

## The Ascension (What Jesus Did Next) – Zoom Service 17/05/20

### Welcome:

Welcome to our Zoom service this morning

- It is good to be together again
- To be able to encourage each other
- And learn from God, together.

This Thursday is Ascension,

- The day we remember when Jesus returned to heaven
- And that is what we are thinking about this morning

But let's begin with a prayer

### Prayer:

Lord Jesus, this morning we are thinking of your return to heaven,

It is hard for us to comprehend your power and glory, yet it is good to know you are there, in heaven, loving, leading and supporting us. It is so much more than we deserve. We want to thank you and praise you this morning for all you have done for us. For all you continue to do for us.

Help us to hear your words this morning, to know you better and to trust you more. Fill us with your Holy Spirit that we may be able to be your people living lives that reflect the wonder of your love and the salvation you have won for us.

Open our eyes to see you in all things, to know your love in all circumstances and to feel your presence with us

To see your light shining in the dark

For you are our Lord and king, seated in power and splendour and all things belong to you.  
Amen

### Reading: Acts 1:1-14

*In my former book, Theophilus, I wrote about all that Jesus began to do and to teach <sup>2</sup> until the day he was taken up to heaven, after giving instructions through the Holy Spirit to the apostles he had chosen. <sup>3</sup> After his suffering, he presented himself to them and gave many convincing proofs that he was alive. He appeared to them over a period of forty days and spoke about the kingdom of God. <sup>4</sup> On one occasion, while he was eating with them, he gave them this command: "Do not leave Jerusalem, but wait for the gift my Father promised, which you have heard me speak about. <sup>5</sup> For John baptized with water, but in a few days you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit."*

*<sup>6</sup> Then they gathered around him and asked him, "Lord, are you at this time going to restore the kingdom to Israel?"*

*<sup>7</sup> He said to them: "It is not for you to know the times or dates the Father has set by his own authority. <sup>8</sup> But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth."*

<sup>9</sup> After he said this, he was taken up before their very eyes, and a cloud hid him from their sight.

<sup>10</sup> They were looking intently up into the sky as he was going, when suddenly two men dressed white stood beside them. <sup>11</sup> “Men of Galilee,” they said, “why do you stand here looking into the sky? This same Jesus, who has been taken from you into heaven, will come back in the same way you have seen him go into heaven.”

<sup>12</sup> Then the apostles returned to Jerusalem from the hill called the Mount of Olives, a Sabbath day’s walk from the city. <sup>13</sup> When they arrived, they went upstairs to the room where they were staying. Those present were Peter, John, James and Andrew; Philip and Thomas, Bartholomew and Matthew; James son of Alphaeus and Simon the Zealot, and Judas son of James. <sup>14</sup> They all joined together constantly in prayer, along with the women and Mary the mother of Jesus, and with his brothers.

## Introduction

This morning we are continuing with our theme of following what Jesus did

- We have been looking at the people he met after his resurrection
- And last week we looked at his last instructions to us
- To go and make disciples

Now we come to the point where he leaves us.

- Strangely, this is not something we often think about
- We spend a lot of time thinking about his death and resurrection
- We talk about the coming of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost.
- But somehow overlook the Ascension.

Maybe it’s because it falls on a Thursday,

- 40 days after the resurrection on Easter Sunday
- And 10 days before Pentecost.
- I’m sure the 40 days is significant
- The Israelites were 40 years in the wilderness
- Jesus was then 40 days in the wilderness being tempted

So maybe these 40 days speaks of a time of preparation

- A time for the disciples to be prepared for the start of a new era.
- An ending of Jesus time with us in a physical sense
- And preparing for the coming of the Holy Spirit

And now the 40 days are over

- Jesus has returned to heaven
- Where he is enthroned at the right hand of the Father
- A place of ultimate power and authority.
- But what does it mean for us?

The disciples were left standing gazing at the sky

- As we 've just read in verses 10-11  
*"They were looking intently up into the sky as he was going, when suddenly two men dressed white stood beside them. <sup>11</sup> "Men of Galilee," they said, "why do you stand here looking into the sky? This same Jesus, who has been taken from you into heaven, will come back in the same way you have seen him go into heaven."*

Actually, that seems quite a strange thing to say

- That could be why they were looking up
- Waiting for Jesus to come back.
- But they needed to be reminded to get on with what they had been told to do

The Ascension should inspire us to action

- We are not to be just looking back wishing Jesus had not left
- Neither are we to be standing waiting for him to come back.
- We need to be confident that he is coming back
- And that should give us encouragement to serve him in the meantime

Jesus spoke to his disciples about this in Luke 12 (vs. 35–46)

*"Be dressed ready for service and keep your lamps burning, <sup>36</sup> like servants waiting for their master to return from a wedding banquet, so that when he comes and knocks, they can immediately open the door for him. <sup>37</sup> It will be good for those servants whose master finds them watching when he comes. Truly I tell you, he will dress himself to serve, will have them recline at the table and will come and wait on them. <sup>38</sup> It will be good for those servants whose master finds them ready, even if he comes in the middle of the night or toward daybreak. <sup>39</sup> But understand this: If the owner of the house had known at what hour the thief was coming, he would not have let his house be broken into. <sup>40</sup> You also must be ready, because the Son of Man will come at an hour when you do not expect him."*

<sup>41</sup> Peter asked, "Lord, are you telling this parable to us, or to everyone?"

<sup>42</sup> The Lord answered, "Who then is the faithful and wise manager, whom the master puts in charge of his servants to give them their food allowance at the proper time? <sup>43</sup> It will be good for that servant whom the master finds doing so when he returns. <sup>44</sup> Truly I tell you; he will put him in charge of all his possessions. <sup>45</sup> But suppose the servant says to himself, 'My master is taking a long time in coming,' and he then begins to beat the other servants, both men and women, and to eat and drink and get drunk. <sup>46</sup> The master of that servant will come on a day when he does not expect him and at an hour, he is not aware of. He will cut him to pieces and assign him a place with the unbelievers."

But we talked about what we should be doing last week

- This morning I want to think about Jesus
- Where is he, and what is he doing?
- Jesus' earthly appearances have come to an end
- He will no longer be with us in the same way as he was during his time on earth.
- But why did he have to go away?
- What does it mean for Him, and what does it mean for us?

### What the Ascension Means to Jesus

- I want to begin with what the Ascension means for Jesus
- Firstly, and most obviously the ascension means Jesus has had to go away
- He has left the disciples and gone to heaven.
- You see Jesus is a physical being, just like us.
- We know God is Spirit, He transcends the physical Universe
- And He exists outside time and space.

But Jesus became a human being

- He took on physical form and was born as a baby
- He didn't become human for a few years and then return to being a spiritual being
- When he died, he did not lose his physical body and become purely spirit again
- He was resurrected in his body.
- His disciples touched him, and he ate with them
- We read in Luke 23: 36--43

<sup>36</sup> *While they were still talking about this, Jesus himself stood among them and said to them, "Peace be with you."*

<sup>37</sup> *They were startled and frightened, thinking they saw a ghost. <sup>38</sup> He said to them, "Why are you troubled, and why do doubts rise in your minds? <sup>39</sup> Look at my hands and my feet. It is I myself! Touch me and see; a ghost does not have flesh and bones, as you see I have."*

<sup>40</sup> *When he had said this, he showed them his hands and feet. <sup>41</sup> And while they still did not believe it because of joy and amazement, he asked them, "Do you have anything here to eat?" <sup>42</sup> They gave him a piece of broiled fish, <sup>43</sup> and he took it and ate it in their presence.*

So, Jesus remains human for eternity.

- And that is an amazing concept
- It means there is currently a human being sitting at the right hand of God
- Sharing Godship

It also explains why he had to leave

- He couldn't remain as a physical presence in the world
- But will return in the same way he left – as a human being

But the Ascension was also something else,

- It was Jesus' coronation
- He returned to heaven in order to receive the reward for his work
- To be crowned Lord of All.

In Daniels prophetic vision he sees the empires of the world depicted as beasts

- Arrogantly defying God
- He sees God seated on his throne, then he sees Jesus and says. (Daniel 7:13-14)  
*"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. <sup>14</sup> He was given authority, glory and sovereign power; all nations and peoples 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.*

Jesus returned as a conquering hero

- In Psalm 68 David describes a King coming into his kingdom
- Worshipped and honoured by his people
- Paul refers to this picture when he describes Jesus' ascension in Ephesians 4:8-10  
*This is why it says: "When he ascended on high, he took many captives and gave gifts to his people." <sup>9</sup> (What does "he ascended" mean except that he also descended to the lower, earthly regions? <sup>10</sup> He who descended is the very one who ascended higher than all the heavens, in order to fill the whole universe.) <sup>11</sup> So Christ himself gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the pastors and teachers, <sup>12</sup> to equip his people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up*

So, Jesus has arrived in heaven

- And has taken his rightful place at the right side of God the Father
- And from this position of power and authority he does three things
  1. He gives gifts to the church in the form of equipping ministries to build us up
  2. He intercedes for us, supporting us through our spiritual battles (Rom 8:34)  
*Who then is the one who condemns? No one. Christ Jesus who died—more than that, who was raised to life—is at the right hand of God and is also interceding for us.*
  3. And he prepares a place for us to join Him (John 14:1-3)  
*"Do not let your hearts be troubled. You believe in God; believe also in me. <sup>2</sup> My Father's house has many rooms; if that were not so, would I have told you that I am going there to prepare a place for you? <sup>3</sup> And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am.*

This brings us to the question what the Ascension means for us

### **What the Ascension means for us**

The first point I want to make is that it is for our good.

- Jesus ascending into heaven is a means of blessing
- We know his death was for our good
- To reconcile us to God and provide a means for us to be forgiven and restored

We know his resurrection was for our good

- Enabling us to be raised to life with him
- As Paul reminds us in his letter to the romans  
*But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.*  
*<sup>9</sup> Since we have now been justified by his blood, how much more shall we be saved from God's wrath through him! <sup>10</sup> For if, while we were God's enemies, we were reconciled to him through the death of his Son, how much more, having been reconciled, shall we be saved through his life!* (Romans 5:8-11)

But how is the Ascension for our good?

We know it is because that's what Jesus told his disciples.

- John records in his gospel how Jesus tried to prepare his disciples
- And he tells them

*"But now I am going to him who sent me. None of you asks me, 'Where are you going?'"<sup>6</sup> Rather, you are filled with grief because I have said these things.<sup>7</sup> But very truly I tell you, it is for your good that I am going away. Unless I go away, the Advocate will not come to you; but if I go, I will send him to you."* (John 16:5-7)

The advocate he is talking about is sometimes translated 'Counsellor' or 'Comforter'

- And is, of course, the Holy Spirit.
- And it seems it was necessary for Jesus to leave for the Holy Spirit to come
- And he is saying
- It is better for us to have the Holy Spirit here and Jesus in heaven

In some ways the Holy Spirit has always been here

- We see Him at work in creation (Genesis 1:1)
- We see him throughout the Old testament coming upon leaders and warriors in power.
- David, Saul, Samson, and so on.

And, of course, we see him active throughout Jesus life

- Jesus was conceived by the holy Spirit, (Matt 1:18)
- The Holy Spirit descends on him like a dove when he is baptised (Luke 3:22)
- He is led into the wilderness by the Holy Spirit where he is tested (Luke 4:1)
- and he returns full of the Holy Spirit to begin his preaching ministry (Luke 4:14)

But Jesus is promising that He is coming in a new and special way.

- To meet with us, live within us and empower us.
- A way that would allow us to know God in a deeper more intimate way
- A way that would allow us to know God's transforming power in our lives.
- A way that would enable us to live for Jesus in a hostile world
- And a way that would make us witness to Jesus and enabling us to make disciples

And this will begin at Pentecost

- We will be talking about this in a couple of weeks.
- But this morning we're thinking about the Ascension
- And as we can see it is a far more important event than we might think
- It is not just an interlude between the resurrection and the coming of the Holy Spirit

So, let's get back to the question - What the Ascension Means for Us

- I have 4 suggestions
  1. We have a place prepared for us in heaven
  2. We have the security in knowing Jesus is ruling in heaven
  3. We have an advocate pleading our case in heaven
  4. We are fully equipped.

So, Firstly, our place in heaven is assured

- Because Jesus has gone to heaven
- We can be sure that, if we belong to him, we will be able to join him there.
- There is already a human in heaven
- Jesus has become the bridge between heaven and earth.
- When his disciples ask the way to heaven Jesus tells them  
*"I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me".*  
(John 14:6)

This surely is a great comfort and encouragement

- There is a future that is safe in Jesus
- Nothing in this world can take it away from us.
- A place where nothing can hurt or harm us again

We have a hope of a future secure in Jesus

- This was the promise of the angels when he ascended
- *"This same Jesus, who has been taken from you into heaven, will come back in the same way you have seen him go into heaven."* (Acts 1:11)
- The ascension carries the promise of His return

Secondly, we have the security of knowing Jesus is ruling in heaven

- No matter what circumstances, griefs of burdens we face in this world.
- Jesus is in control
- John recalls Jesus telling his disciples in John 16:33  
*"I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world."*

Thirdly, it means we have an advocate in heaven

- Jesus is mediating for us
- Hebrews 7:25 tells us  
*"Therefore he (Jesus) is able to save completely those who come to God through him, because he always lives to intercede for them"*
- And in Romans 8:24  
*"Who then is the one who condemns? No-one. Christ Jesus who died – more than that, who was raised to life – is at the right hand of God and is also interceding for us"*

In other words, Jesus is in heaven, sticking up for us

- Supporting us against the accuser
- Defending us, supporting us, fighting our corner.
- So, if we want to criticise another believer, remember Jesus is arguing on their behalf.
- That doesn't mean we cannot correct someone in error
- But we cannot condemn them
- Neither can we condemn ourselves
- Because Jesus will say. 'I've already paid for that'
- And God will say 'Case dismissed!'

I think we sometimes get the idea that nice loving Jesus is defending us against angry judgemental God.

- Nothing could be further from the truth
- Jesus is the weapon God uses to defend us from the devil

Fourthly, it means we are equipped to serve Him

- As we've said earlier.
- Now that he has ascended, Jesus gives gifts to the church  
*Christ himself gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the pastors and teachers,<sup>12</sup> to equip his people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up.* (Eph. 4:11-12)
- Again, this is done chiefly through the Holy Spirit

There has been a lot of comment on PPE equipment in the news recently

- I'm not going to add to that debate this morning
- But because Jesus is in heaven, he can assure we receive all the equipment we need
- That we are never left defenceless against the Devil or this world.
- Paul tells the Ephesian Christians

*"Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ.*

We have received every spiritual blessing in Christ

- Not some blessing
- Or occasional blessings
- But every spiritual blessing
- In Him we have everything we need to face life
- For ourselves, for his church
- And to serve Him in this world.

## Conclusion

The Ascension is a crucial part of God's plan

- Part of the restoration of His kingdom on earth
- Jesus has not played his part and now been substituted by the Holy Spirit.
- He is still hard at work

He has returned to heaven a conquering hero

- He is sitting at the right hand of God ruling their creation
- He is gifting his church with ministries for it to be built up
- He is interceding for us, supporting us through our spiritual battles
- And he is preparing a place for us to join Him

This should give us confidence

- Our place in Heaven is being kept safe for us,
- Jesus is in control,



- He is always sticking up for us
- And he is giving us everything we need to serve him.

So where does this leave us this morning

- What should we be doing?
- My suggestion is to follow the example of the disciples
- As we read at the beginning in Acts 1:14
- *They all joined together constantly in prayer,*

Then after the Spirit came we are told the fellowship of believers (Acts 2:42-47)  
*Devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. <sup>43</sup> Everyone was filled with awe at the many wonders and signs performed by the apostles. <sup>44</sup> All the believers were together and had everything in common. <sup>45</sup> They sold property and possessions to give to anyone who had need. <sup>46</sup> Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, <sup>47</sup> praising God and enjoying the favour of all the people. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved.*

We really couldn't do better than that could we?

- Prayer
- Waiting on God
- Sharing the good news and encouraging one another in faith (Making Disciples)

Amen