

Precious Stones

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[0 : 00] Zechariah chapter 9 and let us meditate upon the words that we shall find in verse 16. They shall be as the stones of a crown. What a long list of names for God's people can be compiled from the scriptures. Saints, soldiers, servants, sacrifices. The names of Indians. And in Zechariah chapter 9 verse 16 there are three more. Heap, stones and standard.

Now we want to focus our attention this morning on the second of this triad of titles. They shall be as the stones of a crown.

When some time ago a 69-parat diamond was sold at a New York auction for well over a million dollars, the news made headlines.

And if there are headlines in heaven, I am sure they are giving over to featuring the jewels for Christ's crown that God is now collecting and preparing for his beloved son.

And those jewels are his people. On Christ's triumphant coronation day the divine promise will be fulfilled and his people shall be as the stones of a crown.

[1 : 41] Now let us search out some of the wonderfully instructive comparisons between God's people and crown jewels.

We must begin our study by reminding ourselves of the preciousness of jewels. Diamonds and rubies and sapphires are precious stones. Zechariah is not referring to pebbles and gravel when he predicts they shall be as the stones of a crown.

He is referring to diamonds and sapphires and sapphires and other precious stones. When we turn to the biblical teaching concerning the people of God, we encounter what will forever remain a mystery to us.

We learn that God's people are counted as precious to God himself. This truth is expressed in Isaiah chapter 43 verse 4 where Jehovah says to his people, Since thou wast precious in my sight, thou hast been honorable.

Who can explain this mystery? Apart from the grace of God, how can it be said of any of us that we are precious to him?

[3 : 10] When a stone is esteemed as being precious, it becomes the object of various attentions and activities. As the heavenly lepidary, God expresses his concern for us in various ways.

God delights in his people as precious stones. To Israel God says, Thou shalt also be a crown of glory in the hand of the Lord, and a royal diadem in the hand of thy God.

The Lord delighteth in thee. Isaiah chapter 62 verses 3 and 4. In the days of the Roman Empire, a very rich lady was visiting in the home of Cornelia, the mother of Carche.

In order to impress Cornelia, the rich lady displayed the diamonds and the jewels she possessed. She then requested Cornelia to permit her to see her jewels.

And carefully Cornelia prolonged the conversation until her sons came home from school. And then with pride she said to the rich visitor, These are my jewels.

[4 : 30] Cornelia delighted not in her broaches and necklaces and bracelets, but in her sons. They were to her the source of satisfaction and joy.

And in the same way God, our heavenly parent, delights not so much in inanimate objects as in his sons and daughters who have been purchased by the precious blood of Christ.

But God also defends his people. Around the crown jewels of Great Britain are iron railings, glass windows, electronic alarm systems, ever watchful garments.

And such is the value of those jewels that the British government is determined to protect them at all costs. Are believers precious to God?

Then shall he not also protect his own? Indeed he shall. But although they put their trust in thee rejoice, let them ever shout for joy, because thou defendest them.

[5 : 43] So says the Sanist. Aye, says the Lord, will be unto her a wall of fire round about her. There is a promise of God concerning the holy city of Jerusalem.

And he grants similar protection to his people today. God delights in his people. God defends his people. And God displays his people.

According to Paul, in Ephesians chapter 3, verse 11, believers are on display that now unto the principalities and powers in heavenly places might be made known by the judge the manifold wisdom of God.

God is putting you on display. Fellow believers, no matter how insignificant or impotent you may feel, God is putting you on display.

An advertisement for the diamonds of the De Beers Consolidated Minds Limited states, Once you get to know small diamonds, you will realize that they have all the magic properties of a large diamond in beautiful miniature.

[7 : 02] And they lend themselves to designs that are more intricate. So cheer up them little diamond. God is able to make your life beautiful and blessed.

God is able to make your life beautiful and black. So, thank you, God. Brilliant. Ernest Bacon reminds us of a period in the early centuries when Christians were persecuted by the Roman emperors.

About the year AD 250, the emperor Valerian needed money to continue waging war against Persia. And someone reported to Glabrio, the governor of Rome, that Lawrence, the leader of the Christians who met in the catacombs, had charge of the treasures of God.

Now that was all Glabrio needed to know, and he sent soldiers immediately to bring Lawrence to the governor. You are a Christian, asked Glabrio, once replied, by the grace of God I am.

They tell me that you have charge of the treasures of God. Is that so? It is. Now, said the governor of Glabrio, now your God is almighty, and can it possibly need those treasures?

[8 : 27] Now the emperor needs money badly. Bring those treasures to me and not a hair of your head will be touched.

In four days I will bring them, promised Lawrence. The four days passed, and finally Lawrence appeared before the governor.

You have kept your promise? Glabrio inquired. I have, was the reply. Where are the treasures then? I have brought them. They are outside.

Are they so numerous? The governor was evident delight. They are precious and very many, answered Lawrence. Bring them in. Lawrence went out. And presently returned with a large number of people, old and young, rich and poor.

They were the Christians who met for what's up in the catacombs. Glabrio cried out angrily, what is the meaning of this?

[9 : 30] These said Lawrence. These said Lawrence. These are the treasures of God. Furious. They were the treasures of God. Furious. Glabrio ordered Lawrence to be killed. But you know Lawrence was right.

The treasures of God are not gold or silver or costly jewels. But precious life saved by his grace and lived to his glory.

His trusting and obedient people are the treasures of God. God's people, like jewels, are precious to him.

But, as we pursue the analogy between God's people and precious stones, we must think as well about the properties of jewels.

Now, the cardinal property of a precious stone is its ability to touch and communicate light.

[10 : 31] Writing in the National Geographic magazine, George S. Switzer, who is the curator of the Department of Mineral Sciences in the Smithsonian Institution, he states, The beauty of a gem depends on its color or on its distinctive ability to reflect, refract, and disperse light.

Now, this too is one of the primary qualities of God's people. Ye are a chosen generation, this is Peter.

Ye are a chosen generation that ye should show forth the praises of him with God who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light.

Note that the gem does not create light. It communicates the light that comes to it from other sources. In the 118th Psalm verse 27, the psalmist declares, God is the Lord which hath showed us light.

The believer is responsible to reflect, refract, and disperse the light which has come to him from the one who is in himself light.

[11 : 57] The precious stones of other qualities. In the case of gem diamonds, there must be purity. Gem diamonds ideally must be colorless or slightly bluish, must be free of internal flaws, light shimmers from them in a characteristic silvery beauty.

If they are clouded internally or marred by too many foreign particles, cracks, bubbles, feathery flaws, even a large stone may be usable only as an industrial diamond.

And we believe we are in complete agreement with God's word when we say that God's ideal for the stones which will make up Christ's crown is that they be free from all defects and imperfections. Paul states, Christ loved the church and gave himself for it in order that he might present it to himself a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing, but that it should be holy and without blemish.

There is God's ideal and it will be achieved in the second coming of Christ.

[13 : 31] But what of the present? Are there not in us as the stones for Christ's crown, foreign particles, cracks, bubbles, feathery flaws?

But let us not despair. We read recently of an artist who works mainly with stones that have, quote, such inclusions as fractures or bits of foreign matter in the crystals and with his unique settings brings perfection by enhancing the imperfections.

Now the heavenly artist can take our lives marred and ruined by sin and even now create from them that which will glorify and magnify his name.

With regard to precious stones there must be durability as well as purity in the ability to reflect light. Durability. The ancients, we are told, considered the diamond, the king of stones, to be indestructible. The very word diamond comes from the Greek adamas, meaning invincible or unconquerable.

[14 : 58] Pliny in the first century AD wrote, These stones are tested upon the anvil and will resist the blow to such an extent as to make the iron rebound and the very anvil to split.

Now this surely is a needed quality in God's diamonds. God's people face all kinds of pressures today that seek to wear them down and wear them out.

The word patience, in many references in the New Testament, would be best translated endurance. Let us run with endurance the race that is set before us.

Endurance is not merely a passive quality, but is an attitude that faces all the forces around it and triumphs over them.

But look at the comparison between the preparation of precious stones and the preparation of saints.

[16 : 12] There is first the forming of the diamond or precious stone in the darkness of the earth. A diamond, we are told, is composed of pure carbon.

The same basic element that forms coal, graphite, lamp black and common soot. But there is one significant difference.

In the case of the diamond, the carbon was forged by giant pressure and heat deep in the earth. When the General Electric Corporation announced production of the first artificial diamonds, a newspaper printed the following formula.

Take a pinch of coal dust. Apply 1,500,000 pounds of pressure per square inch. Turn up the heat to 5,000 degrees.

And what do you get? A diamond. This is the sort of formula God often uses when He wants to produce a seasoned believer.

[17 : 24] He takes an individual with all his faults and imperfections, applies the pressure of adverse circumstances, and turns on the heat of persecution or trouble.

And when the trial is over, God has His diamond. A mature believer. After the forming of the diamond, there is the separating of the diamond from the useless ore in which such stones are found.

Describing one particular diamond, George Switzer writing to the National Geographic magazine stated, A day or two before, an African miner hundreds of feet underground has blasted the ore free from a dimly lighted mine face, shoveled it into a miniature railway truck, trundled it along a whitewashed tunnel.

The ore, including the hidden diamond, had fallen into a steel-jawed crusher built in solid bedrock in the depths of the mind.

Broken to the size of eggs, the bluish ore rode a big bucket to the separation plant on the surface. A chain of dancing screens, other crushers, whirling vats and conveyors passed it along.

[18 : 52] Finally, with the peculiar affinity for Greece that mine diamonds possess, gleaming grains, gravel-sized crystals and that one huge stone, had buried, had buried into the, had burrowed into the sticky coating of the recovery table.

Is there not in our experience as believers an analogy to this process before God's command to us is finally fulfilled?

Be ye separate is his work to us. And often, often we must be subjected to crushing and shattering before we are set free from that which contaminates us.

Next, in the preparation of a diamond, there is the cutting of the diamond. The same Mr. Switzer tells of the cutting of the Kulinan diamond, the biggest in the world.

The raw gem was taken to an Amsterdam cutter who studied it for months. Finally, he made a groove on one edge, placed his wedge and perspiring freely brought down his hammer.

[20 : 13] The steel blade broke instead of the diamond. Aksar, the cutter, went to a hospital to recuperate. When his nerves calmed, he tried again.

This time the stone split perfectly, but others had to tell the cutter. At the moment his mallet hit the wedge squarely, Aksar fainted into the arms of his doctor.

Now in the cutting process, we as believers are in the hands of the Master Lapidary. Hast thou not known? Hast thou not heard that the everlasting God, the Lord, the creator of the ends of the earth, fainteth not?

Neither is weary. There is no searching of his understanding. With regard to this cutting process, not all of the original stone is preserved.

In the case of the Ice Queen diamond, the stone shrank to less than one third of its original size in the cutting process. After the cutting process comes the faceting work.

[21 : 37] And this we are told is to bring out the gem's inner brilliance and fire. The unique power of the diamond to break up light into rainbow colours.

And this part of the preparation of a believer has been summarised in verse. My life was like an uncut gem.

All rough and angles sharp. Its brilliance dimmed as by a veil. No gleam or sheen. All dark. But the Master's hand worked miracles.

Each pain and woe and trial and test. A facet cut upon my soul. He watched the work and blessed.

When the faceting work has been completed, there comes next the polishing of the diamond.

Now this entire process of sawing, shaping and polishing a large diamond into a great jewel often requires more than a year from start to finish.

[22 : 47] For the believer then, his preparation as a stone for Christ's crown lasts a lifetime. There is always some new phase of the preparation to be undertaken.

Finally, we must consider the setting of the precious stone. This too is a most important part of the total preparation of a diamond.

There are in the Russian Imperial Crown 4936 diamonds. And each one is expertly placed in the crown to shine beautifully and brilliantly.

And we may rest content in the knowledge that God knows precisely where each one of his children should be placed in Christ's crown.

Zechariah states concerning God's people, They shall be as the stones of a crown.

[23 : 57] Malachi gives a companion promise in the words, They shall be mine, saith the Lord of hosts, in that day when I make up my jewels.

While the promise initially was given to Israel, Surely, surely it comprehends in its scope all the people of God.

Let the truth then of these twin texts grip your heart fellow believer. At the present time you must endure grief.

Then it will be glory. Now it is suffering on behalf of the Master. Then it will be shining forever in his presence.

Now is the day of your preparation. Then it will be the day of your presentation. The rarest James Bear hardest grinding.

[24 : 59] God's own workmanship are we. They shall be as the stones of a crown.

Amen. Let us pray. Gracious and never blessed one, We would lift up our hearts in thanksgiving for every sinner saved by grace.

For all those whom thou hast chosen to be as stones in a crown. For those, O Lord, who are thy precious jewels.

And O gracious one, as we undergo trials and tribulations, Which are a preparation for our being placed in that crown.

May we be able to say and to know that all things are working together for good to them that love thee.

[26 : 07] And O gracious one, in the meantime, as we wend our pilgrimage way, May we be shining lights here below until that day when we shall shine as jewels in a crown.

Accept of our parting praise. Seer us to our homes in safety. Watch over us till we meet again with her in this world of the world to come. Come out with us in the evening.

For we ask it in Jesus name. Amen.