

High and Lifted Up – The Son of Man

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Well, Jesus has given Nicodemus descriptions of these things couched in terms of earthly phenomenon – like birth, and the wind.

In this Jesus is telling Nicodemus: hey look, I've given you the remedial reader version of these spiritual truths – heavenly things expressed in earthly terms. If you can't understand that, how in the world can you understand the university level texts? Heavenly things expressed in heavenly terms?

Still striving to bridge the gap, Jesus then reveals the quintessential Heavenly truth expressed in earthly terms. And that is Jesus Himself. The Son of Man.

Now think about that. Jesus – The Son of Man - is the quintessential, the perfect embodiment, of Heavenly truth expressed in earthly terms – because Jesus is God, Yahweh Himself, expressed as also a man. As the Holy Spirit wrote through Paul: In Christ, all the fullness of the Deity dwells in bodily form – Christ: the one who is head over every power and every authority. The mystery of Godliness is great: He came in a body.

Jesus tells Nicodemus that no one has ever ascended to Heaven to discover its secrets, face to face as it were - and then come down to reveal them to man. No one that is except the one Who actually is from Heaven and Who has come down to earth, both as what He was in heaven – namely God, and as also a man – God also made flesh. He came in this manner with this dual nature to reveal the heavenly secrets to all who will accept them. The Son of Man Nicodemus.

See, in His efforts to reach out to Nicodemus, Jesus is leading him back to what he knows – or what he should know – the Old Testament – the law and the prophets. But specifically, a very special Heavenly vision of the Messiah. God had provided many earthly descriptions of Messiah, but at this very special place in Daniel – we are given a Heavenly vision of Messiah.

Let's look for a second at the Son of Man in Daniel. This is from the NIV translations are there is one important point where I want to explain a difference between the NIV and other translations:

Da 7:13 “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.

Da 7:14 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.

Jesus is calling to mind the Old Testament's teaching about a very interesting and mysterious figure called The Son of Man. Jesus is saying to Nicodemus: Remember Daniel the prophet? Remember his vision of the Son of Man, in Heaven, led right into the very presence of The Ancient of Days? The Ancient of Days... that's God Nicodemus: Yahweh. You remember, right?

In the New Testament the moniker “son of man” is used by Jesus as a claim to divinity. It was this claim that led Caiaphas to accuse Jesus of blasphemy: making Himself one with God, or equal with God. Caiaphas and the Sanhedrin fully understood Jesus' intent when He called Himself the “son of man”, that He was equating Himself with God.

It was this specific claim, this special description, that caused them to accuse Jesus of blasphemy. Because after all, His humanity was apparent to all. Pointing out His humanity would not have attracted the charge of blasphemy. Jesus as the “son of man” in the New Testament was a claim to divinity.

But in the Old Testament, “son of man” was usually used as a designation for a human being: a fleshly man. This is true in Numbers, Job, Psalms, but probably most especially in Ezekiel, where the prophet himself is referred to by God as 'son of man’.

The message here is, if we are speaking colloquially, mostly where you see a “son of man” in the Old Testament, feel free to insert “dude”. You know, a male human being. It's important to note that it is specifically a “fleshly” designation. It doesn't speak to a man's spirit, it speaks directly to the fleshly creature nature of mankind.

But in Daniel's vision the moniker “son of man” takes on an entirely new and shocking dimension, most especially to the Jewish mind. Most especially to the Jewish mind. Descriptively it still refers to a man, a being of the flesh. And grammatically it is still used without the definite article “the”, so it is still “a son of man” rather than “The Son of Man”, but conceptually it might as well be a title. Why? Because there is something shockingly the same, and shockingly different - and completely, shockingly unique about the son of man in Daniel's vision verses every other son of man running around under the sun.

What is shockingly the same is that Daniel's “son of man” is still a human in His flesh. What's so shocking about that? It's not so much the what but the where. The “son of man” in Daniel's vision is right there in Heaven, standing in the very presence of the Ancient of Days – and He is still alive. Nicodemus would recall the scriptures that we should recall – that no person could truly see God as He is and live. He could see various representations, manifestations of God, but not God Himself and live:

In Genesis 32 where Jacob wrestled with God – Jacob named the place of his struggle Peniel **pi ni'- el**) (which means “face of God) – because he realized he had wrestled with God, had seen Him face to face, yet his life was spared.

This was because no one could truly see God face to face and live.

This vision in Daniel recalls Exodus chapter 19, when the children of Israel were at Mount Sinai, and the Lord warned Moses not to let anyone approach the mountain lest they see the Lord and many of them perish.

In Exodus chapter 33, where Moses asks to see God, and God replies:

Ex 33:20 But,” he said, “you cannot see my face, for no one **may see me and live.**”

Here we have a “son of man”, in the very throne room of Heaven – face to face with the Ancient of Days, yet He is not dead. He is alive in His flesh in the very presence of God.

But that isn't the shockingly new element of this prophetic vision of Daniel. At least a few other men had seen a manifestation of God and lived. This one was really and truly seeing God, in God's dwelling place, and that was unique – but the really shocking thing is that this “son of man” was given things that are completely God's and God's alone.

In this simple little reference to the “son of man”, Jesus is saying to him, “Nicodemus, do you remember the rest of the vision? How all dominion and sovereignty was given to this “son of man”? How does your brain compute that Nicodemus? Those things are God's and God's alone. Remember how every creature, everywhere, worshiped this “son of man”? Worshiped Him Nicodemus. Worshiped Him. And not in some idolatrous pagan temple somewhere on this dirt clod we call the Earth, but right there in Heaven Nicodemus. But not in some back alley of Heaven.. it was right there in Heaven's throne room. What do you make of that Nicodemus? What answer does your theology give you on that one? Only God can rightfully receive worship. And this special, unique Son of Man received worship right there in God's presence, as God Himself.

In His efforts to reach Nicodemus, Jesus is building a bridge. The bridge leads to Himself, and the bridge IS Himself. On one end lies all the foreshadowing and the prophecy of the Messiah in the Old Testament. And on the other end of the bridge sits their reality made manifest in the person of Jesus Himself. Jesus is using the scriptures Nicodemus knows to lead him to Himself. This is exactly the way God saves people through Jesus Christ today. No one can come to Christ unless the Father calls him, and the mechanism the Father uses to call people to Christ is His Word.

So what else is Jesus telling Nicodemus in this passage?

Well, He's trying to make clear to Nicodemus, and us, that the only one who truly and fully understands Heavenly truth, is the one who is Himself from Heaven and has come to Earth to provide His testimony as to how we may be saved.

No amount of discovery on a man's part is sufficient to determine God's truth. It can't be discovered. It can only be revealed by God to us.

So is Jesus saying that we can understand nothing of God on our own? No. We have everything that has been created around us that testifies to God's existence. We have ourselves: all humanity is incurably religious. All of us have a gaping hole in the center of our being that only God can fill, but we try to fill it with other things instead. Idols of marriage, family, career, money, various possessions, fame, success, false humility, false religion, etc. And some people, the brightest people actually, seek to fill that void, or explain it away, out of their own intellect.

Well, I can assure you that Jesus isn't leading us into an intellectual black hole. He is most certainly leading us to an intellectual decision. He is. So what would that be? Well, it would be this. Jesus is leading us to the point where we realize that saving knowledge of Him and

of His Father cannot be attained with what we have between our own ears. Jesus isn't preaching victory through human effort and discovery.

He is leading Nicodemus and us to the fact that our full understanding is not required (nor is it possible)... but that our full and complete trust is. Amen. He is trying to impress upon Nicodemus that the things of Heaven cannot be discerned through mere discovery, but that they can only be bestowed upon a person via God's revelation in His word and in His Son, Jesus Christ.

How kind and wonderful is God. I love the way He works. His plan of salvation is so kind.

God has as the foundation of His plan simple and full, childlike trust and acceptance. That means it is no longer about ability.. it is about choice. And anyone with a will can choose to simply trust and accept God's plan of salvation in Christ - no matter if their IQ is 50 or 250. God didn't have to do that. He could have had a litmus test of knowledge or ability one had to pass. But He is kind and loving, and He desires for everyone to come to repentance and faith in His redeemer, Jesus Christ. So He kindly and gently made it all about the choice of trust that everyone with a will can exercise.