

Greater Works Than These

By Pastor David C. Forsyth

Background and Context of John 14

In John 14 Jesus is in the upper room on the night of His arrest and is speaking to His disciples in order to comfort and prepare them for His imminent departure. After promising to return for them at the Rapture (Jn. 14:2-3), and clearly stating the necessity and exclusivity of faith in Him for salvation (Jn. 14:6), Jesus teaches on His essential unity with the Father (Jn. 14:7-11). One of the evidences, for His essential unity with the Father which Jesus offers His disciples, is the miraculous works which He has done in their midst (Jn. 14:11b). These miraculous works or signs that Jesus performed were vast in number (Jn. 20:25) and were intended to demonstrate the divinity and credibility of the messenger (Acts 2:22).

“Truly, truly, I say to you, he who believes in Me, the works that I do shall he do also; and greater works than these shall he do; because I go to the Father” (John 14:12 – NASB)

In John 14:12, Jesus promises His disciples, and to all who would later follow them (“he who believes”), that as believers in Him, they would do not only the works that He had done, but even greater works. Jesus made that promise based upon the knowledge that even though He would be leaving them the Father would send the Holy Spirit to reside within them, empowering them for ministry. (Jn. 14:16-17).

Greater Works Than These

The question immediately arises “In what sense did the Apostles perform works equal to or greater than Jesus?” They were certainly not equal in power, for Jesus performed many miracles of nature (i.e. calming the sea, water into wine, unexplainable catches of fish, money from a fish’s mouth, the feeding of the 5000 etc.), which the disciples never performed. In addition, the Apostles did not perform greater physical

miracles, since what could be greater than raising someone from the dead? Thus we conclude that when Jesus spoke of greater miracles, He was referring to the miracle of the conversion of a sinner, which the Apostles did perform in a greater quantitative sense.^{1&2} We find Scriptural support for this view in John 5:20-21, where Jesus spoke of Himself doing greater works than the Father's raising of the dead, by His (Jesus) imparting spiritual life.

The reality of the Apostles greater works can be seen in Acts 2:41, where in response to Peter's sermon at Pentecost, 3000 believed.

This is far greater success than Jesus ever enjoyed in His preaching ministry.³ A further indication of the disciple's "greater works" is both the vast area over which they spread the Gospel, and the Gentile kings and rulers to which they were able to witness. This is in sharp contrast to Jesus' earthly ministry, in which He never traveled outside of Palestine, nor had significant contact with the pagan world.

What About the Church Today?

Finally, the force of the statement is not lost on the church today. Through our own fellowship we are, via our missionaries, taking the Gospel to the remote parts of the earth, the sophisticated urban dweller of Japan and Austria, and via short-wave radio, to the jungles of Indo-China, just to name a few. In addition, each and every one of us has the privilege and joy of interacting and sharing the Gospel with people that Jesus, in His earthly ministry, never could have met. Thus, although the miraculous signs faded out with the maturing of the Church, and the writing of the New Testament (see pamphlet entitled "[Understanding Spiritual Gifts](#)"), we have lost nothing in terms of our evangelistic power. We have the

¹ Lenski, R. C. H., *The interpretation of St. John's Gospel*, Augsburg: Minneapolis, 1943, pg. 989.

² Hendriksen, William, *The Gospel of John*, Baker: Grand Rapids, 1953, pg. 272-73

³ Tenney, Merrill C., *Expositors Bible Commentary*, Zondervan: Grand Rapids, 1981, 9:145

complete Scriptures which clearly say “*Faith comes from hearing, and hearing by the word of Christ*” (Ro. 10:17 -NASB). Let us be faithful then to utilize the power we have to continue to do those greater works.

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