

Matthew 16:24-28

Introduction

This message is something of a sequel to the last message in Matthew three weeks ago. In fact, we'll be covering some of the same verses and making, in the end, basically the same point. We're going to begin with the last two verses (27-28), and then go back to the beginning of the passage and put it all together.

Verses 27-28 both speak about the "coming" of the "Son of Man". But what is this "coming" of the Son of Man? Verse 27 seems to be talking about the final judgment (something that is still yet to come), while verse 28 seems to talk about something that will happen within the lifetime of some of Jesus' disciples! So how do we make sense of this?

When we were in Matthew 10:23 we looked at the Old Testament background for the phrase "*Son of Man*". This morning, we're going to review *some* of this background, but if you want something more thorough, you can go to our website and read or listen to the message on Matthew 10:23.

A. The "coming" of one like a "Son of Man" in Daniel (Old Testament)

"In the first year of Belshazzar king of Babylon [552 B.C.], Daniel saw a dream and visions of his head as he lay in his bed" (Dan. 7:1). Daniel describes what he saw:

- ✓ Daniel 7:2-7 — I saw in my vision by night, and behold... four great beasts came up out of the sea... The first was ***like a lion [Babylon]***... And behold, another beast, a second one, ***like a bear [Persia]***... After this I looked, and behold, another, ***like a leopard [Greece]***... After this I saw in the night visions, and behold, a fourth beast, terrifying and dreadful and exceedingly strong [Rome].
- ✓ Daniel 7:9-10, 13-14 — As I looked, thrones were placed, and the Ancient of Days took his seat; his clothing was white as snow, and the hair of his head like pure wool; his throne was fiery flames; its wheels were burning fire. A stream of fire issued and came out from before him; a thousand thousands served him, and ten thousand times ten thousand stood before him; the court sat in judgment, and the books were opened.

As the Ancient of Days sits for judgment, sentence is passed ***against*** the three beasts that were ***like a lion***, and ***like a bear***, and ***like a leopard***, and also the fourth beast (cf. Dan. 7:11-12). But then Daniel sees something very different:

Daniel 7:9-10, 13-14 — 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. 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.

Notice that when the “son of man” *comes* with the clouds of heaven, His coming is to the Ancient of Days. The one like a “son of man” is “*presented* before” the Ancient of Days in order that “judgement” might be passed *for Him* (not against Him), and that He might receive an everlasting kingdom (cf. Dan. 7:21-22).

B. The “coming” of the “Son of Man” in Matthew (New Testament)

When we come to the *New Testament*, this “coming” of the “Son of Man” to the Ancient of Days is fulfilled when Jesus is resurrected from the dead and then ascends to the throne of God. When Jesus ascended into heaven, judgment was passed in His favor, and it was given to Him to sit down on God’s throne so that all peoples, nations, and languages should come to serve Him in true righteousness and holiness (Acts 7:55-56; Rev. 1:12-18; 2:26-27; 3:21 [cf. 3:7]; Luke 23:42-43; 1 Pet. 3:21-22 [cf. Mat. 28:18; Rev. 12:5, 7-10]; Heb. 10:12-13 [cf. 1 Cor. 15:22-26, 51-54; Ps. 110:1-2]; Eph. 1:20-23; 4:7-10; Acts 2:32-33; 5:30-31; Heb. 1:3; 10:12; 12:2; Col. 3:1; Rom. 8:34; Phil. 2:9-11).

Now if you’re just reading Daniel you might think that when the “son of man” comes to the Ancient of Days and receives His kingdom, that’s it, everything’s finished, God’s enemies are all destroyed, and the kingdom is consummated. But in the New Testament, we learn about the mystery or the secret of the kingdom (Mat. 13). We learn that the kingdom will come with small beginnings, and gradually grow and spread by peaceful means until at the very end it is consummated by Christ’s victorious return to this earth. So in Daniel, it’s very simple! The Son of Man “comes” with the clouds of heaven to the Ancient of Days and is enthroned in glory so that He might rule the nations. But in the New Testament, when the “Son of Man” comes to the Ancient of Days and receives His royal authority, we see that he does not manifest this authority suddenly and all at once, but rather *in different ways and progressively over time*. So for example, Jesus said to His disciples:

- ✓ Matthew 10:23 – When they persecute you in one town, flee to the next, for truly, I say to you, you will not have gone through all the towns of Israel before the Son of Man comes.

Jesus is referring here to His “coming” in judgment on the city of Jerusalem in 70 A.D. (see message notes for Mat. 10:23). In other words, the destruction of Jerusalem was one *sign* of the fulfillment of Daniel seven. The destruction of Jerusalem would be *evidence and proof* that Jesus had come to the Ancient of Days and received the royal authority of the kingdom. But what is the *final* and *ultimate* sign that Jesus has come to the Ancient of Days and received the kingdom? The final and ultimate sign that Jesus has come to the Ancient of Days and received the kingdom will be His bodily return to this earth in power and great glory!

- ✓ Matthew 25:31–32 (cf. 19:28) – When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, then he will sit on his glorious throne. Before him will be gathered all the nations, and he will separate people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats.

So we see that the Son of Man comes with the clouds of heaven to the Ancient of Days and receives the Kingdom (at His ascension). But then we see that this coming to the Ancient of

Days (this kingdom authority) is actually manifested on earth in different ways and progressively over time. On the one hand, this royal authority was made clearly visible when the Son of Man “came” and destroyed Jerusalem in 70 A.D. On the other hand, this royal authority will be *fully* revealed only when the Son of Man “comes” at the end of this age. So in light of all this, let’s read Matthew 16:27.

I. Matthew 16:27 (cf. Mk. 8:38; Lk. 9:26) – For the Son of Man is going to come with his angels in the glory of his Father, and then he will repay each person according to what he has done.

What is Jesus talking about here? He’s talking about the time when His coming to the Ancient of Days will be *fully and finally* revealed for all to see (cf. Matthew 25:31–32; 19:28). He’s talking about the end of this age when He will physically return to this earth and repay each person (both the righteous and the wicked) according to what they have done. But now let’s read verse twenty-eight.

II. Matthew 16:28 – Truly, I say to you, there are some standing here who will not taste death until they see the Son of Man coming in his kingdom.

Now what is Jesus talking about *here*? We can see that He’s still talking about the “coming” of the Son of Man! But in verse twenty-seven, that coming is still at least 2000 years away. Here in verse twenty-eight, the coming of the Son of Man happens within the lifetime of some of those who are listening to Him speak! Can you make sense of this now?

The coming of the Son of Man in *both verses* is ultimately rooted in His coming with the clouds of heaven to the Ancient of Days so that judgment might be passed in His favor, and He might receive the royal authority of the kingdom (this all happened at Jesus’ ascension). But we know that this coming to the Ancient of Days (this kingdom authority) is actually manifested here on earth in different ways and progressively over time (cf. Mat. 13). In verse twenty-seven, Jesus is talking about the *final* revelation of His coming to the Ancient of Days (which is His bodily return to this earth). But in verse twenty-eight Jesus is talking about a much *earlier* manifestation of His coming to the Ancient of Days.

So what is this “earlier manifestation”? What is this coming of the Son of Man in His kingdom which some of the disciples will see with their own eyes? We saw that in Matthew 10:23, it is the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 A.D. And this may be included here in Matthew 16:28. But in the context, it doesn’t seem like we should limit this coming to one specific event. In Matthew, Jesus says: “There are some standing here who will not taste death until they see ***the Son of Man coming in his kingdom***. But in Mark, Jesus says: “There are some standing here who will not taste death until they see ***the kingdom of God after it has come with power***” (9:1). And Luke simply says: “There are some standing here who will not taste death until they see ***the kingdom of God***” (9:27). So once again, what is this “coming” of the Son of Man in His kingdom? Another earthly sign of the coming of the Son of Man to the Ancient of Days is the outpouring of the Holy Spirit on the Day of Pentecost.

- ✓ Acts 2:33-36 – ***Being therefore exalted at the right hand of God***, and having received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, ***he has poured out this that you yourselves are seeing and hearing***. For David did not ascend into the heavens, but he himself says, “The Lord said to my Lord, Sit at my right hand, until I make your enemies your footstool.” ***Let all the house of Israel therefore know for certain that God has made him both Lord and Christ***, this Jesus whom you crucified.

So when Jesus speaks of the Son of Man coming in His kingdom, could He be referring to this pouring out of the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost? Once again, this may be included and assumed, but it doesn't seem like we should limit this coming to one specific event. And there's another problem. Jesus implies that *some* of His disciples will die *before* this fuller manifestation of the Son of Man and His kingdom authority (cf. 16:24) – but Pentecost was less than two years away, and by that time none of the disciples had died! So what is this coming of the Son of Man in His kingdom supposed to be? What is Jesus talking about? Well there is one other earthly sign of the coming of the Son of Man to the Ancient of Days, and it's very closely related to the outpouring of the Holy Spirit on the Day of Pentecost.

- ✓ Matthew 28:18-20 – And Jesus came and said to [His disciples], “***ALL AUTHORITY IN HEAVEN AND ON EARTH has been given to me [cf. Daniel 7!]. Go therefore and make disciples of ALL NATIONS [cf. Daniel 7!]***... And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.

When we see the Church spread throughout all the earth, we are witnessing a sign of the universal lordship and rule of the Son of Man who has come with the clouds of heaven to the Ancient of Days (cf. D.A. Carson). And this fits especially with the fact that in verses 18-19 Jesus has *just* promised to build His *kingdom assembly* (His Church) through the proclamation of the Gospel! Only thirty years after Jesus' coming with the clouds of heaven to the Ancient of Days, Paul would be able to write these words to the church in Colossae:

- ✓ Colossians 1:5–6 (cf. 1:23) – The word of the truth, the gospel... has come to you, as indeed *in the whole world* it is bearing fruit and increasing.

The Son of Man has come with the clouds of heaven to the Ancient of Days and received the royal authority of the kingdom (this happened at His ascension). In Matthew 16:27, we see that the final manifestation of this coming of the Son of Man will be His return to this earth at the end of the age for the salvation of His people and the judgment of His enemies. But then in verse 28, Jesus emphasizes the *certainty* of this final return to the earth by telling His disciples that even within some of their own lifetimes, they will see the Son of Man coming in His kingdom. Have you seen the Son of Man coming in His kingdom? So now let's go back to the beginning of this passage and put everything together. What is the practical significance of all of this?

III. Matthew 16:24 – Then Jesus told his disciples, “If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me.”

Jesus calls us to be prepared and ready at all times to *suffer* and to die even as *He* will. We must be *ready* for the experience of persecution, and suffering, *and death* in this life. But Jesus knows

that for many people, this idea of taking up a cross and following Him to the death will be almost impossible to accept. It's instinctive for us to guard and preserve our lives (our earthly wellbeing) at *whatever* the cost! It's called "self-preservation". And so Jesus goes on to say this:

IV. Matthew 16:25 – For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will find it.

It's actually those who *cling* to this earthly life who will *lose* their life *in the end*. On the other hand, it's those who actually *lose* their lives for Jesus' sake who will *save* their lives *in the end*. And then Jesus comes to the very *heart* of the matter with two very simple questions:

V. Matthew 16:26 – For what will it profit a man if he gains the whole world and forfeits his soul? Or what shall a man give in return for his soul?

There is a life that is infinitely more important than this present life – and that life is the life to come – it is the eternal well-being of our souls! "For what will it profit a man if he gains the *whole world* and forfeits his *soul*? Or what shall a man give in return for his *soul*?" Jesus said:

✓ Matthew 10:28 – Do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Rather fear him who can destroy both soul and body in hell.

And so now, in case He's not already been clear enough, Jesus goes on to say this:

VI. Matthew 16:27 – For the Son of Man is going to come with his angels in the glory of his Father, and then he will repay each person according to what he has done.

It is on *this day*—when the Son of Man returns to this earth—that every human being will either find his life or lose his life. The Son of Man will judge all people based on whether they took up their cross and followed Him by faith... or whether they rejected the sufferings and death of the cross, and clung instead to this earthly life. And then in order to *assure* us of the *reality* and *certainty* of this future day, Jesus says to His disciples:

VII. Matthew 16:28 – Truly, I say to you, there are some standing here who will not taste death until they see the Son of Man coming in his kingdom.

Yes, the disciples must be ready to see persecution, and suffering, and death in this life. But some of them can also expect to see with their own eyes, and within their own lifetimes, the powerful coming of the Son of Man in His kingdom. So as they take up their cross and lose their lives for Jesus' sake, they can be certain of finding and saving their lives *when Jesus returns*.

Conclusion

Have *you* seen the Son of Man coming in His kingdom? Can you *see* in the building of the Messiah's assembly the *evidence* that He has come with the clouds of heaven to the Ancient of Days? Can you *see* in our own existence right here in Morris, Illinois *evidence* of the royal authority that the Son of Man has already received so that all peoples, nations, and languages

should serve Him? Have you *seen* the Son of Man coming in His kingdom? Because if you can rejoice in having *already* seen this, *then* you will be able to see with even clearer vision His future coming with his angels in the glory of his Father, when he will repay each person according to what he has done. If we can see *today*, and *throughout all of history*, the coming of the Son of Man in His kingdom, then we may also be more *assured* of His coming at the end of this age! The Son of Man *will return to this earth*, and it's *on that day* that all who have *lost* their lives for Jesus' sake will find to their everlasting joy that they actually get to *keep* their lives unto life eternal. So let us be willing to *die* for Jesus! Let us not reject the sufferings and death of the cross by clinging instead to this earthly life. "For what will it profit a man if he gains the whole world and forfeits his soul? Or what shall a man give in return for his soul?"