

Knowing God

Learning about God from the “Son of Man” (Part 4)

In Part 3, Jesus the “Son of God” reveals not only that God is a relationship, but also that God created us humans to share in that relationship. The question then becomes, “HOW does God make that relationship possible for us?”

This is where Jesus the “Son of Man” comes in. It’s a title Jesus often used in referring to himself, as in **Matthew 16:13** “When Jesus came to the region of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples ‘Who do people say the Son of Man is?’” - and then he asks them in **verse 15**, “But what about you? Who do you say I am?” He makes a clear connection here between the Son of Man and himself.

But what meaning would such a title have to his disciples? Huge meaning because they knew what Daniel had predicted in **Daniel 7:13-14** “In my vision at night I looked, and there before me was one like a son of man, coming with clouds in heaven...He was given authority, glory and sovereign power; all peoples, nations and men of every language worshipped him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion that will not pass away, and his kingdom is one that will never be destroyed.”

And that meant a great deal to the disciples because in **verse 18** “the saints of the Most High will receive the kingdom and will possess it forever – yes, for ever and ever.”

This was the dream of God’s chosen people, that one day “one like a son of man” would kickstart the Messianic age that would rule the world forever. “One like a son of man” became the title of the Messiah, therefore, the one who would destroy the enemies of God and rule the kingdoms of this world with absolute authority. And here was Jesus actually calling himself by that very title, connecting himself directly with what Daniel had predicted:

Matthew 19:28 “I tell you the truth, at the renewal of all things, when the Son of Man sits on his glorious throne, you who have followed me will also sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel.” And when “the high priest asked him,” in **Mark 14:61** “Are you the Christ, the Son of the Blessed One?” Jesus answered in **verse 62** “I am. And you will see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of the Mighty One and coming on the clouds of heaven” (+ Matthew 26:63-64, Luke 22:69-70).

There's no doubt here that Jesus is connecting himself with the great Son of Man, the Messiah, who would be taking over the world, just as Daniel predicted. And he's coming again with power too, just as they expected of their beloved Messiah:

Matthew 24:30 "At the time the sign of the Son of Man will appear in the sky, and all the nations of the earth will mourn. They will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of the sky, with power and great glory" (+ Matthew 16:27-28).

Matthew 25:31-32 "When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, he will sit on his throne in heavenly glory. All the nations will be gathered before him, and he will separate the people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats."

Luke 21:36 "Be always on the watch, and pray that you may be able to escape all that is about to happen, and that you may be able to stand before the Son of Man."

This was all very familiar to the Jews of that day. They expected "one like a son of man," a triumphant Messiah coming in majestic glory, to unleash his vengeance and judgement on a sinning world, where no one can resist him. And here Jesus was saying he was that Messiah!

But then Jesus drops another one of his bombshells! Yes, he was the great Son of Man, the promised Messiah, "BUT FIRST," **Luke 17:25**, "he must suffer many things and be rejected by this generation." And who is the "he" Jesus is talking about here? The "Son of Man," **verse 24**.

The Son of Man would suffer and be rejected? How could that be? Daniel said the Son of Man would come in triumph and shatter all resistance to him, but here the Son of Man himself was telling them he had to be humiliated first. Imagine their reaction, then, when he told them "We are going up to Jerusalem, and the Son of Man will be betrayed to the chief priests and the teachers of the law. They will condemn him to death and will turn him over to the Gentiles to be mocked and flogged and crucified," **Matthew 20:18-19** (+ Matthew 16:21, 17:22-23, Mark 9:31, 10:33-34, and Luke 9:22, 18:31-32).

Flogged and crucified by Gentiles?! Peter was having none of it, **Matthew 16:22**. He took Jesus aside "and began to rebuke him. 'Never, Lord!' he said. 'This shall never happen to you!'" It was simply beyond Peter to connect the majestic Messiah with such utter humiliation. It was an intolerable, impossible contradiction.

Jesus' reaction to Peter was fierce, **verse 23**. "Jesus turned and said to Peter, 'Out of my sight Satan! You are a stumbling block to me; you do not have in mind the things of God, but the things of men.'"

But why was Peter being a stumbling block? Because Satan was trying to trip Jesus up through Peter. Satan was still trying to get Jesus to bypass his Father's will for him, which must've been very tempting to Jesus because he knew it was the Father's will that he suffer and die first. The Father's route to triumph and victory meant dying for one's enemies, which to a typical human mind like Peter's wasn't nearly as appealing as crushing them to death.

Well, Jesus had that kind of mind too. He was fully human, so the thought of escaping suffering and humiliation had huge appeal. He was also a Jew, whose mind had been filled with the dreams of his fellow Jews, of the Son of Man coming in power to free his chosen people. And here he was, the very Son of Man himself, with all the promise and power of his Father behind him to make that freedom happen. But not yet, because it was his Father's plan that Jesus suffer and die first.

Why? Well, it was all in that title, the "Son of Man." Jesus was the son of MEN, meaning God's servant FOR men. That was in the Old Testament too, that one day a Saviour would come as a Suffering Servant (Isaiah 53). He would die and suffer for us to demonstrate and prove God's love for us. The way to victory would begin with sacrificial love. God would die for his enemies first, because what better proof could there be of his love? He was truly the Son of Men, sent by God to serve humanity, and prove it by giving up his life for us, even at our worst.

Now we see "the things of God" that Jesus referred to in Matthew 16:23 above. God isn't interested in crushing and condemning us. He comes as our servant willing to die for us. He proves himself our Servant before he becomes our King. And this was the Father's will, that we see his love in the Son of Man being our Servant first. He's the Son of Man, born of men to serve men.

Jesus said it all in **Matthew 20:28** "the Son of Man did not come to be served, BUT TO SERVE, and to give his life as a ransom for many," and in **Luke 19:10** "For the Son of Man came to seek and to save what was lost."

Whatever God did from that time on, then, had that as its foundation. God came as the Son of Man, with all the power and majesty that the title carried in scripture, yes, but all that power and majesty had sacrificial love and service as its stirring force and motivation. And that's what God wants us to know in Jesus being the Son of Man, that God is our loving and willing servant. In all his majesty he is our servant. Jesus is our

King, yes, but he has a Servant's heart. He's the Son of God, yes, but the Son of MEN, too.

Going back, then, to the question on page 1 - "HOW does God make our relationship with him possible?" – it's through Jesus and this *other* title he bears, the "Son of Man," that we see how. As Son of Man, God proves his love for us, because love begets love in return. "We love because HE FIRST LOVED US," **1 John 4:19**.

That's how God gets our relationship with him started. HE starts it by loving us. "This is love: not that we loved God, but that HE LOVES US and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins," **verse 10**. HE starts the relationship rolling by loving us first, because in doing that it makes it so much easier for us to love him in return.

Imagine, instead, if the Son of Man came only as King of kings in all his majesty and power to crush his enemies. He'd hardly have a relationship with anyone that way, because most of us would be dead! And who'd WANT a relationship with such a fearsome being in the first place? We'd be quivering in fear, and fear is no basis for a relationship at all.

Jesus couldn't stop being the great Son of Man, though. The title spelled out clearly who he was, the great God and King of kings who would one day rule all nations and crush all resistance, just as Daniel predicted. But the Son of Man came as our Servant before he comes as our King, because it's a relationship with us that God wants, and relationships are based on love.

Jesus didn't shy away from who he was, take note. He freely used the title "Son of Man" to describe himself, and the Jews knew what that title meant and the power and majesty that went with it. But then they had to watch this Son of Man do everything *but* what they expected of him: he spent his life here serving people!

A whole new meaning was being added to the Son of Man in the figure of Jesus. The Son of Man loved human beings. He gave his life to serving them. King and Servant went hand-in-hand. The Son of Man was both. He never stopped being God, but he showed this God to be a Servant too, of all things.

There's a great example of this in the healing of the paralytic man in **Luke 5**. His friends lower him down to Jesus through the roof because they can't get to Jesus any other way, the crowd is too tight to let anyone through, especially with a stretcher. "When Jesus saw their faith," **verse 20**, "he said: 'Friend, your sins are forgiven.'" The Pharisees who hear him say this are incensed and accuse him of blasphemy, because "Who can forgive sins by God alone?" **verse 21**. Jesus reacts with this revealing

statement in **verse 24** “But that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins” he then tells the paralyzed man “get up, take your mat and go home.” The man immediately stands up and heads for home. And now look at the reaction of the people watching, **verse 26** “Everyone was amazed and gave praise to God. They were filled with awe and said, ‘We have seen remarkable things today.’”

You bet it was remarkable. Here’s the Son of Man proving his power but using it to serve. He doesn’t shy away from saying who he is and what authority he’s got, but now people have to associate the Son of Man with love. He’s the Son of God but he’s also the Son of MEN, who loves people, loves healing them, and loves seeing people trust in his love for them, enough for them to lower a man through a roof to get to him.

No wonder they were “filled with awe,” because before their very eyes they were seeing God as they’d never seen him before. The great Son of Man had come to serve. He came not as a conquering king but as a humble servant. And what was their reaction to such a picture of God? They “gave praise to God,” **verse 26**.

In response to the obvious love of the Son of Man, the people loved God. But this is how God works; he loves us, because that’s what helps us love him. Love begets love in return. That’s how he makes our relationship with him possible, by showing us his love first, demonstrated for us so beautifully in Jesus.

So now we have two titles for Jesus to help us know God – “Son of God” and “Son of Man.” And both titles fit together perfectly:

- 1) In the “Son of God” we see God wants a relationship with us, and
- 2) In the “Son of Man” we see HOW he makes it possible.