

Introduction:

- A. *Illus.:* Years ago, as a young pastor, I asked an older lady in the church, a lady I didn't know very well, where she might like to get involved. Her answer, small and helpless, was, *"I can't do anything."* She didn't mean that she didn't know how to do anything, or that she was temporarily unable to get involved. She meant that she was useless. It's one of the saddest things I ever heard a Christian say.
- B. I suspect that the disciples of Jesus felt something like that after the Last Supper when Jesus told them that he would be leaving them and they couldn't follow him. Their hearts were troubled because they loved Jesus and didn't want to be separated from him. But even more than that, I think, they had been on the inside of the most amazing, life-changing work anyone, anywhere, had ever experienced. They had heard all that Jesus taught. They had seen all that he did. They had come to know that he never sinned. And they now believed that he was indeed the Son of God, the Messiah, the Savior of the world. They had been part of all that, and now Jesus was leaving them and they feared that once again they would be ordinary. Without Jesus they were nobodies; useless. Turn to **John 14**.
- C. It is in that context that Jesus impressed some key things on his disciples:
- "I am going to prepare a place for you. I will come back and take you to be with me."*
 - "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me."*
 - "Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father."*
- To be Jesus' disciple, we must believe those things.
- D. That brings Jesus to one of those 'bottom line' statements in **Jn 14:12**. *Since you believe those things, "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."*

I. CHRIST'S DISCIPLES WILL DO EVEN GREATER THINGS THAN JESUS DID (14:12)

- A. That statement warrants a double-take. *Say what?!!* How is that even possible? I mean, only days before this Jesus raised Lazarus from the dead! Greater than that?!
- B. **Start with this: what did the Son of God come to earth to do?** **Jn 3:16**, “*For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.*” **Jn. 12:46**, “*I have come into the world as a light, so that no one who believes in me should stay in darkness.*” The work of Jesus was to offer eternal life, which he purchased with his blood, to whoever would believe in him. Everything Jesus said and did was focused on that purpose. The word *believe* appears about **85 times** in John. The point of Jesus’ every conversation, sermon, and miracle was **that people might believe in him and receive everlasting life**. And near the end of the book, John writes, “*These things are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name*” 20:31.
- C. So when Jesus says, “*whoever believes in me will do the works I have been doing,*” he means his disciples will do and say things that lead others to believe in Jesus for everlasting life, just as Jesus himself did. We do it through all kinds of means—godly lives and churches, preaching, sharing our faith, suffering, signs and wonders. The point isn’t that we will do greater miracles than Jesus did but that Jesus’ disciples will accomplish more than Jesus did in bringing people to believe in him. We can’t accomplish what Jesus did on the cross, but we *can* and *do* accomplish more in bringing people to faith in Christ.
- D. Notice that he doesn’t simply say this is what we *should* do. He is saying that those who believe in him “*will do the works*” Jesus had been doing. It’s like saying it will be in your blood when you’re born again. Any disciple of Jesus will naturally want to see others believe in Jesus.
- E. Then there’s that extravagant extra: “*and they will do even greater things than these.*” What’s “greater” to us and

what's "greater" to Jesus are probably two different things. **What was great to Jesus was seeing people believe in him and have life in his name.** He raised Lazarus so people would believe in him.

Up to that point people had been believing in Jesus as the Messiah based on his words and miracles, but soon he would die for our sins and be raised to life. Then he would ascend into heaven to take his sovereign place at the right hand of God. That's why Jesus added, "*because I am going to the Father.*" Jesus' disciples will do greater things than Jesus did because of Jesus' death, resurrection and ascension.

When it comes to leading people to faith in Christ, we Christians actually have advantages that Jesus didn't have!

1. We are a new race of people: born again—cleansed from our sin and alive in Christ, filled with his Spirit; we are the *immortals!*
2. Jesus reigns over all the work of the gospel from heaven. Through his Spirit he empowers and deploys these Christians all over the world. He arranges our places and relationships; he gives us words to say even under the most intense persecution, he sets within us a hope that has no fear of death, he unites us as one body so that *the whole church preaches the gospel.* He multiplies the effect of even our suffering so that people might believe in him.
3. Jesus has triumphed over all Satan's "powers and authorities" by the cross so that Satan no longer reigns unchallenged in this world. In Christ, we are stronger than the enemy.

We can do greater things than Jesus did when he was here because of what he accomplished when he died on the cross, rose again, and ascended to reign.

Plus, Jesus is, as it were, *multiplied* because he is in all Christians. Innumerable more people have come to believe in Jesus through Jesus' disciples than when Jesus preached himself. On the Day of Pentecost alone, 3000 people believed.

Simply by being born again, by having Jesus' life and Spirit, every Christian carries tremendous gospel potency wherever we go! We have this treasure in clay pots, to be sure, but that's how people see the all-surpassing power of God in our lives. [2 Cor 4:7]. *Illus.*: Did you see Alex Weidmann's testimony in the bulletin. Alex is a pastor from Switzerland. He writes,

I and my parents traveled to Rome when I was 17. At this point I was a Latin major on the academic track of Swiss High School and was looking for the one thing that was worthy to commit my life to in Rome. I saw the Arc of Triumph of the Roman Emperor Diocletian who had persecuted the Christians, gathered all Bibles in the area and had erected this arc to celebrate his victory. The words on the arc struck me in the deepest layers of my soul. "Extinct is the name of the Christians". I realized then there is greater glory and power on earth than the Greatest Empire in world history had ever had even without using force. To this power I wanted to give my life.

That's the effect of the church upon an unbeliever across 1800 years!

So it's as easy as that? Just show up? Not exactly. We are, you might say, born-again ambassadors for Christ, forgiven and filled with his Spirit. If we allow Jesus' life to work through us we lack nothing and we can do anything Jesus' wants us to do. Yet just as Jesus waited on the Father for every word and deed he did so must we. When it comes to living out the gospel there are no independent contractors. So Jesus says in **v.13-14**, "*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.*" Later in this same talk, in **15:16**, Jesus said, "*You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you **so that** you might go and bear fruit—fruit that will last—and **so that** whatever you ask in my name the Father will give you.*" Last night, our Elder Chair Raymond, said, "*I'll be interested to hear what you do with that verse because people say to me, 'Jesus said "whatever you ask," and he didn't give me what I asked for.'*" Then this

morning, getting my coffee at Einsteins, I ran into a New Testament prof from TEDS. “*What are you preaching on this morning?*” he asked. So I told him it was this text. “*How are you going to handle that,*” he asked. I was starting to get nervous! But the context makes this pretty clear. Here’s the point:

II. IN ORDER THAT WE MIGHT BEAR FRUIT IN HIS WORK JESUS WILL DO ABSOLUTELY ANYTHING WE ASK (14:13-14)

- A. To begin with, these aren’t verses about all prayers. They aren’t even about all prayers offered in Jesus’ name. Jesus is talking about our prayers to accomplish his work in us and in the world, that people might believe in him. So you pray that your car won’t break down, or that your little one will sleep without bad dreams, or that you’ll do well on a test. Maybe there is a tangential way in which those have bearing on other people believing in Jesus but that really isn’t our point in asking, and it doesn’t have to be. But this guarantee of Jesus’ ‘yes’ answer is about prayers to accomplish his work in the world of bringing people to faith in him.

Understanding this does reorient our praying. So let’s say you’re really sick and you’re praying that the Lord will make you well. Now there are two things you want—to be well and to have some influence on the faith of others. You line those two things up, like sighting down a gun barrel. *Lord, please use my situation to make me more like Christ, and to show others you can be trusted—whether through my suffering or through healing. In Jesus’ name. Amen.*

Instead of praying for what would make our lives easier pray for what would make our lives more fruitful.

- B. Often we challenge people from these verses saying, *Do you believe it?* But I think the real issue is, *Do we ask?* We ask God for a lot of things—and we’re welcome to—but here Jesus is offering us carte blanche—a blank check—to ask for anything that would move others toward believing in him for life. That begins with our own Christlikeness. Pray that God would prune and bless so that we become more like Christ, because Christ in us draws people to himself. “*When you came you brought a sense of him.*”

But then it also means we pray often as individuals and as a church for God to use us in bringing others to faith.

- C. You can't miss that Jesus says we must ask *in his name* and "*so that the Father may be glorified in the Son.*" We often hear this as a limiter. *O well, then, I guess I can't ask for this or that.* That may be true but that certainly misses the point. The point is, asking in Jesus' name is incredibly powerful. When Jesus spoke and acted lives were changed forever. Nature obeyed him. The demons obeyed him. *Death* itself obeyed him! **To ask Jesus for anything that would further his work is not a limiter. It is astonishing access to his direct hands-on work.**
- D. There's a powerful example of this in Acts 4. In the early days of the church, Peter and John were arrested. Before they were released the authorities warned them "*not to speak or teach at all in the name of Jesus.*" But they went back to the church and they all prayed. They grounded their prayers in the promises of God's sovereign power over the wicked in Scripture, and then they did just what Jesus said to do—"*Ask me anything in my name, and I will do it.*" So they prayed, "*Now, Lord, consider their threats and enable your servants to speak your word with great boldness. Stretch out your hand to heal and perform signs and wonders through the name of your holy servant Jesus.*" Do you remember what happened next? "*After they prayed, the place where they were meeting was shaken. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and spoke the word of God boldly.*"
- E. So here's the question: what proportion of your praying—of our praying as a church—is focused on asking Jesus for anything that would enable us to be fruitful? This is why the primary focus of our *First, Prayer* services the first Sunday of each month is on outreach. This is why we encourage you to use a "List of 5" to pray for the Lord to open doors for us to share or show the love of Christ. Part of your prayer time personally and in your Growth Groups should be asking Jesus for whatever would make you fruitful. Would you do that?