

Core 52 – Week 17

Son of Man

Have you seen those sometimes ridiculous and sometimes disturbing mashups online when they show what it would look like if two people had a baby? Basically, it's this software that morphs two people's pictures into one image. Sometimes their best features combine to make a beautiful baby. But it's far more entertaining when it combines their worst features to form offspring that looks like baby Yoda.

We laugh at these silly creations, but there is an element of truth in them, because we all know that children pick up certain traits from their parents. They get their daddy's hair and their mom's nose. They get their mother's sense of humor and dad's witty sarcasm. Every parent has had those proud moments with their kids where they say, "Yep, that's my baby. He's just like me. You can certainly see me in her." Aaaaand we've had those embarrassing moments where we turn to our spouse and exclaim, "Don't look at me, he's your child."

We don't know what Jesus looked like, but as we saw in Isaiah a couple of weeks ago, there was nothing extraordinary about Jesus' physical appearance. He was just an average looking guy. But in the picture we have of Jesus in the Bible, there are certain traits that Jesus takes after His heavenly Father. In His holiness, righteousness, love and mercy, He certainly looks like his Father. There is no doubt He's the Son of God.

But the Bible also shows another image of Jesus. There is someone else he takes after. He shares a remarkable likeness to you and me. This is because as the Son of God he shared in our humanity. Hebrews 2:14 says,

¹⁴ Because God's children are human beings—made of flesh and blood—the Son also became flesh and blood. For only as a human being could he die, and only by dying could he break the power of the devil, who had the power of death.

It goes on to say, "it was necessary for him to be made in every respect like us." It even says that Jesus calls us brother and sister. There is an unquestioned family resemblance. So in Jesus we see both the Son of God and the Son of Man. This morning we want to zero in on this idea of Jesus as the Son of Man.

"Son of man" is a title found throughout the Bible. It appears 107 times, 81 times in the four gospels that tell the story of Jesus, and four more times in the rest of the New Testament, most significantly in Revelation.

At its most basic level "son of man" is a title of address that simply means "human." The Bible also uses the titles "daughters of men" or "daughter of women" which also mean human. Son of man was used to address people of various rank or position. Most commonly, it is used in Ezekiel of the prophet himself. It's a way of saying, "Remember, you're only human. You're just

a man. You're no different than anyone else." In its ordinary use, "son of man" distinguishes our physical, mortal, human essence from the spiritual, immortal essence of God or of angels.

However, when we get to the book of Daniel, there is a prophecy that seems to invest the phrase "son of man" with a much deeper meaning and infuses it with messianic expectations.

In Daniel 7, Daniel is given these grand visions of the unfolding of history and some of the major players who will cross the stage of the human drama. He sees four great beasts rise up out of the sea. The first was a lion with wings of eagles. The second a bear with three ribs in its mouth. The third a leopard with four heads and four wings of a bird on its back. Then came a fourth, terrifying beast with ten horns, and a little horn rises among the ten, and this horn was filled eyes and a mouth that spoke great things.

The vision then turns to be what seems to be a heavenly court of judgment. There are thrones and the Ancient of Days takes his seat. Now, "Ancient of Days" is a title that Daniel uses for God, and he uses it three times all here in Daniel 7. It's a title that emphasizes his eternal nature, as the opening words of the Bible declare, "In the beginning...God." Psalm 90:2 says, God is "from everlasting to everlasting. Isaiah 44:6 says God is "the first and the last." These are all just different ways of saying before there were days, before there was anything, There was God.

Before the thrones are thousands and thousands, ten thousand times ten thousand standing before the Ancient of Days. Every indication in Daniel is that these myriads that surround the thrones are the saints, those who belong to God.

As you might imagine, Daniel is overwhelmed by what he sees, and so he approaches one of the many thousands of saints standing before the thrones, and he asks, "Hey, Buddy, what's going on?" Okay, that's just a loose paraphrase from the Aramaic.

And so at the end of Daniel 7, the prophet is given an interpretation of the four beasts. He is told that they represent four earthly kingdoms that will rise in power and speak against God, and oppress His people, but in the end, the court of heaven, where the real throne of power is, shall judge and condemn these earthly kingdoms and all dominion and power will be given to the saints.

Other passages in Daniel, as well as history itself, has led nearly all Bible scholars to conclude that these four kingdoms represent the four empires that would rule from the time of Daniel to the coming of Jesus. They are, in order, Babylon, Medo-Persia, The Greek Empire of Alexander the Great, and finally the Roman Empire. Everything Daniel sees matches up perfectly with those four great empires.

But in my retelling of Daniel 7, I've left out one very important detail. Right in the middle, after Daniel sees the Ancient of Days and the thrones, and the many thousands of saints, but before

the interpretation, the prophet sees another vision. He describes it in verses 13 and 14. Our core verse this week comes from verse 13.

*and behold, with the clouds of heaven
there came one like a son of man,
and he came to the Ancient of Days
and was presented before him.
14 And to him was given dominion
and glory and a kingdom,
that all peoples, nations, and languages
should serve him;
his dominion is an everlasting dominion,
which shall not pass away,
and his kingdom one
that shall not be destroyed.*

Daniel doesn't just see "a son of man," a person, a human, a mere mortal, but he sees "one LIKE a son of man." He's like a human, but he isn't merely human. God gives this "one like a son of man" all dominion and glory that results in a kingdom that includes all peoples, nations, and languages. It's a universal kingdom. It's an everlasting kingdom. And apparently, It's a kingdom whose divine glory, power, and dominion, by the end of Daniel 7, is also shared with all the saints.

Daniel's "Son of Man" stands out as something new and something different from all other sons and daughters of men in the rest of the Bible. This is not just a mere person.

Now, fast forward about 550 years to the four Gospels when Jesus begins His ministry, his favorite title for himself is "Son of Man." 78 times in Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John Jesus calls himself the Son of Man. However, Jesus does something different with the term. He puts "the" in front of the title. He doesn't just call himself "a son of man." He calls himself "THE Son of man." He's not just a person, any person, like any other person. Jesus is referring to something specific, something identifiable. "I am THE Son of Man."

What Jesus is doing is referring back to Daniel and his vision of one like the Son of Man. Jesus is saying, "I am the One Daniel told you about. I am the one who will be given all dominion and glory and power. I am the One who will have a universal and everlasting kingdom, and I am the One whose saints will reign with Him in eternity. I am THAT Son of Man."

Jesus leaves no room for doubt in Matthew 26, in one of his only responses to the religious and political authorities who arrested him. We read this in verses 63-68:

⁶³But Jesus remained silent. And the high priest said to him, "I adjure you by the living God, tell us if you are the Christ, the Son of God." ⁶⁴Jesus said to him, "You have said so. But I tell you, from now on you will see the Son of Man seated at the right hand of Power and coming on the clouds of heaven." (Same exact language as Daniel 7) ⁶⁵Then

the high priest tore his robes and said, "He has uttered blasphemy. What further witnesses do we need? You have now heard his blasphemy. ⁶⁶What is your judgment?" They answered, "He deserves death." ⁶⁷Then they spit in his face and struck him. And some slapped him, ⁶⁸saying, "Prophecy to us, you Christ! Who is it that struck you?"

Jesus clearly referenced Daniel's prophecy, and the religious leaders clearly understood it to be nothing less than a claim to be the Messiah, the Anointed One, the Divine Son of God. So, in a strange turn of events, Matthew 26 puts "Son of Man" on the same level as the "Son of God." Jesus is both of these things. He's Son of God. He is of the same divine essence and nature as God. He's just like his Father.

But somehow, at the same time He is Son of Man. He fully identifies with us. And when I say that, I don't mean he identifies with us in the same way as we have men today who identify as women, or women who identify as men. Jesus didn't take a few hormones, undergo a little cosmetic surgery, and dress up in human clothes. Jesus became flesh and fully participated in our human nature and lived as one of us. Paul writes in Philippians 2:

⁵Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, ⁶who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, ⁷but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. ⁸And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.

So the almighty Son of God empties himself to become a lowly Son of Man, to become Isaiah's Suffering Servant that we talked about a couple weeks ago.

If you grew up a Christian and you grew up in the church, this sounds so natural to us. It's what we've heard all our lives. God became a man to live as one of us to die for us. But for Jews, for Muslims, for many skeptics, this notion is absolutely absurd. God can't become flesh. The Creator can't become created. That's like putting a million pounds of potatoes in a 5 pound sack. It makes no sense. It's impossible.

But this is why Christmas is a miracle. This is why Immanuel, God with us is indeed good news that brings great joy. This is what is so astounding and genius about the incarnation, that you can somehow stuff the infinite in a finite package, so that we can be with God and share with Him. Someone might object, "But that's impossible." And my reply is this, "Our only hope is for the impossible. Our only hope is if we have a God who can do the impossible." Because you and I are stuck in an impossible situation.

As we continue to pull on this thread of the Son of Man, it takes us all the way to the end of the Bible to the book of Revelation. Here in John's great vision of the culmination of the Kingdom and God's ultimate plan for His creation and His people, John has a vision of Jesus. The Jesus John sees is not the meek and mild baby born in a manger. It isn't Isaiah's Suffering Servant that would walk the dusty roads of Judea and Galilee. No, what he sees is a risen and victorious

Lord. He sees Jesus, not as he was when he came for the first time. He sees Jesus as He will come His final time.

In Revelation 1, John gets his very first glimpse of Jesus. In verse 13, he says he sees “someone like the Son of Man.” John is using the language of Daniel very purposefully. This is John’s way, and this is the Holy Spirit’s way of saying, “This is what Daniel was talking about. Jesus is Daniel’s Son of Man.”

But the Son of Man John sees is no mere human. This is no frail flesh and bones easily broken. John describes Jesus in the most superhuman terms available to his imagination to emphasize his greatness, His power, and His authority. If John was one of us writing this description, He would be borrowing from every superhero motif from the Marvel and DC universes to describe Jesus. He would have Superman’s laser vision and Captain America’s shield and Spiderman’s web slinging wrists.

But John describes Jesus by borrowing images from a 1st Century fantasy world. Jesus is wearing a long robe with a gold sash which shows his royalty, rank, and beauty. His head and his hair shine white like wool, as white as snow which show his eternal wisdom and purity. His eyes are like flames of fire which signify His piercing vision which sees all things. His feet were like polished bronze refined in a furnace which symbolize the purity of judgment with which He will trample His enemies. His voice thundered like mighty ocean waves which shows that he speaks with power to sweep away any who lay before him.

In Revelation 4 and 5, in another scene builds on Daniel 7, John sees the heavenly court filled with thrones, but he sees it in much greater detail. Again God sits on his throne and he is surrounded by myriads of angels and saints from every tribe and language. And on his throne, he is joined by none other than Jesus, the Son of Man, but in this vision he is portrayed as a lamb who had been slain. He has seven horns and seven eyes which picture complete power and complete knowledge, and he receives worship from every living thing in heaven and on earth.

Again, John sees one like the Son of Man in Revelation 14 right before all the earth is harvested in judgment. In verse 14 John says, *“Then I looked, and behold, a white cloud, and seated on the cloud one like a son of man, with a golden crown on his head, and a sharp sickle in his hand.”* The Son of Man coming on a cloud comes straight out of Daniel 7 and Matthew 26. This time though he’s wearing a crown which signifies authority and dominion. He’s carrying a sickle which signifies judgment. In this chapter, humanity is compared to grapes which will be harvested and thrown into the winepress of God’s wrath. The Son of Man in Revelation 14 has come to rule over his Kingdom and conquer His enemies.

We have come full circle. Jesus started as the divine Son of God, seated at the Father’s right hand. But then Jesus humbled himself. He willingly laid aside His divine power and glory and

traded it all in to take on the very nature of a person. God became one of us. The Son of God became a mere Son of Man.

I don't share all of this with you as a curious bit of Bible trivia, or some obscure bit of theological history. I share all this, because all of this has a very direct impact on your life. And it is something told to Daniel in Daniel 7.

As his visions are being interpreted for Daniel, he is told this in Daniel 7:27,

*27 And the kingdom and the dominion
and the greatness of the kingdoms under the whole heaven
shall be given to the people of the saints of the Most High;
his kingdom shall be an everlasting kingdom,
and all dominions shall serve and obey him.'*

Who is it that Jesus is going to give his kingdom and dominion and greatness to? It says there it, "shall be given to the people of the saints of the Most High." Who's he talking about? Who are these saints?

He's talking about us? He's talking about believers, followers of Jesus, those who belong to the Son of Man. Jesus is going to share his glory and dominion with us. We will rule with him in his kingdom.

There is an amazing verse in Revelation 3:21 where Jesus makes an incredible promise to his followers who overcome. *"The one who conquers, I will grant him to sit with me on my throne, as I also conquered and sat down with my Father on his throne."*

Follow Jesus' train of thought here. The Son of God became one like a son of man, so that we, the sons and daughters of men, could share with Him, the Son of God. That's pretty cool. This is just one more way the story of the whole Bible all ties together.

If God can bring that kind of plan together, from Genesis to Daniel to Revelation, what do you think He can do with the threads of your life? I think He can tie those together to? We debate politics and power endlessly on earth. And just like kingdoms of Daniel's visions rise fall. We see administrations come and go. We the party in power ebb and flow, but you need to know Who sits on the throne. The real throne of power is not in Jefferson City. It's not in Washington DC. It isn't in Beijing. The real power isn't with me, or you. It isn't with some stupid virus, or with any stay at home orders. Ultimate dominion and final authority come from the throne of heaven. Everyone will answer to the one who sits on the throne.

And the One who sits on the throne is none other than the Son of God who became the Son of Man, the One who walked in your shoes, lived in your skin, and faced everything you've faced. He died for everything you've broken and everything that has broken you. And He did all of that so that He can share His throne with you.

Communion: When Jesus suffered, He suffered as the Son of Man. He suffered as a human. He felt all the physical pain and emotional anguish. Jesus did not get to switch on some superhero "Son of God" mode that allowed him to bypass all the painful, nasty stuff. No, He suffered and died as one of us, fully in human flesh. It wasn't until his death, that He went into full on Son of God mode to conquer death and rise again.