

Northwest Community Evangelical Free Church

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Sermon manuscript

Sermon Series: Faithful in Doubtland

The Son of Man

(Daniel 7)

Study #7

On the homestretch in of our study of Daniel...

This morning marks our seventh and next to the last study in the Old Testament book of Daniel.

Next Sunday, we will wrap up in a way that I hope will be helpful. We're going to listen to Daniel give some counsel to us.

He faced challenges while living for God in the 6th century BC, and I think he'll help us who may find it challenging to shine for Jesus, in AD 2021.

Today's message will be different than the preceding six have been, primarily because to this point in Daniel's book, we have seen great stories. Stories of faith and courage and God's deliverance, like the message Jeff gave last week about Daniel in the lion's den.

But the second half of Daniel (chapters 7-12) is not narrative and great stories. It is a series of prophecies about events that would happen after Daniel's days.

Our focus today brings us to Daniel, chapter 7, which is a very important prophetic section of the Bible.

This chapter provides insight into some things which were future to Daniel, and insight into some things that are still future even to us.

So, this message will be different, and in more ways than a movement from narrative to prophecy. I'm hoping that my presentation won't be confusing, but we're also going to be moving back and forth between the Old and New Testaments.

For reasons that I hope will become obvious, before looking at Daniel 7, we're going to first look at Jesus. I want us to pay close attention to a name He took to Himself.

During His three years of ministry, most of those who followed Him referred to Him as "Messiah" or "Christ". But Jesus rarely called Himself the Messiah. Most often, He referred to Himself by the term "***the Son of Man.***"

In all sorts of settings and in different contexts, thirty-one times in Matthew, thirteen in Mark, twenty-six in Luke, and twelve times in John, Jesus called Himself the Son of Man.

For instance...

Jesus. Self-Identifying as the "Son of Man"

The Son of Man - Homeless (Matthew 8:18-20)

Right after finishing His best-known sermon - The Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5-7) - Jesus was followed by huge crowds.

After the sermon, Matthew tells us how He went on to cleanse a man of leprosy, heal a Roman centurion's slave, and heal Simon Peter's mother-in-law of a fever.

Given His growing popularity and His ability to heal, we're not surprised that Jesus was constantly surrounded by crowds.

One day, with the crowds pressing in on Him by the shore of the Sea of Galilee, He gave orders to the disciples to take the boat to the other side.

As they were getting ready to leave, a Jewish scribe approached Jesus and said, **[Matthew 8:19]...“Teacher, I will follow You wherever You go.”**

Jesus replied, **[20]...“The foxes have holes and the birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay His head.”**

He is **“the Son of Man”**. The title here seems to be a term describing His humble life. The Son of Man is homeless.

There is more.

The Son of Man - Forgives Sins (Matthew 9:2-7)

Back in the city of Capernaum (Jesus’ “home base” for ministry), He was in a home, teaching, when some people brought a friend who was paralyzed to be healed by Jesus.

Luke’s Gospel tells us that these friends dug a hole through the roof’s tiles and lowered the man down by ropes. Matthew just says that they brought this paralytic to Jesus, lying on a cot.

Jesus was overwhelmed by the faith of this man’s friends, and told the man, **[Matthew 9:2]...“Take courage, son; your sins are forgiven.”**

That comment didn’t set well with the Jewish scribes who were gathered in the home. They thought Jesus was blaspheming. Only God can forgive sins.

Jesus knew exactly what they were thinking and addressed their thoughts. (Right, how unsettling would THAT be?)

[4]...“Why are you thinking evil in your hearts? [5] “Which is easier, to say, ‘Your sins are forgiven,’ or to say, ‘Get up, and walk’?”

[6] “But so that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins” - then He said to the paralytic, “Get up, pick up your bed and go home.”

Jesus healed him. Just like that. And there’s the term again: **“Son of Man.”** Here, the term doesn’t speak to His low station, but to His power. The **“Son of Man”** has authority to forgive sins. Impressive.

The Son of Man - Lord of the Sabbath (Mark 2:23-28)

Then, Mark tells us in his Gospel about a time when Jesus and His disciples were passing through some grainfields on a Sabbath day - the day when the Jews didn’t work.

The disciples started picking the heads of grain as they passed through the field, eating the grain for a mid-day snack.

The Pharisees accused them of violating the Sabbath’s “no work” rule, and complained to Jesus, **[Mark 2:24]...“Look, why are they doing what is not lawful on the Sabbath?”**

So, Jesus proceeded to give these scholars a Sabbath School lesson, reminding them of the time when David violated Jewish law by eating bread that had been consecrated to God.

His point was that if David could violate Old Covenant rules for the purpose of preserving life - and be blameless - how much more should His disciples be blameless for doing something life-giving and refreshing on the Sabbath, like eating while walking through a grainfield?

What He said was, **[Mark 2:27]...“The Sabbath was made for man, and not man for the Sabbath. [28] “So the Son of Man is Lord even of the Sabbath.”**

Jesus claimed the privilege of doing whatever He wanted to do on the Sabbath. He’s the Son of Man.

And then, one final glimpse of Jesus before we move on to Daniel.

The Son of Man - a Friend to Sinners (Luke 7:31-34)

Luke writes of what Jesus had to say about John the Baptist. John was a truly great man, and many of the Jews had been baptized by John in the Jordan River.

But lots of the leading Jews had not, just like some of the Jews believed Jesus' message, while many others did not.

Jesus said that those who rejected John and Himself were like children who wouldn't respond with happiness when invited to dance to a flute tune, and who don't mourn when listening to a dirge.

He wrapped up with this: **[Luke 7:33] "For John the Baptist has come eating no bread and drinking no wine, and you say, 'He has a demon!' [34] "The Son of Man has come eating and drinking, and you say, 'Behold, a gluttonous man and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and sinners!'"**

This use of the title doesn't speak to special powers or to a humble station in life. It speaks to a unique connection between Jesus and those people who were considered outcasts by the religious rulers.

In these and many other settings, Jesus referred to Himself as **"the Son of Man."** He self-identified as **"the Son of Man."**

At this point it may not be crystal clear why He chose this title. But, while there's more to it than this, it is at least clear that **"Son of Man"** emphasized His humanity. He was a man. One of us.

And all of that about Jesus calling Himself **"the Son of Man"** is prequel to what we're about to see in Daniel 7, which begins with a time stamp.

[1] In the first year of Belshazzar king of Babylon, Daniel saw a dream and visions in his mind as he lay on his bed; then he wrote the dream down and told the following summary of it.

King Belshazzar, a direct descendant of King Nebuchadnezzar,¹ was the last king of the Babylonian Empire.² He was killed when the Persians sacked Babylon in 539 BC.

Daniel received the vision in the first year of Belshazzar's reign, and the vision is of four beasts who rise up out of the sea.

Daniel's Vision (7:1-28)

A Beastly Vision (7:2-8, 15-27)

The vision of four beasts (vv. 2-8)

Beasts #'s 1, 2, 3 (vv. 4-6)

[4] The first was like a lion but had the wings of an eagle. I kept looking until its wings were plucked, and it was lifted up from the ground and set up on two feet like a man; a human mind also was given to it.

[5] And behold, another beast, a second one, resembling a bear. And it was raised up on one side, and three ribs were in its mouth between its teeth; and they said this to it: 'Arise, devour much meat!'

[6] After this I kept looking, and behold, another one, like a leopard, which had on its back four wings of a bird; the beast also had four heads, and dominion was given to it.

Those are all terrible beasts. They don't begin to compare, though, to the terribleness to the fourth beast.

Beast #4 (7:7-8)

¹ See Daniel 5:2 where Belshazzar is called the "son" of Nebuchadnezzar. Technically, he was the grandson of Nebuchadnezzar and the son of Nabonidus. It would have been common, though, to have referred to him as Nebuchadnezzar's "son".

² See the end of his reign, recorded in Daniel 5.

[7] After this I kept looking in the night visions, and behold, a fourth beast, dreadful and terrible, and extremely strong; and it had large iron teeth. It devoured and crushed, and trampled down the remainder with its feet; and it was different from all the beasts that were before it, and it had ten horns.

This fourth, awful beast, gets the most attention. Daniel's vision included more details about this one than about the others.

[8] While I was thinking about the horns, behold, another horn, a little one, came up among them, and three of the previous horns were plucked out before it; and behold, this horn possessed eyes like human eyes, and a mouth uttering great boasts.

This is wild stuff. There is even a name for this kind of prophetic vision. It is called "apocalyptic" and consists of fantastic images and other-worldly creatures.

Can you imagine having dreams and visions like this? It would be confusing and disturbing. You'd want to know. *"What's up with this?"*

That's what Daniel wanted to know. So, we skip forward a bit and read that he ***[16]...approached one of those who were standing by and began requesting of him the exact meaning of all this.***

So, one of those who was standing by (an angel), told Daniel what these beasts symbolized.

The interpretation (vv. 16b-27)

Four beasts are four kingdoms (v. 17)

[17] These great beasts, which are four in number, are four kings who will arise from the earth."

Each beast represented a king, a ruler of a kingdom - and the text doesn't identify which beast represented which kingdom.

My opinion is that the beasts represent Babylon (lion), the Medo-Persian Empire (bear), Greece (leopard), and then Rome (beast).

If I'm right, it is understandable that these kings weren't identified, since when Daniel was receiving this vision, two of the kings/kingdoms hadn't even arrived on the scene of history.

Then, Daniel is told that these four kings/kingdoms will be succeeded by God's kingdom.

[18] "But the saints of the Highest One will receive the kingdom and take possession of the kingdom forever, for all ages to come."

Daniel had more questions about the super-terrible fourth beast,³ which the angel answered.

The fourth beast (vv. 19-27)

The fourth beast represents a kingdom different from the three that preceded it. Its scope will be world-wide. It will rule over the world known to Daniel's readers with cruelty and devastating force.

The ten horns of that fourth beast signify ten kings that will rise out of the fourth kingdom. Out of them will come one king who will humble all the others and will become preeminent.

[25] And he (this one king) will speak against the Most High and wear down the saints of the Highest One, and he will intend to make alterations in times and in law; and they will be handed over to him for a time, times, and half a time.

I think that there is good reason to believe that this "little horn" is the "beast" - the one we sometimes refer to as the Antichrist - spoken of in Revelation (chapter 13).

And the angel goes on to explain to Daniel that the reign of the little horn will come to a sudden end.

[26] But the court will convene for judgment, and his dominion will be taken away, annihilated and destroyed forever.

³ See Daniel 7:19-24.

[27] Then the sovereignty, the dominion, and the greatness of all the kingdoms under the whole heaven will be given to the people of the saints of the Highest One; His kingdom will be an everlasting kingdom, and all the empires will serve and obey Him.”

The fourth beast and his descendants will be overwhelmed by a fifth kingdom, the kingdom of God.

Immediately after telling us the vision, Daniel moves to describe a heavenly scene. He writes of a Being who reigns over the heavenly kingdom that will overthrow the fourth earthly kingdom. This Being is called **“the Ancient of Days.”**

The Ancient of Days (7:9-12)

The Ancient of Days on His throne (v. 9)

**[9] “I kept looking
Until thrones were set up,
And the Ancient of Days took His seat;
His garment was white as snow,
And the hair of His head like pure wool.
His throne was ablaze with flames,
Its wheels were a burning fire.**

This, most Bible students agree, is God the Father. His appearance speaks of purity and holiness.

He sits on a throne, which speaks of sovereignty over a kingdom. And there are other thrones. Presumably, angelic authorities will sit on these thrones.

Daniel continues.

The scene at His throne (v. 10)

**[10] A river of fire was flowing
And coming out from before Him;
Thousands upon thousands were serving Him,**

**And myriads upon myriads⁴ were standing before Him;
The court convened,
And the books were opened.**

Innumerable saints and angels are present at the throne scene. They worship and serve the Ancient of Days. Judgment has come for the nations as books are opened.

Then, the scene shifts from this heavenly scene to a vision of the destruction of the earthly beast.

The defeat of the beasts (vv. 11-12)

**[11] Then I kept looking because of the sound of the boastful words which the horn was speaking; I kept looking until the beast was killed, and its body was destroyed and given to the burning fire.
[12] As for the rest of the beasts, their dominion was taken away, but an extension of life was granted to them for an appointed period of time.**

I believe that these words (vv. 9-12) refer to an actual, physical event. It was far distant in the future for Daniel and for the writers of the New Testament, and is still future to us, today.

I believe that this final judgment of the nations describes something that happens at the second coming of Christ, when the fourth beast and his descendants are destroyed, and a kingdom from heaven is established.

As we continue to read Daniel’s words about the far distant future, we meet another Figure. This is the high point of Daniel’s vision, and the scene is of heaven, not earth.

The Son of Man (7:13-14)

**[13] “I kept looking in the night visions,
And behold, with the clouds of heaven**

⁴ Myriad = 10,000.

*One like a son of man was coming,⁵
 And He came up to the Ancient of Days
 And was presented before Him.
 [14] And to Him was given dominion,
 Honor, and a kingdom,
 So that all the peoples, nations, and populations of all languages
 Might serve Him.
 His dominion is an everlasting dominion
 Which will not pass away;
 And His kingdom is one
 Which will not be destroyed.*

The point to take away from this vision is that at the end of the story - all of human history - God reigns. The Father (the Ancient of Days) will be seated on a throne and will be attended by a great multitude who worship Him.

Then, another Person comes with the clouds of heaven. There is something distinctly human about this Person. But He's not only human. He is *"like"* a *"son of man."*⁶

So, we can say that He is human AND that He is more than human. That He arrives at the throne with the clouds of heaven implies deity. This is a God/man.

He is presented to the Ancient of Days and is given authority to rule and to have dominion over all peoples and nations. And His kingdom, unlike all the other kingdoms described in Daniel 7, will have no end.

When we first saw the term *"the Son of Man"* today in the Gospels, it was describing Jesus as humble and homeless, as a forgiver of sins and the Lord of the Sabbath, and as a friend to outcast sinners.

⁵ There are lots of other places where "son of man" is used in the Old Testament. For instance, Ezekiel uses the term dozens of times, but it is always used to refer to himself. Daniel 8:17 uses the term "son of man", but it clearly refers to the prophet himself. This usage is unique.

⁶ Aramaic, the language in which this passage was written, does not have the definite article, which would read *"THE son of man."*

After seeing Daniel 7, we understand that much more was implied by the term, *"the Son of Man."*

Now, fast forward to the ending chapters of Mark's Gospel.

Jesus, the Unimagined "Son of Man"

Jesus Was Opposed for This Claim (Mark 14:55-64)

Just before Passover, Jesus was betrayed by Judas Iscariot, arrested in the Garden of Gethsemane, and turned over to the Jewish Sanhedrin for trial.

The court was putting witnesses forward who were giving false testimony to get Him arrested. But they couldn't find credible witnesses. The witnesses were all contradicting each other.

Finally, exasperated, the High Priest stood, walked right up to Jesus, and asked *[Mark 14:61]... "Are You the Christ, the Son of the Blessed One?"*

Or, *"Are You the Messiah we've been waiting for who will rescue us from Rome?"*

Jesus didn't exactly answer that question. He upped the ante with a much more radical response.

[Mark 14:62]... "I am;⁷ and you shall see THE SON OF MAN SITTING AT THE RIGHT HAND OF POWER, and COMING WITH THE CLOUDS OF HEAVEN."

That was not Jesus making reference to His humble life or to His lowly birth. That was as clear a claim from Jesus to be the *"Son of Man"* of Daniel 7 as it was possible to make.

It was that claim that prompted the response of the high priest.

⁷ Greek: *"Εγω εμι"* referring to God's self-identification to Moses - I AM - at the burning bush in the wilderness. (Exodus 3) Jesus was claiming here to be God in the flesh.

[63] Tearing his clothes, the high priest said, “What further need do we have of witnesses? [64] “You have heard the blasphemy; how does it seem to you?” And they all condemned Him to be deserving of death.⁸

In the mind of the high priest, that a man, especially a guy like Jesus, would claim to be Daniel’s **“Son of Man”** was crossing an uncrossable line.

He was a poor carpenter’s son from Nazareth. He led a life of abject poverty. He was sure not a heavenly Being coming on the clouds of heaven.

But the Jewish rulers definitely “got it.” They knew exactly what Jesus was claiming, and they saw to it that He was sentenced to death for that claim.

When He actually died, they were more convinced than ever that He couldn’t have been **“the Son of Man.”** Who had ever heard of **“the Son of Man”** dying on a cross? How oxymoronic!

But how fitting that Jesus, who was the God / man, should take the title **“Son of Man”**, do what only the God / man could do, and promise to do what Daniel promised the **“Son of Man”** would do.

Make no mistake about it. The **“Son of Man”** that Jesus came to earth to be was, during His first-century life, nothing like what was predicted by Daniel’s vision.

The Jesus we know came to earth as the Son of Man, to serve.

A Very Different Understanding of the Son of Man

Servant of all (Mark 10:42-45)

Right after James and John, two of the apostles, requested the first places in Jesus’ coming kingdom, and the other ten were filled with

indignation that they had missed their chance by not asking first, Jesus pulled them all aside and told them that if they wanted to be great in His kingdom, they would have to learn to serve.

Jesus then offered Himself as the ultimate example of greatness.

[Mark 10:45] “For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many.”⁹

Savior of the lost (Luke 19:1-10)

Jesus passed through the city of Jericho right before making the ascent to Jerusalem to enter the city for the last time, to die.

In Jericho was a high-ranking tax collector, Zacchaeus, who wanted to see Jesus. But Zacchaeus was height-challenged and had to climb a sycamore tree to get a glimpse of Jesus.

When Jesus saw Zacchaeus, He invited Himself to Zacchaeus’ house for a meal. Not surprisingly, Zacchaeus was thrilled.

Also, not surprisingly, the crowds grumbled against Jesus because He was going to eat a meal with a notorious sinner.

The Lord took their insult as a compliment.

[Luke 19:9] And Jesus said to him, “Today salvation has come to this house, because he, too, is a son of Abraham. [10] “For the Son of Man has come to seek and to save that which was lost.”

Lifted up to give eternal life to those who believe (John 3:8-17)

And much earlier, when Jesus was approached by a well-known rabbi, Nicodemus, He explained that in order to have eternal life, one must be **[John 3:3] “born again.”**

⁸ Also, Matthew 26; Luke 22

⁹ Also, Matthew 20:25

Nicodemus didn't understand what Jesus was talking about, so the Lord gave him a word picture, dating back to Old Testament times.

During the days of Moses, the Jews had rebelled against God, prompting God to send poisonous snakes into the midst of their encampment.

Thousands of the people died. So, at God's command, Moses made a bronze serpent and attached it to a wooden standard.

He let it be known that anyone who looked at that bronze serpent - just faithfully looked at it! - would be saved from the fatal bite of the snakes.

Jesus went on to explain to Nicodemus, **[14] "As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up; [15] so that whoever believes will in Him have eternal life. [16] "For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life."**

As the author of the book of Hebrews writes, **[Hebrews 9:27] And just as it is destined for people to die once, and after this comes judgment, [28] so Christ also, having been offered once to bear the sins of many, will appear a second time for salvation without reference to sin, to those who eagerly await Him.**

But the days of Jesus of Nazareth were not that.

Today, we know and we worship and we present a **"Son of Man"** who came to give His life as a ransom for many, to seek and to save the lost, and to give eternal life to all who believe.

Conclusion:

I am not denying for a minute that Jesus will come back as the glorious, heavenly Son of Man predicted in Daniel's vision.