

Exegesis

Vs. 12 – The Lord talked about how, contrary to what the disciples might think, his departure would be to their advantage because he went "to prepare a place" for them (vs. 1-4). He then briefly conversed with Thomas and Philip (vs. 5-11). And now he gives them *another* reason why his return to the Father is actually to their benefit: "Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that believeth on me, the works that I do shall he do also; and greater works than these shall he do; because I go unto my Father."

Continuing on with the topic of faith (vs. 1, 10-11), Jesus solemnly declares ("Verily, verily,") that those who "believe" in him will not only do the *same* "works" as their master but the believer will also do things even "greater" than those that the Lord performed. But what does Jesus mean by this? Is he saying they will do the same miracles? Perhaps. Like Jesus (cf. 5:1-13), the apostles will heal disabled people (Ac. 3:1-11; 9:33-34; 14:8-10). Like Jesus (cf. Lu. 8:54-55), they will raise the dead (Ac. 9:36-41; 20:9-12). And, like Jesus (Lu. 8:33), they will overcome demonic spirits (Ac. 16:16-18). But all those examples parallel Jesus' own feats; he insisted that "greater works than these shall he do." The miracles in the Book of Acts do not seem "greater." How could they be? Resurrection is a top-tier level miracle. It's impossible to do any better than that.

Well, one might argue that when the Lord said "greater," he meant "more;" as in, believers would perform a "greater" *total* of works. After all, there were twelve apostles and only one Jesus; it's reasonable to assume they did more miracles collectively than the Lord did individually. Given that "greater" is an adjective, it could refer to an amount (cf. Mar. 5:11; 1 Tim. 6:6; Heb. 10:35). But in the context of John's account, "greater" almost always refers to something of more extraordinary substance, importance, or consequence (cf. 1:50; 5:20; 5:36; 6:18; 7:37; 11:43; 15:13; 19:11, 31).¹ Thus, the ministry that all believers undertook, not just the disciples here,² is of greater *significance* than the works that Jesus performed during his lifetime. He was emphasizing the *quality* of the work, not the quantity.

This is not to say that Jesus' works were insignificant or subpar. Instead, those things were the foundation for something more substantial, complete, and valuable; they were the building blocks for *the church* (cf. Mat. 16:18). The New Testament is the culmination of the Old

¹ The one exception is 21:11, wherein the net was "full of great fishes, an hundred and fifty and three: and for all there were so many, yet was not the net broken."

² Morris (1995), p. 573; Carson (1991), p. 495; Köstenberger (2008), p. 433, the term "he" refers to "anyone."

Testament.³ During this time, all the promises of the old age are fulfilled in the new one.⁴ And this makes the age of fulfillment—i.e., the church age—*greater* than the age of promise—i.e., the covenantal age (cf. Lu. 5:36-38). We reap another's labor (cf. 4:38). Is not the harvest season of greater consequence than the planting season? Only when a plant yields its fruit can it be enjoyed. This is why Jesus says that the "least in the kingdom" is "greater" than John the Baptist (cf. Lu. 7:28). When a believer was "born again" (3:3), they were given a *greater* status in God's kingdom than the *greatest* prophet of the Old Testament. And they were given a *greater* ministry, a harvest ministry, wherein the dead are brought to life. Thus, having a *greater* status and ministry means that our works will be, as Jesus put it, "greater."

Undoubtedly, this greatness factor is not due to our own greatness. To borrow Paul's phrasing, "There is *none* great, no, not one" (Rom. 3:10-12). Or, as Jonathan Edwards put it, "You contribute nothing to your salvation except the sin that made it necessary." Whatever virtue we might think we have pales in comparison to the righteousness of God. And, if we're honest, our so-called "virtue" is nothing more virtuous than pride. No, the power to do "greater works" comes from *Jesus Christ*, the Great I Am (cf. 8:58). As he said at the end of verse 12, it is only "because" the Lord went to his "Father" that the believer is *enabled* to do the "works," be they the same or somehow greater. Even Peter, when he healed a lame man, said, "Silver and gold have I none; but such as I have give I thee: In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth rise up and walk" (Ac. 3:6). Peter's name didn't give that command power; it wasn't great. But in *Jesus'* name, there was power; *it* is the greatest. And only through *his name* can we lay claim to the greatness which is not ours, but can be by faith (cf. Rom. 3:21-26).

Vs. 13-14 – The Lord clarifies the process by which these "greater works" are done: "And whatsoever ye shall ask in my name, that will I do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son. If ye shall ask any thing in my name, I will do it."

Prayerful work is productive work. It is to our detriment that we forget this. We too often think to ourselves, "I'm too busy to pray," when it ought to be, "I'm too busy *not* to pray." If a work has already begun without communicating to God, it is a work that has already started to fail. Those who've accomplished anything for the Lord will tell you how crucial their prayer life was to their success. Martin Luther, that great reformer, was asked what he planned to do

³ Carson (1991), p. 496, "Thus *greater things* is constrained by salvation-historical realities.... The contrast itself, however, turns not on raw numbers but on the power and clarity that mushroom after the eschatological hinge has swung and the new day has dawned."

⁴ To be clear, the church cannot claim the specific promise given to Jesus; it did not replace the nation of Israel—i.e., supersessionism, replacement theology, fulfillment theology, etc. God still has particular future plans for the Israelites that have little to do with the church.

tomorrow and he replied, "Work, work, from early until late. In fact, I have so much to do that I shall have to spend the first three hours in prayer." And James, the half-brother of Jesus, does not say the talented man "availeth much" or the hard-working man "availeth much" or the creative man "availeth much;" no, he says, "The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much" (Ja. 5:16b). Only by prayer will we accomplish "greater works" than Jesus.

What's more, when the Lord says to pray "in my name," he is not instructing us to use his name as if it were a magical phrase, like something you tack on at the end of prayers to make them work (cf. Mat. 6:7). "Jesus Christ" is not the Christian equivalent to "abracadabra," "alakazam," or "open sesame." To do something in a person's name is to do it according to their *will*. As John explains in his other book, "And this is the confidence that we have toward him, that if we ask anything *according to his will* [emphasis added] he hears us. And if we know that he hears us in whatever we ask, we know that we have the requests that we have asked of him" (1 Jn. 5:14-15). When a police officer says, "stop in the name of the law," they are invoking the power and authority of their state. Likewise, when we pray in the name of Jesus, we invoke heaven's power and authority.

This is why it is essential that, if we invoke the name of God's Son, our request had better align with God's will. Jesus wants us to pray in his name so "that the Father may be glorified in the Son." The Lord will *not* answer those requests that will dishonor God, even if we ask in his name. Again, we turn to James; he is a wealth of knowledge regarding unanswered prayers. He says, "ye ask amiss, that ye may consume it upon your lusts" (Ja. 4:3). In other words, the Lord will not be complicit in our attempt to satisfy our gluttonous appetites. He's instructed us not to pray for our daily indulgences but for our daily necessities and nothing more (cf. Mat. 6:11). A Christian has matured when they discern the difference between their greed and need and so ask only for the latter.

Would the Son of God enable his followers to do the same things he did if it would make them proud? No. Would the Lord empower his followers to do even greater things than he did if it would make them self-reliant? No. Would Jesus answer his followers' request if it would make them greedy? No. If Christ's primary concern throughout his life was his Father's glory, so should it be ours. The Westminster Shorter Catechism has it right: "What is the chief end of man? Man's chief end is to glorify God and enjoy him forever" (cf. 1 Cor. 10:31). He that is most fulfilled in life looks to fulfill the purpose for which he was made, and that purpose is exactly same for every man, woman, and child whether they be young or old: *glorify the Father*.

VIDEO DESCRIPTION

Deep Dive: The Gospel of John | Week 48 | John 14:12-14

So far, the Lord has said some pretty shocking stuff in the Farewell Discourse. He's given the disciples a new commandment. He's surprised them by talking about his departure. He's revealed he is "the way, the truth, and the life...." And, as we'll see tonight, the surprises don't stop there. Jesus will show that his departure will work out in their *favor*. After all, it is "because" he goes to the Father that believers will be enabled to do the same works (greater even) as him, and it is "because" of his return to heaven that his followers will experience answered prayers. Who doesn't want these things?

But for what purpose was Jesus going to do all this? Why give his followers such benefits? To glorify the Father. If Christ's primary concern throughout his life was his Father's glory, so should it be ours. The Westminster Shorter Catechism has it right: "What is the chief end of man? Man's chief end is to glorify God and enjoy him forever" (cf. 1 Cor. 10:31). He that is most fulfilled in life looks to fulfill the purpose for which he was made, and that purpose is exactly the same for every man, woman, and child, whether young or old: *glorify the Father*.

Pastor's manuscript can be found here:

Grace Pointe Baptist Church

12029 Eastern Ave.

Baltimore, MD 21220

Contact: info@GracePointeLife.com

Website: <https://www.gracepointelife.com>

Give: <https://www.gracepointelife.com/give/>

Podcast Details:

Season 1 | 48