

Sermon Transcript from 25th May 2025 – Ascension

Based on John 20:17-31 & Acts 1:1-11

Sermon TLDR

This sermon discusses the **significance of Jesus' ascension** into heaven and its connection to the **coming of the Holy Spirit**. The speaker [Tony.R] explains that Jesus' return to heaven was necessary because his **earthly work was completed**, his **true home is heaven**, and most importantly, so the **Holy Spirit could be sent** to empower believers and continue the divine mission. The text emphasises the Holy Spirit's role in **enabling Christian life, convincing people of sin, and guiding believers into truth**, highlighting the Holy Spirit's permanent presence in those who have accepted Jesus, and empowering them to witness to others.

Link to the Start of the Sermon (on YouTube)

<https://youtu.be/m7xv9A94tRw?t=2886>

Sermon Transcript

[Tony is initially referring to Acts 1:1-11]...

A slightly different translation, but just a few key words from that reading that I'd just like to read and then ask a question.

Jesus told them not to depart from Jerusalem, but to wait for the promise of the father. You heard from me, he said, you will be baptised with the Holy Spirit not many days from now. You will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you and you will be my witnesses.

So, it was a big event coming up. Wonder what big events you might have experienced. What impact they had whether you had any great expectations as you face them. I thought, well, if I asked that question, I ought to have an answer, didn't I? I recall probably the biggest first event that met that criterion uh was in Easter, Easter Monday 1958. Those students of history will immediately identify that as the date uh when the first CND march ended up just outside the atomic energy place at Aldermaston.

My home was about half a mile away from the field in which they assembled and it seemed a good idea uh that Glenis and I, in old-fashioned language just started courting I would say, and she'd been to my house for lunch and so we walked up to this field and there were hundreds and hundreds and hundreds of people in the field next to the one where you would take a look at and see if the strawberries were progressing well or not. And nothing outstanding about it, just lots and lots and lots of people.

But I did learn one thing, not that day but the day after because there were a number of cars that had been parked also in this field. Somebody needed their car, now bearing in mind we're talking the 1950s, not modern [heavy] cars, needed their car moving. Its was a probably a very the early Ford Escort or something. And so since it was in a position that you'd need to have moved a lot of other cars, but there was a way sideways, a group of big hefty Tadley men bumped the car wide of the others so it could get into a position that it could drive out.

A photographer took the picture and the next day it was splashed on the front page of I think the Daily Express and recounting how the hoodlums in the gathering there had done this mischief to this motorcar. A very forced statement, a forced description [*Fake News*]. And I think we've kind of gotten used to it now, it was rarer I suspect in those days.

But that's my first remember of a big event.

And I wonder how the followers of Jesus felt as they waited in Jerusalem would appear on the Mount of Olives to see Jesus ascend to heaven. They would have had some ascension experience of a different sort. Because as Jews entered Jerusalem for the festival, many of them would be chanting or singing Psalms 120 to 134, which are the psalms of ascension for the festivals. And being good Jews, I suspect some of them had done that.

But this was different.

The disciples who stayed as commanded, Jesus came and then went up into the skies. And as they looked upward, he was gone. They were asked the question, why were they still looking up? There were lots of questions that day.

And here's our question this morning. Jesus returned to heaven. Why?

And I'll give you three suggestions.

Firstly, because his job on earth was finished.

Secondly, because his true home is in heaven. We singing about God in heaven.

And thirdly, as Jesus promised, the Holy Spirit would come. The job Jesus started needed to be completed. And it was the Holy Spirit who was going to complete that job in the world and is completing it today.

We'll look at the Holy Spirit himself a little bit later on, but just focus on those questions and those answers to that question in a moment. But before looking at them, just reflect on that scene in the hill outside Jerusalem.

They've come together as commanded to see Jesus off. They were probably still exceedingly bewildered and wondering. They really didn't know what was going to happen next. After his death on the cross and the resurrection, Jesus had made himself known to them. Some individually, some in groups, some in pairs at different times. Some of them will have seen him a few times. But there were many unanswered questions. What was Jesus really about? What was going to happen about this kingdom that he'd spoken of so often?

Last week, Gideon covered the period between the cross and ascension and a bit more. But this morning, our focus is on this ascension of Jesus to heaven and its meaning for us. His followers had questions about the present and the future. And many of those thoughts were largely still linked with those that were in the minds of the Jewish people of that time. Their expectations of the Messiah, the Christ. They were about time and the nature of God's kingdom on earth. And when they raised that question before he left, Jesus said, "That's not your concern. Don't worry about that. Forget it. I have something much more important to say to you. When I'm gone, you will receive the Holy Spirit to keep you close to me, to keep you for me, and to enable you by his power to worship, to witness, and serve me. You're going to start here. Then you'll go around to the surrounding country, and ultimately into the wider world."

Jesus said that and then he was gone. And two men, I think angels, spoke to the group of followers, "Stop looking up. Don't worry, he's going to come back someday." And I wonder if those were the same two men that Reuben mentioned last week who met the ladies as they went into the tomb. and ask them a different question.

But with that scene in mind, let's consider those answers to the question as to why Jesus had to return to heaven. His job on earth was finished. We sometimes sing Rick Fan's *[song]* words, "Jesus came from heaven to earth to show the way. From the earth to the cross, my debt to pay. From the cross to the grave, from the grave to the sky. And that on that basis we go on to sing Lord I lift your name on high."

That of course is in a nutshell the gospel. What the good news of the Christian gospel is all about.

Jesus had shown his followers and many many others what he what God is like. If you have seen me, Jesus once said, you have seen the father and also the way that God would have them live. Jesus did much teaching about the way that men and women were intended to live when God created them. Jesus had stepped down from the glory of heaven to come to earth ultimately to the cross where he paid the debt for the sins of those of that day and yours and mine if we have allowed him to. And on the cross before his very last breath his final words were, "It is finished." His job had been done. almost his job of paying the price for mankind's sin, your sin and mine, had been completed.

But he still had some dealings to do with his followers, which he did in the following days. God raised him back to life, showed that the mission had been done. Jesus wanted to meet with his disciples so that he could confirm both his achievements and their calling as his disciples to encourage them and to renew their calling.

It was encouragement and commission for them and for us. You and I are encouraged and should be encouraged because Jesus fulfilled his mission and went back to heaven having dealt with our sins and offered us a new life in the spirit with him.

The question is, are we accepting that commission that he gave to those disciples to share the good news near and far?

So, Jesus returned to heaven so that the Holy Spirit, the third person of the Trinity, could come and continue that mission that Jesus had started. And secondly, Jesus's home is in heaven. He returned there because that's where he belonged.

John in his account of the gospel begins by paraphrasing Genesis chapter 1, the very beginning account of God dealing with earth, its creation and the creation of man. And he puts Jesus there at the beginning. In the beginning, he says was the word and the word was with God. God the father, God the son.

And then if we go to the equivalent verse in Genesis chapter 1, it tells us that the Holy Spirit was brooding over the waters. So, all three members of the tri-godhead were there at the beginning.

Now God in truth is of course indescribable and I'm sure that we are told through the words in scripture and in other ways about God and his nature and his being in ways which are just about understandable to we humans. But we'll never truly know of course what God is like until we see him in heaven.

Jesus told the Samaritan woman at the well in John chapter 4 that he, God, is a spirit and we need to worship him in spirit and in truth. He can be worshiped that way and we have to make sure that our worship (as Paul has helped guide us this morning) is done right. That's the main reason why we're here this morning, to give worship to God, joining with millions of others around the world worshipping our creator and our redeemer. I hope we get a big yes to that from each of our hearts.

John also painted some amazing pictures of Jesus in heaven in the book of Revelation. Show Jesus clearly to be there. He's there praying for us. And one day he will welcome us there with two provisions.

So the two provisos are this that Jesus hasn't fulfilled that promise to come back before we reach the end of our life here. I know Christians have had that desire that it might happen for nearly 2,000 years. But one day he will come.

And the second one is, of course, that we have truly accepted his offer of salvation and a new life in him, placing our trust in him, making him both our saviour and our Lord. We need to make sure of that.

And then thirdly, the Holy Spirit has come. He's here to finish the job that Jesus started. Jesus promised that those at his ascension. You will be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now. If you've done your arithmetic and know your book of Acts, you know that's in 10 days time.

But the good news is that we don't have to wait.

When you and I became a Christian, the Holy Spirit should have come into our lives. As we've discussed in recent days, in our morning house group at any event. I don't know about the evening one. We've recognised that the Church has quite often not given the true place and attention to the Holy Spirit that we should.

But we're going to think on about that for a few moments.

In the third study, the writer to the notes gave the leader 12 references about the Holy Spirit. He's come here to finish the job that Jesus started to do broadly two things. To help the world know about Jesus and people if they choose for him to become Christians.

And secondly, to help us as Christians to live the life that God wants us to. So let me just pick up on those three references about becoming a Christian. In John 3:1-8, Jesus said, "You can only enter the kingdom of God by being born of the spirit." Jesus was talking with Nicodemus. told him that we need to be born of water and the spirit that the Holy Spirit gives spiritual life. But we can't tell how the spirit is moving. It was Jesus who paid the price. It was Jesus who went to the cross. But it's the Holy Spirit who makes that effective in the lives of those who put their trust in Jesus. So the simple question is the Holy Spirit working in that way in your life and mine this morning.

Secondly, the Holy Spirit will convince people of the truth of their sins and of eternal judgment. Thus, Jesus speaking in John chapter 16 verses 7 and 8. Jesus said, "When I am gone, the advocate will come and convict the world of sin. and God's righteousness and judgment." Christians should know that. But when the Holy Spirit moves, then others will learn of that too. And some will be drawn to place their trust in Jesus.

And then thirdly says, thirdly, Jesus in John chapter [20] verse 22 says the Holy Spirit can be received personally. as a gift. I'm going to change the verb there. If we're to be true Christians, it isn't that the Holy Spirit can be received, but that he must be received in order that we can be true Christians. And Jesus breathed on them and said, "Receive the Holy Spirit." So, has the Holy Spirit worked in our lives to convince us of the need to take Jesus as saviour and to begin a new spiritual life and have a daily one in which the Holy Spirit directs and controls us because the other quotes that we were given in the study that we're still going through to be a Christian the first one in chapter 1 verse 33 Jesus was filled with spirit and will inspire impart the Holy Spirit to others. That's to those then and to you and me today.

John the Baptist told those watching that Jesus would wash would baptize people with both water and the spirit. Then in chapter 3 verse 34, a footnote to what John was saying when Jesus spoke to the disciples of John the Baptist that the Holy Spirit will minister in the world without limit. He's comparing to what happened in the Old Testament, but now the Holy Spirit is unlimited in the world. But he principally works through the lives and within the lives of those who have put their trust in Jesus.

And thirdly, the Holy Spirit longs to flow into and through believers. John 7 verses 37-39, Jesus has gone to the festival and he's speaking near the temple and he talks of people being able to receive rivers of living water for those who are thirsty. And John interprets that and says that Jesus explains that is given to all who believe.

So are our lives bubbling the living water that Jesus has offered us with the Holy Spirit living in our lives daily. And then in chapter 14 verse 16 we are told that the Holy Spirit will abide permanently in believers. No need to worry about tomorrow or the day after. The promise is if we've received Jesus, we've received the Holy Spirit to make Jesus alive in us forever.

Jesus talked of heaven and of he himself being the way, the truth, and the life. And Thomas asked one of his questions to which Jesus replied that he would send the advocate, the Holy Spirit acting as a counsellor, an advisor, and someone who represents us in heaven. And he will lead us to all truth.

Then the Holy Spirit will teach, reveal, and bring to our remembrance the things of God in chapter 14 verse 26.

In a continuation of that same dialogue, Jesus talked of love and obedience as the hallmark marks of those who follow Jesus and the Holy Spirit would continue that advocacy by teaching them and us everything we need to know about him, reminding us of Jesus. The Holy Spirit would give them and us inner peace.

The Holy Spirit teaching us, showing us and helping us to remember. And then the Holy Spirit will cause and empower us to witness to the truth of Christ to others in chapter 15 verses 26 to 27. After Jesus had been talking about love.

He also promised that the Holy Spirit would be an advocate for truth, testifying about Jesus, something that those followers and we need to do. It's the Holy Spirit working in us, helping us to live our Christian lives, but also to witness to Jesus who made that all possible.

And then finally, I've wrapped two together. The Holy Spirit will guide believers into all truth and will give us a deeper insight of past, present, and future. He will focus on Jesus and glorify him. That's in John chapter 16 verses 13 and 14. The focus of the Holy Spirit is almost always on Jesus, what he did, who he is, making him real to us.

I didn't know until I looked at that that John had talked so much, written so much about the Holy Spirit. Those of us with the booklets, [used on] a Thursday morning or afternoon might do well to look at the back of the booklets [read] through them.

But let me just finish with the words from an old hymn, one we certainly rarely sing and I think even the Church of England rarely sing. It was written in the early 19th century and in the language I'm afraid of that era.

“Our blessed redeemer air he breathed his tender last farewell. A guide, a comforter bequeathed with us to dwell.”

The quote I'm really going to make is from verse four of that. But let's put those words into today's language...

The Holy Spirit is our guide.

He is our comforter.

Jesus bequeathed him.

Jesus left him to us to live in us.

And Harry or then went on to write and every virtue we possess and every victory won and every thought of holiness are his alone. So, if you think holy thoughts, if you think you've won a victory over sin, over Satan, over some problem, if you think you have some virtue, It's all down to the Holy Spirit living in you and me.

Shall we pray?

Father God, we thank you that you and Jesus are now in heaven.

We gladly accept Jesus' death on the cross as a sacrifice for our sins. Help us continually to seek cleansing and refreshment.

We pray this morning that we will give place to your Holy Spirit in our lives, not momentarily, but daily, permanently to work through us. that we might have victories, that we might, like Samuel, live holy lives, but we might recognize that is by your Holy Spirit working our lives that these things are possible.

Thank you, Father.

Thank you, Jesus.

Thank you, Holy Spirit, have your way in us. Regenerate and empower us, we pray, to live for you victorious Christian lives.

We pray in your name and for your sake.

Amen.