8. In Exodus 24 Moses says. “***Behold the blood of the covenant, which the LORD has cut with you.***” God rescued his Old Testament people from the angel of death with covenant blood – the blood of the Passover Lambs. Innocent blood. Shed blood. Saving blood. But what about us? We’re not God’s Old Testament people, but we still need to be rescued from the waterless pit. God has an answer for that. God told Jeremiah that He was going to make a New Covenant, by which He would rescue all sinners, of all time, once and for all. In Jeremiah 31 the Lord said, “***This is the Covenant I will make, after those days, I will forgive their sins, and remember them no more!***” That’s God’s New Covenant promise. But Biblical covenants are signed, sealed, and delivered with blood. So where do we find the blood of the NEW COVENANT, which promises us the forgiveness of our sins, that rescues us from the waterless pit of hell? Where is the blood that enacts this New Covenant? Matthew 26 says, “***After supper, Jesus took the cup and said, “This is My blood, of the New Covenant, which is shed for you, for the forgiveness of your sins.”***”

Our God isn’t some great Terminator. Our God isn’t a vengeful judge. Our God is a loving Savior, who rescues us with His covenant blood, Passover blood. Shed blood. Cleansing blood. Forgiving blood. Christ’s blood.



Covenant blood is what Jesus shed on the cross that signed, sealed, delivered, and enacted His New Covenant, in which He forgives our sins and remembers them no more. On Maundy Thursday Jesus said, “*This is My blood of the new covenant.*” And with those words, Jesus begins to leave a trail of forgiving blood. After the Last Supper, Jesus leads his disciples to the Garden of Gethsemane where Jesus sweats drops of blood. After his arrest, Jesus is bound and taken to Annas, the high priest, where He is beaten, and spit upon. More blood. Then He’s taken to Caiaphas where He’s blindfolded, and struck in the face with fists. More blood. The next day Pilate has Jesus stripped, taken, thrown down and scourged with whips that have chunks of bone or pieces of metal attached to the end of each leather strip. More blood.



Then, already drenched in blood, Jesus takes up His cross and marches to Calvary. He’s a man on a mission, Who’s come to set us free from The Waterless Pit. Down the Via Delarosa – the Way of Suffering – Jesus marches to Calvary. Finally, Roman soldiers stretch Jesus out on two pieces of wood, and hammer three spikes into his flesh — and then covenant blood, forgiving blood, cleansing blood gushes forth everywhere. Like Joseph by his brothers, like us by the devil, Jesus is now *Stripped. Taken. and Thrown, into THE waterless pit of hell, for you and for me.*

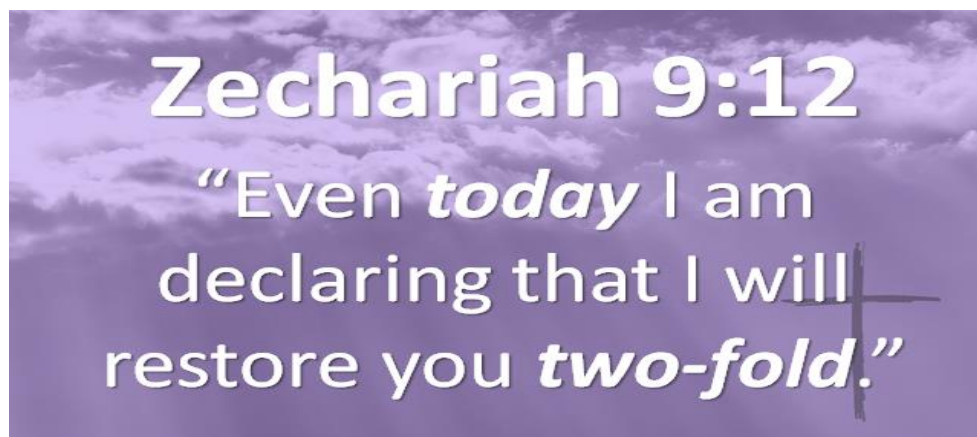


His closest friends ran away. His clothes were stripped away. His possessions were gambled away. His strength was ebbing away. His life was taken away. And even his Father turned away. All Christ had left, literally, was blood—covenant blood. But His blood was pure enough and sinless enough to sign, seal and deliver the New Covenant, in which the Lord *“forgives our sins, and remembers them no more.”*

And now that the New Covenant has been enacted by Jesus’ Covenant blood, our sins are forgiven, our death is defeated, we are rescued from the devil’s waterless pit of hell. God’s Paradise is Restored. Fear, anxiety and worry are upended! When Luther first experienced this Good News he said. *“I felt as if I were born anew at that very moment, and as if the gates of paradise had been flung open wide for me.”*

Christ’s covenant blood sets us free from the condemnation of our sin; from the pain of our past; from the guilt of our conscience, from the isolation and depression of our present, and from the fear of our future. No one can take this freedom from us. No virus, quarantine, or social distancing can stop it. No power on earth or hell can destroy it. No power of hell, no scheme of man, can ever pluck me from His hand!

And now, as we grow in our walk with Jesus, his covenant blood unlocks more and more prison doors in our lives; until all believers will finally experience the perfect freedom of God at the resurrection of the dead, and in the life of the world to come.



Zechariah 9:12
*“Even **today** I am
declaring that I will
restore you **two-fold**.”*

In Zechariah 9:12, God promises, *“Even today I am declaring that I will restore you two-fold.”* Not tomorrow! Not next week! Not next year! **TODAY!** God says, *“I will restore you two fold!”*

John 1 says, “*Jesus came, full of grace. And from the fullness of His grace, we have all received grace upon grace.*” When Jesus rose on Easter morning, and met the disciples in the upper room, locked behind closed doors, for fear of the Jesus, Jesus appeared, and He said to the disciples TWICE, “*Peace be with you!*” So why does Jesus restore us two-fold – grace upon grace, and peace upon peace? Here’s why. God gives us more restoration, grace, and peace than we need or could ever use for ourselves. John 10:10, “*I have come that they may have life, and have it abundantly.*” Why? He richly blesses us with more restoration, grace, and peace than we need, to give it away to the all those who are still trapped in waterless pits.



What happened to Joseph? The Lord rescued him from his waterless pit. And 20 years later, the roles were reversed. Joseph was in power, and his brothers weren’t. The brothers came to Joseph in fear, assuming he would settle the score and throw *THEM* into the waterless pit of prison. But Joseph didn’t. *Joseph didn’t do that!* And you, forgiven children of God don’t do that either. Why? Covenant blood. Forgiving blood. Cleansing blood. Christ’s blood. In Genesis 50 Joseph told his brothers, “*You meant what you did for evil, but God meant it for good, to accomplish what is now being done, the saving of many lives!*” These are words spoken by someone who is free from their waterless pit—free in every way. Free to live in God’s grace — even in a pandemic, even when the devil threatens. We can say to others who hurt us: “*You meant it for evil, but God meant it for good, to accomplish what is now being done, the saving of many lives.*”



Just like Joseph's brothers, by our sins we tossed our dear brother, Jesus, into the waterless pit of hell. But, even more, for us and our salvation, God the Father tossed Jesus into the waterless pit of hell to suffer it for us. And Jesus willingly descended into the waterless pit of hell, to save us from it, by pouring out His blood, that enacts God's covenant of grace, that forgives our sins, and remembers them no more. And once the payment was done – Jesus cried out, "***IT IS FINISHED*** – Jesus has now rendered the waterless pit of hell entirely unnecessary for anyone to ever have to go to. And then the Father received His Son back in victory. And now our loving Savior gives us to drink of the very blood that rescued us from the waterless pit, and the very blood that signed, sealed, and delivered God covenant promise of forgiveness, so that we will never doubt our rescue from the pit, or forget our forgiveness. This is why, on this night, Jesus gives us His blood to drink - covenant blood, shed blood, cleansing blood, forgiving blood, Christ's blood, given and shed for you, to set you free forever. Amen.