

Greater Works (Part Two)

John 14: 12 – 31 ⁱ

Having Accomplished the Work

The work of the Lord Jesus Christ is summarized for us in His High Priestly Prayer for the church, found in John chapter 17. Eventually, we'll be taking a more in depth look, but for this morning please note verses 1 – 6:

¹ When Jesus had spoken these words, he lifted up his eyes to heaven, and said, “Father, the hour has come; glorify your Son that the Son may glorify you, ² **since you have given him authority over all flesh, to give eternal life to all whom you have given him.** ³ And this is eternal life... John 17:1–3a (ESV)

And we need to pay attention here, because, as we have noted so many times, this is the purpose for the Gospel According to John. John 20, verse 31:

³¹ ...so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, **and that by believing you may have life in his name.** John 20:31 (ESV)

³ And this is eternal life... John 17:3a (ESV)

(this is what the life that we receive by faith looks like),

that they know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent. John 17:3b (ESV)

And how was that going to happen? Jesus continued in John 17, verse 4, still speaking to the Father:

⁴ I glorified you on earth, **having accomplished the work that you gave me to do.** ⁵ And now, Father, glorify me in your own presence with the glory that I had with you before the world existed.

And here's the work—here's the distilled essence of what Jesus was sent into the world by the Father to accomplish. Verse 6:

⁶ “I have manifested your name to the people whom you gave me out of the world. Yours they were, and you gave them to me, and they have kept your word. John 17:4–6 (ESV)

So, the great work of Jesus Christ was (and is) the manifestation of the name of God to the people of God, so that, being saved by grace through faith, they might keep the Word of God. This was the reason why He came proclaiming the Gospel of the Kingdom.ⁱⁱ This was the reason why He spoke the words that God gave Him to speak and did the work that He saw the Father doing.ⁱⁱⁱ The great work accomplished in the life, death, resurrection and ascension of the Lord Jesus Christ is the reconciliation of all things in heaven and on earth to the Father, as accomplished through the redemption of His chosen people.^{iv}

The thing is, while Jesus spoke to many people during the course of His ministry in Galilee and Judea, at the time of His ascension, His followers were numbered only in the hundreds. As we saw a couple of weeks ago:

When...Jesus left this scene, committing His gospel to a little group of eleven men in order that they might carry it to the ends of the earth, at that time the whole world, with the exception of a few in Israel, was lost in the darkness of heathenism. ^v

The Greater Work of the Church.

But on the day that He rose from the dead, He appeared to 10 of that little group of eleven men and said to them (twice, no less), “Peace be with you.” Then He said,

²¹ ...“As the Father has sent me, even so I am sending you.” John 20:21 (ESV)

In other words, “As the Father sent me into the world to accomplish the work that He gave me to do, I am now sending you to accomplish that work. As the Father charged me to manifest His name to His people, I am now commissioning (**co**-missioning) you to do the same.” We even call Jesus’ last words in the Gospel of Matthew “the Great Commission”. Jesus said,

¹⁸ ...“All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. ¹⁹ Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, ²⁰ teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.” Matthew 28:18–20 (ESV)

And this “co-mission”—the church functioning under the authority of the ascended Christ is the greater work that Jesus spoke of—the work that was to be done by those who would follow in His steps. As we read previously,

Jesus never preached outside of Palestine, yet His followers would spread the gospel throughout the world. Jesus had only a limited outreach to Gentiles...but the disciples... would reach the Gentile world with the gospel.^{vi}

And again,

...in three hundred years Christianity closed nearly all the temples of the heathen Roman Empire, and numbered its converts by millions. **These were the greater works**, and down through the centuries He still carries on this ministry.^{vii}

It all starts with prayer...

But how are we, as those who believe in Jesus, to do these “greater works”, that is, the work of evangelism—the work of proclaiming in word and deed the Gospel of the Kingdom of God? Well, I believe we find four points in the balance of John 14, and it all **starts** with prayer. Verses 12 and 13:

¹² “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. ¹³ **Whatever you ask in my name**, this I will do...” John 14:12–14 (ESV)

Then, verse 14:

¹⁴ If you ask me anything in my name, **I will do it.** John 14:14 (ESV)

Now, like the “greater works” aspect of this text, this has often been misunderstood, but

¹⁴ If you ask me anything in my name, I will do it. John 14:14 (ESV)

is not suggesting that we can ask for **anything** as long as we remember to tag our prayers with “in Jesus’ name, amen,” and expect it to be delivered. Jesus is not some heavenly version of Amazon Prime. We must ask in His name, and the definition of “in [Jesus] name” is found at the end of verse 13,

¹³ Whatever you ask in my name, this I will do, **that the Father may be glorified in the Son.** John 14:13 (ESV)

The Glory of God is the Goal

And that’s the second thing. It all starts with prayer, but the goal of this prayer must always be the glory of God. In other words, if you ask for those things in which “the Father may be glorified in the Son”, your prayer **will** be answered, but it will always be answered **by** the Father being glorified in the Son. That’s why we don’t always get what we want, because God knows better than we do not only what we need and what is best, but also what will ultimately bring Him glory. This makes Jesus’ prayer in John 12, verse 28,

²⁸ “Father, glorify your name.” John 12:28 (ESV)

a perfect example of what it means to pray “in the name of” and “according to the will” of God. It’s shorter than “the Lord’s Prayer” (and, as such, easier to remember), and it summarizes the whole purpose behind that prayer. Remember? “Hallowed be **Thy name...Thy Kingdom come, Thy will be done...for Thine** is the Kingdom and the power **and the glory...**” In other words, “Father, glorify your name.” This is what we are praying whenever we pray the Lord’s prayer, whether we say it as an individual or as a church, and it can be prayed any time and under any circumstance. Jesus was drawing near to the cross when He prayed it. He was about to suffer more than any person before or since and He knew it. In chapter 12, verse 27 He said:

²⁷ “Now is my soul troubled. And what shall I say? ‘Father, save me from this hour’? But for this purpose I have come to this hour.

Then, verse 28:

²⁸ Father, glorify your name.” John 12:27–28a (ESV)

and His prayer was answered, when,

...a voice came from heaven: “I have glorified it, and I will glorify it again.” John 12:28b (ESV)

And it is the answer to this prayer from which all true evangelism springs—the “greater works” of which Jesus was speaking in John 14. See, sometimes we want people to be saved for *their* sake (or, worse still, for ours), but Jesus came to save people for the glory of God.

¹ ...“Father, the hour has come; glorify your Son that the Son may glorify you, ² since you have given him authority over all flesh, to give eternal life to all whom you have given him.

John 17:1–2 (ESV)

Jesus was motivated by His desire for the glory of God in the salvation of His people, and this should be our motivation to proclaim the gospel as well.

Obedience is the very best way to show that you believe...

The third means by which we do “greater works” is found in the conditional in verse 15:

¹⁵ “If you love me, you will keep my commandments.” John 14:15 (ESV)

And it’s amazing how many sermons and lessons I’ve heard on John 14, verse 14,

¹⁴ If you ask me anything in my name, I will do it. John 14:14 (ESV)

that never arrived at the very next verse:

¹⁵ “If you love me, you will keep my commandments.” John 14:15 (ESV)

It would seem fairly obvious, really. Jesus came to do the work that the Father commanded Him to do—if that seems strongly worded, look down at verse 31, where He said:

³¹ ...but I do as the Father has commanded me, so that the world may know that I love the Father. John 14:31 (ESV)

—it’s the same for us. Jesus said,

¹⁵ “If you love me, you will keep my commandments.” John 14:15 (ESV)

so, if we would do “greater works”, then it starts with the works commanded by God. Like I said, “obvious”, but also very important, because Jesus lands on this idea four times in the next 10 verses. We’ve already noted verse 15:

¹⁵ “If you love me, you will **keep my commandments**.” John 14:15 (ESV)

Then, verse 21:

²¹ Whoever has my commandments **and keeps them**, he it is who loves me. And he who loves me will be loved by my Father, and I will love him and manifest myself to him.” John 14:21 (ESV)

He states it again in verses 22 and 23:

²² Judas (not Iscariot) said to him, “Lord, how is it that you will manifest yourself to us, and not to the world?” ²³ Jesus answered him, “If anyone loves me, **he will keep my word**, and my Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him.” John 14:22–23 (ESV)

Then it’s restated in the negative in verse 24:

²⁴ Whoever does not love me does not keep my words. And the word that you hear is not mine but the Father’s who sent me. John 14:24 (ESV)

By the way, this puts a very important perspective on both the first and second greatest

commandments of the law. Jesus did say,

³⁷ ...“You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. ³⁸ This is the great and first commandment. ³⁹ And a second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself. Matthew 22:37–39 (ESV)

But to lend some content to what that means, John 14:

²¹ **Whoever has my commandments and keeps them, he it is who loves me.** John 14:21 (ESV)

And this would become something of a theme for the Apostle John. He would later write in 1st John 5, verse 3:

³ **For this is the love of God, that we keep his commandments. And his commandments are not burdensome.** 1 John 5:3 (ESV)

It turns out then that obedience to God really is the very best way to show not only that you believe (some of you may remember the song), but also, that you actually do love God.

²¹ **Whoever has my commandments and keeps them, he it is who loves me.** John 14:21 (ESV)

Like the song says, “Doing exactly what the Lord commands, doing it happily.^{viii}”

So, if we would do greater works, then it starts with prayer, but very specifically, prayer that calls for the Father to be glorified in the Son, and this happens—this is manifest—in the loving, faithful, obedience of God’s people to His Word and commandments. This is, in fact, the very definition of good works found in Lord’s Day 33 of the Heidelberg Catechism. We are asked, “What do we do that is good?” And we are taught to answer:

Only that which arises out of true faith, conforms to God’s law, and is done for his glory; and not that which is based on what we think is right or on established human tradition.^{ix}

But here’s the thing. We can’t do any of that in our own strength. We can’t love. We can’t obey. We can’t glorify God. We don’t even know how to pray as we ought.^x On our own, we’re just not capable. We need a Helper, and that’s why all of this talk of greater works, prayer, obedience, and glorifying God is set into a very particular context.

I will not leave you as orphans...

In verses 16 – 18 Jesus said:

¹⁶ **And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Helper, to be with you forever, ¹⁷ even the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees him nor knows him. You know him, for he dwells with you and will be in you. ¹⁸ “I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you.** John 14:16–18 (ESV)

Then, down in verses 25 – 27:

²⁵ **“These things I have spoken to you while I am still with you. ²⁶ But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, he will teach you all things and bring to your remembrance all that I have said to you. ²⁷ Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. Not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your hearts be troubled, neither let them be**

afraid. John 14:25–27 (ESV)

Which, of course, is much the same as what He said at the beginning of this chapter, and also in chapter 20. “Let not your hearts be troubled...” “Peace I leave with you...” See, left to ourselves we can’t do any of this, but we have not been left to ourselves. Jesus said, “I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you,” and He has. This was not the promise of His second coming at the end of the world. It was the promise of the Holy Spirit sent to equip and empower the people of God to bear fruit for the glory of God, and we do not need anything else to do the greater works of which Jesus spoke. We have His Word. We have His Spirit. We have all that we need, and even now,

Christ by his Spirit is also renewing us to be like himself, so that in all our living we may show that we are thankful to God for all he has done for us, and so that he may be praised through us.^{xi}

The fourth and final piece, then, is really the first and most important. It is only through the power of the Holy Spirit that we can truly proclaim Christ to our family, our friends, and to the world. This is the greater work to which we are called, and if the Lord is willing, next week we will continue our study in chapter 15, and learn more about how the Spirit of truth dwells in and with the people of God.

i All Scripture citations, unless otherwise noted, *The Holy Bible: English Standard Version* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016).

ii Cf. Matthew 4:23 and 9:35.

iii Cf. John 8:28 and 5:19.

iv Cf. Colossians 1:15 – 23 and 2nd Corinthians 5: 16 – 21.

v H. A. Ironside, *Addresses on the Gospel of John* (Neptune, N.J.: Loizeaux Bros., 1942), quoted in, James Montgomery Boice, *The Gospel of John: An Expository Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2005), 1095.

vi John F. MacArthur Jr., *John 12–21, MacArthur New Testament Commentary* (Chicago, IL: Moody Publishers, 2008), 106–107.

vii Ironside, *Addresses on the Gospel of John*, quoted in, Boice, *The Gospel of John*, 1095.

viii <https://www.songlyrics.com/patch-the-pirate/obedience-lyrics/>

ix *Ecumenical Creeds and Reformed Confessions*, The Heidelberg Catechism, XXXIII.91, (Grand Rapids, MI: Faith Alive Christian Resources, 1988), 54.

x Cf. Romans 8: 26 – 27.

xi *Ecumenical Creeds and Reformed Confessions*, The Heidelberg Catechism, XXXII.86, 53.