

The Advantage of Jesus' Departure

The Spirit of Christ

Last time we landed on something that should have unsettled you a little. The Spirit and Christ are so bound together that you cannot have one without the other. To have the Spirit is to have Christ. To lack the Spirit is to lack Christ.

So here is something we are left to work out. If that is true, why did Jesus have to leave in order for the Spirit to come?

Listen to what he actually said to the men who had given up everything to follow him, on the night before he died.

“Nevertheless, I tell you the truth: it is to your advantage that I go away, for if I do not go away, the Helper will not come to you. But if I go, I will send him to you.”

JOHN 16:7

Put yourself in that room. These men have walked with God in the flesh. They have watched him open blind eyes and calm a sea with a word. They have asked him questions and heard him answer, face to face, for three years. And now he tells them that his leaving is not a tragedy to be endured. It is an advantage to be gained.

That is not what grief usually sounds like. So we have to ask what Jesus knew that made him say it.

The first thing he knew was this. A body can only be in one place. For three years, if you wanted Jesus, you had to go where Jesus was. Galilee, not Judea. This house, not that one. Even his own disciples had to compete for his time and attention, because the

Son of God, having taken on real human flesh, was genuinely limited by it. He could comfort one grieving family in Bethany, but not the next town over, on the same afternoon.

The Spirit is not limited that way. When Jesus sends him, he does not send a smaller version of himself to make do in his absence. He sends the one who was with him from the beginning, now indwelling every believer everywhere at once. The Father is not choosing between his Son's nearness and his Son's reach. Through the Spirit, his people get both.

But there is something deeper going on than geography. John tells us plainly, earlier in his Gospel, why the Spirit's coming had waited this long.

“Now this he said about the Spirit, whom those who believed in him were to receive, for as yet the Spirit had not been given, because Jesus was not yet glorified.”

JOHN 7:39

The Spirit had always been active in the world. He hovered over creation. He filled prophets and judges and kings. But the Spirit who was about to come at Pentecost was going to arrive carrying something new: the finished work of the cross, the emptied tomb, and the throne. He could not come as the Spirit of the crucified and risen and enthroned Christ until Christ had actually been crucified, and risen, and enthroned. The gift had to wait for the victory.

This is why Peter, preaching on the day the Spirit finally came, does not start with the wind or the fire. He starts with the throne.

“Being therefore exalted at the right hand of God,
and having received from the Father the promise of
the Holy Spirit, he has poured out this that you
yourselves are seeing and hearing.”

ACTS 2:33

Long before that, the Father had promised the coming King:

“Ask of me, and I will make the nations
your heritage, and the ends of the earth
your possession.”

PSALM 2:8

Pentecost is the moment that promise starts being paid out. The Spirit falling on ordinary people in a rented room is the first visible sign that Jesus is now ruling, and that his rule reaches further than his footsteps ever could.

That is the Kingdom shape of this whole event. Jesus did not leave the throne empty to go administer a kingdom from a distance. His going away was his going up. And the Spirit is not a substitute the King sends because he cannot make it himself. The Spirit is how the King reigns now, in the hearts of his people, in every nation, at the same time, without ever needing to leave the throne to do it.

So when Jesus says his departure works to their advantage, he is not asking them to be content with less than they had before. He is telling them what is coming is more than they have ever had. Every believer, everywhere, indwelt by the same Spirit who rested on Jesus without limit. Not visited occasionally. Indwelt permanently.

He says as much a few verses earlier, in words that answer the disciples' fear before they can even voice it.

“And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Helper, to be with you forever, even the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees him nor knows him. You know him, for he dwells with you and will be in you. I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you.”

JOHN 14:16-18

Read that last sentence again. Jesus does not say, “I will leave you, but I will send someone in my place.” He says, “I will come to you.” The coming of the Spirit is not Jesus stepping back so someone else can step in. It is Jesus coming to his people in a new way, a better way, a way that does not depend on which town they happen to be standing in.

This is why last session’s claim and this session’s question are not actually in tension. The Spirit and Christ are inseparable precisely because the Spirit’s coming was never a replacement for Christ. It was the means by which Christ himself, now enthroned, could be present to every one of his people at once. Departure and indwelling were never rivals. They were the same plan, in two necessary stages.

So here is where this has to land somewhere real for you. Most of us quietly believe we are the ones who missed out. We imagine that if we had been in that upper room, if we had touched the wounds like Thomas, if we had eaten breakfast on the beach with the risen Christ, our faith would finally feel solid. We treat the Spirit’s presence in us now as the consolation prize for having been born too late for the real thing.

Jesus looked at the men who actually had the real thing, in the flesh, in front of them, and told them they were about to receive something better. Not a memory of him. Not a message about him. Him, by his Spirit, permanently, inescapably present in them.

So ask yourself honestly this week. Do you actually live as though the Spirit in you is Christ with you? Or do you quietly treat him as second best, a placeholder until something more tangible comes along? Because Jesus did not describe his going away as a loss you would have to make peace with. He called it an advantage. The question is whether you believe him enough to live like it is true.

Group Discussion Questions

- 1 Jesus told his disciples that his physical departure would work to their advantage. What surprises you most about that claim, and what does it reveal about how he saw the Spirit's coming?
- 2 John 7:39 says the Spirit had not yet been given because Jesus had not yet been glorified. Why does the timing matter, and what does it tell us about what the Spirit carries into believers?
- 3 Acts 2:33 ties the Spirit's arrival to Jesus being enthroned at the Father's right hand. How does seeing Pentecost as a coronation change the way you think about what happened that day?

Self Reflection Questions

- 1 Do you tend to treat the Spirit's presence in you as a lesser substitute for the real Jesus, or as Christ's actual presence with you? Where do you see that assumption show up in your own life?
- 2 If you had been in that upper room and heard Jesus say his leaving was to your advantage, would you have believed him? What would it look like to actually believe that today?
- 3 Where in your life are you waiting for a more visible sign of God's presence, when you have already been given his own Spirit?

REFERENCES

Ferguson, S. B. (1996). *The Holy Spirit*. InterVarsity Press.