

11 – Greater Works
Pastor Joe Oakley – GFC 3/10/24

We are in a sermon series called “Greater” and today I am preaching on Greater Works. Our text is John 14:12 where Jesus said:

I tell you the truth, anyone who has faith in Me will do the same works that I have done. They will do even greater works than these, because I am going to the Father.

How could Jesus say that believers would do greater works than He did? There are several schools of thought concerning this. One is that believers can actually perform greater, more powerful miracles than Jesus. Now, the word “works” here is not the same word as “miracle.” The works of Christ include miracles, but also everything else He did.

Jesus performed many amazing and wonderful miracles—such as healing, raising the dead, walking on water, and feeding thousands. How can it be true that those who have faith in Him will perform “even greater” works than those? I checked the Bible and I checked church history I found no one who has ever exceeded the power or majesty of Jesus’ miracles.

When Jesus said that those who believe in Him would do the works that He did, Jesus was not saying that every Christian would walk on water and raise the dead. The apostles in the book of Acts performed some miracles that were similar to Jesus’ works, but they did not do more sensational miracles. And 1 Corinthians 12:29-30 tells us:

Not all believers are apostles, are they? Are all of them prophets? Do all of them teach? Do all of them perform miracles or have gifts of healing?

The obvious answer is no. He is talking about how we are a body with many parts and different functions. It takes all of us working together to do the works of Christ. To those who believe believers can do greater miracles than Jesus did, I want you to consider Scriptures like Colossians 1:15-18.

Jesus is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation.

Is that true of any Christians? No!

For by Him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things were created by Him and for Him.

Is that true of any Christians? No!

He is before all things, and in Him all things hold together.

Is that true of any Christians? No!

And He is the head of the body, the church; He is the beginning and the firstborn from among the dead, so that in everything He might have the

supremacy. Is that true of any Christians? No!

Jesus is eternal and the whole creation was made through Him. Can any mere mortal create another universe? NO! Jesus gives life to everything - we give life to nothing.

So, I don't personally believe that we can do miracles that are greater in power than the miracles of Christ. So, what did Jesus mean that His followers would do "greater" works?

One interpretation is that the works of Jesus' followers would be greater in extent. The works of Christ were largely limited to Galilee and Judea. But His disciples' works would be worldwide in their reach and would affect all people to the uttermost parts of the earth. They are greater in number and greater in the extent of their reach.

Think about this - Jesus had more followers after Peter preached on the day of Pentecost than Jesus had in 3 years of ministry. Billy Graham has probably reached more people for Christ than anyone in history. The internet has made the gospel message available to the vast majority of people on earth.

That's why another interpretation of this passage is that the greater work we do is preach the gospel to more people. Plus, no one before the death and resurrection of Jesus could share the gospel like we can today. I'll share a Scripture that can help us understand this. Jesus said in Matthew 11:11

Of all who have ever lived, none is greater than John the Baptist. Yet even the least person in the Kingdom of Heaven is greater than he is!

Now think about that. Jesus said that of all people who had ever lived up until that time, John the Baptist was the greatest. Greater than Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Moses, David, Elijah or Elisha or anyone else in the Old Testament.

The "greatness" that Jesus refers to concerning John has to do with John's unique position in history, not with any special talent, holiness, or personal merit. One reason that Jesus called John the Baptist the "greatest" was that John held the honor of being chosen by God to personally prepare the world for Christ's arrival. John was the one who introduced Jesus to the world in John 1:29.

John saw Jesus coming toward him, and said, "Behold! The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!"

John was also the "greatest" in that God had chosen him to break the 430 years of prophetic silence that existed since the prophet Malachi. John was the Spirit-anointed bridge from the Old Testament to the New. John was the last of the Old Testament prophets and his preaching was at the end of the Old Covenant and

the beginning of the New. He was the last in the long line of prophets who predicted Christ, yet he was the only one who could actually see Christ in the flesh.

Moses, Isaiah, and the rest of the prophets had pointed to a far-distant personage they could see only faintly. John pointed at an actual human being who stood directly in front of him. No other prophet had that privilege. Also, John had a better understanding of who the Messiah was than any of the prophets who came before.

Although John was the greatest of all who ever lived before the coming of Jesus, he did not see the death and resurrection of the Lamb of God. The common people saw it, and thus were more privileged than John. Jesus plainly told His followers in Matthew 13:16-17

Blessed are your eyes because they see, and your ears because they hear. For I tell you the truth, many prophets and righteous men longed to see what you see but did not see it, and to hear what you hear but did not hear it.

That's a reason why the least person in the Kingdom of Heaven is greater than John. That's how we can be greater than all those Old Testament heroes. It's not about our power or holiness – it's about the fact that we have actually experienced what they could only imagine – the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

Heaven's kingdom will be filled with those declared righteous before God by His grace and because of their faith in Jesus. In Christ, their sins are forgiven and God gives them credit for the righteous life that Jesus lived. Anyone forgiven for all sin and is declared righteous before God through faith in Christ will be "greater" than John the Baptist who could stand only in his own righteousness.

John was the last of the prophets to point forward to the kingdom of heaven. This gave him greater status and knowledge than any who came before. Yet he is not greater in either status or knowledge than those who stand in the kingdom itself.

John prepared the way for the Messiah who was coming, but we get to follow the Messiah who is already here. John preached a message of repentance and works, but we preach a message of repentance and faith.

The "kingdom of heaven" referred to here is not only the glorious heavenly kingdom that we will go to when we die, but it is the kingdom of grace which Christ brought to us now. Christ plainly tells us that the kingdom of Heaven He referred to was not something that was to come, but something that was around since the preaching of John.

The kingdom of God that Christ set up was not a physical kingdom, but a spiritual one. The people in the B.C. period looked forward to it, and we in the A.D. period look backward to it.

John died before the crucifixion of Christ and His glorious resurrection. Yet even the “least in the kingdom of heaven” knows of these events and understands their meaning.

By the way, another reason why John is lesser than the least in the kingdom is because of the insufficiency of his teaching and baptism compared to the new covenant. Acts 18:24-26 says:

A Jew named Apollos, a native of Alexandria, came to Ephesus. He was a learned man, with a thorough knowledge of the Scriptures. He had been instructed in the way of the Lord, and he spoke with great fervor and taught about Jesus accurately, though he knew only the baptism of John. He began to speak boldly in the synagogue. When Priscilla and Aquila heard him, they invited him to their home and explained to him the way of God more adequately.

The Bible is saying that John the Baptist was the culmination of the old covenant of works. Under the old covenant people were made righteous by keeping the law of Moses and by offering blood sacrifices when they broke the law. But that is no longer true under the New Covenant. Acts 19:1-6 says:

While Apollos was at Corinth, Paul took the road through the interior and arrived at Ephesus. There he found some disciples and asked them, "Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you believed?" They answered, "No, we have not even heard that there is a Holy Spirit." So Paul asked, "Then what baptism did you receive?" "John's baptism," they replied. Paul said, "John's baptism was a baptism of repentance. He told the people to believe in the one coming after him, that is, in Jesus." On hearing this, they were baptized into the name of the Lord Jesus. When Paul placed his hands on them, the Holy Spirit came on them, and they spoke in tongues and prophesied.

By the way – this is the normal New Testament Christian way of life: to believe in Jesus, be baptized in His name and baptized in the Holy Spirit.

The disciples of John in Ephesus needed to hear the whole gospel; not just what John had taught. They needed to be baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus and they needed the baptism of the Holy Spirit. Even John the Baptist knew this. He said in Matthew 3:11

I baptize you with water for repentance. But after me will come one who is more powerful than I, whose sandals I am not fit to carry. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and with fire.

John could not baptize people in the Holy Spirit because the Holy Spirit was not poured out until the Day of Pentecost.

John was truly the greatest prophet of his era—the Old Testament time—yet all Christians today have a fuller perspective on the work of Christ.

Jesus ended the covenant of works and replaced it with a new covenant of grace and faith in His sacrificial death and resurrection. All those who place their faith in the work of Christ on the cross, rather than in their own imperfect works, have Christ's perfect righteousness credited to them, which results in eternal life.

Since John's preaching represented the culmination of the covenant of works, Jesus was saying that, despite John's greatness, even the lowest person who enters God's kingdom by relying on faith in Christ, rather than their own works, are therefore greater than John.

Let's look at John's ministry. Matthew 3:1-2 says:

In those days came John the Baptist, preaching in the wilderness of Judaea and saying, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand!"

Luke 3:3-14 says:

John went into all the country around the Jordan, preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins...

After John preached, The people asked him, "What should we do then?" John answered, "Produce fruit in keeping with repentance... The man with two tunics should share with him who has none, and the one who has food should do the same."

Tax collectors also came to be baptized. "Teacher," they asked, "what should we do?" "Don't collect any more than you are required to," he told them. Then some soldiers asked him, "And what should we do?" He replied, "Don't extort money and don't accuse people falsely — be content with your pay."

So when John preached, people asked him what they should do and he replied, "Repent and do good works." This is how it was before the New Covenant.

But after Jesus died and rose again, Peter preached on the Day of Pentecost. Acts 2:37-39 says that when he finished preaching, the people asked,

"Brothers, what shall we do?" Peter replied, "Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. The promise is for you and your children and for all who are far off — for all whom the Lord our God will call."

John the Baptist's message was "repent and do good works."
But the disciples' message was "repent and have faith in Jesus for forgiveness."

Another interpretation of why believers do greater works than Jesus is right here in the sermon Peter preached. When Jesus ascended to heaven, His followers numbered in the hundreds. 40 days later, in response to the preaching of the apostles, that number leaped into the thousands. By the end of Acts, the gospel had made its way to Rome. Greater results came from the preaching of the finished work of Christ in the power of the Holy Spirit.

Now, remember that John 14:12 says:

They will do even greater works than these, because I am going to the Father.

Why does Jesus link the works of His followers with His return to heaven? In fact, He says His absence is the cause of their greater works. Christ's going away was necessary because only then would He send the Holy Spirit to empower all believers to live as Christ lived. Jesus said in John 16:7

I tell you the truth: It is for your good that I am going away. Unless I go away, the Counselor will not come to you; but if I go, I will send Him to you.

It is through the power of the Holy Spirit that the church is enabled to do the work of God.

Jesus also links the greater works His followers will do to the promise of answered prayer. After He said His followers would do greater works and connecting that to receiving the Holy Spirit, His very next words in John 14:13-14 were:

I will do whatever you ask in My name, so that the Son may bring glory to the Father. You may ask Me for anything in My name, and I will do it.

When Jesus said to ask in His name, He was not saying that if you pray anything you want and then tack His name on the end of it, He will do it. To act in Jesus' name means to represent Jesus by doing the will of the Father in the power of the Holy Spirit by the authority of Jesus Christ in God's time, in God's way for God's glory! It simply means to do what Jesus would do if He were here. It means to act in His authority. 1 John 4:17 says:

As Jesus is, so are we in this world.

As believers we represent Jesus Christ on the earth. Acting in the name of Jesus means to act in His behalf. That means that we have the authority to act in His name – to do what He would do, say what He would say, be who He would be.

So back to our Scripture on greater works:

I tell you the truth, anyone who has faith in me will do the same works that I have done. They will do even greater works than these, because I am going to the Father.

So many people get caught up in the meaning of greater works, but miss that Jesus said believers will do the same works that He did. I will tell you plainly that there needs to be greater works in all of our lives because we all fall short in doing the works that He did. How do we know what He would do? By examining the Word to see what He did when He ministered on earth. Acts 10:38 says:

God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and with power, who went about doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the devil, for God was with Him.

You will find Jesus doing these 3 things over and over in the Gospels: preaching the kingdom, healing the sick and casting out demons. And when Jesus left this planet, He gave the marching orders to all His followers in Mark 16:15-18

Go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature... And these signs will follow those who believe: In My name they will cast out demons; they will speak with new tongues... they will lay hands on the sick, and they will recover.

In other words, Jesus said, “Do what I would do if I were there.” Jesus has all authority and He delegated that authority to us to go and minister in His Name!

Unlike anything that has happened up until John, Jesus said that we will do “greater works” that point people to a finished work of atonement and an empty grave and a risen and glorified Savior and we will do it in the fullness of the Spirit’s power and in the name of Jesus!

Satan’s not afraid of us – he’s afraid of the name.
We don’t overcome by our power – but by the power of Christ.
It’s not our authority; it’s God’s – but He’s given it to us!

After the earthly ministry of Christ ended, His work still goes on!
We are now the ones commissioned to preach the gospel of the kingdom!
We are the ones authorized to heal the sick and cast out demons!
We are the ones who get to see the greatest miracle of all—the spiritual transformation of a sinful heart through faith in Christ!
No one – including John – could see that under the Old Covenant. That could not happen until the resurrection of Christ and the outpouring of the Holy Spirit.
The message we speak is “greater” because we do not look forward to the payment of a ransom for sin but we look backward at it.
We no longer preach a future salvation but a salvation that is finished!