

ENTHRONED ABOVE

Daniel 7:13-14

Philippians 2:5-11

John 10:14-18

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SCRIPTURE

¹³ “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” (Daniel 7:13-14 NIV).

⁵Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus, ⁶ who, though he was in the form of God, did not regard equality with God as something to be exploited, ⁷ but emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, being born in human likeness. And being found in human form, ⁸ he humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death— even death on a cross. ⁹ Therefore God also highly exalted him and gave him the name that is above every name, ¹⁰ so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bend, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, ¹¹ and every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father (Philippians 2:5-11 NRSV).

¹⁴I am the good shepherd. I know my own and my own know me, ¹⁵just as the Father knows me and I know the Father. And I lay down my life for the sheep. ¹⁶I have other sheep that do not belong to this fold. I must bring them also, and they will listen to my voice. So there will be one flock, one shepherd. ¹⁷For this reason the Father loves me, because I lay down my life in order to take it up again. ¹⁸No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it up again. I have received this command from my Father” (John 10:14-18 NRSV).

After this I looked, and behold, a great multitude that no one could number, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed in white robes, with palm branches in their hands, and crying out with a loud voice, "Salvation

belongs to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb!" And all the angels were standing around the throne and around the elders and the four living creatures, and they fell on their faces before the throne and worshiped God, saying, "Amen! Blessing and glory and wisdom and thanksgiving and honor and power and might be to our God forever and ever! Amen" (Revelation 7:9-11).

INTRODUCTION

I remember coming across an article a few years back about a survey of 2,000 adults who were asked what they thought was the most boring thing one person could tell another. At the top of the list was, "People telling you their dreams." Linus Edwards puts it this way:

We've all been there, you are having a perfectly pleasant and engaging conversation with someone when suddenly they say the dreaded words, "I had the strangest dream last night." Your eyes immediately glaze over because you know that no matter how strange and crazy the dream seems to them, it will be excruciatingly boring to you. They then proceed to tell you how in their dream they were attacked by a Gila Monster, but then were suddenly in their 9th grade homeroom, but it looked more like a church, and the teacher was their brother, although he didn't look quite right. You find nothing at all interesting in their incoherent dream but respond appropriately, "wow, that's crazy." They are usually satisfied and the conversation continues.

There are exceptions, of course. Consider the prophet Daniel. He had amazing dreams.

MESSAGE

Daniel saw terrifying beasts arise from the sea, beasts that represented great kings and kingdoms. The last kingdom was more terrible than the others and its king so terrifying that he could even "wear out" the saints of God. But in the midst of the terror, a throne of fire was set up before Daniel's eyes. It was not the throne of a terrible king. It was the throne of God himself, the Holy One who is called the Ancient of Days. Then in Daniel's vision, there came on the clouds of heaven a human figure, a figure who is "like a son of man." Daniel watched as this human being, this son of man, came to stand before the throne. The Ancient of Days gave the son of man a kingdom, a kingdom of "all peoples, nations and languages," a kingdom that will never be destroyed, a kingdom that will last forever.

The Son of Man is a title that we often hear in the New Testament. The phrase, "Son of

Man” was Jesus’ favorite way of referring to himself. It was a seldom used term in Jesus’ day that traced its roots to the Book of Daniel (7:13-14). Jesus used this term in order to avoid the mistaken notions about the Messiah so prevalent in his day.

But before we talk about the mistaken notions about the Messiah let’s consider where the idea originates. As Christians, we are so used to saying “Jesus Christ” rather than “Jesus the Christ” that we may think that Christ is his last name instead of his title. In the Old Testament, priests and kings were recognized in a ceremony that involved pouring olive oil on the person’s head. A person who experienced this was called an “anointed one.” Prophets were also considered “anointed ones” even if olive oil was not used. The Hebrew term for “anointed one” comes into the English language as “messiah.” “Christ” is from the Greek form of messiah and means the same thing.

So each prophet, priest and king was a messiah. Each prophet, priest and king was a christ. But over the generations, the people of God made some important observations about this. They concluded that most of their prophets had been liars, most of their priests corrupt, and most of their kings malevolent.

But some of the prophets, like Isaiah and Jeremiah (and, of course, the other prophets that became part of the canon of Scripture), had been telling them the truth. Its just that the people did not like what these prophets had said and so rejected them in favor of prophets who gave more enjoyable, but less truthful, sermons. Later, during the long, dark time known as the Babylonian Exile (*circa* 587-517 B.C.), the people of God began to come to their senses and realized that God had been speaking to them through these “unpopular” prophets. Furthermore, these truthful prophets indicated that God was going to send a special leader to redeem his people. So the people yearned for this to take place. They looked for One who would be, all at the same time - a prophet who told the truth, a priest whose heart was pure, and a king who was righteous. In other words, they longed for THE Messiah – the hope of Israel -- whom God would send.

Those who were first attracted to Jesus during his three years of ministry believed that he was the hope of Israel. But they thought of that hope in materialistic terms. There were many rabbinical writers who spoke of the future salvation of Israel as the “new exodus.” In the first exodus, you may recall, God through Moses put down the power of Egypt and liberated the Israelites. In the new exodus, God through his Messiah would put down the enemies of Israel and set his people free. So when people saw Jesus as the hope of Israel what they wanted was for Jesus to raise an army, overthrow the Romans, set the people free and bring wealth, power and prestige to the nation. However, when Jesus spoke about his destiny he never quite mentioned these things.

By using the phrase, "Son of Man," Jesus was able to dissuade people from thinking that his destiny was to become a Jewish Caesar. He also used this phrase to persuade people to recognize two unexpected but nonetheless necessary characteristics of the Messiah. The Messiah is divine. The Messiah would suffer and die for his people.

In Daniel's vision, Daniel saw the Son of Man as someone who approached God in his heavenly throne room and was given universal authority and dominion. So the claim to be the Son of Man is a claim to divinity. Jesus said:

"The Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins" (Matthew 9:6).

"The Son of Man is Lord of the Sabbath" (Matthew 12:8).

"You will see the Son of Man seated at the right hand of Power, and coming on the clouds of heaven" (Mark 14:62)

The Son of Man is God in the flesh. The Son of Man is divine. The Messiah would have dominion over all.

But before dominion came humility, because, as Jesus put it:

"The Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as ransom for many" (Matthew 20:28).

The Son of Man is the Son of God who emptied himself and took the form of a servant. He is the Son of God and son of Mary, born in Bethlehem – born among us as one of us, true God and true man. Before the Son of Man received dominion and glory, he stood before the heavenly throne and received from his Father another task, the task for which he was sent to earth. It was not a glorious task, not at first, but a mission of humility and suffering, because the Son of Man is the Good Shepherd who will die for his sheep. The Shepherd said:

"I lay down my life that I may take it up again. No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have the authority to lay it down, and I have authority to take it up again. This charge I have received from my Father" (John 10:17-18).

This is the authority the Son received from his Father, the Ancient of Days – the authority to lay down his life as a sacrifice for the sins of the world and the authority to take up his life again. In humble obedience to his Father, the Son laid down his life on the cross.

The Good Shepherd is the Lamb led to the slaughter. He is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world, who takes away your sin and mine.

Carol Geisler makes this observation:

You know the familiar nursery rhyme: "Mary had a little lamb, its fleece was white as snow; and everywhere that Mary went, the lamb was sure to go." Mary had a little lamb. That is something we will soon celebrate, the birth of Mary's son in a stable in Bethlehem, the birth of the Lamb of God. The nursery rhyme continues with the story of a lamb found in an unexpected place: "It followed her to school one day, which was against the rule. It made the children laugh and play, to see a lamb at school." The children laughed to see a lamb in a place where they did not expect to see it – at school. In visions sometimes very much like the vision of Daniel, the apostle John sees a Lamb in an unexpected place.

John sees the Lamb who was slain, the Lamb who shed his blood to save us, standing in the midst of the heavenly throne. The Lamb is surrounded by a countless multitude that, as Daniel had foreseen, comes from "all peoples, nations and languages." One day you and I, with all who trust in Jesus as their Savior, will stand in that countless multitude and join in their shout of praise: "Salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb!" The Lamb who was slain is the Son of Man who received from the Ancient of Days an everlasting dominion, a kingdom that will not be destroyed. The Lamb enthroned above will be our Shepherd, and he will guide us to springs of living water and shelter us with his eternal presence. He will wipe away every tear from our eyes. For all eternity we will cry out in praise to God and to the Lamb:

"To him who sits on the throne and to the Lamb be blessing and honor and glory and might forever and ever!" (Revelation 5:13) Amen.