

Who is the Son of Man?

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[0:00] Those of you I don't know, my name is Dave and it is my great joy to open with you to Matthew chapter 16 today.! Our sermon text today is Matthew chapter 16 verses 13 to 23.

! Let's pray together.

Our Father in heaven, Lord, thank you that you have made a feast for us in your word. Lord, will you help us to delight in it and delight in your son Jesus this morning.

We pray that in his name. Amen. Now when Jesus came into the district of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, who do people say that the Son of Man is?

And they said, some say John the Baptist, others say Elijah, and others Jeremiah or one of the prophets. He said to them, but who do you say that I am?

[1:29] Simon Peter replied, you are the Christ, the Son of the living God. And Jesus answered him, blessed are you, Simon Barjona, for flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father who is in heaven.

And I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it. I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven.

Then he strictly charged the disciples to tell no one that he was the Christ. From that time, Jesus began to show his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem and suffer many things from the elders and chief priests and scribes and be killed on the third day be raised.

And Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him, saying, far be it from you, Lord, this shall never happen to you. But he turned to Peter and said, get behind me, Satan, you are a hindrance to me. For you are not setting your mind on the things of God, but on the things of man.

Wow, what a passage. Let's look at each section in turn. I'm so very excited here.

[2:55] Our passage begins in verse 13. Now, when Jesus came into the district of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, who do people say that the Son of Man is? They said, some say John the Baptist, others say Elijah, others Jeremiah, one of the prophets.

Now, right away, Jesus tells us this is going to be a loaded kind of conversation. He doesn't ask, what kind of reputation do you guys think that I've built?

Or what's the word on the street about me? He says, who do people say that the Son of Man is?

Now, have you ever referred to yourself like that? Me neither, right?

Right off the bat, Jesus has the stakes set pretty high, right? He's referring to Daniel chapter 7. We heard that section, or a section of that chapter read earlier in today's service.

Now, here's the context of Daniel chapter 7. The Lord gives Daniel a vision. And there are four beasts in that vision, and they rampage over the entire world.

[4:01] But as ferocious as they are, none of them last. And in contrast to that, we read, Behold, the clouds of heaven, there came one like a son of man.

And he came to the Ancient of Days and was presented before him. And to him was given dominion and glory and a kingdom that all peoples, nations, and languages should serve him.

His dominion is an everlasting dominion which shall not pass away, and his kingdom one that shall not be destroyed. The beasts in Daniel's vision just devour and desecrate the world.

But the Son of Man, he doesn't. Their kingdoms end. His endures forever. And then in verse 16, Daniel approaches one of the servants attending to the Lord, probably an angel, and asks, What have I been seeing?

He learns in verse 17 that the beasts are kings. And then in verse 23 that they are kingdoms. Now, that shouldn't surprise us. Kings go with kingdoms.

[5:08] You can't have a king without a kingdom to rule or a kingdom without a king to rule over it. The two go together. Now, Jewish and Christian scholars are largely agreed that the beasts represent some empires.

The Babylonian, then the Medo-Persian, then the Greek, and finally the Roman empires. If you want to know why they think that, just wait for the Shoreline Sermon series in Daniel.

Now, each of the beasts, verse 17, is a king. And, verse 23, a kingdom. So, we should understand this next figure, this one like a son of man in the same way.

He is a king with a kingdom. And that's exactly what we see. Verses 13 and 14, a king who receives honor, glory, and dominion. Tied, if you're looking there at Daniel chapter 7, tied to the saints of the Most High God, verses 18 and 27.

But this king is not like the beastly kings. He can approach the Ancient of Days, the Most High God. He doesn't take his kingdom by force.

[6:18] It is rightfully given to him. His kingdom lasts forever. And his people, they're named. These other kings, the beasts, they're not. His people matter to him.

And we're going to see just how important that is later in this sermon. Unless he shares his victory with his people, his victory belongs to them as well.

Sinclair Ferguson said of this one like a son of man in Daniel 7, This is the one who is able to stand in the presence of the God whose throne is made of the fire of his judgment.

This is the one who is worthy to receive dominion and glory and a kingdom that all peoples, nations, and languages should serve him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion.

The one like the son of man is related in some special way to the saints of the Most High so that they share in his dominion. And we can be sure that Jesus in Matthew chapter 16 is taking up this very title for himself.

[7:30] He asks, who do people say that the son of man is? And then to clarify that, who do you say that I am? He uses the title some 30 times in the book of Matthew.

Always in reference to himself. No one else takes up that title. He's claiming to be this figure from Daniel chapter 7. And God's people have been expecting a savior.

Someone like this figure in Daniel 7. Adam had been promised a descendant who would defeat the serpent. Moses had been promised a prophet with the Lord's words in his mouth.

Deuteronomy 18. David had been promised a king to sit on his throne forever. In Malachi, the final prophetic word of the Old Testament, God promised that the Lord whom you seek will suddenly come to his temple.

Someone had big expectations to live up to. Zechariah chapter 9. Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion.

[8:39] Shout aloud, O daughter of Jerusalem. Behold, your king is coming to you. Righteous and having salvation is he.

Which makes Caesarea Philippi a most intriguing setting. Remember, last week the Pharisees and the Sadducees rejected Jesus.

And he turned his back and walked away from them. He left the Sea of Galilee and walked some 25 miles north to the border region where there's a larger Gentile population.

About 25 miles away they arrive and it says the district of Caesarea Philippi. We're not confident that he actually went to the city itself, the district of Caesarea Philippi. And it had two things. Water and worship.

Now whether or not he went to Caesarea Philippi or just to its outskirts. You can't go to Washington, D.C. and not know that the capital is there. Like the government looms large, right, over the city.

[9:46] The same thing with Caesarea Philippi. You can't go there without seeing water and worship. First, water. Caesarea Philippi is built up against Mount Hermon, which has a great spring in it.

It forms one of the headwaters of the Jordan River. Now in an arid climate like Israel, water means life. And so a city that was important to the region was there going back generations.

It belonged to the tribe of Dan and before that it was inhabited even before Israel's conquest. Water means food and it means flocks. It also means settlement and society.

And it brought government. It brought armies. Armies, as they marched through, would stop and camp here. It also brought worship. Until just a few years prior to Jesus' visit, the city was called Peneus or Peneion.

It was named after the Greek god Pan. Half goat, half man. He was a fertility god, both for crops and people. And he often appeared with Dionysius or Bacchus, the god of wine.

[10:56] Near the top of the mountain, there was a, we're going to see it here in a moment, there was a cave named the Grotto of Pan, where he was said to live.

Now, you look down there, there was at the time a huge chasm. No one had been able to sound the depths of it. With a great spring of water.

Here's how the first century historian Josephus described it. A dark cave opens itself, within which there is a horrible precipice that descends abruptly to a vast depth.

It contains a mighty quantity of water, which is immovable. And when anybody lets down anything to measure the depth of the earth beneath the water, no length of cord is sufficient to reach it.

Now, today, earthquakes have closed the chasm, but the cave, the Grotto of Pan, remains to this day. Water and worship. The worship extended past Pan, and if you look here, you'll see, next to the Grotto was the Gallery of the Nymphs.

[12:09] Now, carved in the rock face, and I boosted the contrast a lot, because it's just all one rock face, but if you can see, there are niches carved in the rock face, next to, Justin, you showed it, it's next to, next to the Grotto of Pan.

Pan. And in these niches were held idols to many gods, idols to Zeus and Nemesis, Hermes and others.

You could worship every pagan god you could think of here. And one more name was worshipped at Caesarea Philippi, Caesar.

When Jesus visited, the Roman Tetrarch had recently renamed the city from Panias to Caesarea Philippi. Now, his name was Herod Philip.

He wanted to court favor with Caesar in Rome, so he built a temple to Caesar nearby this, and gave the city a new name, Caesarea Philippi, to kind of honor Caesar and join his name to Caesar's.

[13:11] So, right before them, many false gods are being worshipped, and right before them, Caesar of Rome, the fourth beast from Daniel's vision, is being worshipped.

And what happens? Verse 15. He said to them, Who do you say that I am? Simon Peter replied, You are the Christ, the Son of the Living God.

Against all this, against the present movement of the fourth beast, that's, you know, Caesar being worshipped, Jesus declares himself the Son of Man who will stand forever when Rome falls.

Jesus has come to the place that combines every kind of pagan worship known to the world, which has recently been named after Caesar, Daniel's fourth and terrible beast.

On the one hand, he's looking at a summary of all false worship. On the other, he's looking at the growing expansion of that climactic beast. And in defiance of all that, he declares himself Daniel's victorious son of man.

[14:32] against the dead gods, he is the Son of the Living God. Now that title, Son of the Living God, that's special. You know, the Lord sometimes calls his people, his children, right?

He calls Israel his son and throughout the New Testament, he calls believers, sons and daughters by adoption. But Peter is saying something different. Jesus is uniquely the Son of God. There's something special about his sonship, his relationship to the Father.

His is not by adoption. Right? He is uniquely and everlastingly God the Son. That's why the Son of Man in Daniel's vision can receive worship.

Depending on your translation, Daniel 7.14 will say all people's nations and languages should serve him or all people's nations and men of every language worshiped him.

Now that word serve or worship, there occurs just ten times in the Hebrew Bible. Nine of them in Daniel. It doesn't mean serve lunch or serve an employer.

[15:38] Every single occurrence has to do with serving a God, either the one true living God of Israel or an idol. It answers the question, to whom do you give your allegiance?

To whom is your life devoted? In Daniel chapter 3, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego answered and said to the king, O Nebuchadnezzar, we have no need to answer you in this matter.

If this be so, our God, whom we serve, is able to deliver us from the burning, fiery furnace. And he will deliver us out of your hand, O king. But if not, be it known to you, O king, that we will not serve your gods or worship the golden image you have set up.

And in Daniel 7, verse 14, it is this son of man that receives the allegiance, the devotion, that worship from all peoples, nations, and languages. Who is worthy to receive that?

God. And God alone. The son of man is, in the words of the Nicene Creed, the only begotten son of God.

[16:47] Begotten of the Father before all worlds. God of God. Light of light. Very God. Of very God. Begotten, not made. Being of one substance with the Father by whom all things were made.

That's who Peter has walked with for about three years at this point. He has heard his teaching, he's seen his power and his person, and the Lord has guided him to put all the pieces together. This Jesus is the one we're waiting for. He is the Christ, the son of the living God, and friends, if you've been with us as we've walked through Matthew's gospel this last year and a half, you have walked with Jesus.

You have heard his teaching. You have seen his person and his power. You, with Peter, proclaim him king and Lord. How does Jesus answer?

Verse 17. Jesus answered him, Blessed are you, Simon Barjona, for flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father who is in heaven.

[18:02] And I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it. I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven.

Then he strictly charged the disciples to tell no one that he was the Christ. Okay. Let's talk about the Peter thing so that we can get on to the rest of it, right?

Now, Protestants have been eager to downplay or reinterpret verse 18 to counter how Roman Catholics see it, right?

When it comes to Peter and Mary, Protestants tend to get a little nervous, right? Like, if we even admit they were nice people that we've somehow fallen into Rome's errors.

But we don't need to be afraid to read this passage as it stands. And if we do, we won't fall into Rome's errors, right? Peter is the most prominent apostle.

[19:09] Period. Right? He shows that here by being their spokesperson. Right? Jesus asks verse 15, who do you say that I am? He says it in the plural.

Who do you all say that I am? Peter speaks up. He is their spokesman. He is their representative. And he is the most prominent, the most active of all the disciples.

And Jesus recognizes him as such. On the day of Pentecost, who is it that preaches the sermon? It's Peter. Right? He is the leader of the band of disciples. But that doesn't mean he has authority above the others.

That's not what's here. Peter. The authority that Jesus here announces for Peter, he calls it the keys of the kingdom of heaven, he goes on to say here that it has something to do with binding and loosing.

In a few short weeks, in chapter 18, Jesus is going to explain what this means. So stay tuned. But when he does it, he's going to say that this authority is not solely Peter's.

[20:11] In chapter 18, he's going to give it to all of the apostles. And what's more, how do they exercise this authority? Is it by Peter's executive fiat?

No. Is it by their joint council? The apostles make this decision. The leaders of the church just make these decisions. No. When they exercise this authority, they exercise it as part of the gathered

church.

church. So this isn't some unique power or position for Peter. He's the representative of the spokesman, the forbearer. But he doesn't receive a unique authority that is distinct from the other apostles or even the church.

Further, there's no hint at a successor here. The pope is not part of this text. So, let's do what the Protestant Reformation was all about. To the sources, right?

specifically to the text of Scripture. And this source, this text, says Peter is special, but not that special. What is that special, though, is this.

[21:26] Jesus says, I will build my church and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.

Now, when Jesus says church here, church only occurs twice in the Gospel of Matthew. When he says church, he isn't coining a new word.

When the Old Testament speaks about the gathered people of God, the Hebrew word most often used is kahal, the assembly. Now, when the Jewish people translated kahal into Greek for use in the broader world, they used the word ekklesia, the same word used here and in the rest of the New Testament for church.

Jesus is not starting something new. He's continuing something old. Now, before his coming, God's people hoped in the promised Messiah and when he came, his sheep heard his voice and trusted in the resurrected Messiah.

The people of God in both covenants place their hope in Christ. But before we get too far, let's step back and ask ourselves something.

[22:48] Is this the next topic you would expect to be on Jesus' lips? Peter's just said, you are the Christ, the son of the living God. He's like, yep, I'll build my church. Is that what you would expect to be the next thing?

When a leader gets their big introduction, that's the moment to announce, here's my big priority, right? Those of you who are in the military, after a change of command, the new commanding officer says, here are my priorities, here are the watchwords, here's how things are going to get done around here, right?

When a politician announces a run for the presidency, what do they say? Here's my big initiative, that's why you should vote for me. When you get a new boss at work, they say, here's what I prioritize, and what I expect from you.

This is Jesus' big introduction, his big reveal. The disciples have been building slowly to this point, all throughout the book of Matthew, until this point, this is a huge turning point, in the book of Matthew, where now they have tied it all together, and recognize Jesus for who he is.

Jesus says, who do you say that I am? Peter answers that he is the promised coming, rescuing king, and how does Jesus answer? One, you're right, that's exactly who I am.

[24:06] Two, I will build my church. He doesn't say, that's me, now here's my plan to conquer Rome. He doesn't say, I'm the Christ, and here's how I'm going to engage the culture.

He doesn't say, I am he, and I'm going to create a political action committee. He doesn't say, I am the son of God, and I'm going to build a multi-faith cultural center, which is what Caesarea Philippi kind of was.

No, when Peter says, you are the Christ, the son of the living God, Jesus says, blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jonah, for flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my father who is in heaven, and I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock, I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.

That's the big reveal. That's the major initiative. I will build my church. church. Those are the watchwords.

The gates of hell shall not prevail against it. This is his priority? The church? Is the church really that important to God? Yes.

[25:31] And that shouldn't surprise us. From the outset, God has been building a people for his possession.

Exodus chapter 19, you shall be my treasured possession among all peoples, for all the earth is mine, and you shall be to me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.

Deuteronomy 14, you are a people holy to the Lord your God, and the Lord has chosen you to be a people for his treasured possession out of all the peoples who are on the face of the earth.

Psalms 135, the Lord has chosen Jacob for himself, Israel as his own possession. Malachi chapter 3, they shall be mine, says the Lord of hosts in the day when I make up my treasured possession. And then spanning into the New Testament, Titus chapter 2, our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ gave himself for us to redeem us from all lawlessness and to purify for himself a people for his own possession who are zealous for good works.

[26:46] Friends, building a people with whom he will enter into covenant, show grace to, and dwell with, all to the praise of his glorious grace, that's God's purpose in creating the cosmos.

grace. So is the church a big deal? It's the reason the universe was formed.

He created all things to make for himself a people, to be his treasured possession. How valuable is the church? The universe itself is incidental, a means to that end.

which is why Jesus says two more things about his church. First, verse 18, he will not let the gates of hell claim victory over her. And second, verse 21, he will shed his blood for her.

First, the gates of hell shall not prevail against it. death. Now, there's a lot of discussion about what does this mean exactly.

[28:06] Is this the attacks of the evil one? I think that's probably where I land. Is this persecution in the world? death. The word used here is Hades, which could also be interpreted the place of the dead, the grave, which would mean that death is not the end of those who belong to his church.

This is why Paul can say that those Old Testament words find their fulfillment in Christ's resurrection. Death is swallowed up in victory. Oh, death, where is your victory? Oh, death, where is your sting?

Some people think that the setting in Caesarea Philippi, you remember that cave you saw, the grotto of Pan. Some think that that's the background of this statement, that Pan's grotto was called the gates of Hades because of the seemingly bottomless chasm.

If Jesus is referencing that, that would mean that false gods won't prevail over biblical truth. Here's the great thing. No matter which one of those Jesus is actually talking about right here, it's all true, right?

His church will never fall to the devil's schemes or to human persecution. He promises it. Death has been defeated and all who die in Christ will be raised with him.

[29:24] And all false gods will be shown to be nothing on the great day of his second advent. No matter how we interpret the gates of hell here, Jesus triumphs over all.

people. And the son of man shares his victory with his people. That's the first thing Jesus says about his church.

The church is so valuable to him that he will not let the gates of hell claim victory over her. And the second is in verse 21. He will shed his blood for her.

from that time Jesus began to show his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem and suffer many things from the elders and chief priests and scribes and be killed and on the third day be raised. And Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him saying far be it from you Lord this shall never happen to you. But he turned and said to Peter get behind me saying you are a hindrance to me for you are not setting your mind on the things of God but on the things of man.

[30:38] The church is so important to Christ that he will shed his blood for her. And that is so important to Christ that he is happy to very sternly rebuke Peter who he had just commended.

It seems that the gates of hell will not prevail against the church and neither will foolish disciples which should be a comfort for many of you.

So valuable is the church that Jesus chose to go to Jerusalem suffer many things and die for her. God will because the! Because the only way to make a sinful people holy for his own possession was to purify them.

If he was going to redeem a hell bound sinner like me he would have to do three things for me. First he was going to have to deal with the justice I'm owed for my sin so that I don't go to hell.

[31:59] Second he was going to have to give me a righteousness I don't have of my own accord to make me acceptable in the Lord's eyes. And third he was going to have to break death itself so that I can live with him forever.

And that's exactly verse 21 what he did. He went to the cross and died a traitor's death so that I a traitor to God might go free.

He offers me his own righteousness if I will simply receive it by faith. And on the third day he rose from the grave.

That's why Christians sing strange songs. about a beautiful Roman execution.

About blood being spilled out. About empty tombs. No one else sings songs like that.

[33:14] In a moment we're going to sing come behold the wondrous mystery Christ the Lord upon the tree that is the cross.

In the stead of ruined sinners hangs the lamb in victory. Who else can sing anything like that?

Only a treasured people that he died to make his own. Friends, Jesus is a king.

But he is not a king who exacts a toll from his people like all the other kings in Daniel's vision and the rest of human history.

he is a king who sacrifices for his people and shares with them his victory.

[34:23] Which is why the apostle Paul can write in Colossians 2, you've been buried with him, with him in baptism in which you were also raised with him through faith in the powerful working of God who raised him from the dead.

And now it's your turn. Who do you say he is?

This is the single greatest question of your life. we've already said that before his coming God's people hoped in the promised Messiah.

And when he came his sheep heard his voice and trusted in the resurrected Messiah. The people of God in both covenants placed their hope in Christ. Friends, where is your hope and trust?

We've seen today as well that perhaps his chief priority in this world is his church.

[35:51] What's yours? And what does that look like in your life? Friends, who do you say that he is?

let's pray. Our Father in heaven, in all the earth, in all the heavens, there is no king like Christ Jesus.

It is him we believe. It is him we trust. It is him we serve.

He is our joy. We thank you Father in his name.

Amen.