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Sermon preached by Mr J K Popham  
at Galeed Chapel, Brighton  
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ZECHARIAH 9 v 11

"As for thee also, by the blood of thy covenant, I  
have sent forth thy prisoners out of the pit wherein is  
no water"

This chapter, in the earlier verses of it, contains very serious threatenings against cities and people, threatenings which, hanging over people, must find terrible fulfilment one day. But in the midst of them, of these threatenings, there are most merciful promises, gracious words sent to captives, to people who were oppressed. Messages of mercy, declaring that God would come and deliver them. There was a gracious word spoken to Zion. "Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion; shout O daughter of Jerusalem: behold thy King cometh unto thee: He is just, and having salvation; lowly, and riding upon an ass, and upon a colt the foal of an ass. And I will cut off the chariot from Ephraim, and the horse from Jerusalem, and the battle bow shall be cut off: and he", this lowly King, "shall speak peace unto the heathen: and His dominion shall be from sea even to sea, and from the river even to the ends of the earth". And we will know who this King is and how, in the first place, it was literally fulfilled when Christ entered into Jerusalem exactly as here, hundreds of years before it was said He should do. But beyond this, there is a fulfilment of it in the spirit whenever this blessed One comes to a captive soul, to one who has been ruled by sin and Satan, who has been carried where he would not go after regeneration; when, I say, this lowly One comes and brings salvation, takes away armour, sword, battle bow; cuts off all that, and as the King of peace proclaims peace and maintains peace in the conscience. If we here, any of us, come into this experience, we shall know then what it is for the chariot and horse and battle bow to be cut off, for our souls to submit and for King Jesus to bear His sceptre of peace and sway in our consciences by His precious blood. Then the text contains this gracious address to the captives. "As for thee", poor captive, far off, "also by the blood of thy covenant I have sent forth thy

prisoners out of the pit wherein is no water".

First, let us look a little at the covenant,

Secondly, at the blood of the covenant,

Thirdly, at the effect of that precious blood, that covenant sealed with precious blood

"I have sent forth thy prisoners out of the pit wherein is no water".

First, the covenant, the covenant of grace. Every covenant has certain contracting parties to it; every covenant has conditions in it; every covenant is, in some way, sealed, and these remarks apply particularly to the covenant of grace. There are contracting parties in it. Each party contracting in the covenant has His conditions to perform. Being a covenant of grace, a covenant of salvation, a covenant that shall bring, certainly bring, salvation to all for whom it was made, it is clear that the conditions of it, that is to say the contracting parties in it, cannot be sinners and God. It is a covenant to save from sin. A sinner cannot contract in that covenant. It is a covenant of life for the dead. The dead cannot contract in that covenant. It is a covenant of peace, but the Lord's people by nature, in common with all others, are at war with God. They did not, they could not, contract here. The contracting parties then must be the Persons in the Trinity, God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Ghost, and these parties have entered into a covenant called the covenant of peace, a covenant which is ordered in all things and sure, a covenant of life, a covenant which is sealed. God the Father has His part in the covenant. It is no less than choosing the people who shall be interested in it and saved in it. This is it that He, the Father, does. He chooses whom He will, whom He will have saved, whom He will deliver from the pit of corruption and death. There is no dispute in this in the Scriptures; there is nothing against it; but the Scriptures do definitely and distinctly and very often declare it. "Predestinated, according to the foreknowledge of the Father". "Chosen in Christ Jesus before the world began". "Elect according to the foreknowledge of God the Father". These are Scripture terms which are distinctly applied to the Father and have a place in this covenant, belong to it. Yea, these acts of the Father are, so to speak,

the foundation of it. The Second Person in the Trinity, who is the Son of God, the eternal Son of God, has His part. He makes a contract. The contract He made was this, in the fulness of time to be made of a woman, made under the law, to redeem them that were under the law, become a curse for them. He was made a curse for His children. To be made sin, to be a Surety, to stand in the precise place and condition of the people whose Saviour He undertook to be. To have imputed to Him their sins in order that He, dying for them, should make an end of sin and bring in an everlasting righteousness. He was to be in this covenant the fountain of life, the author of life, the justifier of the ungodly through His own precious, perfect righteousness. He was to open a fountain for sin and uncleanness for all causes of separation from God. He was to be the Lord and the King of His saints, the husband of His chosen bride, the life of the dead, the light of the blind, the healing of the sick; a perfect Saviour. The part of the Holy Ghost, the third Person in the Trinity, in this covenant, is to come, first to Christ without any measure in the gift of Himself; He was to be given to Christ. He was to prepare the precious human nature for the Son of God to inhabit. He was to come on Christ with all His immeasurable gifts and graces, as in the prophecy of Isaiah it is said of Him, that the Spirit of the Lord should rest upon Him, that is upon Christ; should be in Him a Spirit of wisdom and of might and of understanding in the fear of the Lord. The Holy Spirit was with the Man Christ Jesus. It was the sign given to John so that he should make no mistake in baptising the Messiah. "Upon whom thou shalt see the Spirit of God descending, the same is He". We are told that the Holy Ghost was seen and He abode upon Christ. He was ever with Christ. Through the Eternal Spirit Christ offered Himself unto God. This is that wondrous contract that the Spirit of God entered into respecting the Person of the Lord Jesus. From Him, the anointed Saviour, the Spirit comes to anoint every member of the Saviour's body, to quicken every child of God, every one whom Christ purchased with His own blood. This is that wondrous work of regeneration that is performed in every redeemed sinner. The work of sanctification when Christ is revealed, of justification when His righteousness is put on, and of union to Christ when precious faith is drawn into exercise upon, and to receive, a revealed Christ. Here we have Three Persons contracting in the new covenant. I will make a new covenant. It is a covenant of life, it is a covenant of peace, it is a covenant

in which God performs all the conditions in His Three Persons, a covenant which is given to, in all its perfection, every member of the mystical body of Jesus Christ. We are all in union with God in one or two covenants. We are in union with God as our Creator and Law Giver naturally, and if we are not severed from that union, delivered from it, and the curse attaching to it because of our sin and of Adam's sin, woe be unto us. But the saints are brought into another covenant. They are cut out of the wild olive and are grafted into the good olive, cut out of nature and united to Christ in grace. Brought off from doing and saved without doing. Brought away from dominion of sin and the lordship of the devil and brought into union with Christ under the dominion of grace and the Headship of the dear Redeemer. It is a great covenant; it is called the everlasting covenant because it is to continue. The first covenant is not to continue with respect to those who are redeemed. This is to continue for ever and ever in all the blessings of it, in the peace of it and in the comfort of it; it is to continue for ever and ever. Happy people who are saved by the Lord, happy people who are brought into union with Christ, happy people who, by the grace of the Spirit, make a covenant with God by sacrifice, giving up themselves. That is the greatest sacrifice they ever can make, yielding themselves and uniting to Christ by pure and living faith. This covenant is sealed. Every covenant is witnessed and testified to and sealed. This covenant is no exception. It is sealed and that that seals it is in the text and in another place it is called the blood of the everlasting covenant, because by that precious death of Christ every blessing, favour and good that God has bestowed in the covenant and given to Christ for His children was sealed absolutely and every one must therefore partake of those things which the covenant possesses. This is called the blood of Christ. Of it Hart sings thus

The blood of Christ, a precious blood  
Cleanses from all sin, doubt it not,  
And reconciles the soul to God  
From every folly, every fault

It is the blood of Christ. Sin in itself, as the act of the creature, must be finite. You may feel, and rightly, that it is infinite in its demerit, because it is done against an infinite being. You measure

sin, your sin, by Him against whom you have committed it and a proper measure it is and God brings us to measure our sin that way for our deep humbling. We may see sin as done against Him and see that it deserves endless punishment, that the thought of foolishness is sin, that an idle word is sin, which has a certain infiniteness in respect of Him against whom it was all done. But when you view sin as the act of the creature, a creature of a day, (never more than finite neither here or hereafter), when I say you view sin as the act of the creature, then you must say it seems to get away from it; that it is a finite act. You can never stretch out the act of a creature into an infinite act. Now I have said this because I am going to try to show that the blood of Christ is infinite and therefore if you, any of you, feel as if sin is so infinite in you, in the blackness, the guilt, and the weight of it, as that you have no hope of rising, I would show to you that the blood of Christ is infinite in its greatness and glory beyond all measurement. It is called the blood of God - "Feed the church of God which He hath purchased with His own blood." O sinner, do you feel as if your heart sometimes is ready to break because of what you are in yourself and what you see your sin to be? Do you feel as if it would be an unusual stretch of God's mercy to forgive you? A stretch which you think nowhere in the Scriptures are you warranted to look for it? Do you feel so? O, God help you to behold the blood of Christ infinite, because the blood of Him who is true Almighty God. "Feed the church of God which He hath purchased with His own blood". If you could put the sins of all men into one sin, that one sin would not be equal to the death of Christ. That one sin would be the sin of a creature, and the death of Christ is the death of God. He purchased the church with His own blood. Deity, strictly speaking, cannot die, but He who is God did die because He was also Man. Therefore this great, this invaluable blood will take away all stain and not leave one speck of sin, one little wrinkle of decay upon the person who is sprinkled with it. Well dear friends we may - by the help of God we shall - lift our heads up as we see, by precious faith, this infinitely valuable blood of the Lord Jesus, the blood of the everlasting covenant. I have said a very poor word about the covenant and that that seals it. The best any man could ever say would be infinitely beneath the beauty and the dignity and the glory of this covenant, yet the Lord may not be displeased with me, and I feel you will not be, for my feeble effort to speak to you of this

great transaction in the Godhead, this great work of the Godhead, this wondrous deed of the Godhead, a covenant ordered, a covenant fulfilled in all its conditions, a covenant sealed by the blessed God of all grace, and the blood of Jesus Christ.

Now let us look a little at that that the Lord here speaks to His poor captives far off from Him, held by the enemy, the captor who has captured them refusing to let them go. Says the Lord to them "As for thee also by the blood of thy covenant" Then because I have made it over to thee; then because I have interested thee in it, because I have written thy name in it; then because made by Me on thy behalf; for by the blood of thy covenant O Zion I have sent forth thy prisoners out of the pit wherein is no water. Here I must look at the prisoner. Perhaps you know him. There are three things that hold people in bondage. First, sin. Its chains we cannot break; its power we cannot crush, its influence we cannot get away from. It plagues us, it holds us, it follows us, it goes before us, it brings up the rear. It is like a subtle gas that will insinuate itself through a chink. You cannot discover by looking for it. O it is subtle. Its subtlety largely is its power. Its subtlety is such we are deceived by it, we are held by it, we are ground to powder by it. This is one thing that holds us. The second thing is guilt. When sin is done then guilt comes. You may be tempted to sin and not sin so there is then no guilt. You may see a thief and not be a consenting party, so you are not guilty. But if you see a thief and consent with him you are a partaker of his deed and in that, your consent, there is guilt. Guilt follows the committal of sin; guilt binds people. No man can absolve himself from guilt, any more than he can deliver himself from the dominion of sin. Guilt is put upon, attached to, the person by the law. It is the legal effect of sin and a solemn, dreadful thing it is to be guilty. God will not hold us guiltless. You say an idle word, you take the Name of the Lord in vain, you limit the Holy One of Israel in your thoughts. You think He cannot do this; you are afraid He cannot do that; you think hardly of Him; you wonder why He lets this be and why He permits the other, and in all these there is sin, and following sin is guilt. Guilt; it is the heaviest load that an immortal soul can feel. Guilt is death. You may live and yet be dead in the law; everyone is. If a man in England commits murder, he is dead in the law. Though he may be at large, may never be

arrested, but he is a dead man in the law, and people who are guilty are dead in the law. This holds sinners. The third thing that holds sinners is the law itself. It cannot let you go of itself. It cannot remit punishment because it cannot justify you. It cannot give life to the dead; it cannot give justification to the guilty; it cannot give holiness to the polluted. Two things only can the law do. First, approve of perfection. Second, curse where imperfection is. Only these two things can the law do. Therefore, seeing that we are sinners, full of imperfection, all that the law can do to us is just to claim us, arrest us, and keep us. Of itself it can never let us go and never sanction or permit our escape. Well, this is a perfect death, is it not? Have you followed me? Do you know in your own souls what it is thus to be in captivity? There are many other things I could name, as temptation, may hold you. Care may hold you, corroding care may just hold you down until you cannot lift your face up. Many troubles may hold you; afflictions may be like a prison to you, but I have named these three because they are the main, and let us ever, by God's mercy, hold to the main things. How are these captives to go free? Ask them. O, each one says, I can never get free; I never can expect to be liberated; I deserve to be where I am and when my mortal race is done to sink into perdition. O, but God Himself spoke. He does speak and He speaks here. I have sent thee forth from the pit. Egypt was a pit to Israel for four hundred years. Babylon was a pit to Israel for 70 years, and many pits there have been and are for God's poor people, and in those pits is no water, nothing to refresh us, no water to cool the fever of sin, no water to quench the thirst of a sinner, nothing to do him good. That is the intention. A pit wherein is no water is a gloomy, desolate, hopeless place, as some know. Now comes the Lord, this King - "Thy King cometh unto thee". He is the King of death; He says "I have the keys of hell and of death, Amen; and am alive for ever more". He comes. O what a coming. When the angel went to Peter in prison he touched him and the chains fell off Peter and he followed the angel and door after door and gate after gate opened of its own accord and they came at last to the gate which led into the street and that opened. Our King has but to come and we shall go free. No chains can resist His power, no locked doors can hold the prisoner, no gate leading into the city, heavy, and perhaps rusty on its hinges and difficult to open, no gate can keep a sinner back when this word comes to be fulfilled. "I

have sent forth thy prisoners out of the pit wherein is no water". This prophet Zechariah knew something about the pit. He came up with the restored, the returned captives. He was one of the preachers who encouraged the building. He began to preach two months after Haggai began to preach and he had been in the pit and now he was come away from it and he encouraged these people to go on building the house. Here, by him, the Lord says, "I have sent forth thy prisoners". This sending forth means these things; namely, it means first of all the gracious inshining of the dear Saviour into the heart of a sinner. This is the order that Isaiah has, that is in Matthew: The people which sat in darkness have seen a great light and to them that sat in the region and shadow of death a great light hath shined. O, what an illumination it is when the precious Person of Christ shines, when His death appears in its infinite worth, when a sinner sees a new way to God, a way out of his prison house, a way out of condemnation, a way of justification, a way of escape from the wrath to come. No prison can bind his heart's desires. How they leap, how they go out to God, how he cries, "Lord save or I perish". This is one of the wonderful acts of the Holy Spirit in the covenant of grace when He causes faith in a captive to look on Christ; Christ crucified, Christ a sufficient Saviour, Christ able to save unto the uttermost all that come unto God by Him. Christ who does not take notice of the things which distress and bind and slay His poor people. They notice their guilt, their hypocrisy, their vanity, their emptiness. They notice their death; they notice some Scriptures that speak against them. They notice that there are threatenings from which they cannot run; there are swords whose points are all toward themselves and near their hearts; and they notice these things; Christ does not. What He says is this - What have I here that My people is taken away for nought and they that carry them captives make them to howl and every day continually My Name is blasphemed. Now what will they do? O, says He, but My people shall know, they shall know who I am and what I am and what I have come to do for them. "I have sent forth thy prisoners" You will see a way opened. It will be - when you get a view of this, without an application of it to you at the moment - as is there were no gates, no bars, only you have no present liberty to go forth. You see the way open wide, free, blessed, untaxed way, as the Apostle speaks in the Hebrews: "Having therefore brethren boldness to enter into the Holiest by the blood of Jesus, let us draw near" Then the blessed

Spirit goes on in this great work of liberty by bringing in some gracious word, perhaps an invitation: "Come unto Me". Perhaps a clear testimony in the conscience of, not only the death of Christ, but of the sinner's interest in it, and that does the turn, that brings the sinner forth. He goes forth from his prison house where there was no water. It is written "Surely shall one say in the Lord have I righteousness and strength" and this in the gospel is thus expressed "God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness hath shined in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ." The face of Jesus Christ there, means His Person, and to see the Person of Christ is to see the best gift of heaven, the highest glory of heaven, the greatest manifestation of the love of God to the Church. It is to see perfection; it is to see the law perfected in respect of a sinner, to see justice honoured, to see love's vent in the atonement. It is to see how God justifies the ungodly that believeth in Jesus. It is to see a way opened from hell to heaven, from pollution to holiness, from guilt and condemnation to justification; and the prisoner is free. Ah, some may say, we do not know it. Well, if you do not know it, how do you feel about your ignorance of it? Are you content to be where you are? Is a prison to you a place of liberty imagined? Or, is your cry: "Bring my soul out of prison that I may praise Thy Name" Is your cry: "O let not the pit shut her mouth upon me". Is this your prayer: "O when wilt Thou come unto me?" Then, wait on Him, be of good courage; He shall strengthen your heart and you shall find God one day and your soul in sweet harmony and union and peace.

Then this people brought out find that the Prince of Peace is with them and of the increase of His government and peace there shall be no end. This, therefore, as I see it, is a beautiful gospel text. It contains a full gospel, a free gospel, a glorious gospel; the glorious gospel of Christ. And he who comes into an experience of it is on his way to heaven and shall reach heaven though death and hell oppose the way. One may say, but I am so ignorant of all this; I do not know exactly what is meant. Well, I do feel thankful I trust for one thing in the gospel, and this is it, that ignorance is no bar to Christ. Sin is no bar to Christ. And will He let ignorance be a bar? Suppose you do not know these things, and that your heart aches to know them, will He let that ache die in black despair? What a mercy He

is able to have compassion on the ignorant and on them that are out of the way. None in this world can be said to know much of Christ, but it is a great thing to see enough of Him and enough in Him to pant after Him, to hanker after the knowledge of Him and to be saying: "That which I see not teach Thou me". "Open Thou mine eyes that I may behold wondrous things out of Thy law". How did Paul come to know Christ? Just think, poor sinner, how did Paul come to know Christ? Well, he tells us himself. A great light shined and a voice spoke to him saying, "Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou Me?" And Saul did not know who it was speaking to him and he said "Who art Thou Lord?" and He said "I am Jesus". So it was by revelation that Saul became acquainted with Christ and that is just how you must become acquainted with Him, by revelation. What then, is there nothing more encouraging than that to one who feels he cannot attain to things? Let me say again what I have often said in this pulpit, knowledge of Christ is not a matter of acquisition but of revelation, and if that is so, well who, praying and longing, needs despair? Who can truly and properly say, he will never come to know this Person? No sinner can truly and properly say that. Why, because I am so ignorant? Yes, but He can teach, He is to teach. O, but I am so contracted and He will melt and enlarge. But I am so vile. He came to save the lost. Therefore, hold on to the throne of grace as well as you can. Cast longing looks to Him as well as you can, and remember that though you see Him not, He sees you. You cannot hide from Him either your heart or your place. He sees the heart, its achings and longings and sinkings and fears and desires and pantings and prayers, and he sees the pit wherein you are wherein is no water, none to quench your thirst, nobody to give you a drop of cold water, nobody to quench the law's fire in your conscience, your guilt, your sins burning in your convictions, nothing at all to relieve you. But says this glorious King, I am coming, lowly, not angry, not bitter, not in hot displeasure. I am coming lowly, with a heart of love and tenderness. What for? To save you. He will come, He will save you. What a good God we have. I do like Owen's word and can use it with much more reason of myself than he had to use it of himself, but I do like it. "Though", said he, "I cannot preach a good sermon I can preach a good gospel" and I do feel it now that I love this blessed gospel and like to speak to you about it because there is no death, there is no hell, there is no guilt, there is no wrong in you, no devil to seek to

destroy you, that He will not overcome. No guilt that will sink you to hell if He is coming. O, then, what a Christ there is, what a Christ there is, what a Christ there is. May the Lord reveal Himself; may He come to us. If we have had Him we need Him again. If we are in Egyptian bondage the Paschal Lamb is needed and when that is slain then you will find the blood sprinkled and He will not destroy you. If you are in Babylonian bondage then He will bring you forth. Wherever you are, whatever pit, there is this Redeemer, there is this covenant, this blessed covenant in which is everything that you need. If you will see the atonement by precious faith, you will see it inside the covenant. Everything is in the covenant of grace and may we be found there.

AMEN.