

# Christ the King Sunday

## November 23, 2003

### Daniel 7:13-14

*Sermon by Pastor Paul Janke*

#### **Jesus Christ is the King of Kings**

1. He's a man
2. He's coming again
3. He rules over all

***Daniel 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. 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.***

Fellow Subjects of Christ the King,

Last week two of the most powerful world leaders met in London. Our president, George Bush, paid a visit to British Prime Minister Tony Blair. There was, of course, the obligatory 21-gun salute, the review of the red-jacketed royal guards, and a three-night stay for President Bush at Buckingham Palace. But there was also this: a visit to Prime Minister Blair's neighborhood pub. This was apparently Blair's way of reciprocating. His earlier visit with our president in this country had taken place not at the White House, but at the long-ways-from-lavish Bush ranch in tiny Crawford, Texas. In both instances, it seems, the message was, *We may be world leaders, but we're also just plain folks.*

In today's Old Testament reading from Daniel 7 we see another world leader taking the stage. What message is being communicated here? We see someone like a son of man, that is, someone who is human in appearance. He is led into the presence of the Ancient of Days. That's God the Father, depicted in this vision as an old man—not someone feeble by any means, but someone whose appearance commands respect. The Ancient of Days is wearing clothing that is as white as snow. His hair is white like wool. He's seated on a blazing throne and a river of fire is flowing from that throne. The one like a son of man is led into the presence of the Ancient of Days and he is given authority, glory, and power. And the whole world worships this son of man, who reigns over a universal kingdom that will never be destroyed. So what is the message transmitted in this vision? The message quite clearly is that Jesus Christ, the Son of Man, is the King of kings. As we explore Daniel's vision on this Christ the King Sunday, we'll see 1] that the King of kings is a man, 2] that he's going to come on the clouds of heaven, and 3] that he rules over everything.

## 1. He's a man

This vision of the prophet Daniel actually took place earlier than the one we read about last Sunday. This vision took place in about the year 553 B.C. Daniel tells us, *"In my vision at night I looked, and there before me was one like a son of man, coming with the clouds of heaven."* This is in sharp contrast to what Daniel had seen earlier in his vision. Here Daniel sees someone who is human in appearance. Earlier he had seen a succession of four beasts coming out of the sea. These beasts represented earthly kingdoms and empires. The first was a winged lion, representing the kingdom of Babylon. The second beast was a bear that stood for the kingdom of Medo-Persia. The third was a winged leopard that stood for the Greek empire of Alexander the Great. The appearance of the fourth beast is not as clearly described, except to say that it had iron teeth and ten horns and that it was a terrifying, frightening, powerful beast. This iron-toothed beast represented the Roman Empire. All four beasts were fearsome and intimidating.

But then Daniel sees *"one like a son of man, coming with the clouds of heaven."* The New Testament makes it clear that Daniel is prophesying about Jesus Christ here. Son of Man is one of Jesus' favorite ways of referring to himself. He asked his disciples once, **"Who do people say the Son of Man is?"** And Jesus commended Peter when he answered, **"You are the Christ, the Son of the living God."** Jesus came not as a fearsome beast bent on world domination, but as a humble man whose goal was to rescue the world from Satan and hell and death. He announced his mission this way: **"The Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many."** (Matt. 20:28)

How different this was from the earlier parts of Daniel's vision! The one who will prove to be the King of kings comes as a man. He **"shared our humanity,"** the Bible says. He got hungry and ate. He got tired and slept. He got sad and wept. Without a doubt, he's one of us and one with us in order to be our Substitute. Born of Mary, he was subject to God's law like any other man. He lived under the law for us. The Son of Man gave his life as a ransom for us, suffering and dying as our Substitute.

But the Son of Man is not just a man. In Daniel's vision he sees the Son of Man being given authority, glory, and power by the Ancient of Days. That's what the Bible says happened in the case of Jesus. Though he was a flesh and blood human being just like we are, the attributes of God were communicated to his human nature. He wasn't just God and man like two boards glued together. This man was (and is) God. God the Son is also a true human being. His humanity is permeated by his divine nature. As God and man he was perfectly capable of rescuing us from sin and hell. Christ, the Son of Man, was precisely the King we needed.

The four beasts that Daniel saw coming in the early part of his vision all came out of the sea, that is, they were of earthly origin. But when he sees the Son of Man coming, he comes from heaven. Jesus is no earthly king. His origins are heavenly. The first time he came from heaven, he came in lowly manner, his birth hardly creating a ripple on the world stage. But in his vision, Daniel sees the Son of Man coming again, this time gloriously and in a way that won't be missed.

## 2. He's coming again

Listen to this passage again: *"In my vision at night I looked, and there before me was one like a son of man, coming with the clouds of heaven."* I think you've heard something like that before in a different context. Do you recall hearing the account of the trial of Jesus before the Jewish ruling council? False witness after false witness was taking the stand in an effort to make Jesus guilty of some kind of crime. But their conspiracy wasn't working. Finally, the high priest, Caiaphas, stood up and said to Jesus, **"I charge you under oath by the living God: Tell us if you are the Christ, the Son of God."** (Matt. 26:63) Though Jesus had been mostly silent up to this time, now he answered. **"Yes, it is as you say. But I say to all of you: In the future you will see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of the Mighty One and coming on the clouds of heaven."** (Matt. 26:64) That provoked the high priest so much that he tore his robes and pronounced Jesus guilty of blasphemy.

Caiaphas and the rest of the leaders knew that Jesus was referring to our passage in Daniel 7 and what they saw before them little resembled their picture of the Messiah King. Here they saw a man bound and seemingly helpless against his captors and accusers. He was apparently defenseless against their brutality. This trial would arrive at the pre-arranged "guilty" verdict, as would the subsequent trial the next morning before Pontius Pilate. In less than 24 hours, the pierced, lifeless body of Jesus would be lying in a grave not far from Calvary. And that would be the end of this Jesus' claims to be the Son of Man and the Messiah.

Or so they thought. The New Testament reports a different outcome. The grave was home to Jesus' body for only parts of three days. Then the Ancient of Days exerted his almighty power and raised the Son of Man to life. And by that same power he seated the Son of Man at his right hand in the heavenly realms, where all things are under his feet. And at a day in the future that has already been set, the Son of Man is going to come in glory on the clouds of heaven. His enemies and the enemies of his people will flee in terror before him because now the formerly passive Victim has become the mighty Judge. But for you and me and all believers, this is the time of fulfillment. This is what we said we were waiting for every time we said, "Come, Lord Jesus," or "Thy kingdom come." And he will come, not as a fearsome beast but as a glorious King come to take us to the home he's prepared for us in heaven, come to usher us into the new heaven and

the new earth, the home of righteousness. Just the glimpse of it here in Daniel 7 is enough to make us long for that day. And that's why it's here.

Look at this passage again and we see that there's something else that sets Christ's kingdom apart from the other kingdoms represented here. Christ's kingdom extends over all and endures forever.

### **3. He rules over all**

It says here, *"(The one like a son of man) approached the Ancient of Days and was led into his presence. 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."*

Here's the most obvious difference between Christ's kingdom and the other four kingdoms mentioned in Daniel 7. The other four kingdoms now exist only in history books to the grief of students everywhere who aren't fond of history. The winged lion kingdom of Babylon met its demise while Daniel was still alive. The Medo-Persian kingdom ultimately ended up in the dustbin of history. The vaunted kingdom of Alexander the Great was divided into pieces when God decided that Alexander's time was up. And even the Roman Empire with its ferocious iron teeth ultimately declined and fell. And it's always that way, whether you're talking about the Pharaohs or the more recent scourges of humanity like Joe Stalin or Adolph Hitler. Earthly kingdoms rise only to fall.

But not the kingdom of Christ, the King of all kings. His kingdom, as Daniel tells us here, is a kingdom that will be victorious over all and that will endure forever. Through faith in Christ our King, we belong to a kingdom that never ends. What we have here is not simply a hope for the future, but the confidence that right now we live under the benevolent reign of Christ our King. Because the kingdom and the power and the glory are his now and forever, he is able to answer our prayers for daily bread as well as our prayers for forgiveness for our trespasses. His name is going to be hallowed and his kingdom is going to come and his will is going to be done because he is the King of kings and Lord of lords. He rules over all things for the good of his church.

We are, Daniel wants us to know, the subjects of a glorious King. He is not some fearsome beast whose rule is intended to benefit only himself. He is instead a man, once lowly but now exalted, in whom all the fullness of the deity lives in bodily form. His kingdom extends over all and it will endure forever. To know that as believers we are the subjects of this King gives purpose to our lives and gives us hope for the future. Amen.