

Who is this Son of Man?

by H. A. Ironside

"And Jesus answered them saying, the hour is come that the Son of Man should be glorified... And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto Me. This He said, signifying what death He should die. The people answered Him, We have heard out of the law that Christ abideth for ever: but how sayest Thou, the Son of Man must be lifted up? Who is this Son of Man?" (John 12:23, 32-34).

The title which our blessed Saviour and Lord seemed most to delight in when He was on earth was that of "Son of Man." Its very universality had a large appeal for the heart of Him who came "not to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved." As to the mystery of His person, He was first of all Son of God, though born of a virgin mother. As the promised Seed through whom all nations are yet to be blest, He was the Son of Abraham. As Israel's Messiah and King, He was the Son of David. But as heir of the world and Saviour of mankind, He was the Son of Man.

Thoughtless persons, and surface thinkers, have often declared that Christ nowhere announced His own deity. From this they have drawn the conclusion that He was not God incarnate, but was simply a god-like man, the best and the greatest that the human race has produced. It was His admiring disciples, they tell us, and other followers of His in the early Christian centuries who, in their thinking, raised Him to the plane of deity, and worshipped Him as more than man.

All such assertions are based upon mere assumptions and ignorance. It is true that our Lord nowhere said in so many words, "I am God the Son become man for the redemption of the human race; I am the second person of the eternal Trinity, and, therefore, to be worshipped as God the Father is worshipped." To have done so would have been self-assertion, ill-becoming the humiliation to which He had stooped in grace, when He came from the glory of the Father down to this dark world of sin. But no one can carefully read the Gospel records with unprejudiced mind, without seeing that He acted as none but God could act on many occasions. For instance, when He multiplied the loaves and stilled the raging tempests by His word. And "He spake as never man spake," using language concerning Himself, which would be either meaningless or crudely bombastic, if He had not known Himself to be God manifest in the flesh.

This comes out very clearly in connection with His use of the very title which unbelievers insist is in itself a denial of deity. I want to ask you hearers to constitute yourselves a jury and listen to the evidence which He himself gives concerning His divine personality, and then I would have you answer, each for himself, the question put by the perturbed Jews as recorded in John 12:34, "Who is this Son of Man?"

I shall select seven passages out of the scores that are available, and I beg you to note what is implied in each one of them concerning the true nature of this blessed One who calls Himself the Son of Man.

I. Lord of the Sabbath

In Matthew 12, verses 1 to 8, we have the familiar incident of the Lord and His disciples plucking the ears of corn on the Sabbath day. In meeting the objections of the Pharisees, who claimed that such procedure was unlawful on the Sabbath, He declares, "The Son of Man is Lord even of the Sabbath day."

What a remarkable statement to come from the lips of a mere man! The Sabbath was the sign of God's covenant relationship with His people Israel. Again and again He asserts His own authority in a special way in connection with that day. In Isaiah 58:13 and 14, He says, "If thou turn away thy foot from the Sabbath, from doing thy pleasure on My holy day; and call the Sabbath a delight, the holy of the LORD, honourable; and shalt honour Him, not doing thine own ways, nor finding thine own pleasure nor speaking thine own words: Then shalt thou delight thyself in the LORD; and I will cause thee to ride upon the high places of the earth, and feed thee with the heritage of Jacob thy father: for the mouth of the LORD hath spoken it."

Now observe, God calls the Sabbath "My holy Day." In other words, Jehovah Himself is Lord of the Sabbath day. While it is true that "the Sabbath was made for man, and not man for the Sabbath," yet no man as such, would have authority to regulate human behaviour on that day, or to decree how it should be observed. But our Lord Jesus Christ assumes that very position. He sweeps to one side the regulations of the Scribes and Pharisees, the traditions of the elders, and the additions to the law made by the rabbis, and declares that He is greater than the Temple in which the priests carry on their work on the Sabbath and are blameless, and, therefore, He absolves His disciples of all stigma of impiety because of their action as they walked with Him through the fields, and calmly announces that "the Son of Man is Lord even of the Sabbath day." What must His hearers have thought of such a declaration? How could His disciples explain such an apparent

assumption of authority unless they recognised the fact that *He spoke not merely as man, but as God.*

Imagine one of the rabbis declaring himself to be lord of the Sabbath day! Think of any prophet in Israel making such a declaration! But Jesus does this very thing. In view of it, I put the question to you to-day, and beg you to thoughtfully consider ere you answer, "Who is this Son of Man?"

II. The Saviour of Sinners

Let us now turn to Luke's Gospel, chapter 19, verse 10. "For the Son of Man is come to SEEK AND TO SAVE THAT WHICH WAS LOST." These words were spoken, as you will recall, in connection with our Lord's visit to Jericho, when He went to be a guest in the home of Zacchaeus, the Publican. In answer to the carping criticism of the self-righteous Jews who blamed Him for going "to be a guest with a man that is a sinner," He declares, "This day is salvation come to this house, forasmuch as he also is a son of Abraham." That is, He recognises the faith that was in the heart of Zacchaeus, and, therefore, links him up with believing Abraham, and then he tells of the great mission of the Son of Man. He came not to call the righteous, but to seek and to save that which was lost. Now observe, He does not say that He came to show the lost how they might be saved. He did not come to instruct them as to what to do in order that they might be delivered from their sad condition. He did not come to *point* them to some one greater than Himself, who could do for them what He could not. But He Himself came to *seek* them out as the Good Shepherd, and to *save* them from their lost estate. The Psalmist said, "In God is my salvation," but here is the Son, who to all outward appearances is but a man among men, and yet the Saviour of sinners! Again I ask you to consider well the question and to answer as you will wish you had in the Day of judgment, "Who is this Son of Man?"

III. The Forgiver of Sins

In the next instance, we will look at the Gospel of Mark, chapter 2, verse 10. "The Son of Man hath power on earth to forgive sins." It is the well-known story of the healing of the palsied man who came to Him borne of four, and when they could not get near to where the blessed Lord was, they uncovered the roof, and let the sick man down by cords at the very feet of Jesus. We are told that, "When Jesus saw their faith, He said unto the sick of the palsy, Son, thy sins be forgiven thee. But there were certain of the scribes sitting there, and reasoning in their hearts. Why doth this Man thus speak blasphemies? who can

forgive sins but God only? And immediately when Jesus perceived in His spirit that they so reasoned within themselves, He said unto them, Why reason ye these things in your hearts? Whether is it easier to say to the sick of the palsy, Thy sins be forgiven thee; or to say, Arise, take up thy bed, and walk? But that ye may know that the Son of Man hath power on earth to forgive sins, (he saith to the sick of the palsy), I say unto thee, Arise, and take up thy bed, and go thy way into thine house. And immediately he arose, took up his bed, and went forth before them all; insomuch that they were all amazed and glorified God, saying, We never saw it on this fashion."

What a marvellous scene, and what a testimony to the mysterious wonderful character of the teacher and healer who stood in their midst that day! They were perfectly right in declaring that it would be blasphemy for any mere man to talk of forgiving sins. This was the prerogative of God alone. And yet our Lord claimed the ability to do this very thing, and not only claimed it, but evidenced His authority by rebuking the disease and healing the palsied man.

They could not have known whether His forgiveness was valid or not, had He simply uttered the words, but accompanied as these words were, by the miracle of healing, they must have realised in their souls that God the Father confirmed the declaration of His Son.

The Son of Man then has power on earth to forgive sins. On more than one occasion, He exercised this power. Weary, conscience-smitten, sin-stricken souls came weeping to His feet, and went away rejoicing in a sense of divine forgiveness. Oh, caviller, I beg of you, do not seek to turn aside the force of this, but face the question honestly. "Who is this Son of Man?" Can He who thus forgives sin be any less than God Himself in grace become man for our redemption?

IV. The Kinsman-Redeemer

In the tenth chapter of the same Gospel, we have another marvellous declaration. In verse 45, we read, "For even the Son of Man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give His life a ransom for many." In the Forty-ninth Psalm, we read of all the sons of men, that "none of them can by any means redeem his brother, nor give to God a ransom for him." The reason, of course, is that every man is under the sentence of death and judgment for his own sins, and, therefore, no one has merit sufficient to enable him to redeem another from the power of the grave. The eighth verse as literally translated, emphasises this. "For the redemption of the soul is costly, and must be let alone for ever."

So far then as man is concerned, mere man, sinful man, corrupt man, it

is hopeless looking for redemption through his poor efforts.

But here in the Gospel is the One who calls Himself the Son of Man, and yet makes the amazing statement that *He is come to give His life a ransom for many*. Here is the true Kinsman-Redeemer, the One for whom Job yearned. He can put His hand upon both God and man, and bring the offended Majesty of the Heavens and the guilty sinner together in peace, through His own atoning death. Who can this wondrous Person be who claims that He came to earth on so marvellous a mission? "Who is this Son of Man?"

V. Lord of the Angels

Turning back to Matthew, let us notice chapter 13, verse 41, "The Son of Man shall send forth His angels, and they shall *gather out of His Kingdom all things that offend*, and them which do iniquity." Can you imagine any mere mortal in his right mind speaking like this? Angels are supernatural beings greater in power and might than mankind, and yet the Son of Man speaks of His angels, and asserts His authority over them. They do His bidding. He sends them, and they act in accordance with His orders.

The founders of the great oriental religious systems never dreamed of speaking like this. Gautama Buddha never talked of his angels. Zoroaster, the founder of the religion of the Parsees, nowhere assumed authority over the hosts of Heaven. Mohammed, while claiming signal honours, never took so high a place as this.

For any other man to speak of sending forth his angels would be an evidence of *paranoia*. We would brand him immediately as insane, and we should expect to find him saying and doing most extravagant things. But there is no evidence of lack of mental balance here. Our blessed Lord was speaking in the calmest possible way when He made such astounding assertions, and it never even occurred to anyone to call His words in question. As Son of Man, He was the Sower of the good seed, and it is the Son of Man who will send forth His angels to destroy the tares and gather in the harvest at the end of the age. Again I plead with you, face the question honestly, and answer it, as in the presence of God, "Who is this Son of Man?"

VI. Coming in Power and Glory

In Matthew 24, our Lord answers certain questions of His disciples in regard to His second Coming. In verse 27, He says, "For as the lightning cometh out of the east, and shineth even unto the west; so shall also the Coming of the Son of Man be." In verse 30, He adds,

"And then shall appear the sign of the Son of Man in Heaven, and then shall all the tribes of the earth mourn, and they shall see the Son of Man Coming in the clouds of Heaven with power and great glory."

In the verse that follows, He again uses the same expression that has already challenged our attention in the previous instance. He says, "He shall send His angels with a great sound of a trumpet, and they shall gather together His elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other."

Further down in the chapter in verses 37 to 39, He says, "But as the days of Noe were so shall also the coming of the Son of Man be. For as in the days that were before the flood they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day that Noe entered the ark. And knew not until the flood came, and took them all away; so shall also the coming of the Son of Man be."

And again in verse 44, "Therefore be ye also ready, for in such an hour as ye think not, the Son of Man cometh."

Six times then in this one chapter, and again in verse 31 of chapter 25, He speaks of *the return of the Son of Man*. That return is to be accomplished by a marvellous display of divine power. His Coming will be as lightning flashing across the Heavens. He will be seen riding in glory upon the clouds of the sky. He will appear as the Judge of all living, and their destiny will be determined by Himself. Could there be any stronger proof that He knew He was God incarnate? What amazing declarations for any man to make, unless that Man be also God! Read this chapter carefully; weigh each expression thoughtfully, and then be honest enough to face the question without any bias or pre-judgment, "Who is this Son of Man?"

VII. The Life-giver and Judge

We shall pause to look at but one more passage, and this is found in the fifth chapter of the Gospel of John. Let us read verses 25 to 29, "Verily, verily, I say unto you, The hour is coming and now is, when the dead shall hear the voice of the Son of God: and they that hear shall live. For as the Father hath life in Himself; so hath He given to the Son to have life in Himself; And hath given authority to execute judgment also, *because He is the Son of Man*. Marvel not at this: for the hour is coming, in the which all that are in the graves shall hear His voice, And shall come forth; they that have done good, unto the resurrection of life; and they that have done evil, unto the resurrection of damnation."

In verse 25, He speaks of Himself as Son of God, who during all this age of grace is quickening dead souls. They who hear His voice, though dead in trespasses and sins, receive divine and eternal life. It is the will of the Father thus to save all who trust in Him, and the Father has delegated the execution of judgment to Him, because He is the Son of Man.

We know from other Scriptures that men must stand at the judgment bar of God. It is "God who will bring every work into judgment with every secret thing, whether it be good or whether it be evil" (Eccles. 12:14). But when men are summoned from the tomb, and stand at the bar of God, they will behold seated upon the Great White Throne, the *Son of Man*. His voice it is that will awaken the dead. Both the saved and the unsaved shall rise at His call; the saved in the resurrection of life, and the unsaved in the resurrection of judgment; and every man shall give account to Him. He attributes to Himself fullest divine authority. He makes Himself the touchstone of every heart; He assumes the right to judge every man. Such claims are nothing short of blasphemous unless He be in very truth the divine Son of the living God, one with the Father from all eternity.

In closing, I plead with you again, if you have had any doubt concerning the person of Jesus in the past, to weigh all this evidence, and answer the question in the light of that judgment throne, "Who is this Son of Man?"

"Majestic sweetness sits enthroned
Upon the Saviour's brow;
His head with radiant glories crowned,
His lips with grace o'erflow.

"No mortal can with Him compare,
Among the sons of men;
Fairer is He than all the fair
That fill the heavenly train.

"He saw me plunged in deep distress,
And flew to my relief;
For me He bore the shameful cross,
And carried all my grief.

"To Him I owe my life and breath,
And all the joys I have;
He makes me triumph over death,
And saves me from the grave.

"Since from His bounty I receive
Such proofs of love divine,
Had I a thousand hearts to give,
Lord, they should all be Thine."

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