

Midweek of Lent 3

March 11, 2026

Text: Zechariah 6:9-13

Other Texts: The Passion of Our Lord Jesus Christ Part III: The Palace of the High Priest

“The Kingly Priest”

Grace, mercy and peace be yours from God our Father through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, the Lamb of our salvation.

The text for this evening is from Zechariah chapter 6:

⁹ And the word of the LORD came to me: ¹⁰ “Take from the exiles Heldai, Tobijah, and Jedaiah, who have arrived from Babylon, and go the same day to the house of Josiah, the son of Zephaniah. ¹¹ Take from them silver and gold, and make a crown, and set it on the head of Joshua, the son of Jehozadak, the high priest. ¹² And say to him, ‘Thus says the LORD of hosts, “Behold, the man whose name is the Branch: for he shall branch out from his place, and he shall build the temple of the LORD. ¹³ It is he who shall build the temple of the LORD and shall bear royal honor, and shall sit and rule on his throne. And there shall be a priest on his throne, and the counsel of peace shall be between them both.”’ ¹

As Christian citizens of the United States we live under what is commonly called the separation of church and state in civil parlance and Two Kingdom Theology in the church. Of course, we realize that these two are not exactly the same, especially with how the civil understanding is regularly distorted by the openly immoral who fear even the most basic morality being imposed upon them. Yet, despite the corruptions, our Lord did say, “Render to Caesar the things that are Caesar’s, and to God the things that are God’s.”²

That’s why our text this evening seems odd, even wrong, for it is about the high priest being crowned as king. Doesn’t that sound like a confusion of church and state? Now we might say, “This is the Old Testament and things were different.” And that is often quite true. Yet, it’s not that simple, for the Lord had actually forbidden such a dual role *under the old covenant*.

As an example, King Uzziah had entered the temple to offer incense, a duty reserved for the priests. When the king in his pride raged against the priests who opposed him, God struck him with leprosy on his forehead. Now he was banned not only from the temple but also from his own royal palace, forced to live separate from everyone until his death.³ And the fact that there is no record of a high priest trying to take the throne speaks to the reality that they knew better.

So what then is happening when the Lord commands that the high priest Joshua receive the royal crown? At first, we might think that God is making an exception in this particular instance by allowing Joshua to be both priest and king. However, that is not the case. First, there was no king

¹ Zechariah 6:9-13. All quotes are from *The Holy Bible, English Standard Version (ESV)* unless otherwise noted.

² Matthew 22:21.

³ 2 Chronicles 26:16-21.

anymore; Zechariah is prophesying after the return from the Babylonian Captivity when the Jews were under the Persian emperor. Second, Zerubbabel was the political leader of the Jewish returnees and, while Joshua worked closely with him, he did not replace him.

So, again, what is happening here? Zechariah is a prophet. He received God's Word and was to proclaim it to the people. In this case, God's Word came with an action by which a future reality was revealed. By Joshua, the high priest, receiving a royal crown, he serves as a type, a picture, of Jesus. (By the way, Jesus' name in Hebrew is Y'shua, or Joshua.) Perhaps it seemed strange to Zechariah to combine the authority of the spiritual realm with the authority of the political realm. But he did not question God. If the Almighty had decided that a priest could sit on the throne as king and there would be harmony between the two offices, then it must be okay.

Surely there was very little harmony between church and state at the time of Jesus. The high priest's office was held by Annas until the Romans deposed him in favor of his son-in-law Caiaphas. There was harmony between them: they were united in contempt for the Romans, who held political power, and for Jesus, who was a threat to their spiritual power. They led the Sanhedrin to convict Jesus of blasphemy. That was easy. The hard part was convincing Pontius Pilate to authorize the death penalty for a blasphemer, as Rome did not care about such things.

For his part, Pilate had no love for the Jewish leadership, but they had to cooperate to maintain peace. The Roman governor had the power to free Jesus or crucify him. Convinced of Jesus' innocence, Pilate tried to release Him. When the crowd, at the ongoing instigation of the priests and rulers, demanded the release of Barabbas instead, Pilate ordered his soldiers to brutally flog Jesus as punishment (even though Pilate knew Jesus was innocent!). He then had Jesus presented again to the mob, this time dressed by the mocking soldiers as a king in a scarlet robe and crown of thorns, whose blood had begun to flow, to be shed as a priestly sacrifice.

So Jesus came out, wearing the crown of thorns and the purple robe. Pilate said to them, "Behold the man!"⁴

Did you catch the echo from Zechariah's prophecy? He wrote, "Behold, the man [Joshua] whose name is the Branch: for he shall branch out from his place, and he shall build the temple of the LORD." Now Pilate announced, "Behold the man [Jesus/Joshua]!" Yes, here is the man who would fulfill Zechariah's prophecy, who was foreshadowed by Joshua in symbolic action.

How tragic this all is! The priests condemned *the* High Priest whom every priest and high priest typified. The governor and his goons mocked and ridiculed *the* King of all kings, who ultimately had given them their authority, treating Him as a joke.⁵

True, Jesus didn't look very priestly or kingly as he stood on Pilate's porch, beaten and bloody, crowned with thorns. But we recognize Him! We recall the pictures painted by the prophets: the Suffering Servant in Isaiah, the son of man in Daniel, the priest-king in Zechariah. And we hear

⁴ John 19:5. Was the robe scarlet or purple? The Gospel accounts say both. Both colors represent royalty and were likely used to mock Jesus as "King of the Jews," with purple-red dyes often used interchangeably to represent royal garments at that time. The robe was likely a worn-out, reddish-purple military cloak, making it appear both purple and red, which means both are correct.

⁵ Matthew 28:18; John 19:11; Romans 13:1; Ephesians 1:20-22.

in awed silence, worshipping this man who looks so pitiful yet looms so powerful. For what other king is strong enough to submit to death for His subjects' freedom from eternal death? Pilate wasn't even strong enough to defend an innocent man when his own prestige and career were on the line. And what other priest is so aware of the damning consequences of sin that he would offer his own blood as a payment? Far from thinking of sin, Annas and Caiaphas were focused on shedding Jesus' blood to keep their power; what Jesus calls *the greater sin*.⁶

This Great High Priest submitted to the corrupt priesthood so that He could offer the once-for-all sacrifice that sinful priests never could: *offering Himself* as the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. This King of all kings and Lord of all lords submitted to the injustice of a temporal ruler so that He could fight the real battle against the real enemies, the real tyrants: sin, death, the devil, and hell. The fight that cost Him His life so we can have life.

This man is given the curious title of the Branch, a name He is also given in Isaiah chapter 11. There He emerges from the stump of Jesse, the once-great royal dynasty of David. New life would appear where it appeared where had been only a dead end. And the Branch would rebuild the temple of the Lord. The returned exiles may have hoped that their temple, left in ruins by the Babylonian invaders, would finally be rebuilt. And it was, in part due to Joshua and Zechariah's ministries. And this was important; necessary. But that is not the fulfillment of Zechariah's prophecy. For Joshua, a priest in the line of Aaron, could only symbolize the coming new reality. The reality fulfilled in Jesus, who was not a priest in the line of Aaron, but of ancient Melchizedek, who was both the King of Salem and a priest of God Most High.⁷

Jesus—the Branch—would build the temple. The physical temple was rebuilt in the days of Joshua the high priest, but that temple would again be destroyed, never to be rebuilt. Destroyed because of Israel's rejection of Jesus as their Priest and King! But the temple built by Jesus would never be destroyed. Truly, the gates of hell itself cannot prevail against it. For it is not built with brick and mortar but with living stones. And as these stones, Christians, are incorporated into the temple by baptism and faith in Jesus, they, *we*, then become kingly priests!

As you come to him, a living stone rejected by men but in the sight of God chosen and precious, you yourselves like *living stones* are being built up as a *spiritual house*, to be a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ...[Y]ou are a chosen race, a *royal priesthood*, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light.⁸

Joshua must have looked impressive clothed in the garments of both the high priest and the king of Israel. But it was the one he foreshadowed who be a truly impressive figure, combining those two offices and carrying them out in perfect harmony. Jesus crucified. Jesus risen, ascended, and glorified. As our Priest, He who offered himself on the altar of the cross for our sins intercedes for us, pleading the merits of His once-for-all sacrifice. As our King, the crown of thorns

⁶ John 19:11.

⁷ Genesis 14:18-20; Psalm 110:4; Hebrews 5:6.

⁸ 1 Peter 2:4-5, 9; *emphasis added*.

replaced by many diadems,⁹ He rules over us with divine compassion, providing protection from our enemies, judgment against evil, and vindication of His elect saints. We have these already now by faith, even as the consummation at His visible return is ever closer, when we will experience His glorious rule, even sharing in it, in the new creation.

So now, dear Christians, as you live under His gracious rule, consider how Jesus having both the political and spiritual offices shows that He is not only the ruler of the Church, but the world, truly all of creation. See how Jesus, who rules all things with omnipotent power, rules on behalf of His Church, His people. See how then, even though we live under two governments, we are under one King. Therefore, we do not live two lives: a church/Christian life in some circumstances, and then a worldly/unchristian life in others. We are to be kingly priests, living a life of prayer, holiness, and sacrifice that bring glory to our God and Savior in all that we do.

So let us remember Jesus, our Priest and King, in both His humility and glory, that in faith we live as His forgiven people, as loyal citizens of His kingdom, as royal priests, in righteousness and purity now and forever. Amen!

⁹ Revelation 19:2.