

## **Greater Works**

John 14:12-14

It's been correctly noted that in the Old Testament the most notable person of the Godhead at work in the world and revealed in the word was God the Father. During the earthly ministry of Jesus, recorded in the gospels, the most notable person of the Godhead at work in the world was Jesus. And in the book of Acts, which records the birth and history of the early church, the most notable person of the Godhead at work in the world was, and continues to be, the Holy Spirit.

In fact, many commentators would agree that although the book of Acts was titled, The Acts of the Apostles, a better title would be, The Acts of the Holy Spirit. This is because the great works accomplished by the Apostles were really the activities of the Holy Spirit working in them and through them.

This is not to say that God the Father and God the Son are absent in the New Testament or in the world. Rather, the Holy Spirit, who makes them known through the word and in our hearts, is working in the world in alignment with the Father and the Son.

But although the Holy Spirit is the primary person of the Godhead at work in the world, He appears to be the most unfamiliar and unknown. According to a Lifeway Research study, 56% of those surveyed, who identified themselves as evangelical Christians, believe that the Holy Spirit is a force rather than a person.

Commenting on this study, Daniel Henderson noted: "I am convinced that even among those who intellectually and theologically affirm that the Holy Spirit is a person, many still speak of Him as a "force" that paranormally arrives from some other location. Many who intellectually believe the Holy Spirit is a person still sing and speak about Him as if He were a force. They describe Him in obscure third-person language as "The Presence" or a "power" in the atmosphere. I am deeply concerned that the Holy Spirit, even in contexts where His work is emphasized, has become the "misrepresented God."

Francis Chan agrees: “He is not an indistinct ‘power’ or ‘thing.’ I often hear people refer to the Spirit as an “it,” as if the Spirit is a thing or force that we can control or use. This distinction may seem subtle or trivial, but is actually a very serious misunderstanding of the Spirit and His role in our lives.”

Beloved, if the Holy Spirit is the primary person of the Godhead at work in the world today to make known the Father and the Son and to accomplish His purposes, misunderstanding Him will diminish what only He can do in and through our lives. To accomplish the greater works that Jesus said believers will do in His physical absence, we must become intimately acquainted with the Holy Spirit, sensitive to His leading, and familiar with how He works in our lives.

**Main idea:** Greater works than Jesus will believers do through the Christ exalting work of the Spirit.

In this message we are going to consider how believers, through the indwelling Spirit, accomplish the greater works that Jesus said they would and what those greater works are all about.

## **1. Greater works are done in faith**

As we begin, it’s important to reiterate that the teachings of Jesus found in John 14 are referred to as the upper room discourse. This designation identifies the teachings of Jesus recorded only by John on the night before His crucifixion while observing the Passover. As I noted last week, knowing that His disciples were troubled, Jesus’ final words on the night before His crucifixion were meant to comfort them and prepare them for what was to come.

And one of the key ways that he sought to comfort and prepare them was by promising them that although He would be physically absent from them, He would be present in them in the person and power of the Holy Spirit (John 14:13-15). More specifically, He sought to encourage them by assuring them that in His bodily absence, they

would not only do the works that He did, but they would do greater works.

With this in mind, notice that these greater works, that Jesus spoke off, are done in faith. Jesus said to His disciples in verse 12: *“Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever believes in me will also do the works that I do; and greater works than these will he do...”* John 14:12

Regarding these extraordinary promises, there are two major questions to answer here. First, what does it mean to “believe in Jesus?” And secondly, what did He mean when He said that those who believe in Him would do “greater works” than even He did? Its hard to imagine how believers through faith can do greater works than Jesus Himself. If Jesus is God, and He is, can those who believe in Him do greater works than God?

First, to understand what Jesus meant by “*greater works will you do,*” we should think in terms of quantity not quality. In other words, the disciples of Jesus would do greater works in number than Jesus did to impact the world for Christ.

While Christ’s ministry lasted three and a half years and was limited geographically, individual believers can serve Christ for much longer and with a wider geographical scope. When He ascended into heaven and sent the promised Holy Spirit, His disciples went out into the world with His saving message and multiplied disciples in greater numbers than Jesus did. And the impact they had continues till this day.

There are many churches today who preach a false prosperity gospel who point to this text as proof for their claims that every believer today is promised health and wealth—that if believers just had enough faith they could perform the same physical miracles that Jesus did and even greater ones.

I believe that Jesus still works miracles today. However, what these prosperity preachers fail to emphasize is that the greater works that

churches should be doing is raising up people, who are spiritually dead in sin, to a new life in Christ.

The greater works of Jesus, as we saw last week, is a life that manifests the love of Christ, and ministers to the lost for Christ in the same power that raised Jesus from the dead. The greater works of Jesus is not a church that grows in numbers per se, but that displays the life and love of Christ in a cold and lawless world.

Remember that the Apostle Paul admonished the church of Corinth who were more focused on the gifts of the Spirit, like physical healing, by explaining that if we performed physical miracles, absent the motive of love, than we are nothing and gain nothing (1 Corinthians 13:1-13).

And after describing some of the qualities of love, qualities like, *love is patient and kind*, Paul concludes, *“So now faith, hope, and love abide, these three; but the greatest of these is love.”* 1 Corinthians 13:13

As important as faith and hope are in the Christian life, it's all negated if we don't have the greatest of these, which is love. Love for God and love for people should be the pillars of everything we do for God in faith and hope.

There are a lot of people in ministry today who are talented, but lack love, which is a fruit of the Spirit. And because of their lack of love, they end up misrepresenting Jesus and doing more harm than good.

Now, considering that the greatest work is love, which enables us to impact the world for Christ, Jesus said that those who believe in Him would do greater works. What does Jesus mean by those who believe in Him?

According to Ephesians 1:13, those who hear the saving message of the gospel and believe in Jesus as Savior and Lord, receive the Holy Spirit. But it's important to note also that we are sanctified (transformed) and called to gospel service by the Spirit through faith.

Speaking of the disciples who could not cast a demon out of a boy, Jesus said, “*All things are possible for one who believes*” (Mark 9:23). And the author of Hebrews wrote: “*Without faith it is impossible to please God*” (Hebrews 11:6).

It’s important to emphasize that, although we are incapable of doing the greater works that Jesus spoke of apart from faith, there is a counterfeit faith that we need to be aware of. The word of faith movement, which is widespread, has led millions of professing Christians astray around the world.

Word of faith proponents teach that Christians are little gods, and faith is a force that is activated by positive or negative declarations of belief. In other words, they believe that, like God, we can create our own reality by our faith filled words. Faith is a force that we can control to produce the outcome that we desire. Again, this teaching is false and is actually keeping people from the greater works that Jesus promised those who believe in Him would experience.

Beloved, faith is as good as its object. The faith that leads to the greater works that Jesus promised is to believe in Him— to trust Him—to rely upon Him to work in us by the indwelling Spirit. Doing greater works than Jesus is hard to imagine. But we can do them because those who believe in Jesus are the temples of the Holy Spirit.

The apostle Paul wrote in the context of knowing the incomprehensible love of God, “*Now to him who is able to do far more abundantly than all that we ask or think, according to the power at work within us,*” (Ephesians 3:20).

How do we connect to the power of the Spirit? As well-known Christian writer Jerry Bridges explained: “We do it by faith—by renouncing any confidence in our own willpower and relying entirely on the Holy Spirit to empower us.”

This bring us to our second point:

## 2. Greater works are done through the Spirit

Notice that Jesus further explains that those who believe in Him “*will also do the works that I do; and greater works than these will he do, because I am going to the Father*” (John 14:12). It was no doubt hard enough for the disciples to believe that they would do even greater works than Jesus did while He walked this earth. But then He adds, that they would do greater works than He did because He was going to the Father.

If the disciples had trouble doing great works while Jesus walked this earth, how in the world will they do greater works than He did in His absence? Later in His upper room discourse, Jesus clarifies: “*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).

The reason it was to their advantage that He would depart from them and go to the Father, was because He would send them the Helper, the Holy Spirit. One bible teacher put it this way: “Jesus claimed that having the Holy Spirit in them would be better than having Him beside them” (J. D. Greear).

And because Jesus kept His promise, the church, through the indwelling Holy Spirit, has done greater works over the last 2000 years than Jesus did Himself when He walked upon the earth.

After His resurrection and before ascending into heaven, Jesus said to His inquisitive disciples: “*But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth*” (Acts 1:8). And about ten days later, 120 disciples who had been waiting in prayer in an upper room, received the promised Holy Spirit. Acts 1:14; 2:1-4

On that day, Peter went out, filled with the Spirit, to proclaim the gospel to those who had come to Jerusalem on the Day of Pentecost, and three-thousand came to Christ. And despite great opposition and persecution, Christ's Church has been growing ever since.

“The Church has grown from the small group of 120 that were gathered in a secret upper room somewhere in Jerusalem (Acts 1:15), to countless numbers of believers around the world. Countless sinners have been redeemed through the power of the Holy Spirit! Countless healings have occurred! Countless miracles have been performed! Countless prisoners of the devil have been set free! Countless marriages have been saved! Countless lives have been changed! Countless redeemed souls are now with Christ and will be with Him forever! Truly; the church, through the indwelling Holy Spirit, has done greater works than Jesus Himself did as He walked upon the earth - just as He promised!” Greg Allen

Again, in light of the false prosperity gospel that so many professing Christians have bought into today, I can't emphasize enough that the greater works that the church has accomplished over the last 2000 years is not living a more comfortable lifestyle than Jesus. It's quite the opposite.

The greater works are not greater works in kind but greater works in number. The greater works are driven by the help that we as believers receive from the indwelling Spirit to represent Jesus in this world and accomplish His redemptive purposes.

Now to accomplish these greater works, Jesus explained to His disciples in John 16:13, “*When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth...*” (John 16:13a). The Psalmist declared: “*The steps of a good man are ordered by the LORD*” Psalm 37:23 KJV

Let me ask you, are you living with a conscious dependence upon the Holy Spirit to lead you and guide you in the way that you ought to go in every area of your life? The Holy Spirit is not given to us to help us establish our own plans or reach our own goals. He leads us to were

God wants us to be and to where God can bless us to be a blessing. Moreover, He does more than point us in the right direction. The Holy Spirit is the “How to.”

In His book, *Transforming Presence*, Daniel Henderson explains: “As I contemplate why so few pastors lead pervasive efforts of prayer in their churches and why so many congregations would hardly be identified as a “house of prayer for all nations” I am convinced that one primary reason is that the Holy Spirit is no longer our “how to” in ministry. In my own journey, I have so easily relied on readily-available popular wisdom and pithy methodologies, making the Holy Spirit more of a silent partner rather than the executive director of my life and ministry.

Of course, the tools of modern-day ministry have their place and can be useful. However, there is a difference between “using” these tools and “depending” on these tools. The clarion difference is the degree to which we intentionally, humbly, and passionately seek the mind and power of the Holy Spirit in the word, and prayer

Do you know that before choosing His 12 apostles, the gospel of Luke records in Luke 6:12-13, that Jesus spent all night in prayer? In Luke 4, we read that in His humanity, He was led by the Holy Spirit into the wilderness where He showed us how to overcome the enemy through the word.

In the book of Acts, there are numerous examples where Peter, Paul and other followers of Jesus were sent by the Holy Spirit on very specific gospel missions and endeavors. Moreover, we read in the New Testament that the Holy Spirit kept Paul from going to places where Paul intended to do gospel work because God had a different plan for Him (Acts 16:6-7).

The point is that the Holy Spirit helps us to fulfill more than our good ideas, but to know God’s ideas and He empowers us to accomplish them as we step out in faith and obedience. Moreover, sometimes the Holy Spirit leads us in providential ways as He did Paul when His



young nephew overheard a plot to kill Him and made it known to Him as recorded in Acts 23:16-22

How does the Spirit make known to us the heart and mind of God so that we accomplish the greater works that Jesus promised? This question brings us to our final point:

### **3. Greater works are done by asking in Jesus name.**

In addition to the promised Holy Spirit who works in the believer to pick up where Jesus in His earthly ministry left off, and to empower us to accomplish even greater works, Jesus adds: *“Whatever you ask in my name, this I will do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son. <sup>14</sup> If you ask me anything in my name, I will do it.”* John 14:12-14

Just as the Holy Spirit and faith are often wrongly viewed today as mere forces that can be controlled to get whatever you want, so is the promise of Jesus to His disciples that *“Whatever you ask in my name, this I will do”* (John 14:13). What does it mean to ask or pray in the name of Jesus?

Some people pray in Jesus’ name like it’s a pin number to God’s ATM machine from which we can withdraw whatever amount we enter. One bible teacher also suggested: “People pray in the name of Jesus as if to indicate to God that they are about done—”the prayer equivalent of saying, “OK, I guess I’ll let you go. TTYL.” That is not what praying in the name of Jesus is all about.

Jesus makes it clear at the end of verse 13 what it means to ask or pray in His name? Whatever we seek God for in His name, Jesus says, *“this I will do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son.”* That is to say, the goal of everything Spirit filled believers seek God for is the exaltation of Jesus. If it doesn’t honor God or exalt Jesus, or if it’s not part of His plan for our lives, we don’t want it. We pray in His name because we love Jesus and we trust that His will is best.

In addition to praying in Jesus' name, we must also pray in the Spirit. Remember, the Holy Spirit is more than a force, He's the third person of the Godhead. And His aim is to reveal, glorify, and exalt Jesus in and through our lives. John 16:14

When you pray in the Spirit, you are in awe of Jesus and what He's done in your life. Therefore, whatever you seek of the Father, you do so in Jesus name. This means that you're asking in **submission to His will**, that you're **seeking His exaltation**, and that you're **standing on His authority**.

Concerning the Spirit, Jesus said, "*He will glorify me*" (John 16:14). Do you know how you can discern that a person is filled with the Spirit, by which the "greater works" are accomplished? Jesus is everything to them. And when Jesus is everything, you don't pray to inform God. He knows everything! You pray to invite God to be God in every area of your life.

Someone said, do you want to make God laugh; tell Him your plans. We should pray about everything and bring all our needs to the Father. But it seems to me that often our prayer lives are more about informing God concerning what we want Him to do for us, rather than seeking Him to inform us about what He wants us to do for Him?

When Jesus is everything to you, you don't tell Him what you think is best for your life so that He would grant it to you. You trust that the God who loves you and spared not His only Son to save you, knows and desires what is best for you.

I want to submit to you that the greater works that Jesus promised believers will do, are accomplished in the lives of those who in every area of their lives seek to be led by the Spirit to the glory of Jesus.

## **Conclusion**

Beloved, the greater works that Jesus promised are done through faith in Him, as we consciously depend upon the Spirit, and pray in Jesus name to fulfill His God glorifying purpose in every area of our lives.

May we seek Him moment by moment to inform us—to show us His plans and depend upon the indwelling Spirit to fulfill them for the greater fame of Jesus.