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#80

## “Doing the Greater Works of God”

John 14:12-15

### Introduction

You have the power to do greater works than what Jesus did while he was here on earth. Do you believe that? That is an amazing thing to consider! It is also an easy thing to misunderstand. When I was in college there was a popular book going around called *God Can Make It Happen*. If I remember correctly, the premise of the book was John 14:14. *If you ask Me anything in My name I will do it*. The book promoted the idea that if you had enough faith and asked God persistently enough and with the right motives, He would, in fact, give you anything you wanted. It's easy to see why that was a pretty attractive book to a bunch of poor college students.

Men are always attracted to the supernatural and the spectacular. Doing greater works than Jesus is not a license for selfishness and personal gain. When Jesus did His work on earth, His purpose was to bring in the Kingdom of God and to bring glory to His Father. If we think of doing the works of God, in terms of miracles and signs and wonders, we miss the true meaning of Christ's works.

Today we are going to see how we can be involved in doing the greater works of God. If your life lacks focus, meaning and purpose; if you are consumed with personal desires and selfishness; if your life seems to be wasting away in a swirl of busyness with no significance, then today you need

to see the promise of God for something greater. Our passage this morning contains a couple of the most amazing promises in the Bible.

### [John 14:12-15]

*Truly, truly, I say to you, he who believes in Me, the works that I do, he will do also; and greater works than these he will do; because I go to the Father.* There are two places where we are prone to go wrong in thinking about this verse.

1. We forget the context. The context is not personal fulfillment, but rather the works of Christ.

2. We misunderstand what the works of Christ are all about. Everything that Jesus did while He was here on earth was aimed at redeeming the lost. All of His words, miracles, teachings, actions – everything was aimed at bringing salvation to the elect. Jesus said, *I came to seek and to save that which was lost.* That was the only reason He needed to become a man and live among us. So our works must be of the same purpose even if they are not the same type. We can do greater works than Christ without ever healing a blind man, calming a stormy sea, or feeding a five thousand with a sack lunch.

So when you think about this promise in verse 12, two things need to grab your attention. First of all, the promise is that you will do the **works of Christ**. *The works that I do, he will do also . . .* This promise is all about the ongoing work of Christ in building His church and bringing His kingdom on earth. How is He doing these things? The answer is He is doing them through the proclamation of the gospel, through the effective witness of God's righteous people being lived out among the world, through the purposeful discipling of men and

nations. But the defining question for each of you ought to become, Lord what do you want to do with me? The starting point in understanding this verse is Christ's will and work, not my wants and desires.

The second thing we need to get if we are going to see the wonder of this verse is that the promise of it is true. It's a phenomenal promise. It doesn't come naturally to us to believe it. Do you believe that you are really able and suppose to do *greater works than these*? Not more miraculous. Not more impressive. Not more eye-popping. But greater. We desperately need to try and think like God.

Consider some parallel thoughts. When God says if you meditate on the Word you will have success, you can think like the world thinks and assume you will have nice promotions and win awards and be well liked. But God thinks about success in terms of accomplishing what He desires for you. The Bible promises you peace that passes all understanding. The world assumes that peace = a lack of conflict. God thinks about peace in terms of a certain trust and settledness when we are under duress. God promises prosperity. We think money. God thinks heavenly resources and riches to live a full life here on earth no matter how much we have. And so on it goes.

So when we come to this idea of doing greater works, we have this natural tendency to think that the greatest things Jesus did here on earth involved His miracles and signs and wonders. But in God's way of viewing things, those things pale in comparison to forgiving sins and redeeming lives. What's a greater thing – that a man be transferred from the kingdom of darkness to the kingdom of light? Or that 5,000 people eat lunch?

If you want to be involved in the work of redemption, you can do greater works than Christ did. His work laid the foundation. His atonement is the foundation, source and work of salvation. But that work is built upon by each generation. And the work keeps getting greater and greater and higher and higher. (Jenga illustration – each move a greater work – but built upon what precedes it.) It is His work, for sure. But we are given a place in that work. And the promise is for both the individual and the collective church of God.

And let's make something clear. Each generation is called to faithfully labor and enter into these works in the place and under the circumstances in which they live. Too often we are tempted to think God is not doing anything of significance in our day and our place. I received an invitation this week to return to China to attend the inauguration of a new Seminary and to teach one of the first classes. This from a church calling themselves the Reformed Presbyterian Church of China. They quietly advertised for the class – all to be held secretly and immediately had 270 sign up. They can only accommodate 70 so nearly  $\frac{3}{4}$  of them were turned down. It's easy to look at something exciting like that and say, *now that's a great work of God! How come we don't see things like that in America? The great works of God are not happening here.*

But that's not what this passage teaches. Jesus said, *Truly, truly, I say to you, he who believes in Me, the works that I do, he will do also; and greater works than these he will do; because I go to the Father.* Now either that is true or it isn't. What we need to realize is that Jesus Christ is the one who determines how and to what degree He will work in a given place at a given time. But understand this.

Any works that Jesus is doing in our midst now to proclaim His gospel and to change people's lives, is a great work. To the extent that we give ourselves to His work, we participate in the greater things of God.

So what is necessary for you to be involved in doing the great works of God? This passage gives us four prerequisites.

1. You must have faith.

*He who believes in Me, the works that I do he will do also.* The truly great works of God belong to the people of God. God loves to take ordinary people like you and me and use us to do extraordinary things. These are things that will usually not be written about in the papers. They will go unnoticed by the world – but God sees their eternal greatness. If you go to the jail on the Lord's Day afternoon, if you lead a Bible study, if you faithfully pray for and teach our covenant children in their classes, if you disciple or mentor a young Christian, if you faithfully teach your children to love Christ – you are doing the greater works of God. But these things are by-products of faith in Jesus Christ.

2. You must walk in Union with Christ.

Jesus said these things would be possible because *He goes to the Father*. Why does His going to the Father open the door to greater works? The answer, as we will see in the coming weeks, is because by going to the Father He sends the Holy Spirit it to dwell within us. Through the Holy Spirit we walk in union and communion with Christ. Through the Holy Spirit men are convicted of sin and awakened in their souls to believe in Christ. As we walk in union with Christ, we learn to desire and seek after the things that Christ is interested in. Through our union with Christ we find our desires

and priorities being rearranged to reflect His desires and priorities.

### 3. You must pray.

Now we are ready to understand the scope of the promises about prayer. *Whatever you ask in My name, that will I do, so that the Father may be glorified in the Son. If you ask Me anything in My name, I will do it.*

Rather than this being a license to get whatever we want in life through prayer, we can see that this is an invitation to participate in the work Christ is doing. If you are praying for His work to be done, so that the Father can be glorified – and asking specifically that God might use you to bring about that work – you are invited to petition God and He promises to answer.

*Praying in His name* then, is not just a suffix to our prayers, not just a way to close things out when we are done, but rather the very foundation upon which we make request. We are asking the Father to do something for the sake of Christ. We are making supplication for the very thing we believe Jesus is working at and involved in. We are coming *in His name, for His work, and because of what He has already done at Calvary.*

### 4. You must love Christ

Verse 15 says *If you love Me, you will keep My commandments.* The Lord loves to respond to and use those who love Him and are walking to please Him. Love for Christ always translates to obedience. Listen. There are two ways that obedience can come about. You can obey someone because you are afraid of them. People who live in countries run by tyrants are obedient because they must be. But in their hearts they are always looking for a way out. That's why, historically, there were things like the Berlin Wall and border check points. They were designed first and foremost to keep people in. So

you can obey because you are afraid not to obey. Or you can obey out of love. Obedience out of love brings joy and is always looking for ways to please and serve. We obey Christ because we love Him.

There are many who will say to Jesus on the last day, *Lord, Lord, did we not do this and that for you. And I will say, Depart from Me. I never knew you.*

When you think about the ones in the Bible who saw great answers to their prayers, who did mighty things for God, they were also ones who loved the Lord deeply.

So, if you want to do the great works of God – wherever you are and to whatever extent the Lord would use you:

1. Begin with Faith. Trust in Christ with all your heart.
2. Walk in Union with Christ. This will direct you heart and mind into His things.
3. Pray for His work to be done through you.
4. Love God and obey Him.