

Over the past two weeks, our kids have all returned to school and we have begun winding down summer. For many of us, memories of our summer break include a road trip. Now, I love a road trip, and I am a second-generation road trip aficionado. But, if I'm honest, not a lot happens on our way to where we are going. Yes, we can talk and read road signs and play slug bug but, in a lot of ways, a road trip is just sitting around and waiting to arrive at your ultimate destination. And we may even get cranky along the way! I'm concerned that, for many Christians today, our lives are like a road trip to heaven. We know and are excited about our ultimate destination, but there's also just a whole lot of sitting around until we get there.

Last week, we read about the incredible promise Jesus gave his disciples on his last night with them before he went to the Cross. The conversation included lots of bad news: he is going away, one of them will betray him, Satan is after them, they will fall away, and Peter is going to deny Jesus three times. But in the midst of all that bad news, Jesus gave them some very good news, a promise that they would be with him for eternity. It was the promise of our ultimate destination, heaven. But what about until then? Are they supposed to simply bide their time? Tough it out? And if that's the case, is there really any reason to stick around?

The question for the disciples is the same question for us. We may have believed the good news of the Gospel and know we have escaped death, but what we are doing now may not look much like living. While we hold on to the ultimate hope of heaven and of being in the presence of our God for eternity, what might God be calling us to in the interim? Does he have any work for us to do between now and when we get to our ultimate destination? Far too many Christians are spending their lives simply waiting to get to heaven and are missing out on the thrilling adventure God calls us to before then.

Many of you know of the Great Commission, the mission Jesus gives his Church just before he ascends to heaven. This morning, though, we are going to look at what I call the Great Upper Room Commission, where Jesus follows his promise of eternity with him with the call to do his work before we get there. He gives his us three landmarks of an active journey of faith on this road trip to heaven we call life.

**Belief precedes our work for God.** If we are going on a road trip, belief starts the car and gets it out of the garage. Before we can ever be effective for the Lord, there are two things we must come to believe first.

**[John 14:7-12a] <sup>7</sup> If you had known me, you would have known my Father also. From now on you do know him and have seen him.” <sup>8</sup> Philip said to him, “Lord, show us the Father, and it is enough for us.” <sup>9</sup> Jesus said to him, “Have I been with you so long, and you still do not know me, Philip? Whoever has seen me has seen the Father. How can you say, ‘Show us the Father’? <sup>10</sup> Do you not believe that I am in the Father and the Father is in me? The words that I say to you I do not speak on my own authority, but the Father who dwells in me does his works. <sup>11</sup> Believe me that I am in the Father and the Father is in me, or else believe on account of the works themselves. <sup>12</sup> “Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever believes in me will also do the works that I do.”**

Have you ever had to tell someone the same thing over and over again? Imagine a fictional husband, we'll call him Curt (spelled with a C), whose shortcomings include an inability to ever remember what is on the family calendar. As much as he tries to hide it, every time his wife (we'll call her Martha) mentions something coming up on the schedule, it's abundantly clear that it just hasn't stuck in his brain, and he gives his wife a subtle blank stare, not having any idea what she's talking about. Needless to say, it frustrates her, having to repeat herself regularly.

It appears Jesus is showing some frustration here. The language is a little unclear, and there's a difference of opinion if Jesus is giving his disciples a promise or a rebuke. Some of your translations may say something like "If you know me, you will know my Father", which sounds like a promise. But based on what Jesus says after, it appears that he's rebuking Philip and the rest of his disciples for not recognizing his identity and mission, even though he's told them multiple times. So he will take this opportunity to make clear again exactly who he is.

Philip's request to see the Father is a legitimate and sincere desire. All of us want to see and know God. Jesus' answer is "You have." If anyone ever says that Jesus never claimed to be God, this is one of the many passages that show that statement is clearly false. When Jesus says, "I am in the Father and the Father is in me", he is making a claim to be God. Jesus knows they must understand this, and believe it for themselves, before they can carry out the work he's about to call them to before he goes to the Cross.

Jesus appeals for them to believe using three different areas of evidence. First is their relationship with him. They know the one they have spent so much time with and should believe him based on the character he's shown. They should also believe because of the powerful and authoritative words he's spoken, which Jesus says come from the Father. And if all else fails, they should believe on account of the works he's done, his miracles, which Jesus says multiple times in John's Gospel confirm his identity and unity with the Father. Now, before we get too hard on the disciples, remember they don't yet have the benefit of Jesus' death and resurrection, and his entire written Word. Ultimately, they will get it, Thomas the last to be convinced, but who is recorded as making the very clear confession of faith when he looks at Jesus and says, "My Lord and my God."

What do you believe, and upon what are you basing your beliefs? Are you negotiating with Jesus, telling him to show you one more thing and then you'll believe? Are you here this morning, not sure what you believe, but eager to ask questions? If so, you've come to the right place. This is a church where you get to ask questions, so ask them. If you do, be prepared to hear the truth of Scripture and the encouragement to believe it and apply it to your life. The best way for us to get to know someone is to spend time with them, listening to what they say and observing what they do. God has given you his Word, which speaks of him, his works, and his desire to have a relationship with you. He has also given you a cloud of witnesses called his Church who have stories to tell you about their relationship with him and his work in their lives.

There's something else we need to believe to be effective for God. We have to believe who we are too. Jesus is secure in his identity. He knows who sent him and he knows who is in him. He and the Father are one, they are united in person and purpose, and it is from his identity and relationship that he is given his ministry, his God-given purpose, and enabled to live it out.

I talk to so many people who are confused about who they are. If you are a follower in Jesus, your identity is in him. Maybe you came in this morning forgetting that, and you need to be reminded that God now calls you names like friend, child, and beloved. In John 17, a passage called the High Priestly prayer where Jesus prays to the Father on behalf of his followers, Jesus speaks directly to our identity and the purpose that flows out of that identity.

**[John 17:20-21] “<sup>20</sup> ‘I do not ask for these only, but also for those who will believe in me through their word, <sup>21</sup> that they may all be one, just as you, Father, are in me, and I in you, that they also may be in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me.’”**

Jesus uses the same language he used to define his relationship with the Father to define our relationship with God. As the Father is in the Son and the Son is in the Father, we too are united with them. And, as we’ll see next week, we are given the Holy Spirit, who comes to live in us, to accomplish what God is calling us to. When we know who God is and who we are before him, we are secure in our identity and willing and able to accomplish what he calls us to.

There is one condition to qualify for service in the Kingdom of God: belief. Some of you this morning need to take that step of belief and receive Jesus as your Savior, and others of you need to take that step of belief and reclaim him as your Savior because you’ve drifted far off. If you have said yes to Jesus, you have been accepted and gifted for ministry. That doesn’t mean we don’t pursue growth. We need to be equipped more and more for the work God is calling us to, but that doesn’t mean we wait until we are a finished product before we begin (because we’re never finished this side of heaven). Doing is part of learning. We get better at serving by serving. But before you can live out your purpose from God, you must first know the person of God. The beginning is belief, and once you believe, you have begun the journey. And when you take that step forward, buckle your seat belts, because...

**Anticipation saturates our work for God.** Believers in Jesus can live with the incredible expectation God is on the move and eager to do a mighty work through your life. The road to heaven is active.

**[John 14:12] <sup>12</sup> “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, because I am going to the Father.”**

It’s not every day you read that you will do something greater than Jesus. The point here is not that we will do miracles more spectacular than he did. It’s that the reach of our ministry will expand beyond the reach of his. We see this in Acts 2. Jesus has ascended to heaven and the Holy Spirit has come upon the disciples. Peter preaches a sermon and 3,000 people come to faith in Christ. Not a bad way to start to the Church. The book of Acts finishes with the Gospel having reached people throughout the Mediterranean, and over the course of the last 2,000 years, it has reached the ends of the earth. That is the work we are called to continue. Few of us, though, consider how far-reaching of an impact we can have for the Kingdom of God.

What is it that we’re supposed to do? Jesus says we’ll do the same works he did. For many of us, we think “doing ministry” is volunteering for a church program, and we don’t think of the impact we may have. I want you to see it as so much more than that. Outside of climbing upon the Cross

to pay for the sins of the world, we are called to continue the work that Jesus started. That means you may have a ministry that introduces people to God, young and old, that instructs them in his Word, that calls them to repentance, that tells them how to be forgiven, that cares for those in need, that comforts others in times of pain, that welcomes strangers as if they were family, that takes the Gospel to new places, that puts you in the position of an ambassador of reconciliation between God and man, and an agent of restoration and peace between men. Does this fire you up?!?! There is so much to do between now and eternity!

There's one other way we do the works Jesus did. He gives it away. We know he could do it without us, but instead he goes to heaven, sends us his Spirit to work through us, and says, "Now it's your turn." If we are going to do the works he did, if we are going to emulate Jesus, a significant part of our calling, of our ministry, is that we would reproduce ourselves and equip, empower, and encourage others to go and do those same works themselves.

I want you to know that I have challenged our staff to do everything they can to give away the ministry of Fellowship. The Church was never built for a just handful of paid professionals to have all the fun. God has a work to do in and through each and every one of you who believe in Jesus. All of us can move down the road with the expectation that God is not only going to do something great in and through us, but he's also going to do something great in and through everyone we serve who also believe in Jesus. Before you leave today, remind someone that God wants to do a mighty work through them, and then I want you to pray for them this week.

**Prayer propels our work for God.** The richer our prayer life, the greater the impact we can have in the Kingdom of God. If belief is the ignition that starts the car, prayer is gas pedal that makes it go.

**[John 14:13-14] <sup>13</sup> 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.**

This is an astounding promise from Jesus. He says that he'll do whatever we ask, but we have to understand the condition he puts on this promise when he says, "in my name". Many have twisted the meaning of this verse to suggest that I can ask Jesus for anything and, as long as I end the prayer with "in your name", God will answer it. New car? Done. Better job? Done. But "in your name" is not a holy abracadabra.

When we pray in Jesus' name, it means we ask for what Jesus would ask for. It means we ask for God's will to be done and that our lives would be pleasing to him. Jesus will most certainly move when we ask for his help in accomplishing what he is calling us to. The favor of God is for the glory of God, not the satisfaction of self. When we pray for God to do in our lives what he wills, we bear fruit for his glory. I will end today's service with a prayer, and that prayer will conclude with the phrase "in Jesus name". It is a confession that we want all we do in this church to align with the Father's will and it's an invitation to Jesus to accomplish what he wants to accomplish through us.

Our prayer life is a direct reflection of what we believe about God and what we believe about ourselves. There were several of us meeting this week to discuss what we want to be true of

every disciple of Jesus at Fellowship, and someone offered courageous and bold, that we would pray for big things because we worship a big God who, as Jesus just said, wants to accomplish great things through us. How big are your prayers? Are they said with the belief that God hears them and the anticipation that he's going to answer them?

Many of us pray small prayers because we place limits on ourselves. We don't believe our identity in Christ and, therefore, don't believe we can have a significant impact. If you believe you can't accomplish much, you're right, if you assume it's all up to you. But it's not. Jesus says "ask...and I will do it." On your own, your impact will be small. But if it's Jesus working through you, expect great things. And if your prayers are small because you place limits on God, let him remind you, like he did with his disciples, of his character, his words, and his work you find in his Word. If he truly is who he says he is, cast off the limitations of your prayers because they are offered to a limitless God.

I want to encourage you to come back the night of September 16 and join your church family in asking God for great things in his name, where we praise him, confess our belief in him, express our hope that he is on the move, and that he would do his work through us individually and through our church collectively.

I can't wait to get to heaven. And I hope to see all of you there! Some will get there sooner than others. But listen, whether that's next week, or 80 years from now, every day you open your eyes and you are still in this life means God still has something left for you to do. Don't just run out the clock. Don't just eke your way through life until you go home. Don't just sit there until you reach your final destination. You were made for more than that. God has something to do in you and through you, for your blessing and his glory. Ask him to do it, and then expect great things.