

Do Greater Works than HE

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[0 : 00] Let us pray. Living God, we believe that you enabled John to remember these words of the Lord Jesus and to write them down accurately for us.

In your mercy and grace, will you now help us live into the reality these words are describing as never before.

For we pray in Jesus' name. Amen. I invite you to focus with me on one of the most startling promises the Lord Jesus ever made.

John chapter 14, verse 12. Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever believes in me will do the works I do. And greater works than these shall they do because I go to the Father. He made that promise the night before going to the cross, the night before giving his life for the life of the world.

[1 : 25] He had gathered his disciples together for a meal, for the Jewish Passover meal, in an upstairs apartment somewhere in the downtown core of the city of Jerusalem.

Jesus likes to gather disciples in the downtown core of cities. It is his way of bringing salt and light to the city.

During this meal, Jesus does a number of surprising things. He takes a loaf of bread, gives thanks, breaks it, hands it to his disciples, saying, this is my body given for you, eat this in remembrance of me.

He takes a cup of wine, gives thanks, hands it to his disciples, saying, this cup is the new covenant in my blood, drink of it all of you in remembrance of me.

He then tells them what is initially devastating news. He's going away. He's returning to his father. He'd come from the father, and he was going back to the father.

[2 : 43] And then, the startling promise, truly, truly, I say to you, whoever believes in me will do the works I do, and greater works will they do because I go to the father.

Lord, we, we disciples, we ordinary broken disciples, we will do the works we see Jesus doing in the rest of the Gospel of John, turning water into wine, calling a young boy back from the brink of death, enabling a man paralyzed for 38 years to walk, feeding 5,000 people with five loaves and two fish, walking on the water in a storm-tossed sea, giving sight to a man who was blind from birth, calling Lazarus from the dead, the works I do, you will also do.

We, even more startling, and greater works than these shall you do. Greater than multiplying loaves and fish, greater than restoring sight, greater than raising the dead, we, what makes Jesus' promise even more startling is his double truly, truly, which is too flatly rendered by the NIV as I tell you the truth.

Truly, truly, is Jesus' signature introduction to his great and mighty claims. One truly would do, but no, he uses two. Truly, truly.

Literally, it is, Amen, Amen. Amen, Amen, I say to you. It's Jesus' way of saying, this is solid stuff. This is the really real.

[4 : 51] We could translate it as, rock, rock. Solid rock, solid rock. You can build your life on this. You can build your life on this. You can bet the whole farm on this.

You can bet the whole farm on this. Jesus just lays it out there, as a matter of fact, along with all those other fundamental truths, he introduces with his double, Amen, Amen, truly, truly.

Truly, truly, I say to you, you shall see the heavens open and the angels of God ascending and descending on the Son of Man. Truly, truly, I say to you, unless you are born again from above, you shall not see the kingdom of heaven.

Truly, truly, I say to you, an hour is coming and now is when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God and those who hear shall live. Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever commits sin is a slave of sin.

Truly, truly, I say to you, if anyone keeps my word, they shall never see death. Truly, truly, I say to you, before Abraham was, I am. Truly, truly, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the ground and dies, it abides alone, but if it dies, it bears much fruit.

[6 : 03] All saints, to which we can readily add our amen. Right? Truly, truly, I say to you, before Abraham was, I am.

Amen. Right? And then, in the upper room, his startling promise. Truly, truly, amen, amen, rock, rock, I say to you, whoever believes in me, will do the works that I do.

And greater works than these, will they do, because I go to the Father. What does Jesus mean by this greater works?

Does he mean more spectacular works? What can be more spectacular than feeding a huge crowd with a little lunch? What can be more spectacular than giving sight to a man who's never seen before?

What can be more spectacular than bringing a human being out of the grave? Or does Jesus mean by greater works, more works?

[7 : 14] We will do more works than he did because there will be more of us doing the works. What are the greater works?

Jesus promised. Jesus promised. Would you turn to those with whom you're worshipping and share your opinion on that question? What do you think Jesus means by the greater works?

Just chat for a moment with one another. Thank you.

Okay. Okay. Notice, notice that Jesus truly, truly is grounded in a because clause.

Because I go to the Father. It is not just a when clause. It is not just you will do greater works when I go to the Father.

[8 : 21] It's a because clause. You shall do greater works than these because I go to the Father. The reason that we can put our weight on his promise is because he goes to the Father.

The reason he says we can do greater works is because he goes to the Father. What is he getting at? Because I go to the Father.

What is he getting at? Two great facts of life. A new reality and a new resource. Because I go to the Father.

There is a new reality and a new resource. First, the new reality. Jesus going to the Father brings into being a new reality.

Jesus going to the Father alters the structures of reality. Jesus going to the Father changes the way things go together in the universe.

[9 : 30] What do I mean? Going to the Father involves a sequence of events. Going to the Father involves the crucifixion, resurrection, and ascension.

Going to the Father involves dying on a cross, rising from a grave, and being seated on the throne. Crucifixion, resurrection, ascension, all three together in sequence.

Jesus goes to the Father by going to the cross, going through the grave, and being seated on the throne.

Now, what we need to grasp is that this sequence of events alters the structures of reality. This sequence of events alters the way the universe goes together.

That is, reality after the sequence of events is different. Radically different from reality before the sequence of events.

[10 : 34] The way the universe goes together after the events is different than the way the universe went together before the events.

In what way? Well, I'm glad you asked. In the sequence of events, something happens to sin, evil, and death.

Jesus does something to sin, to evil, and to death. He does not just do something about sin, evil, and death.

In the crucifixion, resurrection, and ascension, something objective happens to the enemies of life.

Through the crucifixion, resurrection, and ascension, the stronghold of sin is broken, the authority of evil is broken, and the grip of death is broken.

At the cross, sin is forgiven. All the punishment that sin justly deserves is taken by Jesus himself onto himself.

[11 : 53] Sin, therefore, no longer owns us. At the cross, evil is faced head on. All the powers of darkness are overcome, and they have lost their status as lords in the universe.

At the cross, death is dealt a death blow. At the cross, before the resurrection, Matthew tells us, chapter 27, verses 50 to 52, And Jesus cried out again in a loud voice, and yielded up his spirit. And behold, the veil in the temple was torn in two, from top to bottom. The earth shook, the rocks were split, and the tombs were opened, and many bodies of the saints who had fallen asleep were raised.

Whoa! Wait a minute. Did you hear what Matthew is announcing? At the moment Jesus dies, the tombs were opened.

Should not Matthew have said, at the moment Jesus rises from the grave, the tombs were opened? No. No. Matthew is declaring what C.S. Lewis would later call, the deeper magic.

[13:15] When Jesus, who is life itself, hands himself over to death, death loses its grip. In the moment Jesus died, death's grip is broken, and could no longer hold on to the saints in their tombs.

The structures of reality are altered. In his death, death was defeated, not abolished, as we know, not yet, but defeated.

Some of you have heard me quote the words of the Welsh pastor, Peter Joshua, who loved to say, when death stung Jesus Christ, it stung itself to death.

Death no longer holds the place it once had in the way the universe goes together. In the empty tomb, reality is altered even more.

Jesus' resurrection is not just the return to life of one individual. Jesus' resurrection is the emergence of a whole new creation, a new atom, a new human, the new head of a new human race.

[14:23] On Easter morning, the old order started to die, and a new order of things began to emerge. In Jesus' ascension to the throne, reality was altered even more.

All the powers that sought to destroy us and him before Good Friday and Easter are now placed under his feet. They are not abolished as yet, but they are now under his feet.

They are now subservient powers. They do not like it. Some of them fight it, but from now on, it is the way it is. All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me.

Do we believe Jesus? Because Jesus has gone to the Father, the structures of reality are different than when he was on the earth.

Really different. That is why Jesus can say of John the Baptist that although there was no one greater than John in the old order, the one who was least in the kingdom, inaugurated by Jesus, is greater than John.

[15:30] Something has happened in the crucifixion, resurrection, and ascension that makes for a real before and after. It is wholly appropriate that history is demarcated B.C. and A.D., before Christ and Anno Domini, the year of our Lord.

Now, let me suggest two images or two pictures that might help at this point. One is that of a scaffolding around a large building.

Because Jesus goes to the Father, the scaffolding of reality is not what it used to be. The scaffolding of reality after he goes to the Father is not what it was before.

The scaffolding of sin, death, and evil which held us captive before has been reconfigured. Yes, the powers still are present in this scaffolding, but they are no longer assembled in the scaffolding in the way they once were.

The other image or picture is that of a web. A giant spider web, for instance. The web is made up of all kinds of strands. And some of the biggest strands are sin and evil and death.

[16:47] Because Jesus goes to the Father, the way sin, evil, and death are woven into the web are changed. Yes, they're still there, and yes, they still weave themselves into the web.

They still cause confusion and pain, but they do not have the place in the web of the universe they once had. Do you believe this?

And what does all this mean then with our understanding of Jesus' startling promise that we will be doing His works and doing even greater works?

Well, Jesus does His works before His victory. We do His works after His victory.

Jesus does His works on His way to battle. We do His works after the battle. Which is to say, every foe we encounter is a defeated foe.

[17:53] Sin is still a strong foe, but it is a defeated foe. Evil is still a strong foe, but it is a defeated foe. Death is still a strong foe, but it is a defeated foe.

Because I go to the Father. Because He does, the structures of reality are altered. And therefore, the works that Jesus did before are now able to be done in an even greater measure.

If His works of release and restoration and recreation were done in the old configuration, think of what can happen in the new configuration.

Is this making sense? There's more. I heard a no. I'll talk to you later. Gladly.

There's more. The second great fact of life resulting from Jesus going to the Father. There are now new resources in the new reality.

[19 : 08] Because Jesus goes to the Father, He can now send the Holy Spirit. John chapter 14, verse 16. I will ask the Father and He will give you another paraclete.

That is what Jesus calls the Spirit. the paraclete. Paraclete, one called in alongside. Para, alongside. Kletos, called. Paracletos, one called in alongside. Because Jesus goes to the Father, because He is now on the throne, He can send His very life to us.

And says Jesus, when the paraclete comes, Jesus comes. And says Jesus, when the paraclete comes, the Father comes. We will come and make our home with you.

He will be with you, says Jesus. In the new reality, we have this new companion, this new presence, a new guide, a new resource.

And Jesus says, He will be in you. That is the great fact to grasp. In you. The fact I, rats keep forgetting.

[20 : 10] Do you? I keep forgetting this. I get, lately, I've just been so overwhelmed by the needs of this city.

And so overwhelmed by the needs of the church. And it almost crushes me. But I keep forgetting this great in you. The Holy Spirit.

The animating force enabling Jesus to do what He does. The very life of Jesus is in you. Because He goes to the Father, the way the universe goes together has been changed and there is a new resource that now dwells in us.

Greater is He who is in you than He is in the world, John will tell us later. Lord, how can I put it? Because He is in us, everything He is in us.

Because the Holy Spirit is in us, everything the Holy Spirit is, is in us. Awesome.

[21 : 20] He is strength, He is purity, He is wisdom, He is love, He is victory, He is joy. And all His strength and purity and wisdom and love and victory and joy are in us, in you, in me.

We are strong in His strength, we are pure in His purity, we are wise in His wisdom, we are loving in His love, we are victorious in His victory, we are joyful in His joy.

Now we can say Amen to His Amen, Amen. Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever believes into me will do the works I do and greater works will they do because I go to the Father.

in His going to the Father reality is restructured. Every foe we face is a defeated foe. In His going to the Father He enables us by sending the Spirit we face every defeated foe with inexhaustible resources.

What it all means then is this, the greater works which we who believe in Him will do, the greater work is announcing and applying the benefits of His greatest work.

[22 : 37] I worked on that sentence a long time so I'm going to say it again. The greater work the greater work is announcing and applying the benefits of His greatest work.

The greater work is announcing and applying the benefits of His finished work. The greater work is announcing and applying the blessings of his victory. New Testament scholar George Beasley Murray puts it best.

He says, The greater works are the actualization of the realities to which the work of Jesus point. Namely, the bestowal of the blessings and power of the kingdom of God upon men and women with the death and resurrection of Jesus are to let loose in the world.

Let me say that one again. The greater works are the actualization of the realities to which the work of Jesus point. Namely, the bestowal of the blessings and power of the kingdom of God upon men and women which the death and resurrection of Jesus are to let loose in the world.

So, on the day of Pentecost, the day when Jesus sent the Spirit, one man, Simon Peter, a fisherman, stands up and he announces this new reality and the new resource and 3,000 people come to life in Jesus.

[24 : 04] 3,000 people in one day. That's more people that came to life in all the three and a half years of Jesus' ministry. Greater works. A few days later, Peter and John are going to the temple to

pray.

A lame man stretches out his hand begging for money. They say to him, Silver and gold we do not have, but what we do have we will give you. In the name of Jesus the Nazarene, get up and walk. And he does. Greater works. Now, if you've read the rest of the story as we have it in the book of Acts, you realize it's not all roses. As a result of Peter doing this great work, Peter's thrown into jail by the religious establishment.

First century religion couldn't handle the new reality and the new resource. No matter. Peter went on announcing the news anyway. And if you've read the rest of the story, you know that persecution soon came upon the whole church.

That's because institutions caught up in the old scaffolding in the old web began to feel threatened when they realized this scaffolding and web is being dismantled.

[25 : 14] Not to worry, as we say in Canada. The persecution only served to scatter believers beyond Jerusalem. And within months, cities and towns throughout the ancient Near East were hearing and experiencing this new reality and new resource.

The defeated foe tried to stamp out the gospel, but he only sent sparks of the gospel far and wide, letting loose even more of the power and blessing of Jesus' reign.

And so it has been for 2,000 years. Nothing or no one is able to rebuild the structures of reality Jesus dismantled in his death, resurrection, and ascension.

Sin, evil, and death keep trying, but they keep losing. Like in Latin America today. You might know that in Latin America today, 3,000 people an hour are coming to confess Jesus as Lord.

That's one new Pentecost every hour. That's 500,000 since we met last Sunday. Greater works.

[26 : 30] William Carey goes to India and the gospel is let loose. Slowly but surely, life starts to change for thousands of people. People begin to stop the practices of widow burning, leper burning, killing the sick.

The caste system begins to crumble and people are freed from the oppression of reincarnation and karma. Greater works. Yes, sin, evil, and death are still at work, but they keep losing.

A missionary family goes to Fukau, China. The father and mother are killed in a riot. Their four children escape, running in different directions. They finally meet up again, decide that they will get the best education they can possibly get, and return to China to serve those who killed their parents.

Greater works. The only daughter of an Australian widow is killed in that same riot. She says to her friends, since I have no other daughters to give to the mission work, I will go myself, and she sets up a school for those who killed her daughter.

Greater works. German missionaries go to India. Their only daughter contracts leprosy and dies, and they respond by setting up the finest leprosy home in the world.

[27 : 46] Greater works. Many of us lament the current state of things in our part of the world. We need to listen to Jesus again.

Because I go to the Father. Because He does, it does not have to be this way. The powers of sin and evil and death do not have the last word in our part of the world.

Justice does not have to rule. Internet pornography does not have to rule. Drug addiction does not have to rule. Violence does not have to rule.

Terrorism does not have to rule. They are defeated foes. They cannot stand against the invasion of the gospel through the paraclete Jesus sets captives free.

So what do we do in this city and the other cities represented in the room today? We do three things. One, we lean into this new reality.

[28 : 49] We embrace the fact that the structures of reality have been altered. We say with the New Testament, the stronghold of sin is broken. The authority of evil is broken.

The grip of death is broken. We lean into this reality. Second, we receive the new resources. We receive the paraclete. We welcome the Holy Spirit to be with us and in us.

And third, we throw our weight on Jesus' startling promise. We bank on His ability to fulfill this startling promise in the city.

Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever believes in me will do the works I do and greater works than these will he do because he goes to the Father.

Amen.