



TRUTH APPLICATIONS

Sermon Notes

Introducing “The Son of Man”

David Anguish

Something of a Surprise

Think of titles used in the New Testament that exalt and identify Jesus as God in the flesh. What comes to mind first? Savior? Christ? Son of God? Something else?

Would it surprise you to learn that in the Gospels:

- “Christ” (Χριστός, *Christos*) appears 54 times?
- “Savior” (σωτήρ, *sōtēr*) appears three times (only two refer to Jesus)?
- “Son of God” (υἱὸς τοῦ θεοῦ, *hyios tou theou*) appears 26 times (in ESV)?
- But “Son of Man” (ὁ υἱὸς τοῦ ἀνθρώπου, *ho hyios tou anthrōpou*) appears 82 times?

Some—and this has occurred since the time of the church fathers—have understood “Son of Man” “to refer primarily to the humanity of the incarnate Son of God. Jesus was the God-man, the Son of God and Son of Man.” But “this interpretation is in error because it neglects the historical background and significance of the expression.”¹

How Significant?

George Eldon Ladd has explained the significance of the expression.

Theologically, one of the most important messianic designations in the Synoptic Gospels is the Son of Man. Three facts are of superlative importance. In the gospel tradition the Son of Man was Jesus’ favorite way of designating himself; in fact, it is the only title he freely used. Second, the title is never used by anyone else to designate Jesus.² Third, there is no evidence in Acts or the epistles that the early church called Jesus the Son of Man. The only appearance of the title outside the Gospels is the vision of Stephen. The Gospels place it on the lips of Jesus over sixty-five times.³ It is a striking thing that the title never became a messianic designation for Jesus in the early church.⁴

Just to clarify, the phrase is used elsewhere in the New Testament, in Acts 7.56 (as indicated by Ladd), where Stephen essentially echoes Jesus; in Hebrews 2.6, a citation from Psalm 8.4-6, where the phrase is used in a parallelism for “a man”; and in Revelation 1.13 and 14.14 where John echoes the language of Daniel 7.13-14 in references that refer to the exalted Christ, but are not using the title in the same way it is used in the Gospels.

Given (a) the phrase’s prominence in the gospels and especially by Jesus, and (b) the lack of attention it has been given in popular Christian faith, we will introduce its use in the Synoptic

Gospels to get a sense of how important it is for seeing the claims that are made by and for Jesus in the New Testament.⁵

A Survey of Texts⁶

1. The Earthly Son of Man
 - a. **Mk. 2.10=Mt. 9.6=Lk. 5.24** – Authority to forgive sins.
 - b. **Mk. 2.28=Mt. 12.8=Lk. 6.5** – Lord of the Sabbath.
 - c. Mt. 11.19=Lk. 7.34 – The Son of Man has come eating and drinking.
 - d. Mt. 8.20=Lk. 9.58 – The Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head.
 - e. **Mt. 12.32=Lk. 12.10** – A word against the Son of Man will be forgiven.
 - f. Mt. 16.13 (Mk. 8.28 omits) – Who do men say that the Son of Man is?
 - g. Mt. 13.37 – The Son of Man sows the good seed.
 - h. **Lk. 6.22 (Mt. 5.11 omits)** – Persecution on account of the Son of Man.
 - i. Lk. 19.10 – The Son of Man came to seek and save the lost.
 - j. Lk. 22.48 – Judas, would you betray the Son of Man with a kiss?
2. The Suffering Son of Man
 - a. **Mk. 8.31=Lk. 9.22 (Mt. 16.21 omits)** – The Son of Man must suffer.
 - b. **Mk. 9.12=Mt. 17.12** – The Son of Man will suffer.
 - c. Mk. 9.9=Mt. 17.9 – The Son of Man to be risen from the dead.
 - d. Mk. 9.31=Mt. 17.22=Lk. 9.44 – The Son of Man delivered into the hands of men.
 - e. **Mk. 10.33=Mt. 20.18=Lk. 18.31** – The Son of Man delivered to chief priests, condemned to death, rises again.
 - f. **Mk. 10.45=Mt. 20.28** – The Son of Man came to serve and give his life as a ransom.
 - g. Mk. 14.21=Mt. 26.24=Lk. 22.22 – The Son of Man goes as it is written but woe to the betrayer.
 - h. Mk. 14.41=Mt. 26.45 – The Son of Man is betrayed to sinners.
 - i. Mt. 12.40=Lk. 11.30 – The Son of Man will be three days in the earth.
 - j. Mt. 26.2 – Son of Man will be delivered up to be crucified.
 - k. Lk. 24.7 – Son of Man delivered into hands of men.
3. The Glorious Son of Man
 - a. **Mk. 8.38=Mt. 16.27=Lk. 9.26** – When he comes in the glory of his Father with the holy angels.
 - b. Mk. 13.26=Mt. 24.30=Lk. 21.27 – They will see the Son of Man coming with clouds and great glory.
 - c. **Mk. 14.62=Mt. 26.64=Lk. 22.69** – You will see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of power, and coming with the clouds of heaven.
 - d. Lk. 12.40=Mt. 24.44 – The Son of Man is coming at an hour you do not expect.
 - e. Lk. 17.24=Mt. 24.27 – As the lightning flashes across the sky, so will be the Son of Man in his day.
 - f. Lk. 17.26=Mt. 24.37 – As in the days of Noah, so in the days of the Son of Man.
 - g. Mt. 10.23 – You will not have gone through all the towns of Israel before the Son of Man comes.
 - h. Mt. 13.41 – The Son of Man will send his angels.
 - i. Mt. 16.28 (Mk. 9.1) – Some will not taste death until they see the Son of Man coming in his kingdom.

- j. Mt. 19.28 – The Son of Man shall sit on his glorious throne.
- k. Mt. 24.30 – The powers of the heavens will be shaken. Then will appear the sign of the Son of Man.
- l. Mt. 24.39 (Lk. 17.27 omits) – So will be the coming of the Son of Man.
- m. **Mt. 25.31** – When the Son of Man comes in his glory.
- n. **Lk. 12.8 (Mt. 10.32 omits)** – Everyone who acknowledges me before men, the Son of Man will acknowledge before the angels of God.
- o. Lk. 17.22 – You will desire to see one of the days of the Son of Man.
- p. Lk. 17.30 – So it will be on the day when the Son of Man is revealed.
- q. Lk. 18.8 – When the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on earth?
- r. Lk. 21.36 – Praying that you may have strength to escape all these things . . . and to stand before the Son of Man.

Seeing the Boldness of the Claim

Because of some of the challenges in discerning the exact nature of the background for this phrase, but also because of presuppositions about the texts and the study of history generally, scholars have responded variously to the use of the phrase “Son of Man” in the gospels. Some accept all of them, others reject all of them as having no theological or messianic significance, and some fall somewhere in between, accepting some and rejecting others.⁷ Ironically, it is one who finds it “improbable” that Jesus would have expressed such an exalted view of himself during his ministry who perhaps best expresses how bold this claim is.

If Jesus believed that he *already in his present career was the Son of Man*, he would have to take equally improbable steps in his thinking. He would have to believe that he himself had existed in heaven as the Son of Man from the beginning of time, had descended to earth, would ascend to heaven again and would return to earth again.⁸

The reality is, the claim to be “Son of Man,” rightly understood, “is a claim that no sane man or good man could make. . . . [I]t involves the claim to be a pre-existent heavenly kind of messiah who has unexpectedly appeared as a man among men.”⁹

www.davidanguish.com

Notes

¹ George Eldon Ladd, *A Theology of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1974), 146.

² Ladd adds a note to this statement: “Jn. 12:34 is not a true exception, for here the crowd is only echoing the words of Jesus” (Ladd, 146).

³ Allen Black dissented with Ladd’s number here, noting 82 uses in the gospels. He also noted that “with the sole exception of John 12:34, all of these occurrences of ‘Son of Man’ are on the lips of Jesus.” Allen Black, “Jesus: The Son of Man,” *Jesus of Nazareth: Studies in Christology: The Ninth Annual Lectureship of Southeastern Biblical Institute*, ed. Maurice W. Lusk, III (Doraville, GA: Southeastern Biblical Institute, 1980), p. G1.

⁴ Ladd, 146.

⁵ My goal here is simply to acquaint students with the term within the biblical texts, not deal in detail with the background of the phrase or explore in depth the boldness of the claims of some of the texts where it is used.

⁶ A form of this list originally appeared in Ladd, 149-151. Adaptations, including a title change for one category, and a few corrections of misidentified texts were made by Allen Black in his lecture. I am using Black’s list here, **highlighting in bold those that I briefly cite or mention when presenting this lesson.**

⁷ See Ladd's discussion of "five major types of interpretation" (151-152).

⁸ Howard M. Teeple, "The Origin of the Son of Man Christology," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 84 (1965), 221. The emphasis in the first sentence was added by Ladd, where I first read Teeple's statement. Ladd's additional comment is noteworthy: "The very statement that such a belief on the part of Jesus is 'improbable' reflects presuppositions about what could and could not be true in history" (Ladd, 152).

⁹ Ladd, 152. For other overviews of this theme, including an updated bibliography of studies from that given by Ladd in 1974, see Darrell L. Bock, "Son of Man," *Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels*, 2nd ed., ed. Joel B. Green, Jeannine K. Brown, and Nicholas Perrin (Downers Grove, Ill.: IVP Academic, 2013), 894-900; see also F. F. Bruce, "The Background to the Son of Man Sayings," *Christ the Lord: Studies in Christology Presented to Donald Guthrie*, ed. Harold H. Rowdon (Leicester, UK: Inter-Varsity Press, 1982), 50-70.