

Title: **CHRIST THE BRANCH**
Text: Zechariah 6:12
Date: Sunday Morning — March 26, 2006
Tape # Zechariah #29
Reading: *Ezekiel 34:1-31*

In Ezekiel 34 the Lord God denounces all self-serving false prophets, those men who feed themselves upon his sheep rather than feeding his sheep, and declares the certainty of his wrath against them saying, “*Woe be to the shepherds of Israel that do feed themselves! Should not the shepherds feed the flock?*” (v. 3) — “*Behold, I am against the shepherds; and I will require my flock at their hand*” (v. 10). But this chapter is also a tremendous declaration of God’s saving grace in and by Christ our Good Shepherd, and gives assurance of the absolute safety and security of God’s elect, the sheep of his pasture. Let’s read what our God says concerning his sheep in this great chapter.

(Ezekiel 34:11-17) “For thus saith the Lord GOD; Behold, I, *even* I, will both search my sheep, and seek them out. (12) As a shepherd seeketh out his flock in the day that he is among his sheep *that are* scattered; so will I seek out my sheep, and will deliver them out of all places where they have been scattered in the cloudy and dark day. (13) And I will bring them out from the people, and gather them from the countries, and will bring them to their own land, and feed them upon the mountains of Israel by the rivers, and in all the inhabited places of the country. (14) I will feed them in a good pasture, and upon the high mountains of Israel shall their fold be: there shall they lie in a good fold, and *in* a fat pasture shall they feed upon the mountains of Israel. (15) I will feed my flock, and I will cause them to lie down, saith the Lord GOD. (16) I will seek that which was lost, and bring again that which was driven away, and will bind up *that which* was broken, and will strengthen that which was sick: but I will destroy the fat and the strong; I will feed them with judgment. (17) And *as for* you, O my flock, thus saith the Lord GOD; Behold, I judge between cattle and cattle, between the rams and the he goats.”

(Ezekiel 34:22-31) “Therefore will I save my flock, and they shall no more be a prey; and I will judge between cattle and cattle. (23) And I will set up one shepherd over them, and he shall feed them, *even* my servant David; he shall feed them, and he shall be their shepherd. (24) And I the LORD will be their God, and my servant David a prince among them; I the LORD have spoken *it*. (25) And I will make with them a covenant of peace, and will cause the evil beasts to cease out of the land: and they shall dwell safely in the wilderness, and sleep in the woods. (26) And I will make them and the places round about my hill a blessing; and I will cause the shower to come down in his season; there shall be showers of blessing. (27) And the tree of the field shall yield her fruit, and the earth shall yield her increase, and they shall be safe in their land, and shall know that I *am* the LORD, when I have broken the bands of their yoke, and delivered them out of the hand of those that served themselves of them. (28) And they shall no more be a prey to the heathen, neither shall the beast of the land devour them; but they shall dwell safely, and none shall make *them* afraid. (29) And I will raise up for them a plant of renown, and they shall be no more consumed with hunger in the land, neither bear the shame of the heathen any more. (30) Thus shall they know that I the LORD their God *am* with them, and *that* they, *even* the house of Israel, *are* my people, saith the Lord GOD. (31) And ye my flock, the flock of my pasture, *are* men, and I *am* your God, saith the Lord GOD.”

INTRODUCTION

In the prophecy of Ezekiel 34, which we read earlier, the Lord God promised that he would raise up for his sheep “*A Plant of Renown*” that would shelter and protect us from all danger and all shame (vv. 29-31).

(Ezekiel 34:29-31) “And I will raise up for them a plant of renown, and they shall be no more consumed with hunger in the land, neither bear the shame of the heathen any more. (30) Thus shall they know that I the LORD their God *am* with them, and *that* they, *even* the house of Israel, *are* my people, saith the Lord GOD. (31) And ye my flock, the flock of my pasture, *are* men, and I *am* your God, saith the Lord GOD.”

This Plant of Renown is our blessed Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ. He grew up before the Lord God “*as a tender plant and as a root out of a dry ground*” (Isa. 53:2), and grew into stately tree of renown in the mountain of the Lord, “*a goodly cedar,*” under the shadow of which we take refuge and dwell in safety (Ezek. 17:23-24).

This Plant of Renown, our glorious, famous, renowned Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, is set before us as the Branch of the Lord seven times in the Old Testament Scriptures (Psa. 80:15; Isa. 4: 2; 11:1; Jer. 23:5-6; 33:15-16; Zech. 3:8; 6:12). And this Plant of Renown is my subject tonight. I want to show you the beauty and glory, the blessedness and the fame of **CHRIST THE BRANCH**, as he is set before us in the Old Testament. We will begin with Zechariah 6:12 and work our way back to Psalm 80:15.

ZECHARIAH 6:12

Zechariah 6:12 is the last of seven distinct prophecies in the Old Testament identifying our Lord Jesus Christ as the Branch of the Lord.

(Zechariah 6:12) “And speak unto him, saying, Thus speaketh the LORD of hosts, saying, Behold the man whose name *is* The BRANCH; and he shall grow up out of his place, and he shall build the temple of the LORD.”

Here the Lord God calls for us to “*Behold the man whose name is The BRANCH.*” This word “*Behold,*” is a call to faith. The Lord God here says to all who read and hear the words of this prophecy to look to, believe in, and trust this Man, whose name is the Branch, the Lord Jesus Christ, his dear Son. Mark the wonderful features of his person; and behold him. He is “*the BRANCH.*” This is one of the prophetic names of him, in whom all the Old Testament saints lived and died in hope, the One they trusted as the Redeemer of Israel, and in whom they were accepted of God. — “*The man whose name is The BRANCH.*”

May God the Holy Spirit give us grace to hear and heed the call, and enable us to behold this wonderful Man, whose name is the BRANCH. You will notice that Zechariah was inspired to write his name in all capital letters, as if to call our attention to the importance of this name for our Savior. The Lord God calls for us to trust his Son, “*the BRANCH.*” Then he gives us seven assuring descriptions of this Branch, to encourage us to trust him. This is the Branch that God’s right hand planted. The descriptions of this BRANCH, his person, his glory, and his character, are all things that identify the BRANCH as our Lord Jesus Christ. They have their accomplishment in him alone. Look at them with me, one by one, and behold the Lord Jesus, as we pass do.

1. “**Behold the Man.**” — That Man of whom the Scriptures speak, “*whose name is the BRANCH,*” is the Man God promised to send as our Redeemer and Savior, the Man promised to our fallen parents in Genesis 3:15.

- The Seed of woman.
- The Seed of Abraham.

- The Seed of David.
- The Son of God.
- The Son of Man.

How blessed! Yes, he is *“the man,”* truly and properly man, as well as truly and properly God, all man and all God. Otherwise, he could never have saved us. As Hawker put it, “God and man, forming one Christ, alone could be suited for a Mediator to accomplish redemption by his blood.” This man is *“the BRANCH,”* the *“Plant of Renown”* God planted and raised up for us, under whose shadow our souls are made to dwell in safety.

2. ***“And he shall grow up out of his place.”*** — That certainly has reference to our Savior’s incarnation and **virgin birth**. This Man, the BRANCH did not grow up by the sowing and planting of man. No man had a hand in his being. This *“holy thing”* was conceived in the womb of a virgin by the Holy Spirit.

When the Lord God said, *“he shall grow up out of his place,”* he described our Savior’s virgin birth; but there is more here than just his virgin birth. When the Lord God declares, *“he shall grow up out of his place,”* there is clearly a reference to **eternity**. His *“goings forth have been from of old from everlasting”* (Mic. 5:2). What is his place? The place from which he comes is **heaven** itself (2 Cor. 8:9).

(2 Corinthians 8:9) “For ye know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that, though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, that ye through his poverty might be rich.”

His place, the place from which he grew is **the eternal counsels** of the triune God (Pro. 8:23, 30-31).

(Proverbs 8:23) “I was set up from everlasting, from the beginning, or ever the earth was.”

(Proverbs 8:30-31) “Then I was by him, as one brought up *with him*: and I was daily *his* delight, rejoicing always before him; (31) Rejoicing in the habitable part of his earth; and my delights *were* with the sons of men.”

The Psalmist asked, *“Who shall declare his generation?”* Yes, he is a rod out of the stem of Jesse, and a branch out of his roots. And he is, himself, the root of David, planted in the eternal purpose of God’s own sovereign decree, and budding forth as a BRANCH in his incarnation, death, resurrection, ascension, and glory.

What a BRANCH he is, of never-failing loveliness, everlastingly luscious and fruitful, in all the proclamations of his gospel, converting sinners, and comforting saints! Our Savior is an eternally perennial BRANCH to all his redeemed in grace and glory.

3. ***“And he shall build the temple of the LORD: Even he shall build the temple of the LORD.”*** — This is stated twice, as if to show us what an important and sure promise this is. The Lord Jesus Christ is the Builder of his house, the church of God (Matt. 16:18), which is here (and throughout the Word of God) said to be his temple, his dwelling place.

- The Church is compared to the temple of the Old Testament because the temple was placed on a mountain, lifted above the earth, highly exalted and safe.
- The materials used to build the temple were choice stones and excellent timber, symbolizing God’s elect, who are as lively stones built up into a spiritual house, fitly compacted together.
- The temple was a magnificent, glorious place (Ps. 87:3). — “Glorious things of thee are spoken, Zion, city of our God. He whose word cannot be broken, formed thee for his own abode.” — Oh, what glorious things our God has spoken concerning his church! She is a people — chosen in love — redeemed by blood — called and kept by grace — and there is no spot in her!

- It is called “*the temple of the Lord,*” because he built it, he dwelled in it, there he was worshipped, there he revealed himself, and there he met with his people (Ex. 25:22; 1 Cor. 3:16-17).

(Exodus 25:22) “And there I will meet with thee, and I will commune with thee from above the mercy seat, from between the two cherubims which are upon the ark of the testimony, of all *T H I N G S* which I will give thee in commandment unto the children of Israel.”

So it is with the church of God. Christ is the Foundation and Chief Cornerstone of it; and he is the wise master Builder who builds it. He builds it on himself and for himself. — By His Spirit. — By his grace! — By his Word. — But Christ is the Builder.

4. “**And he shall bear the glory.**”— Who else? He bought it with his blood. He builds it out of nothing. He makes it glorious in himself, with his own glory. Therefore, the glory of his house shall be hung on him alone (Isa. 22:24). — Truly, “*His glory is great in thy salvation: honour and majesty hast thou laid upon him*” (Ps. 21:5).— “*His work is honourable and glorious*” (Ps. 111:3). — “*And blessed be his glorious name for ever: and let the whole earth be filled with his glory; Amen, and Amen*” (Ps. 72:19).

5. “**And (he) shall sit and rule upon his throne.**” — Look yonder, there, in heaven, in heaven, having finished all his work on earth, our Savior is at ease and rests, and his rest is glorious! He rules over all flesh to give eternal life to his elect, ransomed ones, to save, protect, and perfect the purchase of his blood.

6. “**And he shall be a priest upon his throne.**” — “*The man whose name is the BRANCH,*” the One we are called to trust, our all-glorious Christ, is both Priest and King. By his one great sacrifice of himself, he has put away our sins forever. By his precious blood, he has perfected us forever. He is now seated upon his throne as our King, the King of Glory, crowned with glory and honor. He ever lives as our High Priest. He is both our Priest and our King. That means that all he seeks in his intercession for us, as he appears in the presence of God for us, presenting his blood, his sacrifice, and his righteousness to the Father, he shall have. This Priest is the King! He has power and authority as the King of Glory to effectually apply the benefits of his work and to effectually bestow the blessings of his grace, and to effectually accomplish the desires of his heart upon his people.

7. “**And the counsel of peace shall be between them both.**” — That simply means, “*The man whose name is the BRANCH,*” our almighty Christ shall, by his sovereign dominion and eternal, effectual priesthood, fulfill all the covenant of peace toward us, for us, and in us, by his omnipotent grace! To put it another way, “*He shall save his people from their sins!*”

I have purposefully spent the bulk of my time on Zechariah 6:12. Now, let’s look at the preceding prophecies of our Lord Jesus Christ as the Branch.

ZECHARIAH 3:8

(Zechariah 3:8) “Hear now, O Joshua the high priest, thou, and thy fellows that sit before thee: for they are men wondered at: for, behold, I will bring forth my servant the BRANCH.”

Here, the Lord God promised that he would send our Savior to perform his great purpose of grace in saving his people, making all his elect to be men wondered at, saying, “*I will bring forth my servant the BRANCH.*” He is the fruitful BRANCH, by whom...

- Satan is spoiled.
- God’s elect are plucked as brands out of the fire.
- God’s chosen ones are washed.

- Our filthy garments are taken away.
- By whose hand our iniquities are made to pass from us.
- Who clothes poor sinners with a change of raiment, even the garments of salvation.
- And sits the fair miter of “*holiness to the LORD*” upon us, making us kings and priests unto our God.
- It is he who removed the iniquity of Zion in one day, by his one great sacrifice for us!

JEREMIAH 33:15

In Jeremiah 33:15 our Savior is called “*the Branch of Righteousness.*”

(Jeremiah 33:15-16) “In those days, and at that time, will I cause the Branch of righteousness to grow up unto David; and he shall execute judgment and righteousness in the land. (16) In those days shall Judah be saved, and Jerusalem shall dwell safely: and this *is the name* wherewith she shall be called, The LORD our righteousness.”

He is the Branch who brought in everlasting righteousness for us, by his obedience to God as our Substitute, living and dying as our Representative. By his life and death in our place, our blessed Savior fully satisfied all the requirements of God’s holy law and inflexible justice on our behalf, executing “*judgment and righteousness*” (the just verdict of righteousness) in the earth, by whom we are made the very righteousness of God (2 Cor. 5:21). So complete and perfect is our righteousness in him that all his redeemed, the whole Israel of God, are named after him, “*the Lord our Righteousness.*” That is because we are one with him, truly one with him!

JEREMIAH 23:5

- Now, turn back a few pages to Jeremiah 23:5.

(Jeremiah 23:5-6) “Behold, the days come, saith the LORD, that I will raise unto David a righteous Branch, and a King shall reign and prosper, and shall execute judgment and justice in the earth. (6) In his days Judah shall be saved, and Israel shall dwell safely: and this *is his name* whereby he shall be called, THE LORD OUR RIGHTEOUSNESS.”

In Jeremiah 33:15-16, the language is almost exactly the same as the language used here; but the slight differences are very significant. Both passages are talking about this gospel day of grace and salvation. Both are assurances that all God’s elect, all the Israel of God shall be saved.

- In chapter 33, the Lord God speaks of his Son as “*the Branch of Righteousness.*” Here he calls him “*the Righteous Branch.*” Our Lord Jesus Christ is both the Branch who is Righteous and the Branch through whom righteousness flows.
- In chapter 33 he tells us that “*he shall grow up unto David.*” Here he says, “*I shall raise unto David.*”
- In chapter 33 it was promised that our Lord Jesus would “*grow up unto David,*” speaking of his own accomplishments as our Mediator. Here it was promised that the Lord God would, “*raise unto David a righteous Branch,*” speaking of him as the Mediator raised up by God the Father.
- In chapter 33, he says, “*he shall execute judgment and righteousness.*” Here he says, “*he shall execute judgment and justice.*” But the words are the same in both places in the original. — “*He shall execute judgment and righteousness in the earth,*” both speaking of the satisfaction of God’s law and justice.

The matter of truly great significance I want you to see this. In Jeremiah 23:6 we are told that, as the result of Christ's finished work of righteousness, he is called by all who "*Behold the man whose name is the Branch,*" called by every sinner who trusts Christ alone as Savior, Jehovah-tsidkenu — "*THE LORD OUR RIGHTEOUSNESS.*" In chapter 33 (v. 16), we are told that, as the result of his finished work, all who trust him are called by the Triune God Jehovah-tsidkenu — "*The Lord our Righteousness!*" Every believing sinner truly is one with Christ, and, drawing all righteousness from him, we are the very righteousness of God in him!

- His obedience is our obedience.
- His death is our death.
- His satisfaction is our satisfaction.
- And his righteousness, being made our righteousness by God himself, is our righteousness!
- As it is written, "*As he is so are we in this world!*"

ISAIAH 11:1

In Isaiah 11:1 our Savior is called "*a Branch,*" but the word "*Branch*" here (and only here) is a different word. It is the word from which we get the word "Nazarite." In fact, this word is commonly translated "*Nazarite,*" or "*Nazareth.*" Yet, the word is, without question, properly translated "*Branch*" in Isaiah 11:1. Verse 1 reads...

(Isaiah 11:1) "And there shall come forth a rod out of the stem of Jesse, and a Branch shall grow out of his roots."

The Lord Jesus Christ, the only true Nazarite, is that Man who had his family roots of royalty in Jesse, David's father. And he is the Branch from whom all the blessings of grace, righteousness, and peace, described in the rest of Isaiah 11, flow down to us, because the Spirit of the Lord rests upon him and he judges his people with righteousness, and not according to the sight of the eye or the hearing of the ear.

If you will turn back to Numbers 6, you will see this clearly. All the blessings of grace, righteousness, and peace are given to us according to righteousness and truth because of the faithful obedience of Christ the Nazarene, the Nazarite, required and described in Numbers 6:1-21. Upon the basis of the Nazarite's obedience, because he is the Branch of grace from whom we get all, the Lord God commands Moses (the law) to bless us, and promises that he shall perform the blessing (Num. 6:22-26).

(Numbers 6:22-26) "And the LORD spake unto Moses, saying, (23) Speak unto Aaron and unto his sons, saying, On this wise ye shall bless the children of Israel, saying unto them, (24) The LORD bless thee, and keep thee: (25) The LORD make his face shine upon thee, and be gracious unto thee: (26) The LORD lift up his countenance upon thee, and give thee peace."

ISAIAH 4:2

Now, turn to Isaiah 4:2, and take another look at Christ the Branch.

(Isaiah 4:2-3) "In that day shall the branch of the LORD be beautiful and glorious, and the fruit of the earth *shall be* excellent and comely for them that are escaped of Israel. (3) And it shall come to pass, *that he that is* left in Zion, and *he that* remaineth in Jerusalem, shall be called holy, *even* every one that is written among the living in Jerusalem."

We cannot take time to go over everything in this chapter; but let's look at these two verses line by line. They are bursting with the good news of the gospel.

1 "**In that day**" — That day is not a literal day, or a specified time. It is the day of salvation (2 Cor. 6:2; Isa. 49:8). It is the day when God visits his elect in the mighty operations of grace, revealing Christ and giving us faith in him.

2. "**In that day shall the Branch of the LORD be beautiful and glorious.**" — When the Lord Jesus is revealed and the sinner is made to know him and trust him as the Branch of the Lord, the Branch into whom we are grafted and from whom flows to our souls life, and grace, and salvation. Oh, how beautiful and glorious he is in our eyes!

3. "**And,**" when Christ is revealed, once the sinner looks to him in faith, "**the fruit of the earth shall be excellent and comely for them.**" — Our Lord Jesus, the Branch, who was brought forth from the earth, as the Fruit of the earth, "*the first begotten from the dead,*" now appears excellent and comely for us. — Our blessed Savior sprang forth as righteousness from the earth, when he "*was delivered for our offences and raised again for our justification*" (Rom. 4:25; Ps. 85:10-11).

(Psalms 85:10-11) "Mercy and truth are met together; righteousness and peace have kissed *each other.* (11) Truth shall spring out of the earth; and righteousness shall look down from heaven."

4. That cannot be said of everyone, but it can be said and is most assuredly true "**for them that are escaped of Israel.**" — "*Unto you, therefore, which believe he is precious!*"

5. Who are these? They are described in verse 3 as "**he that is left in Zion and he that remaineth in Jerusalem.**" — Believing sinners, having escaped the wrath of God, remain among God's people, worshipping him.

6. Who are they? They are those who, being grafted into the Branch of Righteousness are "**called holy.**" — Yes, God himself calls us "*holy,*" because he has made us holy in his Son.

7. Who are these who have escaped? Who are those who shall escape? They are those, everyone of them, whose names are "**written among the living in Jerusalem.**" — If you will refer to the marginal translation, you will see that those words might be more accurately translated, "written to life." In other words, those who have escaped and shall escape the wrath of God, are those whose names were written in the Lamb's book of life before the world began (Rev. 13:8; 17:8; 20:12, 15; 21:27).

(Revelation 13:8) "And all that dwell upon the earth shall worship him, whose names are not written in the book of life of the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world."

(Revelation 17:8) "The beast that thou sawest was, and is not; and shall ascend out of the bottomless pit, and go into perdition: and they that dwell on the earth shall wonder, whose names were not written in the book of life from the foundation of the world, when they behold the beast that was, and is not, and yet is."

(Revelation 20:12) "And I saw the dead, small and great, stand before God; and the books were opened: and another book was opened, which is *the book* of life: and the dead were judged out of those things which were written in the books, according to their works."

(Revelation 20:15) "And whosoever was not found written in the book of life was cast into the lake of fire."

(Revelation 21:27) "And there shall in no wise enter into it any thing that defileth, neither *whatsoever* worketh abomination, or *maketh* a lie: but they which are written in the Lamb's book of life."

No wonder, then, that our Savior said, "*Rejoice because your names are written in heaven.*" Unless our names were written to life in heaven, in the book of life, we shall be cast into the lake of fire. Truly, the

Lamb of God, who is the Branch, is beautiful and glorious, excellent and comely, when he gives us faith and causes us to see that our names were written to life before the world began! Is your name written to life in heaven?

Illustration: *The Retired Soldier*

PSALM 80:15

Turn to one more passage, and I will send you home with a prayer, I hope a prayer upon your hearts, and trust that our God will graciously answer. Psalm 80 is a prayer to God our Savior, the Shepherd of Israel, desiring him to make his face shine, visit us in grace, and visit his church, the vine he has planted. Look at the language of the prayer in verses 14 and 15, and you will see that we have every reason to confidently expect him to do so.

(Psalms 80:14-15) "Return, we beseech thee, O God of hosts: look down from heaven, and behold, and visit this vine; (15) And the vineyard which thy right hand hath planted, and the branch *that* thou madest strong for thyself."

The vine God planted is his church; and the Branch he made strong for himself is Christ our Savior. In this passage, again, the two are spoken of as one. When the psalmist prayed for God to visit his vine, he was praying for him to visit his Son. If he will do that, (and he most assuredly will), all is well, and we shall be saved (Ps. 80:17-19).

(Psalms 80:17-19) "Let thy hand be upon the man of thy right hand, upon the son of man *whom* thou madest strong for thyself. (18) So will not we go back from thee: quicken us, and we will call upon thy name. (19) Turn us again, O LORD God of hosts, cause thy face to shine; and we shall be saved."

The Lord God says, "*Behold the man whose name is The BRANCH.*" O my God, how I thank you for giving me eyes to behold and a heart to trust the Lord Jesus, your darling Son, the BRANCH you brought forth, raised up, and made blessedness to my soul! Truly, he is beautiful and glorious, excellent and comely in our eyes! Let us sit forever under the shadow of this Plant of Renown with delight, and his fruit shall be sweet to our taste. Cause us ever to look to him alone for our everlasting salvation by the unspeakable, infinite mercy of that Man, Christ Jesus, The BRANCH, who alone is our Wisdom, and Righteousness, and Sanctification, and Redemption. Blessed! blessed forever be God, for the Lord Jesus Christ! "*Behold the Man whose name is the BRANCH*" and eternal salvation is yours. He says, "*Look unto me and be ye saved!*" — "*In him shall all the seed of Israel be justified, and shall glory.*"

Amen.