

**Reading:** John 14v1-14

**Theme:** Greater works!

There are programmes on TV showing how people become treasure hunters as they buy up abandoned storage units and the contents that are in them. Sometimes it is just a load of junk, the excitement is always there as there could be something valuable, but they do not find out until they buy, then open the storage unit and go through its contents. John's gospel may seem at times like such a storage unit, but it is well worth opening it up to see its many precious promises and sayings which are so comforting as well as challenging to people like us. Most of the sayings are amazingly comforting; some are very profound and not easy to grasp and understand, yet they are still very precious. John 14 is full of comfort and encouragement - we have already noted 2 areas of comfort and encouragement for believers. We have seen 1. Heaven is secure (v2-3) and 2. The way to heaven is certain and sure (v4-11).

Now we have the 3<sup>rd</sup> area of encouragement and comfort - **Christ's work will not stop after His departure (v12-14)**. This is the area I want to start looking at today, but only look at v12. The disciples could have wondered if the work they were involved in would continue when Jesus departed and left them - whether or not they thought of this in terms of His death or whatever. Their concern would be how would they cope? How would the work go on? For He had done so much, so many great things, had sent them out and they'd been enabled to do so much. Yet if He was not around what would happen?

Here Jesus gently and tenderly spoke to encourage them in their fainthearted condition, to show that His work and working would go on through them in spite of His absence - His physical absence. In v12-14 there are 2 precious promises and they are not the easiest of promises to grasp or understand and are often a source of controversy, but because they are precious promises, we must try to understand what they are teaching and apply such to our lives and church. We will look at each promise in turn and the 1<sup>st</sup> is:

### **1. The greater things done by Christians.** (v12)

Jesus speaks, announces these promises with solemn words that emphasise the seriousness. KJV says “*Verily, verily*”; NIV “*I tell you the truth*” - Jesus is announcing something important in v12-14 which His disciples and we are to take notice of as He starts off with ‘*Amen, Amen*’. In this first promise, Jesus says that those who believe in Him will not only do as He did, but do even greater things than He did! These “greater things” (*literal translation*) would be done not in spite of Him being with the Father, but **because** of that fact. Let’s pause a moment, stand back and look at this promise. On the surface it can appear to say that Christians are to be involved in all sorts of miracles, even greater than those we read of carried out by the Lord Jesus. Does it mean we should expect healings, raising people from the dead, casting out of demons and miracles to be common place in the church! Some teach such, even saying if it is not so with our life or church, then they must question the reality of your experience with God and of the life of the church!

Is that what Jesus is really saying? Did the apostles take it as such? Does the NT teach such? Personally, I feel Jesus did not

teach such, nor does the NT teach such. Yes, the apostles were granted great power and great miracles were carried out by them. Yet none of them walked on water, or raised someone from the dead after 4 days, fed 5000 with a few loaves of bread and a few fish, nor is there record of any them calming a storm by their words!

Sadly, some also misinterpret and, I feel, twist Jesus words here and say “*greater things*” means that some people - they call them “saints”, have done so much and therefore they can be prayed to or their virtue can be used on someone else’s behalf to save them, restore them! In contrast to that, I hope the truth is obvious that “greater works or things” excludes reference to any part of the actual salvation work of the Lord Jesus and His atonement. Words from the old hymn says this clearly - “*There was **no other** good enough to pay the price of sin. **He only** could unlock the gates of heaven and let us in.*” Let’s briefly try to see what the Lord is saying here as He says that these greater things will be carried out by those believe in Him:

**A. It is limited** to those who have saving faith in the Lord Jesus as their personal Saviour. It is not that His name can be invoked as some magical incantation, but these greater things will be done by those who believe e.g. Acts 19:13ff 7 sons of Sceva try and cast out demons from a man but were turned on and fiercely attacked. The Lord Jesus emphasises that faith in Him is essential. This applies first and foremost to the apostles, this promise also embraces all believers, us too. Now we note:

**B. Their timing** - such greater things are possible because and only because Jesus is going to the Father. This is an important clue, pointer as to the meaning of the greater things and works. Jesus had mentioned ‘greater things’ back in 5:20 – the context there are the things the Father will show the Son and the Son reveal to His disciples. These greater things are displays of life-giving power, of resurrection and judgement (5:17, 24-26). The greater things are life giving power in salvation primarily and then at the last day (v28ff). Such life-giving power is related, of necessity, to the Son’s death, resurrection and exaltation. If Jesus had not died, risen and been exalted, there would be no new life, no hope of eternal life or the resurrection and no greater things to show the disciples for them to do.

The Lord Jesus would grant that His disciples would do greater things because He was going to the Father. Only then would believers be able to do these greater things. We know that after Jesus had ascended to the Father, the disciples waited at Jerusalem until they were endued with power from on high - the coming of the Holy Spirit in His fullness on the day of Pentecost.

Then the church did greater things. Many emphasise the tongues, the miracles, but I do not feel they are the greater things, as important as they may appear. If the greater things the Lord Jesus spoke of in 5:20 were referring to the things of salvation - conversion and new life given to all who believe on Him, the subsequent hope of eternal life and the resurrection to life, then why do people insist on downgrading these “*greater things*” to just miracles, signs and wonders! What is greater than the salvation of a soul? Yes, the apostles

did many miracles, but their aim was not for the spectacular alone, but to proclaim the gospel and to see people saved. Now see:

### **C. The reason the greater things are possible.**

After Jesus went to the Father, the Holy Spirit came in His fullness, sent by the Father and the Son - a new age, dispensation began (*I use those words carefully*), - the gospel age, NT times. This time was so different from OT times and age. There in OT things were seen through rites, rituals, symbols- as in such times the Holy Spirit hadn't come in His fullness, then the covenant people of God were mainly of the Jewish nation, for God had spoken in various ways at different times, through prophets to the Jewish people.

Even in Jesus' human lifetime, His words and teachings were veiled, hidden, mysterious to His closest followers who were still in OT age. They grasped so little of what He taught and showed them. The things Jesus did, could not fully accomplish their true end until after His death, resurrection and glorification at the Father's right hand. **Only then** could they be seen for what they were. Only as the Spirit came His fullness were the disciples empowered to realise, understand, work out, apply and preach the work of the Lord Jesus.

These greater things are what apostles and believers through the ages would accomplish in the power of the Spirit sent from the Father and Son after Jesus' glorification. These greater things are in the context of Jesus' life, death, resurrection and triumph and will glorify the Son by revealing Him as the only Saviour - the way, the truth and the life, the only way to the

Father, the only One who fully reveals the Father - His words and works reveal this.

So, when the Spirit came, not only would there be new power, but greater clarity. In OT times there was light - as light shining through the cracks of a door with a few small glass panes in it on a dark night. Yet Jesus going to the Father is the hinge on which the door swings open and with the coming of the Holy Spirit, it is as if a powerful spotlight has been lit and shines out through the doorway into the darkness and there is clarity to those heading to the door and through its opening.

John the Baptist was a great man of God, but Jesus said that the least in the kingdom of God was greater than him, because those in the kingdom of God understand so much and had God's new life. Yes, John the Baptist did - but only in OT terms of understanding. Jesus spoke of those who had clarity to see and know Him as Saviour - a comparison and contrast. Now see finally:

#### **D. What the term “greater things” applies to.**

The term ‘greater things’ are not to be limited to miracles alone. Jesus’ work included more than miracles and He pointed this out a number of times. His work, His chief work, was to glorify the Father and would do so supremely in His atoning death as He secured salvation for the likes of you and me. The term “greater things” does not mean only more spectacular, supernatural or more in number, but with more clarity and certainly more extensive.

Personally, I feel ‘greater things’ refers to the spiritual works accomplished in the new, the gospel dispensation. They are

greater things in the spiritual realm and the disciples were used by the Lord to proclaim the gospel to the Gentiles as well as to the Jews, they did so in dependence upon the Lord, in the power of the Holy Spirit, and the promise in v13-14 would be fulfilled.

The conversion of Gentile (non-Jewish) sinners, could not have been so fully accomplished before Jesus' death, resurrection and ascension. Only in the post-resurrection, post ascension, post Pentecost age could such a gospel work have occurred as the gospel was proclaimed by ordinary, frail men and women, equipped by God's Holy Spirit.

The great God of heaven descends upon, comes down to use the Peters, Johns, Pauls of this world. He condescends and comes down to use people like us who tell the same gospel and of the same Saviour. The Holy Spirit's power is not diminished or weaker. He allows people more "success", to do greater things than Jesus had and His work has not ceased since Jesus has gone from this world and to the Father, for His work still goes on.

The book of Acts is usually called *the Acts of the Apostles*. Some say it is *the Acts of the Holy Spirit*, but it's true title should be *the continuing acts of the risen glorified Lord Jesus*. It is He who is at work through people like us. In Acts we often read "*the Lord did...*" Thankfully He is still doing great things not only in our lives, but in the lives of all who go to Him as their Saviour.

They appear to do greater things as He uses them. Imagine, many years ago, a ship's doctor is taken ill with appendicitis

while on a ship the Atlantic. The only man with any first-aid experience was the ship's cook! By radio, using makeshift equipment, he was talked through the operation to save the doctor's life. He would be hailed as a hero, doing this great operation and a great work. Yet in reality it would have been a routine operation to so many surgeons, but a great thing for a cook to do. The great and glorious work of proclaiming the gospel was not given to angels, supernatural beings, but to mere mortals like Peter, John, many others throughout history, to you and me in our time.

It is a great thing for us to be used to the salvation of a soul. We certainly do not save, but we preach, witness, pray and if God uses such, then we have done a great thing. Here in v12 Jesus assures the weak, frightened disciples that they would do the same work of gospel telling, would do greater things and many, many worldwide would hear and believe. They are also granted the promise of having their prayers heard and answered as they do these greater things. There is this double assurance of Christ's work going on after His departure to be with the Father.

That comfort and encouragement is ours today and we should press on doing Christ's work with confidence, even in this Covid pandemic time. So that we too will do great works by telling, sharing the gospel and seeking our Saviour in prayer. As we tell of the Saviour we are to go resting, depending on Him and His empowering us. Without prayer our witness will be powerless, but with right persevering prayer, our Saviour can accomplish great things through our struggling and feeble witness and telling of Him.