

## Names and Titles of Jesus “Son of Man”

In the preaching series on the *Names and Titles of Jesus*, last week we looked at by far the most popular name and that’s literally the name, “*Jesus*”. It was a popular name for parents to name their boys during that time period because it carried the meaning “*The Lord is our Salvation*” and it carried with it great hope and visions of God, once again, rescuing His people. It’s the name the angel told both Mary and Joseph to name their baby. And to Joseph the angel added that this baby would save the people from their sins.

This morning we’re going to look at the most popular title that Jesus used to describe himself. And once again, just like with “*Jesus*”, it’s a title that was filled with meaning and hope of deliverance. It’s the name “*Son of Man*”. Jesus is referred to as “*The Son of Man*” 88 times in the New Testament. In the Gospel accounts Jesus alone used this title to describe himself. There is one time in John 12:34 where people in the crowd asked Jesus who exactly this “*Son of Man*” that he kept talking about is.

In the book of Acts there is only one account of the Son of Man being used and that’s right before Stephen is about to be stoned to death because of his faith in Jesus. At the end of his speech before the Sanhedrin the hearers became extremely angry over Stephen’s words and it says that Stephen looked up to heaven and saw the glory of God and Jesus standing at the right hand of God. And Stephen declared, “*Look, I see heaven open and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God.*” Their immediate reaction was to grab Stephen, drag him out of the city and stone him.

So, what was Jesus exactly trying to communicate by using the title, “*Son of Man*” in referring to Himself over and over again?

First, Jesus was communicating that he was a real man in the flesh and blood. He was as real as you and I. And so, when he experienced pain and hunger and temptation it wasn’t to a lesser degree than any of us have experienced it. His pain on the cross was very real and excruciating. When Jesus left heaven he became a real man, while still maintaining His godliness as well.

If you’ll read through the book of **Ezekiel** you’ll notice that God referred to him as a “*son of man*” 93 times. That’s to communicate to Ezekiel and those listening to him that he wasn’t God but that he was a human being through whom God was working in declaring things yet to be.

This message that Jesus was truly God and man is the message communicated in the opening verses of John’s Gospel.

**John 1:1 (NIV)** *In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.*

**John 1:14 (NIV)** *The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only Son, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.*

The reality of what Jesus went through while here on earth in the flesh that allows Jesus to not only know what we’re going through when we suffer but also gives us hope and access into God’s presence. When I’m going through a difficulty it’s very helpful to have someone else who can relate somewhat to what I’m going through and that can provide me encouragement and wisdom from their experiences. That’s why support groups are often so helpful because they provide us with a group of people who can relate to what we’re going through. And that’s what Jesus provides us.

**Hebrews 4:15-16 (NIV)** *For we do not have a high priest who is unable to empathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are—yet he did not sin. Let us then approach God’s throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need.*

I hope you don’t ever lose the power and significance of this aspect of the Son of Man title. God loved us so very much that He was willing to leave His privileged and safe place in heaven in order to be born as a human being, a baby, for the eventual purpose of willingly giving up his life for the payment of our sins, so that we could come into a right relationship with our Heavenly Father. No other religion can make that claim.

The second meaning of the title, “**Son of Man**”, is where it really takes an unexpected twist, but which God is such an expert in.

When Jesus began to talk about the “*Son of Man*” it would have certainly peaked the interest of his Jewish hearers. Because they’d been waiting for this “*Son of Man*” to arrive and deliver the Jewish nation from oppression of foreign rulers. This belief was deeply rooted in the book of Daniel the 7<sup>th</sup> chapter. At the beginning of that chapter, God gives Daniel this vision of 4 kingdoms represented by four different and ferocious animals. The kingdoms they represented were Babylonia, Assyria, Persia and Macedonia. They had been the most powerful and brutal kingdoms that world had ever seen. But in the first part of this vision, each of the nations are identified and their ultimate defeat is prophesied and then Daniel sees this:

**Daniel 7:13-14 (NIV)** *“In my vision at night I looked, and there before me was one like a son of man, coming with the clouds of heaven. He approached the Ancient of Days and was led into his presence. 14 He was given authority, glory and sovereign power; all nations and peoples of every language worshiped him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion that will not pass away, and his kingdom is one that will never be destroyed.*”

It was through this Son of Man that defeat and deliverance of these mighty kingdoms would come. He would come from God in heaven and wage war and defeat and provide the Jewish nation with independence. And so, the Jews began to anticipate and look for this delivering Son of Man.

Then in the inter-testamental period between the Old and New Testament, a book was written that refueled this excitement. The book was called the Book of Enoch and contained within its pages was extensive talk of the Son of Man and his upcoming deliverance. The picture you get of this Son of Man is that he is a divine pre-existent figure waiting in the heavenly places to be unleashed in vengeance and in judgment upon the world. He has a special relationship with God. But the day is coming when he will be launched upon the earth for the merciless judgment and destruction of sinners and all those who are against God’s holy people. He will also be the comfort, the guide and the support of God’s faithful people. Those that oppose God will be defeated and suffer eternal punishment. But those who are faithful to God will share in God’s glory and will be rewarded for all of eternity.

So then arrives Jesus and as they are watching and listening to Him, he’s unlike anyone else they’ve ever seen. He clearly has supernatural power as he heals people of various diseases and casts out demons and has absolute control over nature. And he’s talking extensively about this Son of Man.

- He says to **Nicodemus** that the Son of Man has come from heaven and will be lifted up so that all who believe in Him can have eternal life (**John 3:13-15**)
- He talks about **sitting in glory** one day (**Matthew 25:31-32**)
- He says to **Zacchaeus** that he’s the reason that he left heaven and came to earth (**Luke 19:10**).
- He said that the Father has given him the **authority to judge** (**John 5:27**)

Jesus’ teachings were filled with references to the **Son of Man** and so this kind of talk would naturally create excitement in the minds and hearts of the Jewish people that this might just be the great deliverer that Daniel had been given that vision about. What they were hearing and seeing met their expectation for the Son of Man. And excitement was building.

But then Jesus began to **redefine** what the role of the Son of Man was.

A key moment was when He asked His disciples “*who do people say the Son of Man is?*” (Mt 16:13). They replied that some are speculating that maybe the Son of Man is John the Baptist or Elijah, or Jeremiah or one of the prophets. In other words they are thinking that John the Baptist might be who the prophets had pointed to as a possible Messiah.

Then Jesus draws a line of clarification in the sand: *“But what about you? Who do you say I am?”* And Simon Peter had this breakthrough moment: *Simon Peter answered, “You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God.”* (Matthew 16:16 (NIV)).

Clearly Simon Peter and the other disciples had been discussing Jesus’ identity. Is he the Son of Man that Daniel had prophesied about? And in that moment, they’d decided that Jesus fit the advance billing prophesied through Daniel. Jesus affirmed to Peter and the rest of them that they were correct. And at the end of this conversation the text says, *“Then he ordered his disciples not to tell anyone that he was the Messiah.”* (Mt 16:20).

But then right after that breakthrough moment and inspirational encounter, things began to change. For it says,

*“From that time on Jesus began to explain to his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem and suffer many things at the hands of the elders, the chief priests and the teachers of the law, and that he must be killed and on the third day be raised to life.”* (Matthew 16:21-23 (NIV))

Peter’s reaction is classic and somewhat understandable:

*Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him. “Never, Lord!” he said. “This shall never happen to you!” Jesus turned and said to Peter, “Get behind me, Satan! You are a stumbling block to me; you do not have in mind the concerns of God, but merely human concerns.”*

And that’s the crux of the matter. Peter and all the other Jews wanted the Son of Man, the Messiah, to provide them with political freedom. They believed that this was also what God had promised and most wanted. And for the Son of Man to die was not part of the plan.

But what the Jews and Peter didn’t realize is that God’s plan wasn’t so small minded that it was merely about providing political freedom to his chosen people. God’s plan was to provide real freedom to everyone, through dying for their sins. And providing spiritual deliverance everyone could have a renewed relationship with their Heavenly Father and one day be free from any sort of oppression they experience in this world, but for all of eternity have the privilege of living under God’s loving rule and protection and provision.

Did you notice that Jesus shared with Peter and the other disciples that one day he will be killed but then three days later be raised back to life? Because the Son of Man’s death didn’t fit into their preconceived ideas of how history should flow – they completely missed out on his talk of a resurrection. And so, when he died rose from the dead three days after his death, they were ill prepared for this, although they should have been. And on the day of his resurrection, God sent an angel to wait for the first visitors, some women, and remind them of what Jesus had foretold them about these events. (Luke 24:7)

And bless these apostles, but their preconceived ideas and expectation of political freedom from the Roman government didn’t die even after Jesus’ resurrection. For on the day in which Jesus was taken up into heaven, on the last opportunity they had to talk with Jesus, they asked him *“Lord, are you at this time going to restore the kingdom to Israel?”* (Acts 1:6)

**So What?** Why does it matter that Jesus used the title **“Son of Man”**?

1. It shows the consistency of the Bible and that God has been working out His plan?
2. *The Son of God became a Man to enable men to become the sons of God* – C. S. Lewis (bulletin cover)
3. By essence of being God, you can’t kill Him. So, he willingly became one of us to pay the penalty for our sins.
4. One day He will come back as the risen and reigning Son of Man and take us to be with Him forever and ever in His kingdom – which is far better than any earthly kingdom.