

# LIVING WATERS NEWSLETTER

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OCTOBER 2015

## DOING GREATER WORKS THAN JESUS

The words of Jesus in John 14:12: "I say to you, he who believes in me, the works that I do shall he do also, and greater works than these shall he do because I go to my Father" has been a questionable passage to many commentators and most Christians. Most commentaries suggest that because Jesus' ministry was limited to the Jews and confined to Palestine, after his death, resurrection and ascension the church would take the gospel into the whole world and to all people, thus doing the works he did and greater works by going into all the world. Most commenters limit this verse to the Apostles. An example of this is *Barnes Notes on the New Testament*: "Interpreters have been at a loss in what way to understand this. The most probable meaning of the passage is: The word 'greater' cannot refer to the miracles themselves, for the work of the apostles did not exceed those of Jesus in power, yet they were greater in their effects. Their works were witnessed by many nations, and the effect of their miracles and preaching was that thousands from among the Jews and Gentiles were converted to the Christian faith." The problem with these interpretations is: Jesus said "he who believes in me" not just the Apostles, and the "works" must refer to more than simply converting more people.

The question, then, is how can this be true of all "who believe"? To answer this question we must understand that John makes a distinction between Jesus' "works" and the performances of his "signs". We generally think of the "works" Jesus says all who believe in him will do as referring to his miracles. Note that John refers to all the miracles of Jesus as "signs" and mentions his "works" many times as something different from his "miracles." This is peculiar to the Gospel of John. None of the other writers designate the miracles of Jesus as signs. Only Matthew uses the word "works" and is used once in a question from John the Baptist when he heard of the "works" of Jesus and questioned if Jesus was the "coming one." To answer John's question he referred to his miracles (Matt. 11:2-5). Jesus did not say the believers would do the same and greater "signs" than he did, but they would do the same and greater "works" than he did. John 20:30, 31 tells us the purpose to his signs: "Many other signs therefore Jesus also performed in the presence of his disciples, which are not written in this book, but these have been written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the son of God; and that believing you may have life in his name." This being true Jesus does not expect believers to do these and greater signs. William Hendriksen in his *New Testament Commentary* states that Jesus' "signs, a work of power in the physical realm illustrates a principle that is operative in the spiritual realm; that which takes place in the sphere of creation points away from itself to the sphere of redemption." The signs of Jesus, then, were more than just accommodating situations or persons witnessing them. Howard Marshall in his work *New Testament Theology* agrees with this by saying: "Signs were actions by Jesus that accomplished what is normally impossible to human beings, and as such they were indicators that God was working through him in the kind of way associated with outstanding servants of God in past history. At the same time, the actions are

all capable of bearing symbolical significance as they point to what God can accomplish on a spiritual level." John records six signs, or miracles performed by Jesus, all having a spiritual significance beginning with his first *sign*, that of changing water into wine at the wedding in Cana of Galilee (2:1-11). Jesus illustrated that he had not come to put new wine in old wineskins, so here is the implication that the old ways of Israel are being superceded by the wine of the new covenant. John says the second *sign* Jesus performed when he came out of Judea into Galilee was the healing of the nobleman's son (4:44-54). The father was perhaps a distance of sixteen miles away from his son, and he wanted Jesus to "come down and heal him" (ver.47), but Jesus heals him not in the way he is asked. God does not answer our prayers in the exact manner in which we ask. The *sign* (6:14, 26, 30) of feeding the five thousand by the multiplication of the loaves reminds us of Christ the bread of life (6:35). The *sign* (9:16) of the opening the eyes of the man born blind (chap. 9) shows that Jesus is "the light of the world" (5). The last *sign* (11:47; 12:18) recorded by John is the raising of Lazarus (11:1-44) shows Jesus as the giver of both physical and spiritual life. Yet, "though he performed many signs before them (the Jews), they were not believing in him" (12:37).

We turn now to the works Jesus did, "works that all who believe are to do and greater works." In the beginning of his ministry Jesus said "My food is to do the will of Him who sent me, and to *accomplish* His work" (John 4:34). In the course of his ministry he said "The witness I have is greater than that of John; for the works which the Father has given me to *accomplish*, the very works that I do, bear witness of me that the Father sent me" (John 5:36). At the close of his ministry he prayed and said "I glorified You on earth having *accomplished* the work which You gave me to do" (John 17:4). Specifically what was the work God gave Jesus to do which he *accomplished*? Whatever it was the redemption of man had to be a factor because the purpose God had when He created man was marred and side-tracked by sin and death making it impossible for man to fulfill God's purpose. It is easy to say that the purpose of God in sending Jesus into the world was simply to redeem man; but God had a purpose for man before he needed to be redeemed. Redemption, then, was necessary before God could fulfill His purpose in creating man. Therefore, the work Jesus accomplished was to make it possible for God to complete the work man was created to do. This purpose is stated in Genesis 1:26-28. Briefly stated man was created to reflect the image of God in His creation, and be in control of the earth. This is verified by the Apostle Paul in Ephesians 3:8-11: "To me grace was given...to bring to light what is the administration of the mystery which for ages has been hidden in God, who created all things; in order that the manifold wisdom of God might *now* be known through the church to the rulers and the authorities in the heavenly places. This was in accordance with the eternal purpose which He carried out in Christ Jesus our Lord." Note again Genesis one: "the image of God"... Adam was to represent God on the earth... "be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth"...his descendants were to do that which Adam was created to do. Adam lost it, but God brought

another “Adam” into the world, the last Adam and the second man. (I Cor. 15:45). Christ, being the last Adam, means there will never be another one, but being the second man, there will be many men to follow who will represent God on the earth. God’s eternal purpose could not be achieved by sinful man. For it to be realized there had to be a sinless man to make it so. Thus: “He made Him who knew no sin to be sin on our behalf, that we might become the righteousness of God in him” (II Cor. 5:21). Believers, then, were predestined to be conformed to the image of His son (Rom. 8:29).

Jesus’ works were to show God had a man in His image on the earth to do what Adam failed to do. Therefore Jesus represented the Father and did His work while he was upon the earth. But he ascended to the Father. Who would now represent God and continue His work on earth that Christ began? Here we begin to see the work believers are to do. It was through the work of Christ that God created a new man to represent Him. He “broke down the barrier of the dividing wall that in himself he might make the two (Jew and Gentile) into one new man, thus establishing peace” (Eph. 2:14, 15). Believers as the body of Christ, continues the work he “began to do” (Acts 1:1). In his physical absence, the believer stands on the earth in his place: “Therefore we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God were entreating through us, we beg you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God “ (II Cor. 5:20). Instead of Christ being here in the body as he was for thirty three years, he is now here by the Holy Spirit dwelling in the believer. This means the works of the believers are the same and greater works of Christ because God now, instead of having one man on the earth to represent Him, has “many sons” (Heb. 2:10).

When “the first man, Adam” (I Cor. 15:45) was created there were three works he was commissioned to do: 1. To be the image of God on the earth; 2. Be fruitful and fill the earth; and 3. Subdue the earth and rule over it. Because of the first Adam’s sin it is only in the “last Adam” (I Cor. 15:45) and thus believers that these works could be accomplished. 1. Jesus was “the image of the invisible God” (II Cor. 4:4; Col. 1:15) and “the exact representation of His nature” (Heb. 1:3). The believer is “being transformed into the same image” of Christ (II Cor. 3:18). The believer “is being renewed to the knowledge according to the image of the One who created him” (Col. 3:10). God has “predestined them to be conformed to the image of His son” (Rom. 8:29). 2. As the first Adam was to “be fruitful and fill the earth with descendants after his likeness, but because of sin they became a race who were “natural,” the last Adam is filling earth with a race that is “spiritual” (see I Cor. 2:14, 15). The believers, serving as Christ’s ambassadors (II Cor. 5:20), are “bringing many sons into glory” (Heb. 2:10), thus fulfilling the Great Commission (Matt. 28:18-20). 3. The first Adam was to rule over God’s creation (Gen. 1:26, 28). He sinned and the whole “creation was subjected to vanity and corruption” (Rom. 8:20, 21). It is to the last Adam that “all things have been subjected to him” and “he must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet. The last enemy that will be abolished is death” (I Cor. 15:25-27).

With reference to the reign of Christ being one of his “works” how does the believer do greater works in respect to his reign? To answer this we must understand that to “reign” necessitates a “kingdom.” “When questioned by the Pharisees as to when the kingdom of God was coming...he answered them ‘the kingdom of God is in your midst’” (Luke 17:20, 21). They did not see that

when Jesus ministered among them (in their midst) that the kingdom was there. Further, Jesus told them “If I cast out demons by the Spirit of God, then the kingdom of God has come upon you” (Matt. 12:28; Luke 11:20). Also when he sent the seventy out, they were told “to heal those who are sick, and say to them, ‘the kingdom of God has come near you’” (Luke 10:9). This means that where and whenever Jesus or his disciple ministered the kingdom was there. By their ministry they were displaying the reign of God. In this way he has been “ruling in the midst of his enemies” (Psalm 110:2). This is a greater work believers are doing because they are not limited to one location as Jesus was, rather their ministry covers the entire world. Jesus said “I have other sheep, which are not of this fold; I must bring them also, and they will hear my voice; and they will become one flock and one shepherd” (John 10:16). When he spoke of “this fold” he was referring to Jewish disciples, and “other sheep” must be referring to the Gentiles. Notice he said “I must bring them” but his earthly ministry was, as stated above, not to Gentiles but to the Jews. In John 12:21 the Greeks came to Philip asking to see Jesus and his response was that he spoke of his coming decease, showing that only a crucified and glorified Jesus could be the object of Gentile acceptance. This is further seen in John 11:51, 52 when Caiaphas “prophesied that Jesus would die for the nation and not for the nation only but in order that he might gather together into one the children of God who were scattered abroad.” Because of the limitations of his ministry, to the Jew only, none of these things could happen. However after his resurrection and ascension Jesus, by sending the Spirit would accomplish this through believers. This is the believer doing his works and greater works because he went to the Father.

When Jesus said the believer would do his works and greater works, he added “because I go to the Father.” Doing these works was contingent upon his ascension. He said in John 16:7: “If I do not go away, the Helper shall not come to you, but if I go, I will send Him to you.” Doing his works, and greater works, can only be done by the power of the Spirit. A comment on these verses by George Eldon Ladd in *A Theology Of The New Testament* is worth our consideration: “The Spirit will empower believers. At first glance it is amazing that Jesus said the disciples would be better off after he had left them (16:7). But people are able to do greater exploits for God when the Holy spirit has come and indwelt them than they could do with Jesus’ bodily presence in their midst; for the coming of the spirit meant the infusion of a new divine power. In this light we are to understand the saying that the believers would perform greater works than he did “because I go to the Father” (14:12). These greater works are surely in the spiritual realm and not in the physical realm. No one can perform a physical work greater than raising the dead to life as Jesus did Lazarus, even when he had been dead four days. The “greater works” consist of the transformation of lives wrought by the Holy Spirit as a result of the preaching of the gospel, included in the ministry of the forgiveness of sins. It is noteworthy that John attributes nothing of the ecstatic or marvelous to the coming of the Spirit. His work was primarily to exalt Jesus and interpret his work of salvation.”

The ministry of Jesus and believers was and is to prepare for the time when “the kingdom of this world will become the kingdom of our Lord, and His Christ and he will reign forever...with his saints upon the earth” (Rev. 11:15; 5:10; II Tim. 2:12). Luke in Acts 1:1 stated that the first account he composed (the gospel of Luke) was “about all that Jesus began both to do and teach.” Believers continue doing his works and greater works.