

Daniel 7:13-14 - Visions of Heaven, Part II: The Son of Man

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 12 June 2016

Preacher: Will Spink

[0 : 00] You are listening to a message from Southwood Presbyterian Church in Huntsville, Alabama. Our passion is to experience and express grace. Join us.

I tell you, I've been up here in a robe before, and I've never been as hot as I was in that fur. That is warm.

Otherwise, I would have gladly worn it through the whole sermon without serving as any distraction to you all whatsoever. But I just had to take it off. Last week, we entered the second half of the book of Daniel, where we have had recounted for us Daniel's visions of the future, visions of events in human history to come, but particularly of end times and of heaven.

And as we said, as we were looking at them last week, we need to think more of heaven, not as a way of avoiding the daily realities of this life and getting away from it, but as a way of transforming our attitude toward those daily realities that we live right in the midst of.

We said remembering our eternal home and our place in God's story are vital to living as He has called us to right now. As these visions of heaven were for Daniel vital to following the true King while living in another's kingdom.

[1 : 27] To maintaining a singular devotion to God in the midst of a pluralistic culture where He found Himself. And so the first vision we got last week was of the Ancient of Days.

God Himself on His throne as the ultimate judge, the most wise, most righteous, most powerful judge over all creation and all of history.

There are many frightening parts of Daniel's vision too, right? Beasts and battles and so forth. But we saw the point of even those dark apocalyptic visions.

The reason that God gives them to His people is not merely to frighten them, but to encourage them. To encourage His people who are struggling with the comfort that they shouldn't be surprised by the difficulty.

So that they can be hopeful in the midst of it in a day when God will achieve final victory. When His enemies will be conquered. When His people will be saved.

[2 : 30] And so we saw God destroying mighty kings and kingdoms in an instant with the flick of His wrist. Punishing evildoers.

Demolishing idols and those who worship them just one by one. And there's certainly comfort there for God's people who are suffering unjustly that God will judge like this and bring justice.

But at the same time as we have that comfort, doesn't it this morning if you stop and think about it also make you a little uncomfortable? Doesn't it frighten you?

Just a little bit at least. I mean, seeing clearly this pure God sorting out right from wrong. With dreadful punishment on all evil and every injustice and every idol.

It's kind of disconcerting if you know your own weakness and your own idolatry even a little bit. If you are unclear perhaps which side of His justice you would stand on if the perfectly just God sorts everything out.

[3 : 41] It certainly shook Daniel up, didn't it? And he was a pretty remarkable guy. He was greatly alarmed. Overcome, lay sick for days when he saw these visions.

Imagine being another one of God's people in Daniel's day. Maybe not quite as holy as Daniel even. Maybe someone who hadn't been through the lion's den and come out alive.

Imagine how you might have felt suffering in exile. Now, wondering if God's promises were something that you could count on. You felt so distant from God and His promises.

Did He really love you? Perhaps questioning whether He should love you at all after all of your unfaithfulness and idolatry that led to you being sent into exile in the first place. Or maybe you don't have to imagine those kinds of emotions too much. Maybe you know exactly what that feels like.

[4 : 45] You've been in church for years perhaps, but the honest reality this morning as you sit there is that you're struggling with faith, with God.

What do I really believe and what's a relationship with God really like? Perhaps you feel the weight of battling sin and losing again. Perhaps then this just and righteous God that was supposed to be so comforting last week feels like someone who would be against you, not for you.

One of our elders said to me this week, my counselor has helped me see that I often struggle to believe and feel God's acceptance and love for me.

Are you discouraged? Depressed? Disappointed in yourself? That elder's not alone in this room, is he?

Struggling to feel God's acceptance and love for him. We've all been there. Maybe in the dark moments I'll end up on the wrong side of God's justice and it's frightening to me.

[6 : 08] Perhaps you're suffering with relational pain or brokenness and you're feeling alone. Even abandoned by friends or family and it's easy to think in that moment abandoned by God too.

Be honest this morning, if we think about our hearts, if we know ourselves at all, don't we tremble just a little bit before that judge? Don't we wonder?

Don't we struggle? What will it be like for this righteous judge to sort everything out? God says to Daniel and to his people, both then and today here, that there's another vision of heaven that we need to see this morning.

Not only the ancient of days on his throne, but also the Son of Man. Look with me at Daniel 7 at verse 13. This is God's holy word.

I saw in the night visions and behold, with 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.

[7 : 19] 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 grass withers, the flowers fade. But these words of our God will indeed stand forever.

Pray with me. Father, thank you for your word. Thank you for the vision that it gives us of Jesus. Would we see him clearly today? Oh, Holy Spirit, you who delights to shine the spotlight on Jesus so that our hearts see him and trust him and worship him more.

Would you do that here as we open up the word of God? Might you work powerfully in our hearts? We believe that if we see Jesus more clearly, we will leave different people with different views on every aspect of our lives.

[8 : 27] So would you do that in this time that we would see him new and fresh this morning? We ask it in his name. Amen. As we read a vision like this in Daniel chapter 7, who's the figure in the vision?

What's the identity of the Son of Man here? Let's notice briefly what the text tells us. First and most obviously, that he appears human.

He is one like a Son of Man. Verse 13. He's not another beast in the visions, but rather has a human form.

Beyond that, though, all the details of these two verses actually point to the divinity of the figure. That he is then God and man. You'll note that he comes riding on the clouds of heaven. Over and over again in the Old Testament, clouds are a sign of God's presence.

[9 : 35] And God is the only one who comes on clouds, who rides on the clouds. And when he does so throughout the Old Testament, it's almost always in a context of judgment.

Where he's coming powerfully in battle and in judgment on people. And so the Son of Man coming on the clouds is undoubtedly a divine figure about to judge right alongside the ancient of days that he's brought to in this vision.

Then verse 14 nails it down for us, doesn't it? This is in fact the eternal King. There's no question left. These words here in verse 14 about all people serving him and everlasting dominion and kingdom never destroyed.

Those sound familiar to us by now, don't they? They're not uncommon in Daniel. We've heard them at the end of almost every one of the stories. But they're always about one person and one person only.

Yahweh. Daniel's God. That there's no one like him and no other God with an eternal kingdom. That's usually what is declared.

[10:50] And now, all of a sudden, there is apparently one who's on par with him. Reigning forever. Judging eternally. Standing right alongside the ancient of days and looking like a man.

And of course, we know this side of history that the Son of Man figure is actually Jesus himself, right? Pre-incarnate form here in this vision of the Son of God who appears like a Son of Man. The Son of Man is actually language that Jesus adopts for himself. In the Gospels, he calls himself the Son of Man 80-some times. It's more than any other name or title he uses for himself in the Gospels is Son of Man.

In case you're wondering if he meant to import Daniel 7 and these pictures of divinity and the only true God that are there.

Look at how his contemporaries heard when he called himself that and made this claim. In Mark chapter 14, the high priest asks Jesus as he's interrogating him, Are you the Christ, the Son of the Blessed?

[12:04] And Jesus said, I am. And you will see the Son of Man seated at the right hand of power and coming with the clouds of heaven. Clearly drawing on the vision we just saw there in Daniel 7, right?

And what do those around him hear when he says it? How do they respond? The high priest tears his garments and says, What further witnesses do we need? You have heard his blasphemy. What is your decision? And they all condemned him as deserving death. It was not difficult. They didn't have to go consult. Hold on, what does he mean?

No, they knew clearly. He's a man who's claiming equality with God. Blasphemy. You're claiming eternal dominion alongside Yahweh himself.

We all know that story in Daniel. That's who the Son of Man is coming on the clouds of heaven. And you're Joseph's son. And you're making that claim.

[13:03] Yes, yes, he was making that claim. Jesus is pictured again as the Son of Man in Revelation. And when we get another vision of heaven, I love these visions as our hearts get pulled towards seeing the glory of Jesus.

One of my favorite pictures in all the Bible is in Revelation chapter 1. Look at this. In the midst of the lampstands. One like a son of man. Clothed with a long robe and with a golden sash around his chest.

The hairs of his head were white like white wool, like snow. His eyes were like a flame of fire. His feet were like burnished bronze refined in a furnace. And his voice was like the roar of many waters. In his right hand he held seven stars. From his mouth came a sharp two-edged sword. And his face was like the sun shining in full strength. When I saw him, I fell at his feet as though dead.

But he laid his right hand on me saying, Fear not. I am the first and the last and the living one. I died and behold I am alive forevermore.

[14:10] And I have the keys of death and Hades. You see this vision and you immediately sense the glory and the power of the person being described, don't you?

I mean, how strong do you have to be to hold seven stars in the palm of your hand? Seven stars this mighty one is holding. And then we find out later that the seven stars are representatives of the churches.

That this great and mighty God is actually holding in his powerful hand his people, the ones who are falling as though dead in awe at his glory and power.

And so because he's holding them in his hand, the message is fear not. Don't be afraid. I'm powerful and strong and I'm holding you in my hand.

What a comfort for those who have just fallen as though dead at the sight of the mighty one to see that he's holding them in that powerful hand.

[15:15] This is where the comfort of the Son of Man comes into focus for us. Okay, so we knew this was Jesus. Nobody was surprised that this was the eternal King, the God-man himself.

But will I need comfort today? Another powerful, eternal judge and King is not addressing my struggling faith today.

My battle with sin today. My loneliness today. But that's actually exactly what a clear vision of the resurrected, exalted Jesus is about to do for Daniel and for us, the comfort of the Son of Man. Let me show you this, how it develops as Daniel continues to have these visions through the rest of the book. Look for just a minute, if you've got your Bible open, to Daniel chapter 10. Let's read about another of Daniel's visions of heaven. As he's looking, Daniel 10 at verse 5, what does he see? I lifted up my eyes and looked, and behold, a man clothed in linen with a belt of fine gold from Uphaz around his waist.

[16:27] His body was like beryl, his face like the appearance of lightning, his eyes like flaming torches, his arms and legs like the gleam of burnished bronze, and the sound of his words like the sound of a multitude.

And I, Daniel, alone saw the vision, for the men who were with me did not see the vision, but a great trembling fell upon them, and they fled to hide themselves. So I was left alone and saw this great vision, and no strength was left in me.

My radiant appearance was fearfully changed, and I retained no strength. Then I heard the sound of his words, and as I heard the sound of his words, I fell on my face in deep sleep with my face to the ground.

Sound familiar? Are you asking yourself, why are we reading this vision again? Didn't we just read something like that? Both this man and the one in Revelation 1, clearly identified as Jesus, are clothed in white priestly robes.

Both have gold kingly belts. Both have blazing eyes. Both have bronze skin. Both have booming voices. Both leave the one seeing the vision overwhelmed on the ground as though dead.

[17:44] I believe, along with many commentators, that this man Daniel sees in chapter 10 is once again the Son of Man. Jesus Himself.

But even if you're like other commentators who are less convinced that this is Jesus, what's clear and what's important for our understanding this morning is that the man in Daniel 10 is a representative sent from God to Daniel.

Right? That much is clear. The point is that God sends him to Daniel. He actually leaves heaven and comes to meet God's sorrowful servant in the midst of his despair.

God sends the Son of Man to Daniel here in this vision because Daniel is discouraged. In Daniel chapter 10, where we are in the story is at the very end.

God's people have actually, after these 70 years in exile and a little bit longer, been released to go back to Jerusalem. They've been able to go back to rebuild the city and the temple.

[18:48] But only a few of them have been willing to go back. And those who've gone back are facing great opposition. In fact, the plans for the rebuilding are really on hold right now.

It looks like it's not going to be continued. And so Daniel, again, in his aging years, feels like a failed prophet.

Desperately fasting and mourning for three weeks. Could anything good be happening? Where is God in all of this? And the comfort of God comes to Daniel in his discouragement through these visions of the Son of Man.

Listen to the comfort here. Verse 10. Behold, a hand touched me. Remember, he's face down on the ground with no strength left in him. It sets him trembling on his hands and knees.

And he said to me, O Daniel, man greatly loved, understand the words that I speak to you. And stand upright, for now I have been sent to you.

[19:56] And when he'd spoken this word to me, I stood up trembling. And then he said to me, Fear not, Daniel. For from the first day that you set your heart to understand and humbled yourself before your God, your words have been heard and I have come because of your words.

I've come from God. He's sent me to you to help. I've come to help. I've come to comfort. See the eternal King standing alongside the ultimate judge.

And know first for your comfort that your righteousness is in heaven before the judge. The first way the Son of Man comforts us is in this.

The vision of the Son of Man as the eternal King who stands alongside the Ancient of Days as final judge like we just saw, shows us that He rules righteously where we have failed.

You remember the charge given to mankind when we were created? What was it? What was our purpose? We were created to bear God's image and part of that was to rule on His behalf.

[21 : 06] To be His vice regents in His creation. Ruling righteously the way God would. We weren't very successful at that very long, were we?

Adam and all those after him as well have failed to live up to that calling. We feel that failure in our own hearts, don't we? That we've not been the righteous rulers that God created us to be in the places that He has placed each of us.

And so in the midst of the failures of God's people through the Old Testament, God sends prophets to tell them of a Messiah. One who's going to come who will be the righteous ruler.

Reigning with justice over all the nations the way I would have Him to reign. And He comes and He does it perfectly in our place. And so we see the Son of Man stand before the judge of all, accepted and ruling righteously forever.

The judge says He's the one who's going to rule forever because He's done it perfectly. Like no one else. And so we must see Jesus this morning as we know our failures.

[22 : 15] We need to see Him as our righteousness in heaven. Because I know we see our failures. We see our failures painfully clearly when we're honest with ourselves.

We feel we'll never measure up. How could I be righteous as God is and rule the way He would in every moment? The just judge will just be done with me.

John Bunyan, the author of Pilgrim's Progress, was feeling like that. Like a failure himself. One day as he was walking through a field and as he was thinking about this, he wrote these words.

He said, This sentence fell upon my soul. Thy righteousness is in heaven. Thy righteousness is in heaven.

And me thought withal. If you want to know, if you want to sound really smart, you say things like me thought withal. I'm not sure what it means, but it's really helpful here. Me thought withal.

[23 : 17] I saw with the eyes of my soul Jesus Christ at God's right hand. There, I say, was my righteousness. So that wherever I was or whatever I was doing, God could not say of me, He lacks my righteousness.

That was just in front of Him. I also saw, moreover, that it was not my good frame of heart that made my righteousness better, nor yet my bad frame that made my righteousness worse.

For my righteousness was Jesus Christ Himself the same yesterday, today, and forever. And Bunyan says, I thought those things and realized that, and I went home rejoicing for the grace and the love of God.

Friends, listen. If you but trust Jesus, your righteousness is in heaven. You need do no great deed to stand before the judge.

You need not hide the failures that make you ashamed. The good news of the grace of God is that your righteousness doesn't wax and wane every moment, depending on your frame of mind and heart, depending on your performance.

[24 : 30] Your righteous standing before God isn't going up and down every time you have a good moment or a bad one. Your righteousness is in heaven. It stands before the judge in heaven, reminding him that you are perfect, that you are safe.

Because that's true. Because the Son of Man stands there before the Ancient of Days as your righteousness, you can hear this morning the words Daniel hears from the Son of Man in chapter 10.

Oh, Daniel, man greatly loved. He says that twice to Daniel in this encounter.

Daniel, I love you. The mighty God, who could have destroyed you in an instant with the flick of His wrist, loves you.

Yes, you, discouraged Christian, fearful, and failing, and overwhelmed by your failure.

[25 : 34] He loves you. That's the comfort of the Son of Man. He doesn't love you because you're lovable in the moment.

He loves you because He is so loving in every moment, even in spite of you. I suspect I'm not the only one in here who, in the midst of disciplining a child, has told the child, hey, I love you so much. Only to hear the child push you away and say, it doesn't feel like that right now. I don't feel like you love me. I've disobeyed.

I can tell I've let you down. I don't feel very lovable. And I tell my girls in that moment, I don't love them because of their performance.

I don't love them because of their behavior that they're being disciplined for. I love them. Why? Because they're my girls. That's why.

[26 : 42] What have you done that if someone knew about it, you think they could never love you? And so you think, and you know God knows that thing, so it makes you think God could never love you.

Right? Maybe tolerate me if I do enough other things to balance it out, but not really ever love me. This morning, see the Son of Man standing, standing before the judge as your Savior, standing before your Father.

Hear Him call you by name and say, Dear one, man greatly loved, woman greatly loved, in the midst of your failings.

My child, the one I love so much, I love you. Listen, the strong one loves you. You are safe there. Isn't that nearly unbelievable? Almost too good to be true that the one who is most capable of either destroying me or protecting me loves me despite myself.

[28 : 01] If no one has ever loved you at your worst, if you've never known love like that at your lowest point in the midst of the mess and failure that you are, that's the good news of Jesus Christ to the worst of us.

No matter what we've done, we can be not judged on the basis of our own record, but loved and accepted on the basis of the record of another.

Christian, if you've begun to live as though you have to do enough to stay in the family, stop and remember that already, before you fix any of the mess, you are greatly loved.

Then finally, the comfort of the Son of Man is that right now, today, in this moment, and forever, you are never alone because the eternal King is with you.

Remember that He is sent to Daniel in this vision three times, in fact, Daniel out of strength, undone on the ground, and He touches him and strengthens him.

[29 : 13] He says to him what? Fear not. Fear not. The most repeated command in all of Scripture. Oftentimes used by the way when God shows up.

And He doesn't want people to respond in fear to the glory of His presence. Fear not. And most often accompanied by what reason, do you know?

Fear not because I am with you. That's why you don't have to be afraid. It's not just anyone who's present, right? The one who today and forever sits on the throne of heaven and is in control of everything forever, He is with you today.

And He wants you to feel not afraid in His presence but comforted by His being with you. Think of how alone Daniel must have felt.

Unable, perhaps, because of his age to return to Jerusalem with the most faithful of God's people. So they have left Him. And He's sitting, fasting and mourning where?

[30 : 26] In Babylon. Where it probably feels like God has also left Him. Pastor Sinclair Ferguson writes, Now Daniel is a man alone.

But the truth of the matter was that He was never less alone in all His life. Daniel feeling as alone as He possibly could, as abandoned as He could have been, but never less alone in all His life.

Let's hear the comfort of the Gospel this morning. Your righteousness is in heaven. So you are greatly loved. And you are never alone.

Not just one day, someday, but today already. Doesn't that strengthen your feeble arms and your weak legs and your discouraged heart? Doesn't it give you courage for today?

Doesn't that give you hope even in your failure? Here's what you see when you get a clear vision of the Son of Man in heaven. Because of Jesus, He is there in heaven standing before the Father, the one who is the most fearful being in all the world, the one whose judgment should be feared more than any other, loves you and is with you.

[31 : 49] You have no need to be afraid. I got a great picture of that love this week. One of our oldest members, 93-year-old Bob Hill was on his deathbed in his final hours.

His wife, Marie, was there with him. Bob's 93-year-old body was weak. His breathing was very labored. His mind was wracked with dementia so that he was often confused.

And as we all knew, he was close to meeting Jesus. What Marie wanted most for him was in his confusion and weakness, facing death, not to be afraid. And so for hour after hour, she stood there next to him and stroked his face and touched him and said, Bob, I'm right here.

It's okay. I love you. Stroked his face. She bent over and kissed his forehead. I love you. I'm right here. Don't be afraid, Bob.

It's okay. You've heard that message. I love you. I'm with you.

[33 : 13] Don't be afraid. It's okay. You've heard it from God's written word. You're going to see it and taste it in his visible word. has Jesus reached out with his hand this morning to touch you and have you hear from him.

You are greatly loved. Do not fear. I love you so much. I am with you. That's the message that he wants us to hear.

It's the reason he gives us this sacrament and he gave it to his followers that we would do it often. He said, I know you're struggling. I know you're weak.

I know you're confused. I know you're lonely and fearful. Don't be afraid. I'm with you. I love you.

Paul reminds us of Jesus instituting this supper in 1 Corinthians 11.

He writes, For I received from the Lord what I also delivered to you that the Lord Jesus on the night when he was betrayed took bread and when he had given thanks he broke it and said, This is my body which is for you.

[34 : 23] Do this in remembrance of me. In the same way also he took the cup after supper saying, This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this as often as you drink it in remembrance of me.

For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes. Brothers and sisters, this is a table where we come to be reminded of and to celebrate the comfort of our righteousness being in heaven and what God has done for us in Jesus.

Listen, if you don't know the love of God for you in Jesus, I would invite you not to come to this table this morning, but also not to think that this table is a place where you come once you've figured life out and gotten yourself put together.

Remember that those who come to this table this morning are not those who've found righteousness for themselves. It's those who acknowledge their righteousness is only in heaven. That's their hope. That's what enables them to feast with their Father. Jesus invites you to trust Him too that your righteousness might be Jesus in heaven allowing you to sit and feast with your heavenly Father.

[35 : 42] Father. If you trust Him today, if you've joined yourself to a church that preaches the gospel of Jesus Christ, that Jesus is our only hope for standing before God, then know that this is not the table of Southwood or of the Presbyterian church.

This is the Lord's table. And He invites you to come and to share fellowship with us and to rejoice in His love for you. So do that gladly.

Let's celebrate together that we are greatly loved by our great King. Pray with me. Father, even in this moment, would You set these elements aside from a common use to one that is sacred in our hearts that teaches us to trust You more, that makes us more grateful for Your love for us and more confident that despite anything we're struggling with, our righteousness is in Heaven.

We are greatly loved and the King of the universe is with us today. Do that work in our hearts, we ask in Jesus' name. Amen.

Our Lord Jesus, on the night He was betrayed, took bread and He broke it and gave it to His disciples. As I, ministering in His name, give this bread to You. He said, take, eat, this is My body broken for You.

[37 : 06] Do this in remembrance of Me. In the same way, after supper, He took the cup, saying, this cup is the new covenant in My blood, shed for many for the forgiveness of sins.

Drink from it, all of you. Our host team will usher you to tables at the front and at the back and we will celebrate God's love for us together. For more information, visit us online at southwood.org.