

“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 peoples, nations and men 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)

Do You Recognize this King?

I have a superpower. At least, my wife and I joke that I do. My superpower is recognizing actors. When we watch TV, my wife will say, “Who is that?” and I can usually come up with what other movie or TV show we’ve seen that actor and what role they played. In fact, sometimes, I’ll ask her, “Do you know who that is?” and then reveal the stunning insight of my superpower. Now, as far as superpowers go, it’s not all that great. But you have to take what you can get. This morning, I wonder if we could all use my superpower. You see, in God’s Word for today, the prophet Daniel shows us a king. Can you see from the words he speaks who that king is? Obviously, we’re here in church this morning, so even if you’ve never heard these words before, you probably know who the king is. And if you look at the cover of your bulletin for today, you’ll see another clue: the name for this Sunday – the last Sunday of the church year – is Christ the King. But if you didn’t have those obvious clues, if all you had were the words before you and the rest of the Bible to compare them to, would you get the right answer? And if you had lived when Jesus walked this earth, would you have put him together with these words? **Do you recognize this King?**

In Daniel chapter seven, God shows the prophet a vision of the future. Much as he did in the chapter before our text for last Sunday, God shows Daniel the struggles of the New Testament age and the attacks of the Antichrist. But then, Daniel sees the Ancient of Days – God the Father – come in and sit on a throne to judge the world. And the books are opened which record all the events of our lives and the faith and unbelief of every person. The Antichrist is destroyed and then Daniel says, **“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.”**

Do you recognize this king? What does God call him? “One like a son of man.” Of course, you recognize those words, right? Jesus calls himself “the Son of Man” almost thirty times just in the gospel of Matthew alone. But what does that title mean? It’s really a Hebrew way of speaking. It’s a way of saying, “That’s what he is.” For instance, in Hebrew, if you want to say that someone is ten years old, you say that he or she is a son or a daughter of ten years. In the Bible, people who are wicked are sometimes called “sons of wickedness.” Once, when someone deserved to die, King David said, “he is a son of death!” So, on one level, “son of man” simply means a human son, that is a human being. In that sense, God calls the prophet Ezekiel “son of man” almost a hundred times and he calls a few other people – including Daniel – by that same expression, always emphasizing that they are human beings, not God. In fact, at least once, God says that he is not a son of man, not a human being, so he doesn’t lie.

So what Daniel saw in his vision was someone who looked like a human being, coming on the clouds of heaven and led into God’s presence. He goes on and he says, **“He was given authority, glory and sovereign power; all peoples, nations and men 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.”** This obviously takes us far beyond what any human being can ever have. Who alone has authority, glory and sovereign power? Who alone will all peoples and nations worship? Who alone has an everlasting dominion and a kingdom that will never pass away? God. He gives those things to the King who is led into his presence.

Who is Daniel talking about? Jesus, of course. God said that this king will come with the clouds of heaven. Jesus himself said that when he returns, he will come on the clouds of heaven. He was clearly thinking of this verse when he spoke that way. And he was clearly thinking of this passage when he called himself “the Son of Man.” With that little word “the,” Jesus was setting himself apart from all other sons and daughters of man, from all other human beings. He was calling himself the one, great Son of Man you should know about. He was pointing back to this passage and asking his people, “Don’t you recognize me? I’m the one that God said would come. I’m the one that Daniel saw six hundred years ago, the one like a human being who will

come with the clouds of heaven and who will be led in triumph into the presence of God himself. I am the one who will rule forever.”

Jesus had to say that because without some clue, the people of his day could never have recognized him, because he was *like* a human being. When you looked at Jesus, what did you see? He didn't really look the way we often see him in religious art. Picture Jesus in your mind. What does he look like? Is he wearing a white robe? Does he have a halo? Does he look larger than life and different – maybe even cleaner – than the disciples standing behind him? That's often the way we portray Jesus. But understand that he always looked like a normal human being. There was no halo. After a long day of walking on dusty roads, his clothes got dirty and sweaty. While he clearly was a great preacher, he wasn't obviously different from other Jewish men of his time. He was a normal human being in every respect just like we are. So he needed to reveal to his people that he was only *like* a son of man. He was more than just a human being. He was also the Son of God. He was the Savior they had been waiting for throughout all their history.

The people of Jesus' day had great difficulty in recognizing him. Most of them missed their king when he came. Do we have the same problem? We have a tremendous advantage over those people: we have the full story of Christ. We don't have to figure out who this preacher was. We don't have to think about that expression “the Son of Man” and put it together with Daniel to understand that he was claiming to be the Savior. We know that already. But do we still struggle to recognize the King today? Certainly our society does. Our society is becoming less and less a churchgoing people. While it would be unusual to discover someone in America who didn't understand that Christians believe that Jesus is the Son of God, there are many people who do not understand why that is important. There are many, many people who do not trust in what he did to give us eternal life.

Hopefully, we do. But that doesn't mean that we have a reason to pat ourselves on the back. Christians have a long history of self-congratulation in America. And unfortunately, it leads away us from Christ. The more I think that I'm better because I know who Jesus is, the more I think that I know who Jesus is because I'm better than those poor, unenlightened people who just don't get it. It is a blessing to know the Savior. But none of us figured that out on our own. God came to every one of us in the gospel and he showed us our Savior. God claimed us in the waters of baptism and in the promise of his forgiveness. Without his work, not one of us would recognize the King. That's true, because every one of us was born a sinner. We were born in full scale rebellion against God. Left to ourselves, we would've grown up thinking we were good people and that when we died, we'd go “to a better place.” That's what almost all Americans think, even those who never come to church. But the truth is, God sends sinners to hell. God crushes wickedness, rebellion and sin and on Judgment Day, the King will celebrate his triumph over his enemies. The only reason that we won't be part of those who are crushed is that God came to us in his word and he made us believers.

That is what it means to recognize the Son of Man: we recognize that in that human body our Savior came. We recognize that we need that Savior because every day of our lives, we sin. A few weeks ago, we sang a hymn that has been stuck in my mind ever since. One verse spoke of “all the longing hopes that haunt us.” Usually, we think of hope as a good thing. But in this verse, longing hopes haunt us. Isn't that true? I find myself thinking about things that I wanted for my life and for my ministry, some of which I have not had and I may never have. And I feel discontent because I don't have those things. Sometimes, I even catch myself getting angry with people who I blame for denying me those things. Do you do that? Do you think about that house, that pretty girl, that opportunity to get ahead that you didn't get and then you think of the person you're sure is to blame and hate them? Do you wallow in discontent? Whether we realize it or not, that discontent is an accusation against God. Those longing hopes that haunt us lead us to say, “God you're not taking good care of me.” That's sin. It comes from the sinful pride of our hearts that believes that everything really should be about me. If God doesn't get that, well, what kind of a God is he?

We would probably never say anything that blasphemous. But don't you see? Every sin we commit says exactly that. We all deserve to spend eternity in hell forever. But God sent his Son, who came “like a son of man” – who came as a real human being – to be perfect in our place. No longing hopes haunted Jesus. No discontent accused God in his heart. He was perfect in word and deed, perfect in heart and mind for us. And he died on the cross for us. He stretched out those human arms and hung there and suffered hell itself for us and then he died. And then he rose. And in his resurrection God took all our sin away. On Judgment Day, he will

return with the clouds of heaven and then he will give us a life that is better than anything we could have hoped for here. And it will be ours for as long as he reigns in heaven – forever.

But we don't live yet in that kingdom that Jesus will rule forever. Right now, we live down here. And we still need to recognize our King. Where should we see him? Right here. We recognize the King in his people, the Church. The Bible calls the Church the Body of Christ. He is the head of the body – the one who gives us life and the one who rules us. The world doesn't see Christ in us. I read an article this week by a woman who was furious because the Anglican Church decided not to ordain women bishops. She was very open about the fact that she didn't believe and she was convinced that anyone who believed what the Bible teaches is a reactionary woman hater and gay basher. That's what the world sees when it looks at us. It sees our sins and it calls us as hypocrites. It hears the law and it hates what God says. On those rare occasions where it does hear the gospel, it doesn't understand it. So our society does not see Christ here. But he is here. He promises that where two or three gather in his name, he will always be with us. He will rule all things for our good.

And he is with us in his Word. Every time we hear the gospel, Jesus reaches into our hearts and strengthens us. He's here in Baptism and he claims our children as his own. He's here in communion. He gives us his very body and blood to eat and drink in order to say to us personally, "You are my child. Your sins are gone. You will live forever." He is here and he will never leave us or forsake us.

That is the promise of Christ the King. Jesus is ruling all things today. And the day will come when he will move into the open and the whole human race will at last understand that his reign will go on forever and ever. Everyone will then acknowledge our King. Today, it's hard to see that. You know, sometimes when I use my superpower, I'm sure the person on the screen is someone I've seen before, but I can't quite put together where. So I cheat. I get out my I-pod and I do a quick search and then announce who it is. In this world, none of us would recognize Jesus our King on our own. So God lets us cheat – he tells us who this King is. But when Jesus comes back, all people we see and understand. And he will rule forever. We will be blessed for all eternity. Amen.