

Zechariah 6:9-13

At this time of year as we start to see some of the snow and ice melt away it uncovers dead leaves and branches that are left behind from the fall. Branches that were once connected to the tree, snapped off as a result of being covered with heavy snow and ice, and are now wilting away on the ground ready to be picked up and thrown into a brush pile. Not as much the last few days, but during springtime as you look outside you are filled with a hope of life. Because as spring is approaching and we will look out at the trees and no longer see death, but you will see branches that looked so lifeless now blooming with new buds. And just a little green bud on that branch will sprout forth new life!

A promise that pulsates throughout the Old Testament is the picture of a Branch springing forth. The branch was a picture of hope to a hopeless people. The Babylonians had ravaged Jerusalem and taken the Israelites captive. In the destruction of Jerusalem the temple was brought to ruin! Imagine the agony that this would have brought to the Israelite nation. The temple unusable for seventy years of exile! The priests and levites who had trained for work in the temple could no longer perform the primary function of their office as there were no sacrifices to be made at the temple. But now there was a little glimpse of hope.

The exiles had returned to Jerusalem and the temple was being rebuilt. There was an altar once again, the sacrifices were able to be made! There was hope for this kingdom under the leadership of the high priest Joshua. And now in our text this high priest was being adorned as king! Here we have the Lord making an exception to one of his own rules! No one was supposed to take up both offices of priest and king. King Uzziah attempted to do so about 300 years earlier as he went to make the priestly sacrifices and the Lord caused him to break out in leprosy!

But as Joshua receives the royal crown God makes an exception to his rule. It may have seemed strange for Zechariah to combine the authority of the spiritual realm with the authority of the political realm. All kinds of things could go haywire. Wasn't it better to have a separation of power? Yes it was and it is! But God wants to give his people a look ahead to one who could bring true harmony. There is rarely harmony between the political realm and the religious world, but God gives a picture of a time and person who transcends both and brings true peace and harmony. In this last vision in a string of 9 visions that Zechariah receives and God gives us a foreshadowing of our Saviour in Joshua. God gives his Israelite people a branch of hope, and that branch still extends to us today!

Even just in his name God is giving his people a preview of their Saviour, as the root of the name Joshua is the very same as the name Jesus, meaning the Lord Saves. But the high priest who now is adorned with the king's crown would represent our Saviour in more ways than just his name. He would take upon two divinely instituted roles as the priest and the king! This was a designation for no normal human being. This was a foreshadowing of a branch of hope for the Israelite people, who were ready for that hope! Foreshadowing one who would come and give himself as the fragrant offering for the sins of the people, as the perfect high priest necessary for you and for me. Joshua was a foreshadowing of the one who would fight for his people as any good ruler should do! But the perfect king would fight even to the point of death giving up himself to secure the victory over sin and death! This priest king Joshua would foreshadow our Saviour in one more way...he would be an integral part in rebuilding the temple! Restoring hope to the Israelite people as they returned from exile with an ability to continue to worship their God! Restoring holiness and the capacity to serve within the temple.

As that temple was restored you can't help but think about how great and wonderful the Israelites are feeling. I mean put yourselves in their shoes. They were slaves! Taken away from every last part of their lifestyle and forced to live like the Babylonians! Coming back to their

land would have been a moment of pure joy and seeing that temple being rebuilt would have been a symbol of hope for the future. The scene was beautiful! A branch of hope! Israel was back! Until they weren't and the temple was again destroyed. They needed hope that was more than rooted in their political standing in the world, they needed hope that was rooted in something deeper than just their place of worship. And they had it! In the form of the Branch who was springing out of the root of Jesse.

But this branch, Jesus, would face it's own rejection and destruction. The prophetic words are spoken in Zechariah, here is the man...whose name is the branch, and as you hear those words, here is the man, we hear an echo of another time that the temple of the Lord was rejected. Here is the man...as Pilate hands him over to the hands of the Romans. Here is the man, take him... have your way with him, brutally flog him in front of crowds of people. Here is the man whose body will be destroyed carrying on himself the wrath of God which his people deserved. Here is the man who is walking to that cross silently...willingly.

Here is the man who gives his life as a sacrifice of atonement as the high priest for his people, yet he is despised and rejected. How did they completely miss who this was? Well...he didn't resemble a king as he came humbly even humbled to being beaten and bloodied on the porch of Pilate. He didn't seem very priestly as he claimed that every stone of the temple would be overturned. His appearance at this moment seemed helpless, naive, weak, unfit to serve as either a political or spiritual leader. And maybe thats why so many dismissed him, and why so many today still dismiss him! Shouldn't a king with such power look more like what we would expect, someone who rules in a more authoritative way showing his rule more directly!

But the reign of this branch is different. He would not be like all other kings, yes he would reign, but his reign would come in a different fashion. He would not be like any other high priest, yes he would make a sacrifice, but this sacrifice would not happen day after day, it was a one time sacrifice! But a branch of hope sprung forth. As Jesus entered into the temple of his body as descended from the glories of heaven humbling himself to take on the form of a servant. Doing so with ultimate goal that this kingly priest would allow the temple of his body to be destroyed. And as death claimed captive our Saviour, fear came over his people, wondering if death had ultimately won! Wondering if hope had been crushed again. But this branch would sprout forth life, the tomb found empty, the temple rebuilt. Not the stones stacked on one another, but the body of our Saviour, alive! A branch of hope for all people!

As we look in faith to this branch we see the one who perfectly fulfilled this role as priest and king. But he doesn't just bring a harmony between the role of priest and king. As the one time sacrifice necessary for our sin, as we look to Jesus in faith our faith receives the results of that sacrifice. We receive the pouring out of blood shed for us for the forgiveness of sins. We receive the hope of an eternity springing forth from the branch of life in Jesus. The high priest has made his sacrifice he has given himself to atone for even your sin! And that same high priest sits on his kingly throne and rules all things for you! He has already deemed you worthy to enter his heavenly temple by the blood of his sacrifice! You can approach God with confidence now and will approach him with confidence eternally!

Now through you he continues to build up his temple. You like living stones are being built up into a spiritual house offering sacrifices pleasing to God. There will be challenges, there will be times where situations in life leaves us feeling hopeless, but as we build up around the perfect king and high priest, a branch of hope always extends, with a bud, a hope of life springing forth. Life through our perfect Saviour who has brought harmony between God and man. Here is the man...the branch...Jesus!

AMEN

