

Pastor Thomas Becker  
How Jesus Loves: Doing Greater Things  
May 7, 2023

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*Very truly I tell you, whoever believes in me will do the works I have been doing, and they will do even greater things than these, because I am going to the Father. John 14:12*

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## Doing Greater Things

We are continuing our series in the Gospel of John. Continuing in what is called the Upper Room Discourse; Jesus' last long conversation with the disciples before the cross. In John 13, we talked about how Jesus loves us. And here in John 14, we're talking about how Jesus cares for us. Jesus cares for us by going to make a place for us with the Father and by showing us the way to the Father. Over the last two weeks, Pastor Roger and Pastor Danny so very excellently and under the guidance of the Holy Spirit continued in John 14, showing how Jesus cares for us, by giving us the Holy Spirit and by giving us peace. But we skipped over a couple of verses here.

These verses deserve special attention. So we're going to go back to them. Reading in John chapter 14: 9-14, where Jesus continues his conversation with Philip. *"Jesus answered "Don't you know me, Philip, even after I have been among you such a long time? Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father. How can you say, 'Show us the Father?' Don't you believe that I am in the Father and that the Father is in me? The words I say to you I do not speak on my own authority. Rather, it is the Father, living in me, who is doing his work. Believe me when I say that I am in the Father and the Father is in me; or at least believe on the evidence of the works themselves. Very truly I tell you, whoever believes in me will do the works I have been doing, and they will do even greater things than these, because I am going to the Father. And I will do whatever you ask in my name, so that the Father may be glorified in the Son. You may ask me for anything in my name, and I will do it."*

What remarkable promises Jesus gives to his disciples. Remember that throughout this conversation, the disciples have become disillusioned as they realize that the great and powerful establishment of the kingdom through the authority of Jesus Christ, was not going to play out as they anticipated. The disciples are waiting for a conqueror and Jesus is telling them that he is going to a cross. They are expecting Jesus to lead them in victory over the nations, but he is telling them that he is leaving them. So he gives them a promise. "The Holy Spirit is going to be with you. My peace is going to be with you."

Jesus amazingly tells them that they will do even greater works than He has done, and that He will do whatever they ask in his name. The first thing that Jesus says in John 14:12 is that *whoever* believes in Jesus, will do the works that He has been doing. Now some of us might be thinking, *Ok, I wouldn't mind walking on water. Head out there in the lake, don't need my boat. Just get my fishing rod and walk out to my favorite spot and catch me some fish. And say, Jesus knows how to catch fish, doesn't he? And someone else might be thinking, I'm going to feed the crowd and not have to lift a finger. No cooking and cleaning anymore! Just pray a prayer of blessing, multiply the bread and the fish, and the crowd is fed day after day.*

Well, clearly, Jesus has something else in mind. If we consider the words that Jesus uses throughout the Gospel of John, one thing we realize is that there is a difference between *works* and *signs*. Jesus talks a lot about miraculous signs, and He talks about the purpose of the signs which point to who He is. But this is a different conversation. Jesus now is talking about the works that He does. What does Jesus say about his works?

Jesus Works Testify to His Relationship with the Father.

“The Father is in me. I am in the Father. The Father is working. I am working.” Jesus emphasizes that the works are good works. For example, in John ten, Jesus is having a conversation with the Jewish leaders and says, “I've done all kinds of good works among you. What is it that you want to put me to death for?” Jesus’ works are good. What are these works? Let’s look back at three places where Jesus talks about his works and what they are.

Jesus’ Works Bring Light.

The Blind Man. The story is found in John nine. Jesus and the disciples have left the temple and come across a man who was born blind. The disciples ask Jesus, “Who sinned? This man or his parents?” And Jesus answers, “It's not about sin, but rather that the Word of God will be displayed in Him.” Jesus makes it very clear that he is talking about the works of God that he does. And so we might think, well, there's our answer. Jesus heals the blind man, that's the work of God that Jesus does in this passage. And certainly to some extent that's true. But there is a whole lot more going on.

An entire chapter is devoted to the works of God through this blind man. In the beginning of the chapter, as Jesus talks about this man being born blind and the works of the Father being seen in him, Jesus says, “I am the light of the world,” and the rest of the chapter is not so much about the opening of this man's physical eyes, but rather about how his heart is opened to Jesus. The chapter concludes with him leaving his past, devoting himself to Jesus, and following him. Jesus wraps up the chapter by saying, “This is the reason I came into the world so that the blind will see.” *Jesus came so the blind will see, but also to show that those who claim to see, are blind.* In John nine then there is an interaction between the physical work Jesus does and the spiritual work that He is accomplishing in the world as he brings light.

### Jesus' Works Give Life

This is demonstrated again in John five with the healing of the cripple by the pool. Around this pool, there are crowds of the sick, and from time to time, the spirit stirs the water. And whoever gets into the water first is the one who is healed. And for 38 years, this crippled guy had been lying on his mat next to the water and he was never able to get into the water first. And Jesus comes up to him and talks with him and says, "You don't need that water. I tell you, stand up, take up your mat, and go home." And the man takes up his mat and goes home!

A wonderful, powerful miracle. Now there's a problem. Doesn't really seem like much of a problem to us, but the Jewish leaders have up an entire set of laws around keeping the Sabbath and not working on the day that God set aside as a day of rest. And one of the laws about keeping the Sabbath is not carrying anything. So this man carrying his map on the Sabbath day is doing work. And the Pharisees call him out and he points out Jesus as the one who healed him. So we have another conversation about work. The first thing Jesus says is, "My Father is always at work to this very day, and I too am working."

And then we read these words about the work that Jesus is doing. "Jesus said to them, 'Very truly, I tell you, the Son can do nothing on his own but only what he sees the Father doing, for whatever the Father does, the Son does likewise. The Father loves the Son and shows him all that he himself is doing, and he will show him greater works than these, so that you will be astonished. Indeed, just as the Father raises the dead and gives them life, so also the Son gives life to whomever he wishes'" (John 5:19-21).

See this interaction between Father and Son? The people have had their attention drawn to and been amazed by a physical miracle of healing. And Jesus says there is a greater work, and you will all be amazed, for just as the Father raises the dead and gives them life, even so, the Son gives life to whom he is pleased to give it.

Jesus talks about his special relationship with the Father, which enables him to do the work that the Father has sent him to do. And the work that the Father sent Jesus to do is to give life. And that's what Jesus went about doing. Yes, He had healed this crippled man. Yes, it was amazing. But something so much more amazing and so much more powerful is going on in this passage far beyond the healing of a crippled man. There is the giving of life. This is the work that Jesus was sent to do—to bring life.

### Jesus' Work Satisfies Thirst.

Let's look at the interaction with the Samaritan woman. Jesus is traveling from Galilee to Jerusalem. Typically when the Jews traveled to Jerusalem they went far out of their way to avoid detestable Samaria. The Jews hated the Samaritans. This wasn't a little detour. But Jesus purposefully goes through Samaria. He is tired, so they stop by a well outside of town. The disciples go off to find some food because they're hungry and Jesus is hungry as well. Jesus is sitting by the well resting when a Samaritan woman comes to draw water and he asks, "Will you draw me some water as well?" She's shocked. "How can you even talk to me? You're a Jewish

man. I'm a Samaritan woman. How can you ask me for water?" And Jesus says, "If you knew who I was, you would ask me for water. Whoever drinks water from this well will be thirsty again. But whoever drinks the water I give him, that water will be like streams of living, water that overflow to eternal life."

Do you see again the contrast between the physical reality and the spiritual reality? The physical thing that's going on here isn't even a miracle. It's just the drawing of water and the satisfying of someone's thirst. But the spiritual reality is the miracle of living water. And this demonstrates how very anemic is our search for physical miracles.

In this passage about doing the things that Jesus did, we automatically start thinking about the signs. But Jesus says, "I have so much more for you than signs. Whoever drinks this water is going to be thirsty again. And those 5,000 men, along with the women and the children who ate the bread and fish that Jesus had multiplied? Well, they kept following Jesus because they knew they were going to be hungry again. The people Jesus healed along the way? The day came when they got sick or aged and for one reason or another, they died. All of those physical things are transient. They pass away. But Jesus has so much more! The work of Jesus is leading people to the living water and helping them drink. He has living water for those who thirst. The work of Jesus refers to the things he says and does that go far beyond what happened on a particular day. Jesus' work led to the greater miracle of leading people to eternal life.

Back at the well, the disciples come back with food. They've brought bread. They say, "Hey, aren't you hungry? Don't you want something to eat?" "My food," said Jesus, "is to do the will of him who sent me and to finish his work. Don't you have a saying, 'It's still four months until harvest?' I tell you, open your eyes and look at the fields! They are ripe for harvest" (John 4:34-35).

Keep in mind, the woman has gone back into town and tells everyone, "Come meet this man who told me everything I ever did!" And she returns to Jesus with a crowd from the village. Imagine them walking with her across the fields. A crowd of people dressed in the white garb of the day—a wave of white coming across the fields. And Jesus draws the disciple's attention to that harvest field. "Even now the one who reaps draws a wage and harvests a crop for eternal life, so that the sower and the reaper may be glad together. Thus the saying 'One sows and another reaps' is true" (vv. 36,37).

Jesus' heart is for the crowds of people who are thirsty for living water. *Jesus' work is to bring those crowds of people to the source of water so that they may drink.* The miracle of Jesus' work is certainly the miracles of opening the eyes of the blind and healing those who are sick. But the real miracle, the greatest miracle, is the miracle of regeneration—the enlivenment of a dead soul. May the Holy Spirit open our eyes and minds to understand that. Scripture tells us that apart from Christ, we are dead. Our souls are dead. It's not like there's a little spark of life remaining, and we're trying to crawl our way back to God. It's not that we were born basically

good and if only we can overcome the evil parts, then we'll be pleasing to him. No. We are dead than a doornail. Our minds have been darkened. The deceiver has perverted our thinking so that we cannot even understand spiritual truth without an enlivening spark from the Holy Spirit. We are dead because every inclination of our heart is against God and toward self.

Even when we do something that seems like it was a good thing, at the root of it is self-righteousness. At the root is the idolatry of exalting who I am above who God is. We are dead. But God makes us alive in Christ. And *that* is the greatest miracle that can ever be. *That* is the work Jesus came to do.

And isn't it amazing in John 17, then Jesus says that he has completed the work that God sent him to do? He is referring here to the cross when he takes the sins of all humankind upon himself and bears the righteous wrath of God fully poured out on him as he dies in our place. He then is able to offer life, forgiveness, and hope. Streams of living water and he calls us to drink. This is the work that Jesus came to do. Everything that he said and did was pointing to the Father so that we might drink of living water and have eternal life. And here in John 14, he says to us, "You're going to do the work that I have been doing. You are going to do even greater things than I've done."

How can we do greater things than Jesus has done? It's a question that jumps out at us. *There's no way. I can't go to the cross in someone else's place. Never mind all those miracles, I can't die for someone and give eternal life. How am I going to do even greater things than these?* Jesus isn't talking about qualitatively greater work. He is not saying his work is somehow inferior. Jesus is not talking about works that are greater in the sense of being more significant than raising Lazarus or feeding the 5000. Jesus is talking about the *extent* of his work.

To help us understand this, let's look at another passage where he drew the disciple's attention to the harvest field. "Jesus went through all the towns and villages, teaching in their synagogues, proclaiming the good news of the kingdom, and healing every disease and sickness. When he saw the crowds, he had compassion on them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd. Then he said to his disciples, "The harvest is plentiful but the workers are few. Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field" (Matthew 9:35-38).

Compassion.

As Jesus spends time with the people, one of the principal effects on his own heart is compassion. As he goes into the towns, and the crowds gather around him, as he heals the sick, drives out demons, and preaches the good news of the kingdom of God, He is moved by the needs of the crowds, because they need a shepherd. And when he asks his disciples to pray about the situation, what he draws their attention to is the need for more laborers.

Let's put this in geographic and demographic terms in our context. As Jesus is going through the towns and villages of Galilee, he basically covers an area from Willow Springs to Durham. You

might say Wake County and some of Durham County. That's the extent of Jesus' ministry in Galilee. A population similar to the population of the Research Triangle Park area. So you can imagine Jesus in his itinerant ministry, going to these towns and villages. Stops in Fuquay, goes to Apex, up to Cary, heads over to Durham. The crowds gather. He is carrying on his ministry of healing. He sees these vast crowds of people, and he is only one man.

We're not putting aside the deity of Christ. We absolutely affirm Jesus is God and Man. But as a man, He is bound by the limits of flesh and time. He cannot go to all of these villages at the same time, nor speak to all of those people at the same time. He sees these multitudes who need living water, and turns to His disciples and says, "Pray. Pray that the Lord of the harvest will send out workers into this field." And we're only talking about Galilee. Well, we're talking about Willow Springs to Durham. What about Greensboro and Winston-Salem and Charlotte?

We haven't even gotten to any of the really big cities in our nation. What about the rest of the world? *When Jesus says you will do greater things, He is talking about taking the gospel that he has made possible.* He is talking about taking the salvation he has purchased for every single man, woman, and child on earth, and making that gospel actualized so that everyone can believe. When Jesus talks about Greater works, He is talking about something fulfilled on the day of Pentecost, not even two months after he spoke these words.

At Pentecost, Peter stands up and preaches. The people who are listening to the disciples on that morning are astounded. They say we are "Parthians, Medes, and Elamites; residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya near Cyrene; Romans, Cretans, and Arabs." All of these people are hearing the good news of Jesus Christ on that one day! Jesus' ministry has been limited to Galilee. Yes, he went down to Judea and yes, the Syrophenician woman, but he never made it to Rome. He didn't preach the good news in Libya. Mesopotamia didn't hear it from him.

But on one single day, the day of Pentecost, 3,000 people from all over the known world came to Jesus Christ. And that was far more than any record we have of people coming to faith in the three years of his ministry. What Jesus promised to the disciples in John 14 was fulfilled on the day of Pentecost. That's in Acts chapter two. Go to chapter four and suddenly we see not 3,000, but 5,000 men alone, not counting women and children. In chapter six the number of disciples in Jerusalem increases rapidly. And as we go through the Book of Acts we see the Gospel get all the way from Ethiopia to Rome because the disciples are doing the thing that Jesus sent them to do.

The disciples are carrying out the greater work of bringing the gospel to the ends of the world. And the key is the work of the Holy Spirit among them. Jesus says, "You will do greater works than these because I am going to the Father." Throughout the upper room discourse, whenever Jesus talks about going to the Father, he also talks about sending the Holy Spirit. In chapter 16, he says, "Unless I go to the Father, the Holy Spirit won't come to you." Jesus is in the flesh is just one man. But when he ascends to the Father, he can send the Spirit of Christ to every man, to

every woman who believes in him, commissioning and empowering us to carry out the greater work that he has given us to do.

That's what happened on the day of Pentecost. The Holy Spirit filled up those disciples for the preaching of the good news of Jesus Christ. And that is happening today. Now. The work of the Father is being carried out around the world. In the last decade, at least 300 million people have come to faith in Jesus Christ. That works out to somewhere between 80 and 170,000 people a *day*. Every hour around the world is the day of Pentecost.

When the disciples had done their work, about 3% of the world's population were believers. Today, it's somewhere between seven and 10%. Just a couple hundred years ago, the church was mainly a European American church. Now, 54% of the churches around the world are non-Anglo-European. In Mongolia, 30 years ago, there were no known churches, now we know of 40,000 believers and hundreds of churches. 40 years ago in Nepal, there were zero known believers, today the number of believers is somewhere around one million. Approximately 15,000 people are baptized in India, every *month*. Before COVID shut things down, the church in China was the fastest-growing church in the world. If history indicates anything, when things shut down, the gospel spreads even faster. In South Korea 100 years ago, there were no believers. Now, approximately 30% of that country is made up of Christ followers. In South America, more than 10% of the population are gospel believers. The center of missions has moved from Europe and North America to the majority countries of Asia and South America.

In our Alliance family, there are fewer than 500,000 people in the United States who associate themselves with Alliance churches. The national churches in Indonesia, the Philippines, and the Ivory Coast are larger than the Alliance church here in the United States. There are 1.1 million people in Vietnam associated with Alliance churches and 1.5 million Alliance believers in the Democratic Republic of Congo. The greater works are being done! Jesus's promise is being carried out as men and women like you and me filled with the Holy Spirit go out and get the job done.

And someday, far beyond these millions or even hundreds of millions, there will be a vast crowd that no one can number made up of people from every tribe and language and people and nations standing before the throne and lifting up the worthy name of our Lord Jesus Christ. That's where we're headed because Jesus sent the Holy Spirit and promised greater works would be done. And I don't know about you, but when I think about that, I'm excited. But I do ask myself a question. What about me? I want to see the greater works. I want to see people coming to Jesus. How can the greater works be seen in us?

We are drawn to the glitzy. Spectacular miracles appeal to our desire to see something physical and concrete. But they also appeal to the transient and temporary. I cannot perform miracles, but perhaps I spend my time accumulating wealth or making life more comfortable. I just got back from Congo. Ministry in Congo was great. Travel was awful. I just hate it. I can't sleep on airplanes. And those long nights in the wee hours when you're absolutely miserable and can't

move are awful. Once you get a good night's sleep it seems worth it. But one of the things that I enjoyed on this trip was a little bit of status on the airline, and it made that miserable journey a little bit more comfortable. Well, I am ashamed to admit how much time I've spent calculating how to maintain the airline status. I will confess, I'm sure I spent more time on that than I spent in the Word this week—apart from sermon preparation. I've spent more time pursuing the satisfaction of the temporal and the transient over the very greatest thing that could ever happen. And that's the salvation of one soul.

If we allow the Holy Spirit to do His work in our hearts, he will rearrange our perspective and draw our attention to the things that are unseen. He will draw attention from the temporal to the eternal. And I think that the primary emotion will be the same emotion that Jesus experienced. Compassion. We will look at people with compassion, the compassion that Jesus felt.

And as we allow the Holy Spirit to do His work in our lives, he will empower. We're going to have a baptism service in June because of miracles—dead souls being brought to life. We might feel discouraged as we look at the world around us. Let us work in faith and expect great things

*Let's pray, Heavenly Father, We are so weak and given to distraction and temptation. But filled with your spirit and saved by your grace, empowered us to do greater things. Open our eyes to see the wonderful work you have called us to. May we fall on you for every resource necessary to bring glory to your name for the sake of your kingdom. In Jesus' name, we pray. Amen.*

Tom Becker  
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