

Zech 6:9-15

The messianic branch  
*Tim Anderson 16/4/2023*

The coronation of King Charles is coming up.  
I wasn't around for the last coronation,  
so this is the first one I've seen.  
And I'm thinking  
that it will be a bit different to previous occasions anyway.  
One of the topics that has got the pundits talking  
is who is going to wear what gemstones.  
And it's a somewhat delicate issue.  
The British crown has in its possession  
some of the most exquisite jewellery in the world.  
But there's a problem.  
Many of these priceless gems,  
and particularly the most special ones of the lot  
came into the possession of the British crown  
by somewhat dubious means.  
In the days of the empire, either by armed conflict,  
or by dodgy financial dealings,  
many of the greatest treasures of the empire  
were brought back to the vaults of mother England.  
The thing is that countries like India these days  
look back and they aren't too pleased about what they lost.  
And if Charles comes out wearing the gems,  
it kind of looks like he's celebrating  
the pillaging of his colonising forebears.

I guess it's just a way of saying  
if you are going to have showy displays of wealth,  
it kind of matters how you came by that wealth.

Well for Zechariah, we don't have those concerns.  
6:9-10 "The word of the Lord came to me:

take silver and gold from the exiles Heldai, Tobijah and Jedaiah, who have arrived from Babylon."

Hold on a minute.

How did Heldai, Tobijah and Jedaiah feel about having their gold and silver taken.

The answer is that they were fine with it.

There were a trickle of people relocating from Babylon to Jerusalem.

They were coming from the capital of the Persian Empire

where it was possible to become rich by working hard

to an impoverished corner of the empire

where it was a struggle to survive.

Why did they come?

Because they believed that God was going to restore his people in the land that he had given them.

And so they came willing to contribute.

This was no exploitation of unsuspecting new arrivals.

These were new arrivals who had come with the very purpose of adding their part to the rebuilding of God's people.

And in this case,

the contribution was to make two crowns.

One is for Joshua the high priest.

One is for 'the branch'.

He's not named here.

But we know from elsewhere that it's Zerubbabel.

Zerubbabel was a descendent of King David.

He would be responsible for rebuilding the temple.

And then he would sit on David's throne.

And like King Charles at his coronation,

they need to have regalia that is appropriate for their office.

And so the gifts willingly given of the new arrivals to Jerusalem

are used to fashion a pair of crowns

to be worn by those holding the office of high priest and king.

Why is it important for them to be wearing crowns?

It is actually almost a universal practice, when people are being invested into a high office, there is some pomp and ceremony that goes with it. Often it is something special about their clothing.

The mayor of the Mornington Peninsula shire would have a big gold chain to wear around their neck on special occasions.

The prefects at my old school had a special tie that marked them out. The judge when I went to court a few weeks back had a special device to knock very loudly when he was coming into the court.

I tried and failed to get out of wearing robes when I was inducted at the minister of Holy Trinity.

The bishop said to me, 'Bad luck. You have to.'

What is it with these symbols of office?

I think it's basically about getting people to respect the office.

The people who occupy these offices are the same as everyone else. They can catch tinea.

If they are blokes, their hair falls out as they get older.

If they eat garlic and onions, you will smell the effects.

So in many ways they are the same as everyone else.

And yet society functions by people respecting certain offices.

If the courts aren't respected, then society would descend into anarchy.

The prefects at my old school had a role in maintaining discipline to take some of the burden of maintaining discipline from the teachers.

The kids knew that this was just another student.

So the special tie helped us to realise that we actually had to take notice of what they said or face the consequences.

The crowns for Joshua and Zerubbabel were similar.

As high priest, Joshua was the chief religious officer of the land.

If the people were going to access forgiveness,

then he was going to need to make sacrifices happen in the temple. But he also had the role of being something like the chief judge. There was no separate judiciary in Israel. The clergy were the judges. And so Joshua and his delegates would have been judging the range of civil disputes that come up in a community. Zerubbabel would be king. So he would also have a range of important roles in the community. He would be the chief military officer in the army, responsible for appointing and leading into battle the armed forces should that be necessary. He would be responsible for levying taxes and spending them on the things the community needed to have done.

Can you see that it's important that people who are going to exercise these responsibilities in the community are given respect?

Otherwise the community itself will start to break down.

The members of the community need to submit to justice that Joshua dispenses.

Otherwise there is anarchy.

If Zerubbabel levies taxes, say for the rebuilding of the temple, it's important that everyone pays them.

Otherwise, one person will see the next person not paying.

And so he won't want to either.

And pretty soon you can't fund the entire community infrastructure.

But for Joshua and Zerubbabel, there is another reason for ensuring people respect them.

It raises things to the next level.

When those guys do their jobs, they are actually representing God.

When Joshua makes the sacrifices that enable his community to be forgiven, the forgiveness comes from God not the sacrifice.

When Joshua dispenses justice in a legal matter,  
the justice is God's justice.

And the law that governs the justice is God's law.

When Zerubbabel rules of the people as king,  
God is their ultimate king.

Zerubbabel is ruling as God's representative.

If you watch Charles' coronation service,  
you will likely hear the same thing said.

However in the case of Zerubbabel,  
the connection is tighter.

Zerubbabel was actually chosen by God for the task.

And he was ruling a people who God had chosen as his own people.

What does that mean?

Well it's really very important

for people to respect the offices that Joshua and Zerubbabel have,  
because those offices represent God.

When the people respect those men,  
they are learning to respect God.

Let's move on from the crowns

that God commanded to be made for Joshua and Zerubbabel  
to a promise that God made for the wearers of the crowns.

6:13 "And there will be harmony between the two."

In Israel's history from the time of King Saul,  
there were two human authorities in the nation.

There was the religious authority and the kingly authority.

Saul was the first king.

But he didn't always do the right thing.

And the prophet Samuel had to rebuke him  
and eventually depose him as king and anoint David,  
because he wouldn't listen to the voice of God  
spoken through the prophet.

And from then on, there was often tension  
between the religious and kingly authority in Israel.

Often that was because the king let the power go to his head and he forgot about God.

But sometimes the king rebuked the slack clergy.

King Josiah, (not the Josiah in today's passage who was a goldsmith) but the king over Israel a couple of hundred years previously, had to get the priests to read the Bible again because they had lost it. That's a bit embarrassing.

Like turning up to Peter Adam's theology class without your Bible.

But here the promise of God

is that there will be harmony between Joshua and Zerubbabel.

Harmony between the chief priest and the king is a great thing for Israel.

What does it mean?

1. It means that they are both doing the job God gave them to do.

There won't be harmony between them if one of them isn't doing their job.

2. It also means that both of them are respecting the job the other one has been given to do.

Remember what it was that got Saul sacked from being king?

He made a sacrifice that it was Samuel's job to make.

If there's going to be harmony, you can't take over the other person's job.

Why is it good for Israel?

Because both centres of authority that God has instituted are working as they should.

And when that happens, the nation will be doing very nicely.

So what is this passage telling us in summary?

God's representatives are going to be crowned which will authorise them to lead with God's authority in the nation.

And that is going to be a source of blessing for Israel.

That material to make the crowns

will come from the gifts of God's people willingly given

because they want to contribute to the establishment of his kingdom.

OK. Let's think about it now for us as Christians.

Who is our Joshua?

Our Joshua, our high priest, is the Lord Jesus.

Jesus is the one who brings God's forgiveness to his people.

Also, our Zerubbabel, our king is the Lord Jesus.

Jesus is the one who rules over us.

He is the one who we obey.

In 14:23 Jesus said, "Anyone who loves me will obey my teaching."

And so the harmony between priest and king that Zechariah is promised is made perfect for us in Jesus.

Jesus is the priest and Jesus is the king.

So our priest and our king are perfectly in harmony.

One thing that means is that you can't have Jesus as your priest without having him as your king as well.

It's not like Jesus can be the priest for some people and the king for others.

No. If he's your priest, he must be your king as well.

And look it was like that in Zechariah's day also.

If you wanted forgiveness from the priest at the temple, you had to submit to the rule of king in the palace.

But for us, it's easy to forget

that we need to submit to Jesus' rule if we want his forgiveness.

Jesus has an opinion about every aspect of my life.

Every aspect of your life.

How we use our time.

How we spend our money.

What we do with our sexuality.

How we treat the other people we come into contact with.

How we care for the world that he has made.

And if Jesus is your king,

then his opinion about those matters becomes your opinion.

Not because he forces you.

But because you want to please your king.  
The priest and the king are united.  
The one who forgives us is the one who rules over our lives.

Here's another implication for us as Christians.  
If Jesus is our king, we ought to think about him in kingly terms.  
Perhaps we ought to picture him in our minds as king.  
What is your mental picture of Jesus?  
Is it an itinerant preacher,  
sitting in a boat cast out a little from the shore  
teaching the crowds?  
Is it hanging on a cross, paying for the sins of the world?  
They are both true pictures of Jesus.  
He did both things.  
But neither of them is what Jesus is doing now.  
What is Jesus doing now?  
Right now he is ruling over the world.  
He is crowned with majesty and honour.  
The angels in heaven bow down before him.  
His splendour is unimaginably greater than Westminster Abbey  
decked out for the coronation of the king.  
It would be great for us  
to incorporate the picture of Jesus the glorious king  
into our mental picture of Jesus.

We've got an art show on at the moment.  
I'm not a visual person.  
I have learned over the years to appreciate looking at some art.  
But I could never do any.  
But I can read about art even if I'm not able to do it.  
One thing I've learned is that the pictures you focus on  
change your image of the world.  
If you focus on a crucified Jesus,  
then your picture of Christianity  
will be about the need for forgiveness of sins.

If you focus on Jesus teaching the sermon on the Mount,  
then your picture of Christianity  
will be about learning from Jesus' teaching.  
If you focus on Jesus the glorious king,  
the your picture of Christianity  
will be about the conquest of death and evil.  
They are all good pictures, right?  
But we don't want to miss the third one.  
Jesus is the ruling King who has conquered death and evil.

For us in Australia at the moment,  
we often feel like Christianity is on the back foot.  
We can't do things we used to be able to do -  
like teach RE in schools.  
For the most part, our churches are weighted towards older people,  
and we wonder if they have a future.  
Many people in the community don't view the church  
as a benign force for helping the needy as they once did.  
Rather they view us as a spreader of intolerance and bigotry.  
It's good to remember that Jesus is never on the back foot.  
He is the ruling king right now.  
Think about the time  
when Zechariah was crowning Joshua and Zerubbabel.  
Israel would have seemed right on the back foot.  
A vassal community in a corner of the Persian Empire,  
economically weak and militarily powerless.  
But God was still reigning.  
The God of the Jews is now worshiped in every country on earth.  
The Persian gods that dominated the religious world of Zechariah's day,  
Ahura Mazda, Mithra.  
You haven't even heard of them, have you?  
Our God reigns even when it doesn't look like it.  
He outlasted the gods of Persia.  
He will be worshiped when the gods of Victoria  
have been forgotten as well.

Can you imagine a historian in 300 years time  
teaching a class about Australian rules football?

It was a sport played in the 20th and 21st centuries in Australia.  
At the time more people gathered each week for football  
than for Christianity.

But a now we see that people are still gathering to worship King Jesus,  
and football has been replaced by the modern sports we play today.

It seems faintly incredible to us now  
that there might come a day when they don't play football.  
It probably seemed incredible to the people 300 years ago  
that the day would come when bandy or curling  
would no longer be played.

They were big sports in the 18th century.

Other things come and go.

At the time you would never imagine they could possibly go.

But Jesus reigns forever.

I think if we picture Jesus as ruler of the world,  
it will help address our anxiety  
about being on the back foot in our community.

And it will help us remember that we too need to submit to his rule.

Let's pray that we might do that.