**The Priest-King is Crowned**

Text: Zechariah 6:9-15

Rev. David Waldron

**Scriptures:** Hebrews 7:1-3; 11-28; Zechariah 6:9-15

**Series: Zechariah**. Sermon 10 of 19.

**Theme:** The symbolic crowning of Joshua the priestly king (‘He will be a priest on his throne’) bringing harmony between the church and state

**FCF:** The battle between church & state

**Proposition:** Christ, the Branch, the priestly King has been crowned with glory and is now building His church

**Introduction**

ISIS is a word which we have come to know in recent times. It stands for “The Islamic State of Iraq and Syria”. ISIS is a Salafi jihadist militant group which separated from al-Qaeda in February 2014 and declared an Islamic State, or caliphate. This powerful force is responsible for beheadings of soldiers, civilians, journalists and aid workers, ethnic cleansing of minority groups including Christians, and the destruction of ancient cultural heritage sites. ISIS has been the cause of large numbers of refugees flooding into Europe.

The combination of political/military power with religious fervour has usually been a potent and destructive mix in human history. Think also of the crusades to the Holy Land in the middle ages, or the Spanish Inquisition.

The Church and the State have separate and different roles and responsibilities. The realm of one is spiritual, the other physical. The church has been given the keys of the kingdom of heaven (Matt 16:19) – the spiritual power of the Word. Whereas the state has civil authority – the power of the ‘sword’ (Romans 13:4).

Here then is a question: **Could church and state ever combine in harmony for the purpose not of destruction, but of restoration?** The clear answer from our text is ‘YES’. Our passage today follows on from the two central night visions:

The clothing of Joshua the High Priest who is symbolic of the coming Branch who will be both priest and ruler (chapter 3) and

The two olive trees who supply the source of power for the light within the temple: the anointed priest and king (chapter 4).

Now the prophecy of the priestly king comes together in our text as Joshua is crowned. What is being prophesied here is the **combination** of the spiritual priestly and kingly physical ruling power in a single individual. It is the **fusion** of church and state so that there would be a priest on the throne.

To grasp the importance of what the Word of God is saying here, we need to understand the roles of the priest, the king, and the promised branch:

1. **The Clean Priest**

In our churches, you don’t have to have a certain surname to be a minister! You don’t need to come from a particular family to be a pastor. We don’t have the office of ‘priest’ in the church today (we are together as believers a holy priesthood – 1 Pet 2:5), but it has not always been this way.

Back in OT times, the high priesthood was a hereditary office based on lineage from Aaron (Ex 29:29-30; Lev 16:32). Other members of the tribe of Levi, not descendant from Aaron were separated from their fellow tribes and placed in charge of dismantling, carrying and erecting the tabernacle in the wilderness (Num 1:47-54). Later they were the priesthood who served in the temple.

The high priest was the one who represented the people before God. So, if the high priest sinned, he brought guilt upon the whole people (Lev 4:3). He was to be a man totally dedicated to the Lord who was only allowed to enter the Holy of Holies once a year on the Day of Atonement (Lev 16:1-25). High priests prior to the exile of Israel in Babylon included Aaron, Eleazar and Phinehas (not Eli’s son), Abiathar, Zadok, Azariah and Hilkiah.

We know that Joshua was the anointed high priest who returned with the exiles to rebuild the temple in Jerusalem. He was the grandson of the last high priest before the temple was destroyed (2 Kings 25:18; 1 Chron 6:14-15; Ezra 3:2). In the first of the two central night visions, Joshua is dressed in filthy clothes. He is literally covered in human excrement: representing both his own sin and the sins of the people. So Satan easily accuses this high priest. He is not fit to be the mediator – the ‘go between’ God and His people. He is not pure and holy. He is not able to offer acceptable sacrifices to God.

Then the Lord acts. His filthy clothes are removed, and he is dressed in rich pure garments. After promising that if Joshua is fully faithful he will govern the house of the Lord, God says "*'Listen, O high priest Joshua and your associates seated before you, who are men symbolic of things to come: I am going to bring my servant, the Branch*”

In our text, when the Lord Almighty says of Joshua: “*Here is the man whose name is the Branch*” (v12). These words point forward to Christ, the pure high priest. Joshua was of the priestly line of Aaron, but Jesus Christ was not. Heb 7:14 confirms this saying: “*For it is clear that our Lord descended from Judah, and in regard to that tribe Moses said nothing about priests*”. Humanly Jesus was of the house of Judah, he was not a Levite. It might seem then that Jesus was not qualified to offer sacrifices for sin, nor to intercede as a priest on behalf of God’s people.

Hebrews 7 explains the priesthood of Christ by linking back not to Aaron, not to the tribe of Levi, but to Melchizedek. This man, who has no ancestry recorded in Scripture met Abraham returning from the defeat of the kings. You can read about this encounter in Genesis 14. Melchizedek blessed Abraham, who gave him a tithe of a tenth of all he had. Hebrews 7 draws the conclusion that this Melchizedek was therefore greater than Abraham, greater than the Levites who descended from this father of faith.

Do you know which part of the OT is most often quoted in the new? Psalm 110! There is a reason for this! The combination of the priesthood and the kingship prophesied both in Psalm 110 and in our text is hugely significant in God’s plan of salvation.

Psalm 110 is a psalm of David, written 500 years before our text in Zechariah, 1000 years before the writer to the Hebrews explained the priestly connection between Melchizedek and Christ and 2000 years before today! The Bible is an intricately woven tapestry of truth! The more you study this unique book the more thrilling the threads become! Psalm 110 is a prophetic word which looks forward to the fusion of church and state in one Lord, One exalted ruler who sits at the right hand of God, One who is a priest, not for a short term in history like Aaron, Eleazar or Joshua, but ‘forever’, in the order of Melchizedek.

**“***Such a high priest meets our need-- one who is holy, blameless, pure, set apart from sinners, exalted above the heavens. Unlike the other high priests, he does not need to offer sacrifices day after day, first for his own sins, and then for the sins of the people. He sacrificed for their sins once for all when he offered himself*” (Heb 7:26-27).

This high priest who is holy, blameless, pure, clean and set apart is Christ!

Brothers and sisters, this high priest is the one who gave himself for you on the ‘altar of the cross’; his blood shed once for all. He sympathizes with your weaknesses, he understands temptation, suffering, betrayal, injustice and sadness. But more, he understands God, the beloved son knows the Father’s love, knows the Father’s heart, has the Father’s ear. God hears your prayers because he is the eternal High Priest who intercedes for you (John 17:6-26).

Joshua, son of Jehozadak, the high priest in our text points forward to Christ and he is here prophetically crowned to be a priest on a kingly throne, which brings us to our 2nd point:

1. **The Ruling King**

Notice in our passage the involvement of the people in the crowning of the kingly high priest Joshua. In v10 we have the names Heldai, Tobijah, Jedaiah and Josiah son of Zephaniah. We don’t know the identities or significance of these particular men. (It is possible that Josiah was a priest, who, along with Joshua lived in the area surrounding the temple, who was descended from the Zephaniah mentioned in 2 Kings 25:18).

You may have noticed that ‘Josiah’ is replaced with the name ‘Hen’ in v14. Joshua means ‘saviour’ and ‘Hen’ is the Hebrew word for ‘grace’. It is possible that ‘Hen’ was an alternative name or title for Josiah. We don’t know for sure. (You may notice in some translations Helem in v14 instead of Heldai in v10 – likewise the significance is unclear). However, what is clear is that some of the returned exiles had brought gold and silver with them which is to be used to fashion a crown for Joshua the high priest. In the original Hebrew, the word ‘crown’ is in the plural form (mataroth), leading some scholars to suggest two objects were to be made. One for Joshua and one for the unidentified Branch. Others have thought that the second crown might be for Zerubbabel, the grandson of Jehoiachin, the last king before exile. Zerubbabel who returned to work alongside Joshua in the rebuilding of the temple in Jerusalem. Another suggestion is that a composite crown was to be made (ref. Rev 19:12). With the two metals there were most likely at least two different circlets making up the crown.

If you look at v14, you can see that this crown was (or perhaps a second crown) to be placed by Heldai, Tobijah, Jedaiah and Hen in the temple **as a memorial**. There was to be an abiding physical reminder to the people that a day was coming when the high priest would be crowned as King. It also shows the involvement of the people in this extraordinary coronation. Yes, extraordinary…

This setting of a crown on the head of the high priest would have seemed very strange to those who heard this prophesy 2500 years ago. In their own context, they were familiar with the separation of church and state. They knew that the kings of Israel were to be ordinarily of the tribe of Judah (ref. Gen 49:10), but that they had also come from Benjamin (e.g. Saul) and Ephraim (e.g. Jeroboam in the northern kingdom). The Lord makes a covenant promise to King David in 2 Samuel 7:12-13, saying “*When your days are over, and you rest with your fathers, I will raise up your offspring to succeed you, who will come from your own body, and I will establish his kingdom. He is the one who will build a house for my Name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever”.*

These OT people would also have known that the anointed king was **not to** personally make sacrifices to God, taking on the key role of a priest as Saul did (1 Samuel 13). When Samuel did not come after a seven day wait, Saul himself made the offering in his place. The kingship was taken from Saul because of this act (1 Samuel 13:13-14). Kings were not to be priests.

Uzziah was a king commended as one who did what was right in the eyes of the Lord (2 Kings 15:34), yet the Scriptures sadly record that after he became powerful as a monarch, his pride led to his downfall, he entered the temple of the Lord to burn incense on the altar. (2 Chron 26:16). Then he is rebuked by Azariah the priest, together with 80 other courageous priests who confronted him and said "*It is not right for you, Uzziah, to burn incense to the LORD. That is for the priests, the descendants of Aaron, who have been consecrated to burn incense. Leave the sanctuary, for you have been unfaithful; and you will not be honored by the LORD God*." King Uzziah’s response? He gets angry and leprosy breaks out on his body, afflicting him until he died. The key point: kings were not to be priests!

Whilst it is true that King David, together with his men, did eat the bread consecrated for the priest without rebuke (1 Sam 21:1-6). He also danced in a priestly linen ephod as the Ark of the Covenant was bring brought into Jerusalem (2 Sam 6:14), again without condemnation. However, he never sought to take on the office of the high priest. Kings were not to be priests. The priest never wore a crown or sat on a throne. The king was never to offer sacrifices as a priest.

But here is the prophesy of a high priestly king sitting crowned on a throne of power. A promise of harmony (literally a ‘counsel of peace’) between priest and king (v13b), a unification of the royal and priestly offices, a fusion of church and state. (Here is an explanation of the 5th night vision where the two anointed olive trees combine to provide the light of God’s presence in His Holy temple). The promised One was to be like Melchizedek as priest of the Most High God, but also like Melchizedek as a monarch; the King of Salem.

The people who first heard this prophesy did not know as much as we do – that the one who is here crowned priest and king points forward to Christ, the high priest, who sat down at the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in heaven (Heb 8:1)[[1]](#footnote-1). Yet they would have been encouraged to keep going with the rebuild of the temple, (perhaps even to see in the harmony between Joshua and Zerubbabel as a foretaste of the perfect harmony to come in the promised priest-king).

Sadly, at times in churches there can be tensions, disharmony, lack of peace between the elders and the deacons. This prophesy reminds us that church office-bearers are to demonstrate in their different roles a harmony and unity which reflects the perfect fusion of spiritual and physical service embodied in the risen Christ. The Session is to function in a ‘counsel of peace’.

I remember giving thanks to God for the harmony and cooperation which was present between elders and deacons in the Session as the Cornwall Street congregation was in the process of rebuilding their church building after the 2011 Christchurch earthquake. As I was writing this sermon, I recall looking out of the window of the Lampstand building to see a ‘forest’ of wooden piles, seemingly ‘sprouting’ up 3 meters from the building site. This foundation of H5 treated posts leads us to our third point…

1. **The Building Branch**

I also remember clearing some of the overgrown pittosporums, elderberry and corokia from the manse garden. Over the years, without much pruning, the branches of these bushes had grown out until they overshadowed large parts of the lawn and towered above the fences. That’s what branches do, the start small and they grow bigger!

Look with me at what the Lord Almighty says in v12: *'Here is the man whose name is the Branch, and he will branch out from his place and build the temple of the LORD’.* Just in case you didn’t hear it clearly, here it is repeated in v13 *“It is he who will build the temple of the LORD, and he will be clothed with majesty and will sit and rule on his throne. And he will be a priest on his throne. And there will be harmony between the two.'* The man who is the Branch will have a small and seemingly insignificant beginning, but he will ‘branch out’ and his influence will expand to cover the whole world.

Here prophesied is a majestic, powerful, ruling priest king who is also in the building business. He is a construction worker. We saw in the 4th night vision the promise of a coming servant of the Lord called ‘the Branch’. As we saw a few weeks ago, the image of the Servant (Isa 42:1; 49:3; 5; Eze 34:23-24) appears first in the pre-exilic time of the Isaiah and prophesies someone who will bring redemption to His people (52:13; 53:8), through his suffering (53:4-11).

The image of the Branch is that of a righteous godly king descended from David (Isa 4:2; 11:1; Jer 23:5; 33:15; Zech 6:12) who would come in the future (e.g. Jer 33:14-16). God had promised that he would raise up such a king who will reign with justice.

Back then, the people first hearing this prophesy from the mouth of Zechariah did not know which king, descended from David, would be the Branch. Yet they would have been encouraged that the temple of the Lord was to be built by such an exalted person. A priest and a king. They didn’t know what part their labours on the physical rebuild of the temple in Jerusalem had in the expanding realm of the priest-king Branch, yet they would have been encouraged to keep labouring, keep trusting, keep hoping and to keep believing in the unfailing promises of God. It’s the same in principle for us today as we contribute to the building of Christ’s church in this place.

We see Jesus, the Branch, building the temple of God. The foundation is not made of up piles driven down onto a subterranean gravel bed, but rather his own body, driven into the grave by the ones who crucified him. Yes, the proud religious leaders. Yes, the weak Pontius Pilate. Yes, the Roman soldiers who drove the nails into his body. Yes, you and me. The hymn “Ah, dearest Jesus, how hast thou offended” expresses it well: “*Who was the guilty? Who brought this upon thee? Alas, my treason, Jesus hath undone thee! ‘Twas I, Lord Jesus, I it was denied thee, I crucified thee*”.

Before he died, Jesus said: "*Destroy this temple, and I will raise it again in three days*" (John 2:19). He said: *I tell you the truth, unless a kernel of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains only a single seed. But if it dies, it produces many seeds. The man who loves his life will lose it, while the man who hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life. Whoever serves me must follow me; and where I am, my servant also will be*” (John 12:24)

As Christ’s body, willingly, sacrificially, serving our Kingly High Priest, we are being gathered together in union with our Lord and Saviour. We have the ‘fellowship of sharing in his sufferings’ (Phil 3:10). We, like living stones, are being built up into a spiritual house, to be a holy priest-hood, offering spiritual sacrifices acceptable through Jesus Christ (1 Peter 2:5); as we are filled with the Holy Spirit (1 Cor 3:16-17; Eph 2:19-22; 1 Peter 2:4-5).

Should we then focus on one another in the church, speaking the truth in love so that we will in all things grow up into him who is the Head? Yes! – Eph 4:14. Should we ONLY focus on one another in the church? NO. Look at verse 15 “*And those who are far off will come and build the temple of the LORD*."

Only a few years after this prophesy, the temple rebuild in Jerusalem was complete. This verse points forward to a gathering of many peoples from other nations – Gentiles. We saw this already in the vision of the man with the measuring line – 2:11. "Many nations will be joined with the LORD in that day and will become my people”.

It is in Christ the Priest King that all nations are brought together as one people. The Lord is not drawing people to us here so that they can bring gold and silver for a crown! He is building his church with them (and us) as living stones.

Next time you see a visitor you don’t know at church, remember verse 15! “*And those who are far off will come and build the temple of the LORD*." You might be looking at the next ‘living stone’ the Lord is including into his church! Don’t despise the day of small things! Just as the temple was built with one stone after another being mortared into the structure, so the Lord builds his church but joining in one person after another.

It was exciting (and noisy!) watching the foundation piles being driven into the ground at Cornwall Street. Yet it is so much more exciting is to see our Lord building His church soul by soul. What confidence can we have that He will continue to do so? The same confidence that God’s people could have back then in Zechariah’s day.

Look with me at verse 15. “*This will happen if you diligently obey the LORD your God*"

Brothers and Sisters, we need to be faithful to Christ our Saviour. Why? Because he is not only our High Priest, the One who laid down his life as a final sacrifice for our sins and who pleads our case before God now based on his perfect righteousness. He is also our King. He rules over us, he commands us, he powerfully reigns over us. Not as a tyrant, not as a harsh taskmaster, not roughly or rudely, but in perfect love.

As STTL184 expresses Psalm 23 “*The King of love my shepherd is, whose goodness fails me never. I nothing lack if I am his and he is mine forever*”.

Our Priestly King said, "*If you love me, you will obey what I command*” (John 14:15)

Who wears the crown in your life, is it you or Jesus?

AMEN

1. The ascension of Christ as he goes up into the heavens established his rule of his enemies as a true heir of David (Acts 2:34-36; Eph 4:8; 1 Peter 3:22) and completes his atoning work as a priest for his people (Heb 4:14-16; 9:11-14,24-26). [↑](#footnote-ref-1)