

Greater Things

My hope and prayer is that, by God's grace, I can lead us into encouragement and blessing as God speaks to us through his Word.

Now I know that I am not the first person to approach preaching on this passage with caution. Even the great Charles Spurgeon, one of my own favorite historical preachers, in an archive of several thousand sermons that I have on my computer, does not have even one message on these verses.

Unfortunately this passage has been one whose interpretation varies depending on which side of the "theological spectrum" you come from. When we face passages like this, it's often difficult to try and put aside some of our theological assumptions and presuppositions and read the passage at face value. Often those from the "Spirit" side of the spectrum, those "Charismatics", look at this passage and see only the power and authority of the believer, and envision incredible miracles and believers bringing in the Kingdom of God.

Then you have the other side, the Word folks. And some of them downplay the strength of these verses, or skip over them all together, and spend more time talking about what Jesus didn't mean than what he did mean. Well, I'm thankful that at Summit we believe there is a middle, biblical way between those two sides. So today, I'm going to try as best as I possible can to avoid both pitfalls, put aside some presuppositions, and take these verses at face value.

Let's begin with the bigger context of John 14 as a whole.

Probably, other than the Sermon on the Mount, John 14-17 is the longest and best known sustained section of Jesus' teaching recorded in the gospels. We've mentioned it before, but John's gospel has this driving purpose, almost a funnel-like focus, leading us toward Jesus' passion week and to the cross.

In John 13, Jesus is in the upper room with his disciples, and they're eating the passover meal together. During the meal, one of Jesus' disciples, Judas, leaves to betray Jesus. After Judas leaves, Jesus begins to assure his closest disciples - these remaining 11, that have been with him for 3 years. For 3 years they've walked with him, slept out under the stars with him, seen his miracles, heard his teaching, served alongside him, been his closest friends - he begins to instruct them again that he will be going away, something they couldn't understand yet, but Jesus assures them that, in fact, far from being something terrible, it is actually *better* for them that he goes away.

And so in Ch. 14:1 Jesus begins this farewell to his disciples with this, "Let not your hearts be troubled." Then he goes on to give several reasons, actually they are really promises, why it was better for his disciples and better for us that he leaves. The first couple should be review from last week, but I want to touch on them before we get to today's:

1. ***Don't let your heart be troubled...*** It is better that I leave *so that I can go to prepare a place for you.* (14:2)

2. **Don't let your heart be troubled...** Even though I'm leaving, I'm *coming back to take you to be where I am.* (14:3)
3. **Don't let your heart be troubled...** If you know me you will also know and see the Father. (John 14:6-7)

Then we come to the verses we're going to look at today. Let me read them again:

"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. Whatever you ask in my name, this I will do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son. If you ask me anything in my name, I will do it."

Well, here's what we're going to do today with this text. Jesus focus is on the doing of his works and greater works. So, very simply, we're going to ask and answer four questions of these verses and then I have some concluding implications for us as individuals and as a church. Here are the four questions:

1. Who does these works?
2. What are the works?
3. Why are some of these works greater than Jesus' works?
4. How can we do these works?

Alright, did you get that? This is like primary English class. Who, What, Why, How? Sorry, no when and where - that's for a different message.

1. Who does these works?

Alright, question number one, who is it that does these works that Jesus is talking about? Who is Jesus addressing with this promise? "*Whoever believes in me will also do the works that I am doing.*" So the answer is.... *Whoever!* Alright, that was easy, let's move on to question number 2.....

I guess we should expand on that a little bit. Look at Jesus words again. There is a modifier in the sentence. This promise is not for whoever, as in anyone in the world, but the promise is for *whoever believes in Jesus*. Belief in Jesus is a requirement to partake in the promise.

Notice too the singular pronoun "he" (*and greater works than these will he do*). Put together with the word **whoever**, Jesus is clearly giving this promise, not to a **group** of people, not to **the church as a whole**, but to individual believers. We can certainly make application of the passage to the church as a whole, but it's important to see this promise is given to individuals.

So who will do these works we're going to talk about? Individual believers in Jesus. But I'm sure Jesus must only be talking about a select few individual believers. I mean, he's talking to his disciples in the passage, so he's probably point toward them doing great works like we see in the book of Acts. So maybe this promise is for the apostles, or for missionaries overseas, and for pastors and people in full-time ministry. It

sure must be only for people that memorize whole books of the Bible, or pray 3 hours a day, or fast for 40 days. It is surely not for every Christian.

"Whoever believes in me." Anytime this phrase is used in John's gospel, and it is used some 13 times, it means what it says. Anyone and everyone who believes. It never means a select group of Christians, it never means only the apostles. It doesn't mean that there are the Junior Varsity Christians that only do Jesus works, and Varsity Christians do greater works. It means every believer in every time and every place throughout history, if you are truly a believer in Jesus, should be walking in what Jesus is saying.

2. What are these works Jesus is talking about?

There are two clauses that talk about works that believers do, let's deal with them one at a time. First, Jesus says that whoever believes in him will do the works that he does. This is staggering enough on its own, but often we get so hung up on the greater works that we miss this first part.

What does Jesus mean when he is talking about the works that he does? Our understanding of what these works are is crucial to how we interpret the meaning of these promises for us today. Let's begin with some observations:

- The word "works" or "deeds" (Gr. *erga*) **is** sometimes used in John to mean only "miracles". Where the synoptic gospels will use the word signs, John will use works.
 - Eg. John 7:21 - Jesus says to the crowd, "I did one **deed** and you marvel at it." Jesus is clearly referring back to a previous miracle he performed.
- However, *erga* can also refer more generally to Jesus overall activity, including, but not limited to miracles.
 - Eg. John 17:4 - "*I glorified you on earth, having accomplished the work you gave me to do.*"

So, how do we know which meaning of works Jesus wants us to understand? We want to know, when Jesus says that whoever believes in him will do the works that he does, is this synonymous with saying, *Whoever believes in me will do the **miracles** I do.* I want to give you 3 reasons that I think this is not the best understanding of what Jesus means when he says "works" in this passage.

1. Think of the miracles that Jesus has performed up to this point in John's gospel alone:
 - a. Beginning in chapter 2 he has turned water into wine, told the Samaritan woman her life story, healed an official's son, healed a man crippled for 38 years, fed the 5000, walked on water, healed a man born blind, raised Lazarus from the dead.
 - b. If Jesus is saying that everyone, that is all people who believe in him, will do the "miracles" that he does, then the natural conclusion is that if you haven't turned water to wine or healed anyone or raised someone from the dead, you are not a believer.

2. If this is what Jesus means, then what do we do with Paul's teaching in 1 Cor. 12? In listing the different giftings given by the Spirit to the church, Paul asks the questions rhetorically - *"Are all apostles? Are all prophets? Are all teachers? Do all work miracles? Do all possess gifts of healing?"* And the obvious answer is "no", not all do these things, but different parts of the body perform different roles.
3. Lastly, if "works" means only "miracles", what do we do when Jesus says that everyone who believes in him will do greater "works" than him? What could possibly be greater than the raising the dead, and calming storms, and healing terminal illnesses? If this is the standard of what all believers, in all places and ages should be doing, then can we even say that anyone in the last 2000 years has been a genuine believer in Jesus?

So, if "works" are not synonymous with "miracles", then what does Jesus mean when he says that all believers will do the "works" that he does?

a.) The immediate context shows us that "works" are meant to point people to believe that Jesus is God.

- John 14:10-11

"Do you not believe that I am in the Father and the Father is in me (That God and I are one)? 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. Believe me that I am in the Father and the Father is in me (I am God), or else believe on account of the works themselves."

- John 10:25 - The one other place in John with this exact phrase **"the works that I do"**
"The works that I do in my Father's name bear witness about me."

Thus, the very least that we can say about the meaning of "works", are that **works are deeds that bear witness to who Jesus is, and show us what God is like.**

Now, even though I think it's clear that this means *more* than just miracles, it is certainly not less. We believe in God's power for today, Amen? We believe that God can and does heal the sick, that God can and does speak to his people to give them words of knowledge and prophecy. We believe God gives his people miraculous gifts to edify the church and bear witness to Jesus. We affirm this here, and this is a part of what Jesus is talking about when he talks about the works that he does.

In three years of public ministry Jesus preached, taught, served, loved people, ate with sinners, spoke truth, challenged false religion, healed the sick and fed the poor. Jesus is telling us that true Christians preach, teach, serve, love people, eat with sinners, speak truth, challenge false thinking and religion, heal the sick and feed the poor. Whoever believes in Jesus has as the central focus of their life doing the works that Jesus did and any other activities that serve to glorify God, bear witness to Jesus and show others what God is like.

Summit Christian, are we living lives committed to the works that Jesus did? Are we living life in such a way that our lives can't be explained in any way outside of

Jesus? What are our lives bearing witness to? Do our lives show other people how good and precious and wonderful we think Jesus is, or how good and precious and wonderful we are?

The last few weeks this question has been repeating over and over in my head and heart as we transition back into life in North America -

“Am I spending my life in service to God or in service to self?”

Are we doing the works of Jesus?

Now, if doing the works of Jesus isn't difficult enough to comprehend, Jesus says that we will do greater works than these. Now here is where we can get tripped up. Greater works than Jesus? How is it even possible for anyone to do greater works than Jesus??

One way some people explain this is they say that Jesus was only one man, in only one place, limited by both time and space. But now that Jesus is glorified and has given his Holy Spirit to the church we have had millions of believers over the last 2000 years doing the works of Jesus, and so the works are greater, not in quality, but in quantity.

Now while this is certainly true, there are two reasons that I don't believe that is what Jesus is saying in this passage:

a.) The Greek word for “greater” used here almost always indicates something being greater, not in quantity, but in quality. Thus it is a stretch to take the meaning quantity in this case.

b.) We have already seen when we asked the question, *“Who does these works?”* that Jesus seems to not be talking just about the church as a whole, but about individual believers (use of the pronoun “he”).

So it seems that verse twelve is pointing us to something other than a greater quantity of believers, doing a greater quantity of works, in a greater quantity of places over a greater quantity of time.

So “**Why** are *these* works greater than Jesus works?”

What makes the works greater is not the *quantity* of works, but the *quality*. The works themselves remain the same - a wide variety of activities that bear witness to Jesus - but it is what they *accomplish* that changes everything.

Jesus answers this question of why these works are greater right in this verse. Look again:

“...and greater works than these will he do, because I am going to the Father.”

How does Jesus going to the Father make it possible that the believer will do greater works?

Think about Jesus time on earth. Throughout Jesus ministry he has been pointing to himself as the way to the Father. Especially in John, what has Jesus been saying? I am life, I am truth, I am that I am. I am the way to redemption, to relationship

with your Father, to wholeness and true life. But, while on earth, all that Jesus is preaching and teaching on salvation and the kingdom of God still waits for its consummation only in a future event. The fulfillment of all Jesus is teaching and doing - the power behind him forgiving sinners, healing the sick, dealing with evil spirits - is based not on something already accomplished, but something yet to be finished. This is the gospel event that John has spent his ink funneling us toward. Where Jesus the bread of life is broken on the cross that we might be made whole. Where the author of life is put to death that we might experience new life. Where the one who had spoken over and over about the oneness of himself and the Father, has that Father turn his face away, that the Father might turn his face in favor upon us.

And the gospel event doesn't end at the cross. This same Jesus who bears the Father's wrath against sin on the tree, who endures the punishment we deserve, rises again victorious and is glorified and seated in heaven as our King and High Priest forever!

Do we see how this changes everything! How is it possible for our works to be greater than Jesus'? Jesus, through his works, pointed to a future redemptive event that **would** change everything. Believers after Jesus death and resurrection bear witness to a past historical event that **has** changed everything. We point people toward a Savior, not that can **potentially** rescue them if he follows through to the end in his mission to redeem men and women, but a Savior who **has** rescued them from sin and death and Satan. A Savior who said on the cross, "It is finished." and was raised to life in power. We bear witness to a Savior who is now an advocate in heaven for us, our high priest forever. A King reigning on his throne with all power and authority given to him, able to accomplish all that he purposes to do.

How can Jesus say that those who believe in him will do greater works than he? Because he went to the cross, because he conquered the grave and is now with his Father, our work of bearing witness before others to Jesus bears witness to a reality that has been accomplished on their behalf. As we bear witness to Jesus we have the privilege of leading people into a full experience of forgiveness of sins, redemption and relationship with the crucified, risen, reigning and indwelling Christ.

Think of how this promise was fulfilled in the book of Acts. Peter preaches the first evangelistic sermon in church history and 3000 miracles happen. Were any of the, what we might call supernatural signs or miracles, performed by the believers in Acts greater in quality than those of Jesus? What made them greater, and it's important of course that we say here that the works were greater, not the people, is what they accomplished. The preaching, teaching, serving, miracles, were part of God's greatest work, the heart of God's plan for this world - bringing ruined sinners into union with a risen Christ.

Finally **4. How do we do these works?**

This week as I was out working on building a fence in Frederickson. I spent a good portion of the week of work doing what is my personal favorite job in the world - if I could spend my life doing one job it would be this - digging post holes! So I'm out there digging post holes, and I've dug post-holes before, but this has to be some of the hardest ground to dig post holes in. About 2 inches below the surface you already hit

hardpan. So I'm slaving away, my hands (woman hands from years in China) feel like they're on fire... and I'm thinking... Really God, "I am supposed to be doing the works you do, and greater works...."

If we don't fully understand this promise of Jesus it can often leave us feeling guilty and hopeless. We look at our lives, digging post holes, changing diapers, sitting at a desk all day and it seems far from doing the work that Jesus did. So much of our lives are honestly filled with mundane tasks that *have* to be done that there seems like a complete disconnect between the life and world that Jesus is talking about and our own.

I want to end with **three reasons to hope:**

a.) The mundane also counts as the works of Jesus -

Look back at a verse we passed over very briefly - John 17:4. Jesus is praying to his Father, this famous high priestly prayer, and look what he says.

"I have glorified you on earth, having accomplished the work you gave me to do."

Undergirding all of the specific works that Jesus did, was Jesus ultimate work of giving glory to the Father. And part of giving that glory was accomplishing, doing the work that God had given to him, the work that God had put in front of him. How many years did Jesus go around healing and teaching and casting out demons? 3. How many years did Jesus spent at his Father's workshop, daily being faithful to build chairs and tables. To help look after siblings.

Brothers and sisters - young mom's changing diapers and running after toddlers. You who sit in an office cubicle or a truck or are at the construction site. Your work isn't meaningless!

b.) These works are not done by us but by Jesus.

*"Whatever you ask in my name, **this I will do**, that the Father may be glorified in the Son. If you ask me anything in my name, **I will do it.**"*

A lot more can be said on these two verses, but this theme is going to come up again in the next two chapters, so I'm going to leave it for Mike.

Here's what I will say. If you are feeling hopeless, with those thoughts - I could never do the works of Jesus, let alone greater works! You're right! You can't! But Jesus can! Verses 13-14 are amazing in their connection with v. 12. Jesus says - "You are going to do extraordinary things, great things!" And then he says this, "but here the only way you're going to do it - you're going to ask me and I will do it." Can we wrap our minds around that?

We look around us and we see Billy Graham preaching in front of stadiums, and missionaries planting churches around the world, and brothers and sisters standing against oppression and injustice and standing for the gospel. But do you know what we'll see on that day when we stand before him? Jesus did that. He did that too. He'll get all the glory and it will be the greatest delight of our hearts.

Christian, are you feeling hopeless that you can never do what Jesus asks?
Great! Ask him and he'll do it.

c.) Jesus does his works in and through us by the gift of his indwelling presence, the Holy Spirit.

Look back at why Jesus says we'll be able to do greater works again. *"because I am going to the Father."* What else happened when Jesus went to the Father?

- *John 7:37-39*

Acts 2:33 - "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."

Look at the record of church history; it reads as an account of God's plan is to glorify himself by working through broken sinners transformed and empowered by his life in them through his Spirit to accomplish his purposes on earth. This little band of uneducated fisherman and outcasts that began as a tiny Jewish sect in a small corner of the Roman Empire transformed the globe. How?

This same Peter that just a few weeks earlier had 3x been too afraid to say that he was one of Jesus' disciples... Is standing up and preaching boldly to thousands!

Paul, goes from killing Christians to the faith's greatest apostle. How does this happen? Only with an encounter with the living risen Christ and utter transformation through the power of his indwelling Spirit. Because I am going to the Father means, you will do even greater works because you will be transformed and empowered by me, through the Holy Spirit!

Nearly 500 years ago the world was turned upside down when a little known monk nailed a piece of paper to the door of a church in Wittenburg, Germany starting one of the greatest revivals in history that came to be known as the Protestant Reformation.

In 1837 in New England a boy was born into the poor family of a stonemason. His father died when he was only 4 years old. His mother had to send him off to work for room and board because she couldn't support the family's eight children. In 1855 at the age of 18 he came to Christ through the ministry of a faithful pastor. After the Civil War he started work with the YMCA (more than just the Y at that time) and slowly grew a Sunday School ministry that eventually moved to Chicago and grew into a church. After a transforming experience with God in New York city after the Great Chicago Fire destroyed his church D.L. Moody, an uneducated Sunday School teacher began to see thousands come to Christ through his evangelistic ministry around the globe.

James Fraser, a trained Engineer from London, went to the China Inland Mission far west outpost in Kunming in 1908 as a 22 year old. His mission, high in the mountains of western Yunnan province, was the animistic Lisu people. Though faced with difficulty and challenges for many years, Fraser labored to create a written language for the oral Lisu and translated portions of the Bible into the very script he had created. In 1916, after years with almost no fruit, through much prayer, there was finally

breakthrough, and by 1918, only two years later, 60,000 Lisu had been baptized. Today well over 60% of Lisu people are Christians.

Christian, do you believe these words of Jesus?

America today, in fact I will say Tacoma/Puyallup, Summit-Waller, desperately needs the church, needs the believers at Summit Christian Fellowship, to walk in faith in Jesus words.

Martyn Lloyd -Jones, the great English preacher wrote these words more than forty years ago, but I think they speak prophetically to our greatest need still today:

We see the Christian church in a more or less perilous condition, ineffective in a world of sin and shame, a world which is increasingly manifesting, in a horrifying manner, godlessness and hatred and antagonism to God. There is only one hope for such a world and that is a revived church. So the most urgent need of the hour is revival in the Christian church, and that means revival in individual Christians.

I want to leave you with three small challenges:

1. I want to see us be a church that is faithfully glorifying God in all we do - both the big and small.
2. I want to see us grab hold by faith these promises - God wants to work through his people!
3. I want to see us become a praying church, that believe and longs for God to move in greater ways.