

## 'The Son of Man'

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September 27, 2009  
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Vancouver, BC, Canada

Text: Matthew 16: 13-28 (Daniel 7:13-14)  
Title: 'Son of Man'  
Series: Who is Jesus?

Sharon and I had the privilege of living in Manila, the Philippines from 1985 to 1989. During those years God brought into my life a man by the name of Mansour. A big man 6'3", 250 lbs. Born and raised in Iran and, at the time we first met, a Muslim.

Monsour has fled Iran when the Shah were engrossed in the revolution led by the Ayatallah Kohoming. Mansour first fled to Hong Kong, and then settled in Manila where he went to work for a Jewish manufacturing- and- export business run by an Italian Catholic from New York. Soon after moving to Manila Mansour met and fell in love with and married the daughter of the Catholic running the Jewish business.

When I became Pastor of Union Church in Manila, Mansour's wife had begun worshipping with the Protestant congregation. She was 'on fire' for Jesus as she put it. She kept asking Monsour to come and hear the 'new preacher in town' – who could help him understand why she was 'on fire'. He finally agreed to do so but for only four weeks. After which she had to agree to leave him alone, to stop bugging him about their Muslim-Christian conflict.

The four Sundays Monsour chose to come happened to be the four Sundays of the Advent- Christmas season. He was, on the one hand, touched by the sounds and sights of the season; and on the other hand, extremely agitated by what I was saying about Jesus. Through his wife he asked if I would be willing to have lunch with him and let him express his agitation. So we met. The first time was quite tense. The second more relaxed; I even felt free to encourage him to start reading the Gospel together, beginning with John. The third time we talked about what he had read thus far. Then we met a fourth time in a Mexican restaurant. What a world - a North American Christian of Swedish decent eating Mexican burritos with a Muslim from Iran in Manila.

During lunch he shared that he had finished reading John and was now in Matthew. 'So what do you think', I asked. 'Never did a man speak the way this man speaks', he said referring to Jesus. I pointed out another that one of the Temple Guards sent to arrest Jesus said the same thing when he returned without Jesus. John 7:46 ' never did a man speak the way this man speaks'.

And then Mansour began to cry. Right there in the Mexican restaurant. 'May I know why you are crying?' I asked. 'Because' he said. 'I think I could come to love Jesus.'

After a few moments of sacred silence, I asked 'is there more to your tears?' 'Yes', he said. 'I am afraid, I am afraid for my family'. 'What do you mean', I asked. 'If I choose to love Jesus my brothers will think of me as a traitor and may try to kill me.' And he just cried and cried. And I with him.

As we were leaving the restaurant he turned to me and said 'tell me again. Why is Jesus worth the risk?'

In the text we read, Matthew, chapter 16, verses 13 and 28, Jesus claims to be 'The Son of Man'.

Verse 13 – Who do people say the Son of Man is?

Verse 21 - The Son of Man must go to Jerusalem, suffer and die.

Verse 28 – There are some standing here who will not taste death until they see the Son of Man coming in His Kingdom.

It is Jesus' use of the title Son of Man that puts Him in a class all by himself. And why he is worth the risk.

Matthew is careful to tell us that Jesus speaks this way in the 1<sup>st</sup> city of Caesarea Philippi.  
MAP

Caesarea Philippi is located some 40 kilometers north of the sea of Galilee at the southern base of the beautiful Mount Hermon.

Now, what we need to know about Caesarea Philippi was famous for its cultural and religious pluralism. The point being that pluralism is not a new phenomenon. Jesus of Nazareth has made astounding claims about Himself in the midst of religious pluralism from the very beginning. Jesus is not afraid of pluralism. Jesus can hold His own in the marketplace of religions, spirituality and ideology.

In its earliest days Caesarea Philippi was called Balinas, in honour of the Cannite fertility god, Baal.. When Greeks invaded the regions, they changed the name to Paneas, in honour of the Greek god of water, Pan to 'all'. After the Romans moved in, Herod the Greek built a huge white marble temple in the city to the glory of the Caesar who had given Herod the city. In that Temple, religious services were regularly held in honour of all the Caesars who, by that time, were beginning to be revered as gods. In Jesus' day, Herod the Great's son Philli ruled the area and changed the name from Caesarea' to Caesarea Philippi ' to distinguish the city from the Caesar on the Mediterranean Sea. And in honour of Caesar Augustus who was, from his birth, being spoken of as 'a Son of God'.

It is in that city; in a city like our city that Jesus poses the question, revealing His own self-understanding. 'Who do people say the Son of Man is? Who indeed?'

It is a fact in history; Jesus of Nazareth's favourite way of speaking of Himself is to use the term 'Son of Man'. The term occurs in the New Testament eighty times, seventy-seven times on the lips of others in reference to Jesus.

Eighty times! Interesting because the term most frequently used by others to speak of Jesus is 'Christ' Greek for 'Messiah'. Used so frequently that 'Christ' has become a substitute name for Jesus. But of all the names / titles/ designations available for His use, Jesus of Nazareth chooses 'The Son of Man'. A fact emphasized by all four Gospels.

This, for me, is one of those many datum which give the New Testament what J.B. Phelps called 'the ring of truth'. As you likely know, many in our day argue that as the New Testament was being written, the early church put words into Jesus' mouth which He Himself did not say. It is argued that the historical Jesus – the real Jesus – did not actually say what the Gospels report Him to say; we have, instead, the early churches reconstruction of Jesus.

If this is so, how do we explain the New Testaments use of the Son of Man title? You see, nowhere in the available record do we find the early church call their master 'Son of Man'. Except in the case of Stephen, who as he is being stoned to death, looks up and says ' I see the heavens open up and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God (Acts 7:56). The title simply was not being used by any of the congregations of the 1<sup>st</sup> century. They were using titles like Messiah/ Christ, 'Lord', Son of God, Logos/ Word.

Now, if the early church was putting words into Jesus' mouth, would they not put into His mouth words they themselves were using? Words like 'Messiah' or 'Logo'? But now where in the record does Jesus use such terms for Himself. He is Messiah. He is Logos but does not say so explicitly.

Yet, seventy-seven times He calls Himself 'Son of Man'. So New Testament scholar Oscar Lulbren writes; 'This would be unexplainable if they (Gospel writers) were really the first to attribute the title to Jesus as a self-designation. Actually, they have preserved the memory that only Jesus himself used it this way' (The Christology of the New Testament, 155 See also FF Bruce, Tradition, 51-52, I Howard Marshall, Origins 72.)

Now, when we line up all the instances in which Jesus uses the self-designation, we discover that more than any other title it embraces the totality of His life and ministry. More than any other! Jesus uses the term 'Son of Man' in reference to 1) His early work, 2) But also in reference to His future work and in reference 3) to a time before He was conceived in the womb of the Virgin Mary.

Listen to a literary of some of Jesus Son of Man. Do not worry about 'getting ' all I am going to read. Just listen to the literary.

On the day the first disciples encountered Jesus, He said to them, 'truly, truly, I say to you. You shall see the heavens opened and the angel of God ascending and descending on the So of Man (John 1:51)

To Nicodemus, a leading Rabbi of the day, Jesus says, 'no one has ascended into heaven, but He who descended from heaven: Son of Man' (John 3:13)

One day Jesus and His disciples have broken one of the Pharisees Sabbath rules. In defense of that action Jesus Says, 'The Sabbath was meant for humanity and not humanity for the Sabbath. Consequently, the Son of Man is Lord even of the Sabbath (Mark 2:27-28). Mark tells us that the Pharisees were furious.

Another time, four men lowered their sick friend through a hole in the roof so Jesus could heal the fellow. To their surprise and to the watching authorities' horror Jesus says, 'my child, your sins are forgiven'. In defense of that action, Jesus says, 'The Son of Man' has authority on earth to forgive sins (Mark 2:1-11)

To the crowds who followed Jesus after He fed the 5000, He says, 'Do not work for the food which perishes, but for the food which endures to eternal life, which the Son of Man shall give to you. (John 6: 27)

Truly, truly, I say to you, unless you feed of the Son of Man and drink His blood, you have no life in Jerusalem' (John 6:53) 'Does this cause you to stumble? What then if you should behold the Son of Man ascending where He was before?' (John 6:61-62)

As Jesus makes his way south from Caesarea Philippi toward Jerusalem He says, at least three times, the Son of Man is going to be delivered into the hands of people, and they will kill Him, and He will be raised on the third day'. (Matthew 17:22-23)

Along the way to the Holy city, the disciples were arguing about who would be the greatest in the Kingdom of God. Jesus called them to Himself and says, 'whoever wishes to be great among you shall be your servant and whoever wishes to be first among you shall be slave of all. For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many'. (Mark 10:42-45)

A few days before entering Jerusalem Jesus has dinner at the home of Zacheus the tax-collector. During dinner Jesus justifies such scandalous behavior saying, the Son of Man came to seek and to save that which was lost. (Luke 19:8)

During Passover week, just before going to the cross, Jesus was teaching on the end times. Listen to these sayings, 'For just as the lightening comes from the east, and the flashes even to the west, so shall be the coming of the Son of Man (Matthew 24:27)

'But immediately after the tribulation of those days the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light, and the stars will fall from the sky, and the powers of heaven will be shaken, and then the sign of the Son of Man will appear in the sky, and then all the tribes of the earth will mourn, and they will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of the sky with great power and great glory.' (Matthew 24:29-30)

‘For this reason you be ready too; for the Son of Man is coming at an hour when you do not think He will.’(Matthew 24;44)

Then, the words He speaks at His trial after being asked by the Sanhedrin, superior Court of Israel, the Son of the Blessed One. Jesus says, Listen ‘I am, and you shall see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of power and coming with the clouds of heaven’.  
(Matthew 26:64; Mark 14: 62)

Matthew, Mark and Luke all tell us that after the High Priest says, after tearing his robes ‘You have heard the blasphemy’. And then all judge Jesus worthy of capital punishment.

Why? Why did the religious authorities react so violently to Jesus’ use of Son of Man? What did the term mean for the people of the first century?

Two basic ideas came to first century minds at the mention of ‘Son of Man’. First, the term was simply a Hebrew/ Aramaic way of saying ‘human being’. The psalmist asks the Creator – Psalm 8 – ‘what is man that you take thought of him’ and the Son of Man that you care for him? (Psalm 8 :4; Numbers 23;19).

Man and Son of Man are in parallel. So God even calls the prophet Ezekiel ‘Son of Man’ – Ninety times. It is a way of saying ‘human being’. In using it of Himself Jesus is affirming His solidarity with us. He is offering His real, full humanity.

This first basic meaning of the term lead some of the earliest Christian theologians to couple it with Son of God, so that Son of Man affirms the full humanity and full Divinity of Jesus Christ.

For example, Iraneaus of the fourth century once said - excuse his non-inclusive language – ‘For your sakes the Son of God became the Son of Man in order that you are sons of men might become sons of God.

The writer of the hymn ‘Fairest Lord Jesus’ seems to follow this line of thought.

But the fact is this line of thought misses the heart of the matter. For, although meaning ‘human being’, Son of Man meant so much more to the first century – so much more.

You see, of the seventy-seven times Jesus uses the title, seventy-six times He uses it with the definitive article ‘the’. He calls Himself, ‘the’ Son of Man, not just a Son of Man. Which leads us to the second basic idea triggered by the title. The Son of Man reminded first century people of a special figure in the Drama of God’s Salvation of the world. ‘The Son of Man’ reminded people of the special figure we meet in the prophet Daniel. In the seventh chapter of his book, Daniel tells us of a vision the living God gave him one night, a vision affecting the course of world history. In the vision, Daniel sees four beasts, representing powerful empires in the world. In the vision, the four beast-empires are brought before the Throne of God, where they are judged. One of the beasts is slain, the rest lost their dominion. Then in verses 13 and 14 of Daniel 7, we are brought into a

remarkable scene. Listen 'I saw in the night visions, and behold, with the clouds of heaven, there came one like a Son of Man, and he came up to the Ancient of Days and was presented to Him. And to Him (the one like the Son of Man) was given dominion and glory and a kingdom, that all people, nations and languages should serve Him; and His dominion in an everlasting dominion which shall not pass away, and His Kingdom is one that shall not be destroyed'. Amazing!

The vision is centered in 'One like a Son of Man'. 'One like' what Daniel sees cannot adequately describe and so he uses the word 'like'. 'One like a Son of Man'. The prophet sees a towering figure – 'a commanding, redeeming, glorious figure' who is human-like. (Eugene Peterson, *Reversed Thunder*, his study on Revelation)

Soon after Daniel's vision was written down and circulated, people stopped using the longer phrase 'One like a Son of Man' and simply used the title the Son of Man.

Now, looking at Daniel 7:13-14, carefully note everything Daniel says about this 'Son of Man'. He comes with the clouds of heaven (7:13) See that? This is crucial. In the Bible, clouds are often used as signals for the presence of the Divine. Whenever God met Moses in the Tabernacle, a cloud would come and envelop the meeting place (see Exodus 16:10; 19:9)

The Son of Man come with the clouds of heaven 'of heaven' on a divine chariot. The imagery is declaring 'the superhuman majesty' of the one like a human; the imagery is declaring the figure's supernatural origin and divine likeness (so Carsten Clope *Theological Directions of the New Testament Vol VIII*, p420)

Notice how these 'one like a human' acts when presented before the Ancient of Days. The Rabbi observed that this Person does not bow to the Ancient of Days. Why not? Is He a peer of the Ancient of Days? The Rabbi also observed that this person does not confess his sins. Confession was the first thing! Israel felt constricted to do when he caught a glimpse of the Glory of God. Why does this 'One like a Human' not confess Sin? Because He is sinless?

Notice that to this figure is given dominion, glory and Kingdom. Unlike the Kingdoms God given to the other humans, this Kingdom cannot be destroyed; this dominion will not pass away.

And note that all peoples, nations and language groups serve this 'the Son of Man'. All! He is a universal figure worthy of universal worship impacting the whole of history. All people will serve Him.

Who is this Person?

- 1) Who is He who comes with Divine investiture.
- 2) Who is He who comes up to the Ancient of Days without bowing or confessing His sin?
- 3) Who is He to whom is given an everlasting Kingdom?

#### 4) Who is He whom all nations will worship?

As you can imagine there was from the time Daniel had the vision, a great deal of speculation about the identity of this central figure of World History.

By the first century, the title 'The Son of Man' came to refer to a heavenly pre-existent Divine being who would come to earth in the end times to judge the nations and inaugurate the Kingdom of God. (George E Ladd)

According to German scholar Ethelbert Stauffer 'Son of Man is just about the most pretentious piece of self-description that any man in the ancient Near East could possibly have used. (New Testament theology, London SCM Press, p 19)

Sisters and Brothers only one person in history ever dared to use that most pretentious title! Only one.

In light of the meaning of the term we are not surprised that Jesus was always talking about the Kingdom. What was His first sermon? One line (Mark 1:15) 'The time is fulfilled, the Kingdom of God has come near' (Mark) Of course! For The Son of Man comes to earth to bring the Kingdom of God.

Nor are we surprised that Jesus the Man of Compassion regularly spoke of judgment. Of course! For the Son of Man comes to judge all the nations of the world (Second John 5:27)

Nor are we surprised to find Jesus making Himself the issue in that judgment. Again and again, He claimed that what individuals and nations do with Him is the criterion for judgment. That is the point of His famous parable of the sheep and the goats, where begins 'When the Son of Man comes in His glory He will sit in His throne (Mark 25:31) One day the Son of Man will separate the nations and the basis of separation will simply be what people did with Him as He came to them in the person of the persecuted (25:31-46)

Now we can appreciate why the religious authorities reacted so violently to Jesus ' words at His trial 'You will see the Son of Man will sit at the right hand of Power with the clouds of Heaven'

Jesus was claiming to be that towering figure of Daniel's vision! He was claiming to pre-existent heavenly peer of God to whom is given the everlasting Kingdom. Who as the sinless one has the right to judge the nations, and exercise authority over all the earth?

He was on trial before the highest religious court. But when He dared to call Himself the Son of Man the tables were turned. The court was on trial before Him. Indeed the judges were now not on the side of the Ancient of Days but on the side of the beasts being judged!

Perhaps one of the greatest ironies in history.

There is yet another twist to the irony. Remember when I read that litany of Son of Man saying? Remember that saying 'the Son of Man will be killed'? Actually, Jesus said at least three times 'Son of Man must suffer and die. 'must'. It confused the disciples. For nowhere in Daniel's vision does the Son of Man suffer and die. This is why Peter protests 'shall this befall you'. In that one line 'the Son of Man must suffer' we discover the Gospel. Jesus is The Son of Man, the judge of the world. But He comes into the world first to suffer as he says (Mark 10:45) 'not to be served, but to serve and gives His life as ransom for many'.

In Daniels's vision all people and nations serve Him. Jesus turns everything upside down and instead serves the world by giving His life a ransom. Ransom.

What does that mean? It means that He, the judge, changes places with us. He puts Himself in the places of the defendants. And suffers the punishment for our sins. He ransoms our lives by giving Himself so that we can live!

The rightful judge of the whole world takes upon Himself the very judgment He decrees. As the Son of Man, Jesus the Christ has the authority to execute judgment. He comes, and to everyone's surprise, exercises that authority by executing that judgment against Himself.

The Son of Man. What does it mean for us today, and tomorrow and Tuesday that Jesus of Nazareth calls himself by that title?

Let me suggest three words around which to gather the practical implications of Jesus' huge claim. The three words are: authority, perspective and decision.

1.) Authority. As the Son of Man Jesus has final authority over all of life. He is the final authority over all of life. He says after His resurrection, 'All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to Me' (Matthew 28:18). He will not be boxed up in the private, religious sphere of life. He will not stay there.

Let all the great church leaders have their say about what it means to be the church in our time; when Jesus, the Son of Man, comes to the podium His word is the last word. Let all the great sociologists and psychologists have their say about what it means to be human in our time; when Jesus the Son of Man comes to the podium His word is the last word. Let all the great philosophers and gurus have their say about the meaning of life; when Jesus the Son of Man comes to the podium His word is the last word. Let all the great political and military leaders of the world have their say about how to achieve justice and peace. Let them each have their turn in the United Nations General Assembly; when Jesus the Son of Man comes to the podium His word is the last word.

Audacious? Pretentious? Yes, only if He is wrong about Himself. After He finishes preaching His sermon on the mount the people who heard Him speak, who heard words that cut across the grain of everything they thought about how to live in the world. Said of Jesus 'This man speaks with authority because this man is the Son of Man'.



2) Perspective. Knowing Jesus is The Son of Man puts our lives in perspective. Rulers and empires will rise and fall. But the Kingdom of the Son of Man will last forever. It cannot be destroyed – His resurrection demonstrates that for all time (Ephesians 1:19-23)

The world order inaugurated by Jesus the Son of Man will never end. Which means that if we live our lives for that Kingdom we do not live in vain. All that is out of sync with the Kingdom of the Son of Man will one day vanish into thin air. But all that is in sync with His Reign is taken up into the Kingdom that endures into eternity.

Thus, Desmond Tutu, long before he became a celebrity, long before he was awarded then Nobel Peace prize – could walk into the office of the Minister of Law and Order, into the office of the Man who enforced the policy of apartheid and say; ‘Mr. Minister we must remind you that you are not God. You are just a man. And one day your name shall merely be a faint scribble on the pages of history, while the name of Jesus Christ, the Lord of the Church, shall live forever’.

The future is secure; it all ends at the feet of The Son of Man.

Authority, Perspective and

3.) Decision. What are we going to do with Him? He keeps showing up everywhere, in every sphere we live and work. And he keeps asking the question He asked the disciples at Caesarea Philippi ‘ Who do you say the Son of Man is?’ ‘What are you going to do with Me today in this sphere of life?’ Do you believe I am who I say I am? Will you follow Me? Will you trust me? Will you trust your relationships to Me? Will you trust your careers to Me? Will you trust your finances to Me? Will you trust the future to Me? Your future?

Two weeks after that tear-filled lunch in a Mexican restaurant in Manila. Mansour attended a Full-Gospel Business Persons Luncheon. After a single clear message on the call and cost of discipleship, the speaker asked if anyone was prepared to respond to Jesus. Mansour stood up, all 6’3” of him, lifted his hands in the air and said ‘I love You Jesus. I am Yours. I will risk it all to follow You.

Not long after I baptized Mansour in an outdoor swimming pool. I do not mind telling you that both he and I were a little nervous; we felt very vulnerable. As we made our way into the water I whispered in Mansour’s ear ‘If they kill you I will make sure your family is taken care of’ I lowered him in the water spoke the name of the Triune God over him. He came out of the water and cried out, for all to hear, ‘I am Yours’.

What else can you say to the Son of Man?