

Choose God

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[0 : 00] Okay. Okay. We are going to be in Zechariah chapter 6 today.

! And because I am bailing, I want to next week I want to be in Malachi. The minor prophets. We'll have touched the entire minor prophets. And so I've still got to work on what we're going to be. But there's more in Zechariah and there's great stuff in Zechariah. But I kind of wanted to feel a little completion in our journey of the minor prophets. So we're going to be looking at Malachi next week. But Zechariah chapter 6 is where we're going to be today. But before we get to that, before we get there, I just want to point this hidden gem from the Apostle Paul.

[1 : 08] How many of you are really familiar with this and know this verse and embrace it as your life verse? Not really your life verse, but you know it, right?

None of us really want to embrace it as our life verse. But it's a very important verse. 1 Corinthians chapter 15 verse 19. If in Christ we have hope in this life only, we are of all people most to be pitied. If the hope that you and I as Christians, as believers in God, if you and I who as men and women have placed our faith in Christ and we have chosen to serve Him, if we are of that group and it turns out that Christ is only valuable in this life, then we lose.

That's what this verse says. That if there's no life after this life, then serving Christ is a bad idea. Just think about that. Because there's people out there who say, oh, God wants you to be blessed right now. God wants you to be healthy, happy, and wealthy.

[2 : 28] And if you're serving God, you're going to be blessed. That's not what the Bible says. The Bible says that serving God, humbling yourself before Him, what does He say?

All who live godly will what? Suffer persecution. You see, we are in the world, but we are not of the world.

As believers, there should be something different about us. Our hopes, our goals, our agendas, the way we handle ourselves, the way we conduct ourselves. And it should be a stark difference between the world and the believing church because we're not like them.

I just want to start there because it's going to become important as we go through this. You see, there are two ways to approach any ethical situation.

There's two ways to approach any question of, hmm, what should I do here? There is the moral way, which all morality is based in spiritual faith, and it comes from God.

[3 : 54] You know, God decides what's right and wrong, and God has, He is the one who defined what it means to be moral.

And then there's the, I called it legal or worldly way. Ever hear of situational ethics? You know, what do I do depending upon the circumstances, you know?

If I am a huge, huge Washington State Cougar fan, I might not want to wear that loud and proud to Husky Stadium and sit in the student section.

Right? I might be able to sit on the visitor side, but not the student section. It could not go well with me, especially if the Cougs win, right? Right? So, I've got a couple of, let me just, do you remember that the Romans used to put the Christians in the Colosseum and give them a choice whether they would recant their faith or not?

And if they recanted their faith, they were let out of the Colosseum. If they failed to recant their faith, the lions were let into the Colosseum. You guys remember that? Yeah, yeah.

[5 : 13] Well, there's two, do you believe in Jesus? Let me think about this. If I say yes, I become lion chow.

If I say no, I get to go home. How are we going to handle that? Are we looking at this life only?

Or do we have a perspective that goes beyond this life? You see, if my personal perspective has my eyes on eternity, I don't care if I'm lion chow.

I mean, it's probably not going to be pleasant. It's going to involve suffering. It's probably not going to be fun to watch, especially from the first row where I'm at. But if I go to glory afterwards.

But not too many of us are being challenged with running away from lions. Right? How about this one? How do you conduct your business? How do you conduct your business?

[6 : 21] Do you conduct your business? Do you cut corners to find room for every bit of profit? Do you perhaps behave underhandedly so that you can maximize the bottom line?

Are you more interested in what you're bringing home than what you're putting out? That's an ethical question.

And the Bible tells us to do all things as if we're serving the Lord. Do you think God wants us to put out a half-baked product? How about this one?

Marriage. Love. How do we live our lives? Divorce.

Remarriage. All of these issues come into play. What are we looking at? Are we looking at today? Or are we looking at tomorrow?

[7 : 35] And for those that are truly spiritual, stinking seat belt and helmet laws. Doggone it. You know? That literally is on the same level.

Am I worried about my comfort today? Or am I worried about my testimony? And so Dick has reminded me time and again to wear my seat belt because that's the law.

But this is the reality. But this is the reality. Is my focus just on my comfort and what I want here on this earth? Or is my focus on tomorrow and the fact that I serve a greater cause?

You see, there is a day coming. And we're going to get into this in the text here today where there will be no difference between living morally with our eyes on eternity and living under the eternal rule of God.

The world and it's all coming together. We'll get to that. But here's our key idea. Believers. They think, they choose and live according to an eternal perspective.

[8 : 46] According to the faithfulness of God. Knowing that He who is promised is faithful and we'll see it through. So, having said that, let's take a look at Zechariah 6, verses 9-15.

Zechariah 6, verses 9-15. And the word of the Lord came to me. Take from the exiles Heldeah, Tobiah, and Jedidiah, who have arrived from Babylon and go to the same house of Josiah, the same day to the house of Josiah, the son of Zephaniah.

Take from them silver and gold and make a crown and set it on the head of Joshua, the son of, yeah, that dude, the high priest.

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.

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.

[10 : 09] And the council of peace shall be between them both. And the crown shall be in the temple of the Lord as a reminder to Helm, Tobiah, Jedidiah, Hen, the son of Zephaniah.

And those who are far off shall come and help to build the temple of the Lord. And you shall know that the Lord of hosts has sent me to you. And this shall come to pass if you diligently obey the voice of the Lord your God.

Now, I've got to be honest. At first reading, that is just such a powerful passage of Scripture that demands money. It's not an easy read, is it? But let's see if we can break this down just a little bit and talk about it.

Now, you have to understand, if you've been here, you know that we've been going through Zechariah, and there's been this duality of visions that we've been working our way through.

And this passage right here is what those visions have been aiming at. Okay? We have been coming down to this particular passage. Now, just to briefly review, the first vision was pointing to the fact that the promised 70 years of exile was winding down.

[11 : 29] God was getting ready to bring the nation of Israel back from Babylon. And that time frame was rapidly approaching. And because of that, there was a second set of visions, which was to remind the people of why they had been sent into captivity.

If you remember, it was because of idolatry, because they failed to live for the Lord, because they were living according to the world's standards, not according to God's standards.

And God said, enough, and sent them into captivity. The next set, the third set of visions that he had was God's promise to cleanse the people.

Excuse me. God promised that he was going to wash them, that he was going to forgive and make them clean. And then the last one, which we talked about last week, was a pair of visions that were looking at the challenge we each face.

Will you follow God? Will you participate? Will you be on the sidelines or will you be involved? Will you be engaged?

[12:40] So we start from the fact that the captivity is over. Remember, you were there because of your idolatry and God has promised that he's going to cleanse you and the question is before you, will you participate?

And then we come here to chapter six where we hear about the branch. We get the word of the Lord about the branch. And notice in verse nine, the word of the Lord came to me.

So this is a direct revelation from God. And let's take a look at what it says. The first thing is, I want you to go, there's going to be this set of exiles that are showing up and they're packing some cash. They've got gold and silver. I want you to take that gold and silver and I want you to go over to the silversmith, the goldsmith, and I want you to make a crown. Okay? Bear with me.

Okay? Just. Does that look like one crown upright and one crown upside down? Does it? And if you look at them, they're slightly different.

[13:45] This one's a little bit darker than this one, right? But they come together and make one solid ring. Is that cool? I have this vision of taking a gold crown and a silver crown and they're separate, but they can be worked together kind of interlocking like this, which is important, but we'll get to that in a little bit.

But there's something about this that... Let me read this. Zechariah 6, verse 11.

Take from them silver and gold and make a crown and set it on the head of Joshua, the son of Jehodiak, the high priest.

Did that make you sit up a little bit and go, wait a minute. I thought, who normally wears the crown? The king.

Not the high priest, the king. In fact, the high priest, according to the law of Moses, has got this special turban that's got this engraving talking about the nation of Israel and set apart and holy to God.

[15:08] They've already got a headdress. Why does he need a crown? He's not the king. What's going on here? Let's read on.

Verse 12. Verse 12. And say to him, Thus says the Lord of hosts, Behold the man whose name is the branch. Okay, we've got to talk about this just a second.

Isaiah chapter 11, verse 1 is where the idea of this branch comes in. Okay? And it says, There shall come forth a shoot from the stump of Jesse.

A branch from his roots shall bear fruit. Well, that means that there...

Okay, what does that mean? Are we talking about trees here? No. What we're talking about is a family tree. And Jesse, who is one of the patriarchs of the nation of Israel, He's going to have a descendant.

[16:15] And it's a specific descendant. The branch. There's lots of branches. There's lots of different shoots from Jesse's stump, right? There's, what, 12 tribes or 13 tribes of Israel, right?

But there's going to be one in particular who's identified as the branch. Turn over to Jeremiah chapter 23.

And we're going to take a look at verse 5. Verse 5 says this, Behold, the days are coming, declares the Lord, when I will rise up for David, a righteous branch.

And he shall... Okay, who is David? Just the greatest king for the nation, right? The man who's hard after God. We all know the shepherd who became king, right?

There shall be... Raise up for David a righteous branch, and he shall reign as king and deal wisely, and shall execute justice and righteousness in the land.

[17:19] Okay, so in Isaiah, we heard that the branch was coming. And Jeremiah, we understand that he's also going to be a ruler. But now, here in Zechariah, what does it say?

Verse 11, 12, it says, For he shall branch out from his place and shall build the temple of the Lord. 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 shall be a priest.

There shall be a priest on his throne and a council of peace shall be between them both. Think of it this way. I'm a dad.

And one of my titles is dad. Okay? I'm also a husband. So I'm a husband. Those are two separate identities. Right? I can't treat my wife as if I was her dad, and I can't treat my kids as if I was their husband.

Right? I'm two different people. But both those people are me. The branch is going to be a king. He is also going to be a priest.

[18:39] Hence, two crowns. Both of them are going to sit on the throne and there will be peace between them. Meaning that his rule as king will be in step.

It will be in the same vein as his role as priest. So he won't have any problems with his rule.

We understand there's some things that the president does that aren't quite nice. Right? Some things that we really wouldn't approve of within the church.

But he's the president. He's not running a church. You realize there's... If I'm running the government, I'm going to be carrying a lot of authority.

I'm going to make things happen. It's going to be yes, sir, no, sir. It's going to be you're late. Too bad. You're fired. Right? That's not how you run a church. This is...

[19:47] Man, I'm just thrilled you made it. What can I do to serve you? How can I make your life better? What can I do for you? Where are you at? How are you doing? Because I'm a pastor.

I'm a shepherd. I'm caring for you. But when I walk over here to be the president, I don't care how you're doing. Do your job. Right?

But in the branch, both of those will come together, king and priest, priest and king, and they will be at peace with one another. I couldn't do it, but the branch can.

All right. Then it ends with... Keep reading in Zechariah. Verse 14. And the crown shall be in the temple of the Lord as a reminder to Helm, Tobiah, Jedidiah, Hen, the son of Zephaniah.

It's going to be a reminder to the priesthood that the branch is coming. So think about this. So the word of the Lord comes to Zechariah.

[20:51] He says, Hey, there's some exiles that are coming home. They've got some gold and some silver. I want you to take. I want you to make a crown. I want you to put that crown on the high priest and tell him the branch is coming.

And then I want you to set it on his shelf where every day he's going to see it. Because the branch is coming. That's what this passage is talking about, right?

Until we get to the very end of it. Verse 15. Those who are far off shall come and help to build the temple of the Lord.

And you shall know that the Lord of hosts has sent me to you. And this shall come to pass if you will diligently obey the voice of the Lord your God.

If. If you will diligently obey. And we talked about if a little bit last week. And if you read through chapters 7 and 8, it comes out and it just, it's there.

[21:56] If. Some people misinterpret this if. They get it wrong.

They think that it depends upon them. The branch, whether or not he's going to come, is dependent upon whether or not they're doing what they're supposed to be doing. That's not the case.

Think of it this way. Think of it. Think of it. I'm going to get in my car and I'm going to drive to Safeway. And I've got room in the back if you want to hop in.

Okay? My going to Safeway, is that dependent upon whether or not you hop in the back? Not at all. I told you I'm going to Safeway.

You can go to Safeway too if you want to hop in the back. If you don't want to hop in the back, guess what's going to happen? I'm still going to Safeway. God's got a plan.

[23:01] That plan is he's going to send the branch. The branch is going to sit on the throne. He will be king and he will be priest. And it's going to happen. And if you participate, I'm sorry, and your participation in that is dependent upon whether or not your behavior is such.

I'm not doing a good job with this. Let me try it again. I was driving back from Wenatchee.

No, I was driving back from Kashmir yesterday. And as I'm cruising down the road, Christmas happened behind me. You know what I mean? The reds and the blues.

Woo! Right? And I'm like, gently pulled off to the side and didn't worry about it. Do you know why? Why? Because I had listened to somebody.

I had my seatbelt on and I was following all the laws of the road. And so I saw the Christmas lights go off and I just pulled over and didn't have a worry at all.

[24 : 16] And sure enough, he went by me about a million miles an hour. I pulled back on, kept on driving, going woo! Because I was part of the, I was doing the right thing, right? I was with it. I was going with the flow.

I was doing what I was supposed to be doing and he had no fear for me. Had I been doing what I normally do, driving a billion miles an hour without a seatbelt and the tunes up really loud and the Christmas lights went off, my emotions would have been somewhat different.

The branch is coming. And if you've got your seatbelt on and you're cruising along like you're supposed to, you get to participate in it and it's going to be a blessing.

But if you are doing all of the same old things, if you're choosing your own way, living according to the world, if you're not following after the Lord, then guess what's going to happen?

The branch will steamroll you. So when it says in here that this is coming and I'm putting this reminder up here because this shall come to pass if you diligently obey, you get to participate with the branch if you're doing what you're supposed to be doing.

[25 : 32] Otherwise, God's still going to Safeway. Does that help you understand what it means now? You get it. God's going to do what God's going to do because God is faithful and God is true.

And we can either come along for the ride with peace, joy, and happiness or not. Our challenge. When I read this and I thought of the branch, instantly my mind went to the words of the Apostle Paul, which we can find in the book of Romans. If you've got your Bible, turn to Romans chapter 11. Romans chapter 11. It's on page 1060 in my Bible. And if you're really super spiritual, it'll be on that. I'm just kidding. Romans chapter 11, verses 17 through 22.

But if some branches were broken off and you, although a wild olive shoot, were grafted in among the others and now share in the nourishing root of the olive tree, do not be arrogant toward the branches.

[26 : 57] If you are, remember it is not you who support the root, but the root that supports you. Then you will say, branches were broken off so that I might be grafted in.

That's true. They were broken off because of their unbelief. But you stand fast through faith. So do not become proud, but fear.

For if God did not spare the natural branches, neither will He spare you. Note then the kindness and the severity of God.

Severity towards those who have fallen, but God's kindness to you, provided you continue in His kindness. Otherwise, you too will be cut off.

Now, Christ is the branch. He's not one of the branches. He is the branch. The big one, right? But my friends, we have a choice.

[28 : 14] Will we live according to the Word of God? Will we face each situation with an eternal perspective? Will we live for today?

Paul's reminding us that the Jews had been living for themselves in the day, and they were cut off. And that challenge remains for us.

Now, I'll be honest with you. We started off with 1 Corinthians, you know. If only for this life we have hope in Christ, then we have above all people are to be pitied, right?

The reality is this. It's not easy serving the Lord. And if you are making that choice every day, I salute you and I encourage you.

Keep it up. I know it's hard. Saying no to temptation, I can do anything but that, right?

[29 : 16] And if you are serving the Lord, if you are in the Word, if you are doing the self-discipline that it takes to be the man or the woman that God has called you to be, keep it up.

Keep going. I know the way is hard. But I promise you and I remind you that the reward is great.

That God has promised that He will never forget your sacrifice.

That God knows the daily walk that you are doing. He knows how you are serving Him. You might not have all the bells and the whistles and the yee-ha-ha right now, but God is in heaven and everything is being recorded.

And He will never forget you. It talks in James about the crowns that we will receive. He says the rewards that wait for us. Glory is going to be glorious for those of us that are serving the Lord today.

And I know it's hard. We live in a hell-bent world. We live... There's so much pressure on us.

There's so many people that are just trying to drive us away from God.

[30 : 27] And if you're clinging to that, good for you. Keep going. Encourage your neighbor. Let us encourage one another that we as Paul can finish the race well.

for great will be our reward. And I... It's okay to keep your eye on that. That's why He tells us about us. To encourage us today.

Because let's be honest, it's really easy to cut corners, isn't it? It's really easy to say yes to temptation. It's really easy to say nobody's looking.

I'm... It's easy. And if you are fighting that fight, sometimes well, sometimes not so good, keep the fight going. God will not abandon you.

God will not forget your sacrifice. As He was faithful, He will be faithful. Keep your eyes on the Lord.

[31 : 25] Now, to be honest, there's the other side. And in my personal opinion, perhaps the hardest.

If you are living and quite honestly not really serving the Lord, you know you ought to be. But you're making wrong choices.

It is so hard to stop doing that. But I want you to. Not only do I want you to, you need to. Not only do you need to, God is aware of what's going on.

Do the hard thing. You've heard that the hardest thing is to stop digging the hole, right? You know, you got your buddy who's digging himself in deeper and deeper.

Just put the shovel down, man. Just stop it. But it's so hard because we get stuck into a rut and we just keep digging that hole deeper and deeper.

[32 : 33] You guys know what I'm talking about. You guys know how it is to struggle with the same sin all the time. You never seem to get any victory over it and you really don't want to talk to people about it because it's a sin and you don't want to be judged and condemned.

Put the shovel down. Stop digging the hole. Let me tell you something. You come forward. You come talk to me or Frank or Jim.

Share your struggle. I promise you we are not going to judge you unless you're doing murder or something bad. And even then we're going to put our arm around you and we're going to walk with you to prison.

Not judging you but encouraging you to put the shovel down. Do you understand that we can come up alongside you as a believer no matter what sin it is that you're struggling with.

No matter what it is that you are just you're digging that hole. You come to me and I'm going to put my arm around you and I'm going to say we're going to stop digging that hole and we're going to start making forward strides. Yeah, what you're doing is wrong.

[33 : 38] But it's so much better you stop digging and start climbing the ladder. You see when we take our eyes off of what's going on here and we feel bad because oh everybody's going to know that I'm not perfect.

Everybody already knows you're not perfect. Everybody knows nobody's perfect. Right? When we stop worrying about that and we start putting our eyes on the Lord and remembering God is faithful God is watching God is and we begin to live like that that's how we begin to make progress.

And I want to close with Hebrews chapter 11 verse 6 Without faith it is impossible to please God for whoever would draw near to God must believe that He exists and He rewards those who seek Him. It doesn't matter if you're doing great or if you're not doing great God is watching God knows and if you diligently seek Him He will see it and reward it.

And so I just I want to encourage you remember that remember the crown that they set in the temple to remind everybody that the branch was coming I want to remind you there's a day coming when we will all stand before the Lord either to receive reward or not.

[35 : 17] Please let's all of us be in the rewards line. Let's pray. Merciful God I know I know seems a little bit odd but Lord I hope that the truth that that you do reward those who diligently seek you that it doesn't matter how deep the hole is we can we can set the shovel down and we can start pursuing you.

The fact that you are faithful just like you said you would send the branch and the branch first came and now we're looking for him to come back as the ruler and the king but Lord I confess too often I see only the world around me and I fail to look up and to remember and so I'm certain that's true for each and every one of us here.

So I pray Lord that you would help us help us to take our eyes off of today in the limited scope of the world and help us to live mindful of the eternal hope that you have promised us.

I pray this in Jesus name Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.