

4 - SON OF GOD, SON OF MAN



Viktor Vasnetsov, His only begotten son and the world of God prep for fresco, c1890

‘Jesus replied. “But I say to all of you: From now on you will see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of the Mighty One and coming on the clouds of heaven.” (Matthew 26:64)

Background info

The title ‘Son of God’ emphasises the deity of Jesus, his role as Messiah and a focus of the church’s faith, worship, and message. Jesus preferred to be known as the Son of Man, which pointed to his humanity and servanthood, but also to the suffering he would endure before being crucified and rising from the dead. This was the point at which so many doubters realised he really was the Messiah they had been seeking, but failed to see.

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a) Son of God the Father

(Read John 10:24-33, John 5: 16-23, Galatians 2:19-20)

One issue that Jesus faced in his ministry was people wanting clarity about who he was claiming to be. They asked how long he was going to keep them in suspense, but were also looking for opportunities to pass judgement on him.

To Jesus, their main issue was unbelief because they had seen enough signs, and heard enough of his teaching, to convince them that he was at least God’s messenger, if not the Son of God. But they refused to believe. They were not his sheep, says Jesus, because his sheep listen and follow him.

The strictness of the law was very often a burden to the ordinary Jew. It is the Jewish leaders who are angry at Jesus healing a man in the temple and apparently claiming equality with God. The gap between Jesus and his accusers was widening because he was asserting his deity. Even though he was not identifying with the Father as one person, Jesus describes his unity as a relationship we might understand as sonship.

Paul had once been on the side of the accusers, as a Pharisee well versed in the strict ways of the law. Then there was his

Damascus Road experience, and no way he could return to the Saul he once was. The law could not bring life for no one had ever fulfilled it. He had effectively died to

the law and risen into a new life by faith in Jesus, the Son of God, 'who loved me and gave himself for me'.

Discussion...

Q) Many are searching today for a spiritual life outside of the Christian faith. How might we as a church help them to fulfil their personal needs and expectations?

Q) Why did the priests and experts in the law have such a closed mind when it came to understanding who Jesus was?

Q) What do you think might be the main reasons why people reject Jesus today?

b) The Son of Man and his humanity

(Read Mark 8:27-33, Matthew 8:18-20, Luke 7:31-35)

Although so many were struggling to come to terms with who Jesus might be, when the disciples are asked who people say he is, they reply John the Baptist, Elijah, or one of the prophets come to life.

Peter sums up their own thoughts by telling Jesus, 'You are the Messiah'. So, Jesus begins to teach them what that actually means, though referring to himself as Son of Man rather than Messiah. It was a title that better suited his ministry, emphasising his dual nature as both human and divine.

In Matthew's narrative we're given a glimpse of the daily pressures that Jesus endured. Wherever he goes, crowds appear in need of love, healing, and ministry. Free time and space are hard to find, and people from all walks of life want to be close to him. But his friends need to know that just as the Son of Man has no place to lay his head, to be a true disciple means a full-time commitment on their daily journey of faith.

Luke reveals more of Jesus' frustrations at the reactions of those who see and hear him, simply because he brings his humanity into the role of Messiah. The Pharisees and experts in the law were hostile to everything he was doing and saying, just as they had rejected John the Baptist's call for baptism. However, ordinary folk, and even outsiders such as tax collectors were ready to believe because Jesus met them where they were physically and spiritually, ate and drank with them, connected with them.



Francesco de Mura, Christ healing the Blind Man, c.1750

Discussion...

Q) Jesus liked to be known as Son of Man. If Jesus asked you, 'who do you say I am?' what would be your answer?

Q) The term 'Almost Christians' has been used to describe some people. What might it mean, and how does it fit with Jesus' thoughts on discipleship?

Q) What does the kind of Messiah that Jesus was, say to the way the church should interact with the community within which it sits?

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c) Son of Man and his divinity

(Read Daniel 7:13-14, Matthew 8:14-17, Luke 24:1-8)

In Aramaic and Hebrew, the title or phrase 'son of man' is a common expression describing someone or something as human or humanlike. In Ezekiel, God calls the prophet a 'son of man' to emphasise his humanness. Daniel's description of the glorified Son of Man in v13 of our passage is the most frequently quoted verse from that book in the New Testament.

The person described appears to be of heavenly origin, approaching a place of coronation accompanied by the clouds of heaven, and this is the only place in the Old Testament where 'son of man' refers to a divine rather than human person. Jesus saw Daniel's vision as fulfilled in him, even emphasising his return to earth accompanied with the clouds of heaven (Matthew 26:64)

In Matthew 8, we see something of both the humanity and divine in Jesus. The chapter begins with him reaching out, touching, and healing a man with leprosy, making sure he offers himself to the priest as required by the law, to be declared 'clean'. This is Jesus asserting his priesthood to the crowd. Then we have the servant of a centurion healed of paralysis, and a promise of the inclusion of Gentiles into the kingdom of heaven,

followed in our passage by Peter's mother-in-law and many others being healed, including the demon-possessed (demonstrating the spiritual authority of Jesus). We also see the inclusiveness of Jesus' ministry; to the outcast and unclean, the foreigner, the woman, to all.

Luke brings us the story of the women at the empty tomb. They were searching for Jesus' body to anoint and are told by two angels to remember what Jesus had told them, that the Son of Man would be crucified but on the third day be raised to life again.

The cross was never going to be the end of Jesus' story, for it was followed by a resurrection that signifies a new beginning, and by which the church was created.

Discussion...

Q) What does the prophesy from Daniel say to you?

Q) Is prayer for healing, and the laying on of hands, a part of your spiritual experience, and should it play a bigger part of the life of your church, in following the example of both Jesus and his apostles?

Q) Jesus' journey was from a humble birth in a manger to a means of death reserved mainly for the likes of criminals and rebels. Could it have been any different?

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Let's pray...

For ourselves, that this might be a time within which we find not only the fellowship of friends and family, but know the presence of the risen Jesus in our hearts and souls.

Quotes

'Once in our world, a stable had something in it that was bigger than our whole world.' — C S Lewis

'The Almighty appeared on earth as a helpless human baby, needing to be fed and changed and taught to talk like any other child. The more you think about it, the more staggering it gets. Nothing in fiction is so fantastic as this truth of the Incarnation.' — J I Packer