

## Daniel 7:13-18

### Introduction

The last couple of Sundays that we've been in Daniel, we've been watching and seeing with Daniel as a vision unfolds before his eyes. We've seen the four winds of heaven stirring up the great sea. We've seen four great beasts coming up from *out of* that sea. And we've learned that this is a picture of the spiritual realities that stand behind the whole course of human history to the very end. Just like that raging cosmic sea seeks to drown all the dry land, so Satan's goal is to swallow up and devour God's new creation. And we are that new creation. So in ourselves we ought to be trembling at the imagery of these four beasts arising from out of the sea. At first we can see clear signs that the beasts are not sovereign—that in spite of all their evil intent they're still on God's "leash," as it were. But by the time we get to the fourth beast it doesn't appear that there's any leash at all. Sometimes it's difficult to discern any of the restraining activity of God. Sometimes it can seem that the beast *is* sovereign and that the raging sea *will* swallow up God's new creation. We can feel this ourselves as we watch with Daniel and see what Daniel sees. And yet Daniel's vision doesn't end with the fourth beast; it doesn't end with that little horn having eyes like the eyes of a man and a mouth speaking great things. It's at just this point—when it might seem to all outward, human appearances that evil has prevailed—it's at just this point that we most need to *keep on* looking with Daniel and seeing what Daniel sees. And so last week we looked in Daniel's vision and this is what we saw:

- Daniel 7:9–12 — 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. I looked then because of the sound of the great words that the horn was speaking. And as I looked, the beast was killed, and its body destroyed and given over to be burned with fire. As for the rest of the beasts, their dominion [had been] taken away, [though] their lives [had been] prolonged for a season and a time.

If the beast should finally be left to itself, it would mean the end of God's new creation – of that wonderful saving work that He's begun in us. These are terrifyingly evil and wicked forces against which we are totally and completely helpless. But then we keep watching with Daniel until our eyes are captivated by this picture of perfect stability and calm. In the midst of all the raging of the sea, here's a place where all is "solid," a place that's established firm and immovable, a place that cannot be touched no matter how high the breakers of the sea should ever mount. It's as we contemplate this part of the vision and meditate on this scene that we find a constant source of peace, and hope, and even great joy as we face the tumult and the upheaval that's all around us in this world.

But even now, this first vision of Daniel is not yet complete. Even now it's so very important that we keep on looking with Daniel and seeing what Daniel sees. Daniel continues in verse 13:

**I. Daniel 7:13a** — I saw in the night visions, and *behold*...

That word “behold” is a powerful link for us that carries us back before the scene with the Ancient of Days (where the word “behold” is never used) to that earlier scene with the sea and the four beasts (where the word “behold” is used six times).

- Daniel 7:2–4a — I saw in my vision by night, **and behold**, the four winds of heaven were stirring up the great sea. And four great beasts came up out of the sea, different from one another. The first was like a lion and had eagles’ wings.
- Daniel 7:5a — **And behold**, another beast, a second one, like a bear...
- Daniel 7:6a — After this I looked, **and behold**, another, like a leopard, with four wings of a bird on its back. And the beast had four heads...
- Daniel 7:7 — After this I saw in the night visions, **and behold**, a fourth beast... It was different from all the beasts that were before it, and it had ten horns.
- Daniel 7:8 — I considered the horns, **and behold**, there came up among them another horn, a little one... **And behold**, in this horn were eyes like the eyes of a man, and a mouth speaking great things.

In this first part of Daniel’s vision, that word “behold” is used, every time, to introduce a vision of a *beast*. In fact, what we “behold” is not just “beasts,” but mutant, hybrid monsters. We saw a couple of weeks ago that the point of this seems to be the “beastly,” animal-like nature of these creatures especially as opposed to their “*humanity*.” What does it mean to be a human? In Genesis 1 it was man, as the image and likeness of God, who was given dominion and who was to rule over *the beasts* (Gen. 1:24-26; cf. Ps. 8:3-8). But here in Daniel 7 what we see is the original creation order turned on its head. Now we see a beast—for instance, a leopard with four wings of a bird and four heads—who is “given dominion” over the earth (cf. 7:6). Here in Daniel we see Satan taking the image and likeness of God and twisting it into a “beastly” perversion of its former self. When men stop worshiping God and exercising rule and dominion (in whatever sphere, whether in the home or at work or anywhere else) according to His will and for His honor and glory there’s a sense in which we become no better than any one of the beasts of the earth. You could say that we’re even worse than the beasts because it was man and not the beasts who was first created as the image and likeness of God. In the book of Job, Elihu says that God is the one “who teaches us more than the beasts of the earth and makes us wiser than the birds of the heavens” (35:11), but when our hearts are lifted up in pride (as Nebuchadnezzar’s was) or when we come to envy the prosperity of the wicked (as the psalmist did for a time), it’s us who actually become more “dumb” and more “stupid” than the beasts. We see this pictured in Nebuchadnezzar’s case in Daniel chapter four when the angelic watcher said:

- Daniel 4:16 — Let his mind be changed from a man’s, and let a beast’s mind be given to him.

The Psalmist confesses:

- Psalm 73:22 — I was brutish and ignorant; I was like a beast toward you.

Man, in his rebellion against God, is worse than the beasts; he's a beastly perversion of what he was originally created to be. And so in the end he becomes a tool of the devil, who's seeking to devour and destroy God's new creation. Remember how the fourth *beast* grew a "little horn" in which there were eyes *like the eyes of a man* and a mouth speaking boastful and arrogant words *against God*?

Are you beginning to see just how far we all fell in Adam? How can there *be* any "new creation"? How can man who has fallen even lower than the beasts ever be "re-created," as it were, as the true image and likeness of God – as one who exercises rule and dominion (in every sphere of life) never in rebellion against God, but always in service *to* God and for His glory and honor? When we see the beast killed and its body destroyed and given over to be burned with fire we know this is the result of the sovereign rule of the Ancient of Days who rides on His chariot throne and comes in judgment. But where is the "good news" in that if there's no new creation—no "new *man*," as it were—no new humanity? Are you seeing, now, that even after that awesome scene from last week, the vision of Daniel is not yet complete? It can't be!

After the sixfold repetition of that word "*behold*" which introduced the vision of the four *beasts* in verses 1-8, now we read in verse 13:

**II. Daniel 7:13b** — I saw in the night visions, and *behold*, with the clouds of heaven there came one like a son of man [*enas*]...

Do you see it? And do you see *Him*? Here is one *not* "like" a lion with eagle's wings (4), and not "like" a bear raised up on one side (5), and not "like" a leopard with four wings of a bird and four heads (6); here is no beast at all, but rather one "like" a son of man. And so the question we all immediately have is this: "*Who is this one like a son of man?*" On the one hand, if we compare "son of man" with "beasts," we see that this expression is a privileged and an exalted title. In other words, to be a son of man is to be human and *not* a beast, and therefore to be in some sense the image and the likeness of God. And yet everywhere else in the Old Testament the expression "son of man" is really meant to be a reminder of our weakness and our frailty and our creatureliness (cf. Job 16:20-21; 35:6-8) – in some places even our sinfulness. Daniel and Ezekiel are the only two people in the Bible ever directly addressed with this title "son of man." We read in Daniel chapter eight:

□ Daniel 8:17–18 — [The angel Gabriel] came near where I stood. And when he came, I was frightened and fell on my face. But he said to me, "Understand, O **son of man**, that the vision is for the time of the end." And when he had spoken to me, I fell into a deep sleep with my face to the ground.

And then in Ezekiel chapter one:

□ Ezekiel 1:28–2:1 — Such was the appearance of the likeness of the glory of the LORD. And when I saw it, I fell on my face, and I heard the voice of one speaking. And he said to me, "**Son of man**, stand on your feet..."

Do you see how in both of these examples we have either an angel or God Himself addressing Daniel and Ezekiel as “son of man” in the context of their creaturely weakness and fear – as both of them are falling on their faces to the ground? So we read in other places:

- Psalm 8:4 (cf. Heb. 2:6) — *What is man* [*enos*] that you are mindful of him, and the **son of man** [*adam*] that you care for him?
- Psalm 144:3–4 — O LORD, *what is man* [*adam*] that you regard him, or the **son of man** [*enos*] that you think of him? Man is like a breath; his days are like a passing shadow.
- Isaiah 51:12 (cf. 56:2) — Who are you that you are afraid of **man** [*enos*] who dies, of the **son of man** [*adam*] who is made like grass?
- Psalm 146:3–4 — Put not your trust in princes, in a **son of man**, in whom there is no salvation. When his breath departs, he returns to the earth; on that very day his plans perish.
- Numbers 23:19 — God is not **man** [*is*], that he should lie, or a **son of man** [*adam*], that he should change his mind.
- Job 25:5–6 — Behold, even the moon is not bright, and the stars are not pure in his eyes; how much less **man** [*enos*], who is a maggot, and the **son of man** [*adam*], who is a worm!

Compared with the beasts, “son of man” is a privileged and exalted title – that’s true. But compared with God and even compared with the angels, “son of man” is everywhere else in the Old Testament a title that emphasizes man’s weakness and frailty and creatureliness. It’s *in this light*, then, that we can feel the tension, and the mystery, and the wonder of these words: “I saw in the night visions, and *behold*, **with the clouds of heaven** there came one like a **son of man**...”

If “son of man” is a title emphasizing weakness and frailty and creatureliness, then this image of coming “with the clouds of heaven” is exactly the opposite. Clouds, in the Bible, are associated with manifestations of divine authority and power and glory. Remember how it was the Lord who went before the Israelites in a pillar of cloud (cf. Exod. 13:21) and who descended on Mount Sinai in a thick cloud (cf. Exod. 19:9; 24:16). When Ezekiel describes the vision that he saw of God’s glory, he says:

- Ezekiel 1:4 (cf. Mat. 17:5) — As I looked, behold, a stormy wind came out of the north, and a great **cloud**, with brightness around it, and fire flashing forth continually.

We read in Exodus:

- Exodus 40:34 (cf. 16:10) — Then the **cloud** covered the tent of meeting, and the **glory** of the LORD filled the tabernacle.

And then again in 1 Kings:

- 1 Kings 8:10–11 (cf. Ezek. 10:4) — When the priests came out of the Holy Place, a **cloud** filled the house of the LORD, so that the priests could not stand to minister because of the **cloud**, for the **glory** of the LORD filled the house of the LORD.

Do you see how, in the Bible, clouds are part of the imagery that's associated with divine authority and power and glory? So how appropriate is it that we read in Isaiah and then in the Psalms:

- Isaiah 19:1 — Behold, **the LORD** is riding on a swift cloud...
- Psalms 104:3 (cf. 97:2) — **He** makes the clouds his chariot.

Now, then, we can truly feel the tension, and the mystery, and the wonder of these words: “I saw in the night visions, and **BEHOLD, with the clouds of heaven** there came one like a **son of man...**” Who is this one like a son of man—even like one of us!—who comes with the clouds of heaven? We go on to read in verses 13-14:

**III. Daniel 7:13c-14** — ...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.

Who is this one like a son of man who comes with the clouds of heaven? Can you see? Here in this exalted figure we see the goal of man's original creation—of our own original creation—being fulfilled. Here, all wrapped up and summed up in this single, exalted figure, what do we see? We see the new creation. We see a new “humanity”—a “new *man*,” as it were, who is the very image and likeness of God, who rules for God and exercises dominion unto the glory of God, and who worships and serves God alone (cf. 1 Cor. 15:27-28). Here, in this one like a son of man, we see who we were created to be.

And yet even as we say all these things we know in our hearts that that's not who we are. *In ourselves* we're more “beastly” than we are *truly* human. Rather than reflecting back to God His own image and likeness each and every day in all that we say and do and think, *in ourselves* we're only reflecting back to God a beastly perversion of what we were originally created to be. In ourselves, we could never, ever be “presented before the Ancient of Days” and not be consumed. In ourselves we could never receive from the Ancient of Days everlasting dominion and a kingdom to possess forever and ever and ever.

So we have to ask again: Who is this exalted figure in Daniel's vision? Have our eyes been cheated? Is this just a cruel joke that only reminds us of what we've lost? Certainly not! Somehow, somehow, the goal of our creation—of who we were created to be as human beings—will be achieved by another – by *this one* like a son of man who we *see* in Daniel's vision coming with the clouds of heaven, being presented before the Ancient of Days, and receiving a kingdom that will last forever.

#### **IV. The Son of Man**

Fast-forward, now, some six hundred years. During the days of Jesus' public ministry He would refer to Himself “normally” just like you and I do using words like “I,” and “me,” and “my.”

- Matthew 11:29 — Take **my** yoke upon you, and learn from **me**, for **I** am gentle and lowly in heart.

But after “I,” Jesus referred to Himself more than in any other way as “the Son of Man” (82 times in the Gospels). For Jesus this expression was just another way of saying “I.”

- Matthew 16:13 — Jesus... asked his disciples, “Who do people say that the Son of Man is?”

But if He could just as easily have asked the disciples, “Who do people say that *I* am?” then why does He say instead, “Who do people say that *the Son of Man* is”? What we have here is a window into Jesus’ own “self-understanding” and therefore a window into who we should understand Jesus to be. On the one hand, when Jesus spoke of Himself as the Son of Man He spoke of His frailty and weakness, and even His suffering and death as one truly made like us – as a real and true son of Adam (cf. Mat. 12:32). So we read verses like these:

- Matthew 8:20 — Jesus said to him, “Foxes have holes, and birds of the air have nests, but **the Son of Man** has nowhere to lay his head.”
- Matthew 12:40 — Just as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of the great fish, so will **the Son of Man** be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth.
- Matthew 17:12 (cf. 17:22) — I tell you that Elijah has already come, and they did not recognize him, but did to him whatever they pleased. So also **the Son of Man** will certainly suffer at their hands.
- Matthew 20:18 — See, we are going up to Jerusalem. And **the Son of Man** will be delivered over to the chief priests and scribes, and they will condemn him to death.
- Matthew 26:2 (cf. 26:24, 45) — You know that after two days the Passover is coming, and **the Son of Man** will be delivered up to be crucified.

Do you see how this title “Son of Man” is connected in Jesus’ own self-understanding with His weakness and His frailty, and even His suffering and His death? And yet, on the other hand, when Jesus spoke of Himself as the Son of Man He also had in mind *at the very same time* his future exaltation to sit enthroned in glory at the Father’s right hand (cf. Jn. 1:51; 5:26-27; Mat. 9:6; 12:8; 13:37; 17:9; Rev. 1:13; 14:14-16). So we read, in turn, verses like these:

- Matthew 25:31 — When **the Son of Man** comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, then he will sit on his glorious throne.
- Matthew 26:64 — Jesus said to him, “...I tell you, from now on you will see **the Son of Man** seated at the right hand of Power and coming on the clouds of heaven.”
- Matthew 16:28 (cf. 10:23; 16:27) — 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.
- Matthew 19:28 — Jesus said to them, “Truly, I say to you, in the new world... **the Son of Man** will sit on his glorious throne.”
- Matthew 24:30 (cf. 24:27, 37, 39, 44) — Then will appear in heaven the sign of **the Son of Man**, and then all the tribes of the earth will mourn, and they will see **the Son of Man** coming on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory.

Do you see how this title “Son of Man” is intimately connected in Jesus’ own self-understanding not only with His suffering and His death as one truly made like us, but also with His exaltation to sit enthroned in power and glory at the Father’s right hand – as one truly made like us? In this selfsame expression, “Son of Man,” we have very powerfully expressed both the weakness and the power, both the suffering and the glory of Jesus. And so it was this “title,” more than any other, that summed up for Jesus His whole life’s work and mission. It’s in this light, then, that we can make sense of these passages in the Gospel of John:

□ John 3:14–15 (cf. 8:28) — As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must **the Son of Man** be lifted up, that whoever believes in him may have eternal life.

Can you see that there’s a double meaning here? How will the Son of Man be “lifted up”? He will be lifted up not only on the cross as one truly made like you and me, but also lifted up and exalted to the Father’s right hand as one truly made like you and me.

□ John 12:23 — Jesus answered them, “The hour has come for **the Son of Man** to be glorified.”

Do you see, again, the double meaning? How will the Son of Man be “glorified”? Jesus could see even in the cross His glorification because His suffering on the cross was the pathway to His exaltation at the Father’s right hand. This is why Jesus could say even as He was going to the cross:

□ John 13:31 — *Now* is **the Son of Man** glorified.

If this simple title, “the Son of Man,” summed up for Jesus both weakness and power, both suffering and glory, both death and life, then it also summed up for Jesus His full identification *with us* so that He might raise us up by His suffering (cf. Mat. 20:28) to share *with Him* in His glory (cf. Mat. 19:28). In other words, Jesus came as the Son of Man to fulfill our calling for us so that He might restore us fully to our true humanity as those who perfectly reflect back to God His own image and likeness. This is what it means to be truly “human,” and so we see, indeed, that we become truly “*human*,” again, only *in Christ*.

Who is this one like a son of man who comes with the clouds of heaven? Can you *see* now for yourself? Here in this exalted figure we see the goal of our own original creation fulfilled. Here, all wrapped up and summed up in this single, exalted figure, we see a whole new “humanity.” We see *in Him, all of us*, redeemed and recreated as God’s true image and likeness and called therefore, *with Him*, to receive the kingdom and possess the kingdom forever, forever and ever. And so we read in verses 15-18:

**V. Daniel 7:15–18 (cf. 7:22, 27)** — As for me, Daniel, my spirit within me was anxious, and the visions of my head alarmed me. I approached one of those who stood there and asked him the truth concerning all this. So he told me and made known to me the interpretation of the things. “These four great beasts are four kings [or kingdoms] who shall arise out of the earth. But *the*

**saints of the Most High** shall receive the kingdom and possess the kingdom forever, forever and ever.”

If we saw in the imagery of the beasts just how far we fell in Adam, then we see in this imagery of the one like a Son of Man who comes with the clouds of heaven just how far God has raised us up again with Christ – so that we might reflect back to Him and even to all the world around us (whether in our homes or in our workplaces or wherever we are) His own true image and likeness. This is our high privilege and calling. We are God’s new creation. So, then, let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the exalted Son of Man, and abide in Him – remembering always that apart from Him we can do nothing (cf. Jn. 15:5). I’ll close with these words from the Apostle Paul:

□ Ephesians 4:17–24 — Now this I say and testify in the Lord, that you must no longer walk as the Gentiles do, in the futility of their minds. They are darkened in their understanding, alienated from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them, due to their hardness of heart. They have become callous and have given themselves up to sensuality, greedy to practice every kind of impurity.

But that is not the way you learned Christ!— assuming that you have heard about him and were taught in him, as the truth is in Jesus, to put off your old man, which belongs to your former manner of life and is corrupt through deceitful desires, and to be renewed in the spirit of your minds, and to put on the new man, created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness.