

Whatever You Ask

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[0 : 0 0] All right, well, as we open up the Word of God this morning, our message is kind of a part two to last Sunday's message. Last Sunday, we finally came to these words of Jesus that we find in John chapter 14, verse 12. He said, 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. And so last Sunday, we acknowledged the plain sense of these words. They seem to say that whoever believes in Jesus will perform miracles like he did. And we acknowledge that this kind of makes us uncomfortable, many of us, because many of us who believe in Jesus have never performed a miracle. So we looked at various ways that Christians have tried to interpret these words.

Generally, our Pentecostal brothers and sisters will point to this verse and say that performing miracles is something that every Christian can and should do, so long as we have the faith and believe.

We can expect to perform miracles like Jesus did. And last Sunday, I pointed us to what Paul said in 1 Corinthians 12, verse 29, where he said, do all work miracles? Implied answer, no.

So most of us do not accept the Pentecostal interpretation. Then we considered how some have tried to define the works of Jesus very broadly, to include all sorts of things that Jesus did, not just the miracles. According to this view, Jesus is not saying that every believer will do miracles, but that every believer will do some kind of the works that Jesus has been doing. And for most of us, it turns out that that's the non-miraculous works of Jesus. And I suggested that defining works this way doesn't work, because Jesus has just appealed to his works in the verse before as the evidence that he is in the Father and that the Father is in him. It has to at least include his miracles. And in case there's any doubt about this, we could fast forward in the conversation this night of Jesus' betrayal, a little farther forward to John chapter 15, verse 24. And Jesus will say this later to his disciples.

He'll say, if I had not done among them, that's the people of the world, the works that no one else did, they would not be guilty of sin. As it is, they have seen, and yet they have hated both me and my Father.

[2 : 4 9] Notice how Jesus describes the works that he's been doing. He says that they are the works that no one else has been doing. The works no one else did. They're not just the works of compassion or service.

they're not just the works of calling people to faith and to repent like John the Baptist did. They're the works that nobody else has been doing, that nobody else could do. The supernatural miracles brought about by the power of God. And of course, yes, the disciples did share in doing some of those works as Jesus gave them authority and power to do it.

So, the works of Jesus must include his miracles. Those are the things that no one else has done in the lifetime of these people. And so, I suggested last Sunday that there's another way to understand this passage. And it goes like this. Very truly, I tell you here in the room with me this evening, Jesus speaking to his disciples, his apostles, whoever of you believes in me will do the works I have been doing, and they will do even greater things than these, because I'm going to the Father.

I suggested that Jesus was not giving a timeless principle for every believer throughout the ages, but that Jesus was making a statement about what the 11 apostles there in the room could expect once he was gone. They could expect that if they believed in him, they too would do the works that Jesus had been doing. Supernaturally enabled miracles like Jesus did. And then we looked at one of those miracles in the book of Acts, the healing of the man who had been born lame at the gate called Beautiful.

And I suggested that the book of Acts really tells the story of how these 11 men in the room with Jesus this night came to do the works that Jesus has been doing, just as he said they would. Now, all of this kind of raised some big questions. For starters, what did Jesus mean when he said that they would do even greater works than Jesus did? Last Sunday, I said we'd chat about that this Sunday, but after my sermon ballooned to over 45 minutes long, I decided to chop that section out completely and put it on a piece of paper on a handout that you can grab off the back table on your way out if that's of interest to you. My short answer is, I do not know. There are at least three possibilities, and I would guess that it probably has something to do with the fact that Jesus is going to the Father. It seems that this is going to bring about a change, a significant change in how this ministry will look for the apostles when he's gone, which brings us to these next two verses. Jesus says to the men in the room,

[5 : 55] These verses are ones that we often point to as our assurance that God will answer our prayers.

But I wonder, have we been too quick to just take these words and apply them to ourselves? Have we considered where these words fit in the conversation that night? As I suggested last Sunday, Jesus is telling these 11 men in the room, the apostles, that if they believe in him, they will do the works that he has been doing. Miracles.

Does he now change the subject completely to just prayer in general? Or is it possible that Jesus is still talking about the same thing? If you believe in me, you, my apostles, will do the works I have been doing. That's miracles. Because I am going to the Father, and here's how it will work.

From then on, whatever you ask in my name, I will do it for you, so that the Father may be glorified in the Son.

So often we just kind of take these two verses about prayer and just kind of rip them right off the page, and just that's all we look at. But there's a context here. There's a flow. If you just kind of read it all the way through in one go, do you hear that?

[7 : 43] 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, and I will do whatever you ask in my name, so that the Father may be glorified in the Son.

I want to suggest the possibility that what Jesus is saying here is that the disciples will do the works that Jesus has been doing, miracles, by asking in Jesus' name.

Now, this might still be a promise of answered prayer that we can all claim, but before we get to that, we have to first consider what Jesus is saying to these 11 men sitting there in the room with him.

It seems, from the context, that this promise of answered prayer has to do with them doing the works that Jesus has been doing.

And maybe at this point we kind of need to take a step back and just consider this whole conversation between Jesus and his disciples on the night of his betrayal. They've just had the Last Supper.

[8 : 57] They're having this conversation. They're going to end up out at the Garden of Gethsemane this very night. And there are going to be lots of things that Jesus says to them that are basically timeless principles for every believer.

For example, in the next chapter, Jesus will give this analogy of the vine and the branches. I am the vine. You are the branches. Remain in me. And this is basically a timeless principle for every believer.

We need to remain in Christ. We need to stay connected to him. He is the vine. We are the branches. And we know this because John, later in his letter, will encourage all believers to do the same thing.

In 1 John 2, verse 27, he'll say, Remain in him. And there are lots of things like this that Jesus will say to the eleven this night that directly apply to us, just like this.

He encourages them to love each other, to serve one another. All of these things are reiterated throughout the New Testament that all believers, that we should be doing this. We should be doing these things.

[10 : 08] But then we have to acknowledge in a few places in this conversation that there are some things Jesus said that are bound to these particular eleven men in the room with Jesus.

For example, at the end of chapter 15, Jesus warns the disciples about what's coming, not for every believer, but just for them. He says, And you also must testify, for you have been with me from the beginning.

All this I told you so that you will not fall away. They will put you out of the synagogue. In fact, the time is coming when anyone who kills you will think they're offering a service to God.

These are obviously words for the eleven there that night and not for all of us. It's the eleven apostles who have been there with Jesus from the beginning of his ministry. And it's the eleven apostles who will be excommunicated, kicked out of the synagogues in the days ahead.

So coming back to these words that we're looking at, John 14, 13, let's first think about what these words mean to the apostles, to the disciples there in the room with Jesus.

[11 : 26] Jesus says to them, 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.

You know, it kind of sounds like Jesus is giving them a blank check, doesn't it? Whatever you ask in my name, I will do. And that word whatever, I mean, that's a strong word.

It's not just, well, the things that you ask in my name. No, it's whatever. In fact, the old King James translation even adds that extra oomph. What so ever you ask in my name, I will do it.

So Jesus seems to be giving them a blank check, a special calling card, a special kind of mobile prayer plan. He's giving them the privilege of being able to call upon him to do anything and the assurance that he will do it.

But the blank check has a few security features, we'll call them. It has a few safeguards that ensure that it will be used appropriately.

[12 : 41] They can write whatsoever they want in the blank of that check. But here's the catch. What they write has to be in the name of Jesus.

And it has to be so that the Father may be glorified in the Son. I will do whatever you ask in my name, says Jesus, and so that the Father may be glorified in the Son.

Those are the safeguards, like the security features. They have freedom to call upon Jesus to do things. In the context here, to do miracles.

But what they ask, it has to be in Jesus' name. which means for the sake of the name of Jesus that they ask it.

So, I mean, think about this. Is Peter going to be praying and asking for a new top-of-the-line yacht to go sailing with his buddies on the Sea of Galilee? Would that be for Jesus' sake or would that be for Peter's sake?

[13 : 49] It's almost like it's embedded in the SIM card of this mobile prayer plan. For it to work, they have to be asking for something that would further the name, the mission, the work, the purpose of Jesus.

And they've had three years with Jesus to learn from him about what those kinds of things would be. So that's the first safeguard to this blank check being given to the apostles of Jesus.

They can ask whatsoever, but they must ask in Jesus' name for the sake of Jesus' name. The second safeguard is this.

Jesus tells them that he will do whatever they ask in his name so that the Father may be glorified in the Son.

So Jesus is telling them the purpose of this blank check. Yeah, you can ask whatsoever, but the purpose of this, me granting this request, it's to bring glory to God, the Father.

[14 : 59] And for a moment we can just notice where Jesus fits into this whole discussion. Notice that it's Jesus, he's the one answering the prayers. Look at that verse 14.

You may ask me for anything in my name and I will do it. So Jesus is deeply involved in this transaction. They ask in prayer and Jesus delivers the things asked for and glory comes to God as Jesus does this.

So that's the second safeguard. They're being given this sacred and special gift to call on God to have Jesus himself grant whatsoever they ask.

But whatsoever they ask will have to be something that brings glory to God. They'll not be able to ask for, you know, the ability to walk across water just because I'm feeling too lazy to walk around the lake.

They won't be able to ask God to do a miracle just so that they can show people that I'm awesome, I've got special powers. They will not receive what they ask for if the things that they ask for are evil or sinful or if they're just asking to scratch the itch of their own greed or lust or covetousness or revenge.

[16 : 21] The answer will be no because those things don't bring glory to God and the whole purpose of this privilege that Jesus extends is to bring glory to God and so whatever they ask it's got to fit with that.

So now we're going to go to the book of Acts and we're going to see how this unfolded in real history. If you have your Bible you can flip over to Acts chapter 3 and we did read this passage last Sunday but we're going to read it again because it tells the story of how Peter and John did this very thing.

How Peter performed a miracle did one of the works that Jesus did and how he did it. Let me read this for you it won't be on the screen you'll just have to listen.

One day Peter and John were going up to the temple at the time of prayer at 3 in the afternoon. Now a man who was lame from birth was being carried to the temple gate called Beautiful where he was put every day to beg from those going into the temple courts.

When he saw Peter and John about to enter he asked them for money. Peter looked straight at him as did John. Then Peter said look at us.

[17 : 46] So the man gave them his attention expecting to get something from them. Then Peter said silver or gold I do not have but what I do have I give you.

In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth walk. Taking him by the right hand he helped him up and instantly the man's feet and ankles became strong.

The man jumped to his feet and began to walk. Then he went with them into the temple courts walking and jumping and praising God. When all the people saw him walking and praising God they recognized him as the same man who used to sit begging at the temple gate called Beautiful and they were filled with wonder and amazement at what had happened to him.

While the man held on to Peter and John all the people were astonished and came running to them in the place called Solomon's Colonnade. When Peter saw this he said to them fellow Israelites why does this surprise you?

Why do you stare at us as if by our own power or godliness we had made this man walk? The God of Abraham Isaac and Jacob the God of our fathers has glorified his servant Jesus.

[19 : 09] You handed Jesus over to be killed and you disowned him before Pilate though he had decided to let him go. You disowned the holy and righteous one and asked that a murderer be released to you.

You killed the author of life but God raised him from the dead. We are witnesses of this. By faith in the name of Jesus this man whom you see and know was made strong.

It's Jesus name and faith that comes through him that has completely healed him as you can all see. I love this story. Peter one of the eleven apostles performs a miracle.

He does one of the works that Jesus had been doing and notice how he does it. He calls on the name of Jesus to heal this lame man.

He says in the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth walk. And later on we didn't see this but Peter will tell the Sanhedrin the reason he did this was just as an act of kindness just like Jesus had done for so many people who he healed.

[20 : 26] Peter calls on the name of Jesus to heal this lame man and Jesus answers right on the spot by healing him. And what was the result?

Did it bring glory to God? Well verse eight tells us that the man was praising God. he was glorifying God. And then when all the attention of all the witnesses came to Peter, what did Peter do?

He said that it was God that did the miracle and he did it to glorify Jesus. Peter denied healing this man by his own power.

He gave all the credit, all the glory to Jesus Christ of Nazareth. He proclaimed Christ to all the people there. that he was crucified, that he rose from the dead, that he was now in heaven, and that it's by his name which means his authority, his power, that this man stands before you healed, is what he preached to the Sanhedrin the next day.

So this right here, it's an example of how John chapter 14 verse 13 and 14 was fulfilled. It's an example of the blank check that was given to the apostles, it's an example of it being cached, and glory coming to the Father and to the Son as a result.

[21 : 53] Now I've been kind of tiptoeing around this until now, but probably we're all still wondering, okay, so that's how Jesus answered the prayers of the apostles to do the miraculous works that they did in Acts, but what about my prayers?

What about all of our prayers? I mean, 2,000 years later, is Jesus giving us assurance of answered prayer here? Or is that assurance just for the apostles, for the special work that they're doing?

This is a really important question, and I want to start by saying this. I think that we would be wise to acknowledge that there is a difference between the apostles and the rest of us.

Just as Paul said in 1 Corinthians 12, 29, he said, are all apostles? Implied answer, no. Notice how the apostle Peter, in the story we just heard, he called in the name of Jesus, and Jesus answered with a miracle right on the spot.

God. The sense we get from that story, as well as other places in the New Testament, is that this kind of prayer for a miracle answer was normal for the apostles.

[23 : 15] They asked in the name of Jesus for the glory of God, and it seems Jesus just answered right away, right there on the spot. God. In fact, the ability to perform miracles was a mark of a true apostle.

Paul said this in his letter to the Corinthians, 2 Corinthians 12.12. He said, I persevered in demonstrating among you the marks of a true apostle, including signs, wonders, and miracles.

So there was a special privilege in prayer given to the apostles for the works that they had to do. But doing miracles is not the only thing that the apostles were urged to pray for.

Later on in the evening, Jesus will be talking to his disciples about some other things, how they will weep when he's crucified, how they will rejoice when they see him again raised from the dead.

He's comforting them, and he says this to them, very truly I tell you, my father will give you whatever you ask in my name.

[24 : 30] Ask, and you will receive, and your joy will be complete. Here, Jesus isn't talking about asking for miracles.

He just seems to give the same sort of blank check and the assurance of answered prayer in general. And for what purpose? So that your joy may be complete.

So that your happiness will be full. We're so used to thinking about how our prayers need to bring glory to God and what we ask for, but actually they're also so that we can have joy in God.

As we read carefully through all the passages about prayer in the New Testament, it becomes clear that we, all of us who are not apostles, actually have the same kind of assurance that Jesus gave to the eleven that night, that yes, Jesus will answer and grant our requests, whatever we ask, so long as we ask with those few safeguards in mind, so long as we ask for the sake of Jesus' name and for the glory of God, so long as we ask according to what God wills, 1 John 5, 14, so long as we're living in obedience to God's commands and doing the things that please him, 1 John 3, 22, we can ask for whatever and the answer is yes.

Remember what Jesus taught not just the apostles but the crowds, like everybody, he told them, ask and it will be given to you, seek and you will find, knock and the door will be open to you.

[26 : 18] He encouraged us not to think of God as stingy and begrudging, but as our loving heavenly father who delights to give us good gifts like a father does his children.

He taught all his disciples to pray, to seek the glory of God, hallowed be thy name. He taught all of his disciples to ask for the things that they need each day. Give us this day our daily bread.

And as the church grew and spread over the world, the apostles were there, they were teaching, they were encouraging believers everywhere to pray for the same things with that same sort of assurance.

Pray continually, said Paul. He said, I encourage the men in the church to lift up holy hands in prayer. Paul urged the people in Timothy's church to make requests, make prayers, all kinds of petitions to God for everybody.

James encouraged believers, if you lack wisdom, ask God. And if you ask believing, he'll give it to you generously. Also in James, is any of you in trouble?

[27 : 37] Let him pray, said James. and one of my favorites, 1 John 3 22. Dear friends, if our hearts do not condemn us, we have confidence before God and receive from him anything we ask, because we keep his commands and do what pleases him.

As I skim through the New Testament again this week, I was just kind of blown away by how many times we are all urged to pray, to ask God for things.

And so, I want to tell you this morning that prayer is not just the privilege of the apostles only. It's the privilege of every believer, all who belong to Jesus.

Now that said, the answers to our prayers might not always be on the spot, right away, where it seems like the apostles, it was, as they did the miracles, as they did the works God gave them to do.

And I'll say too that we shouldn't try to take Jesus' assurance, this promise to answer our prayers, to do whatever we ask, and turn it into a formula.

[28 : 56] There is a bit of a temptation to do that, but God is not a vending machine. There are times when God's answer is yes, but not yet.

The timing is not right. Or yes, that is my will, but not in this way. I have something even better in store.

And so we need to keep those things in mind as we seek to trust this promise of Jesus to answer our prayers and to give us the things we ask for.

So I want to just end by encouraging each one of you, just as I was encouraged this week, it can be so easy to slip into despair over the things that happen to us in our lives, or as we look out into our world, to slip into despair.

God and to his son, Jesus. Ask and it will be given to you.

[30 : 07] Seek and you will find. Knock and the door will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives, the one who seeks finds, and to the one who knocks, the door will be opened.

Let's pray. Father in heaven, thank you so much for this wide open invitation to pray and for the reminder that you are there listening, taking everything that we ask for and say to heart, and we thank you that you are a loving heavenly father and that your answer to us is yes when we ask in the ways that you have told us to.

I pray that we would. Each person here, I pray that we would ask you for things, that we wouldn't try to just do this life all by ourselves, on our own. There are troubles in this life, in this world, and you have resources for us.

You have things for us to help us through. And so I pray that we would ask for the glory of your son. Amen.