

The Journey to Christmas: The Promise of True Peace in Judea

Zechariah 6:9-15

Preached by Rev. Craig T. Smith

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The Office(s)

Have you ever heard of Doa Marja del Rosario Cayetana Fitz-James Stuart y Silva? She was the 18th Duchess of Alba, Spain. If she doesn't sound familiar, perhaps you know her full name: Maria del Rosario Cayetana Paloma Alfonsa Victoria Eugenia Fernanda Teresa Francisca de Paula Lourdes Antonia Josefa Fausta Rita Castor Dorte Santa Esperanze Fitz-James Stuart Silva Falco y Gurtubay. She was a fourteen-time Spanish grandee, a five-time duchess, a countess-duchess, an eighteen-time marchioness, an eighteen-time countess and once a viscountess. This was made possible due some labyrinthian, complicated combinations of nationalities and marriages intertwined within her ancestry. She was the most titled person in history. There were over fifty different titles she held.¹ Even with all of those titles, she still deferred in respect to any actual monarch.

It would be hard to keep up with all of that. I cannot imagine her business cards or how long it took her to fill out one of those "Hello! My name is" nametags. If a lab wanted to create one person to fulfill all of those roles, you would need to Frankenstein together various pieces of families and countries and nations and languages and systems. It would be a massive undertaking to try to knit all of that together. It would demand the cooperation of several different sovereign nations, making the task both impractical and impossible. That kind of coordination simply cannot happen.

Each Christmas, we reflect upon the One who was born with a unique array of titles, one who was born into several offices. Except, the baby born in Bethlehem did not defer to any other human. In fact, that baby was born with all of the authority in heaven.

Many of us are familiar with the prophecy of Isaiah 9:6 in which we get four predicted titles or names or offices that refer to the distinctive roles that the Messiah Jesus will hold.

¹ Those must've must've paid time and a half for overtime. When she died in 2014 at age 88, her net worth was an estimated \$5 billion.

“He will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Eternal Father, Prince of Peace.” These all point to the roles that God the Son will fulfill completely and perfectly in His incarnation. God’s people would find great encouragement and strength in those titles, as they would see the unique purposes of the coming Messiah and also see some of the distinct characteristics that would mark the baby born in Bethlehem.

Today, we turn our attention to a similar teaching, one that draws our attention to the three-fold offices that Messiah would hold. When Jesus came, He was one who would serve as our perfect Prophet, Priest and King. Zechariah points specifically to the King-Priest dynamic that would define the Messiah. I invite you to turn to Zechariah 6:9-15. (read text)

Back to Jerusalem

After David’s son Solomon died, Israel split into two kingdoms. Israel in the north. Judah in the south. Judah’s capital was in Jerusalem and David’s line ruled there. The Assyrians conquered the northern kingdom and carried them off into captivity, using them as slave labor in places like Nineveh, their capital. About 140 years later, Babylon would conquer both the Assyrians and then Judah in the south. The Babylonian kingdom would take Judah into captivity, uniting the divided kingdoms in exile into one nation again. There in captivity God would continue to raise up prophets such as Daniel and Ezekiel to speak to his people. But Jerusalem was ruined. The temple and city walls were torn down.

However, about seventy years after Judah was taken into captivity, the first Persian Empire would conquer Babylon. Cyrus the Great was the Persian king and immediately upon defeating Babylon, he released the captive exiles to return to their homelands. In an official decree², Cyrus gave the Jews permission to return to Jerusalem in 538BC.

Israel would return in three waves³, the first led by Sheshbazzar began to re-establish themselves and also initiated construction toward rebuilding the temple. Prophets like Haggai and Zechariah would preach, and a prince named Zerubbabel⁴ led the people.

² The decree of Cyrus is recorded in both 2 Chronicles 36 and Ezra 1. It was written in Persian, adding that to the various languages that the Bible was written in (along with Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek).

³ There was a significant time gap between the first wave which included Zerubbabel and the second wave which was led by the priest Ezra. The third and final wave, led by Nehemiah, followed shortly after the second wave.

⁴ His name means “born in Babylon.” He was the grandson of King Jehoiachin, the last king of Judah before exile, making Zerubbabel a direct descendant of David.

A high priest was established through a Levite named Joshua⁵, the grandson of the last high priest before exile.

The Crowning of Joshua and the Coming of The Branch

In this third subsection of the first portion of Zechariah, we see a remarkable coronation so to speak. This is accompanied by a fantastic Messianic prophecy.

This is not so much a vision as much as it is a prophetic drama acted out by Zechariah. Gold and silver are provided for Zechariah to make a crown and set the crown on Joshua's head as the high priest.

God then refers to the coming Messiah as "Branch."⁶ The Lord predicts that the Branch will build the temple of the Lord. Also, the Branch, the Messiah, will rule on His throne as a King-Priest. Zechariah placed the crown in the rebuilt temple to remind people of the King-Priest who was coming. The prophetic drama concludes with the prediction that those who are far off will one day come and build the Lord's temple. And they will know that God has sent the Messiah to them.

Two of the Three-fold Offices of Christ

The Messiah will come and be *both* King and Priest. This was a remarkable prediction because in the history of Israel, those two offices were always kept separate. The king was established to represent God and His laws to the people. And the high priest was to represent the people before God. These roles were singular and not meant to have any crossover.

Do you remember when King Saul decided that he would offer burnt offerings because he was tired of waiting on Samuel? After that overstep, God determined to remove Saul from office. Or remember when proud King Uzziah decided to take on a priestly duty by taking a censor and making an incense offering? Uzziah was infected with leprosy on his forehead and would remain one the rest of his life.

However, here Zechariah crowns Joshua, the high priest, as king. Interestingly, Joshua shares the same name in the Hebrew as Jesus:

⁵ Joshua was the grandson of the last high priest before exile, a man named Seraiah.

⁶ The Old Testament uses this term translated as *Branch* six times in the Old Testament. Once it is used to refer to the branch of a tree or bush or vine (Hosea 8:7). The other five are all prophecies pointing to the Messiah (Isaiah 4:2; Jeremiah 23:5; Jeremiah 33:15; Zechariah 3:8, 6:12).

Jeshua, which means *Yahweh saves*. Obviously, Joshua is not taking over Zerubbabel's position as prince and leader. The priests were from the tribe of Levi. The king had to be a descendant of David, meaning from the tribe of Judah.

But the prophecy that the Messiah would be both a forever king and an eternal priest was laid out by David himself in the 110th Psalm: "The Lord has sworn an oath and will not take it back: 'You are a priest forever according to the pattern of Melchizedek.'" (Psalm 118:47) In this prophetic drama, Joshua is not the main character. Instead our attention is directed to the One that Joshua prefigures, Jesus, the perfect King-Priest.

Christ Will Rule as King

Christ will wear the crown and rule as King. The baby born in Bethlehem would be crowned with thorns in His first advent. But in His second advent, Jesus will be crowned with glory⁸ as He comes to reign in victory.

In Zechariah 6:12, the Lord says, "Behold the man..." God is drawing our attention to Jesus Christ's coming. And in a remarkable bookend, Pontius Pilate mocks Jesus by making him wear a thorny crown and a royal purple robe. And what does Pilate say to the people? He inadvertently quotes God here in Zechariah 6:12: "Behold the man." Perhaps Pilate meant "behold the accused" or something like that. However, it is likely that John saw the deeper, richer meaning of Pilate's unwitting part in an encore to this drama.

"Behold the man whose name is Branch." Branch was a messianic term used by Jeremiah and Isaiah. It reminds us that Jesus was born in humble, insignificant circumstances. But the Lord is clear that the Messiah will "branch out from his place and build the Lord's temple." This was an especially significant promise to the people descended from the northern kingdom, as nobody from David's line had sat on the throne of Israel for over six hundred years. David's line there had seemingly ended. That family tree looked dead, lifeless, cut off into a stump.

And then a virgin gave birth to the Branch of David in the City of David. The Branch grew into the mighty Tree of Life whose branches would reach out to the ends of the earth. And when Christ returns, he will "sit on his throne and rule."

⁷ See also Hebrews 7:1-3.

⁸ Revelation 19:12

This reminds us that the end and fulfillment of all prophetic Scripture that we read will be the crowning of the Lord Jesus as the King comes to reign forever.”⁹

Christ Will Be the Eternal High Priest

“He will be the priest on his throne.” Remember, the priest served as the mediator between sinful people and the Holy God. The high priest had to be united with the people he represented. He had to identify with them. However, he also had to be consecrated and set apart in holiness so he could approach God in the holiest of holy places in the temple on behalf of the people. The Messiah was God in flesh, because He “had to be like his brothers and sisters in every way, so that he could become a merciful and faithful high priest in matters pertaining to God, to make atonement for the sins of the people.” (Hebrews 2:17).

According to the text, the priest will also be seated on a throne. The priests of the Old Testament never sat. There were no chairs in the temple. The high priest never sat because his work was never complete. High priests had to continually offer sacrifices for their own sins and the people.¹⁰

But we read that Christ, as our High Priest, “after offering one sacrifice for sins forever, sat down at the right hand of God. He is now waiting until his enemies are made his footstool.” (Hebrews 10:12-13). There is no continual sacrifice. Jesus Messiah was our once-for-all-time sacrifice.

Christ will come and be our King-Priest. This means that in Christ alone can we experience true peace in our souls. There is no more tension between the spiritual and the material in Christ. As Son of God and Son of Man, Jesus exists completely and beautifully in both offices of King and Priest. As Christians, we will struggle with the process of sanctification because who we were before becoming a Christian will influence who we are becoming in Christ.

This understanding of the titles or offices of Christ comforts us. Our old sinful self, focused selfishly on the here and now, will be in conflict with the righteousness of Christ that we receive when we make Jesus our Lord and Savior. Our spiritual will struggle with our physical. Just like in the Old Testament when the king of Israel would struggle with the priest.

⁹ It sort of makes one want to listen to Handel’s *Messiah* and park on the *Hallelujah Chorus* for a while.

¹⁰ Hebrews 7:27

This internal struggle, that mirrors the struggle between king and priest in ancient Israel, will cause anxiety, guilt, as well as restless, sleepless nights because within that conflict we will struggle to experience the peace of God.

However, spiritual and physical can find harmony. Our King-Priest, Jesus Messiah, will be “peaceful counsel between them.” Christ reconciled those two offices into Himself. There is no more tug-of-war going on between those spheres of physical and spiritual. In Jesus, both offices find completion and fulfillment. This means Jesus and Jesus alone can bring people true peace.

This is why we can say, with complete confidence, that if a person doesn't know Jesus, they will not know true peace. Sure, there may be moments where things are quiet. There may be seasons when things seem to go fine. But unless Jesus is both your high priest and your king, deep inside you won't know true peace and rest.

You need a priest to atone for your guilt before God. You need that high priest to deal with your guilt in the presence of the Holy God. Jesus was offered as the perfect, once-for-all-time sacrifice for sins. Trust in Him and that sacrifice applies to all of your sins.

You need a perfect King to rule over your heart forever. Jesus fulfills that role as well. He is the perfect King-Priest, who can bring peace to the soul. No need to cobble together some weird combination of bits and pieces of this world to try to find a functional spiritual system to meet our needs. To do that is impossible. There is no earthly way to find purpose and peace in one thing, let alone in one person. However, because of God's mercy and compassion, people who are far away can still come to God through the Messiah. Everything we need is found in the King-Priest, Jesus the Messiah. Trust in Him today.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS FOR FURTHER THOUGHT:

Prophecy should exalt Jesus Christ and bring people into surrendering to His authority. How do we respond to Biblical prophecy? Do we attempt to speculate on what and how this will come to pass in current events or do we, instead, surrender and submit to the ultimate authority of the Lord Jesus, our King-Priest?

Should believers fear God's judgment in any sense? (Consider 1 Cor. 3:10-15 and 2 Cor. 5:9-11)

To what degree should we use fear of coming judgment verses God's love in our witnessing and evangelism?

How would your life change if you were totally committed to building God's temple (the church)?