

The Lens of Promise Determines Potential John 14:12-14

Scripture Reading: John 14:8-17

Introduction

There was once a woodcutter who upon visiting his local hardware store was sold a chainsaw which the proprietor assured him would enable him to cut a cord of firewood in an hour

Since it currently took the woodcutter a whole day to cut a cord of wood he was looking forward to the increased efficiency

The next day, however, he lugged the chainsaw back into the store with a sour look on his face

And with arms that were so sore he could barely lift the saw up onto the counter he growled at the hardware man that he had been promised a cord an hour but had only managed, through sheer force of will and brute strength, to cut half a cord after working the entire day and he demanded his money back

The store owner was quite perplexed and apologetic as he began to inspect the saw to see what possible defect could have caused such poor performance

He gave the starting rope a yank and the saw it roared to life only to have the woodcutter jump back in fright and exclaim, "What's that noise?"

The woodcutter had labored long and hard without being aware of the power that was available to him

Oftentimes we are the same as we struggle in this Christian life without availing ourselves of the power that is ours

And really, understanding the power we have available is key to all the other Corrective Lenses we've looked at in this series

This morning we are going to focus on **John 14:12-14** which was a part of what Angie just read for us

In this passage we find one of the most remarkable and challenging promises in Scripture in **verse 12** where Jesus says, *"Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever believes in me will also do the works that I do; and greater works than these will he do, because I am going to the Father."*

Jesus spoke those words on the occasion of what we know as the Last Supper as he sought to encourage his disciples

And his disciples were in need of encouragement

Imagine their disorientation at the events of the evening –

Jesus had just held an impromptu **foot-washing session**,

Informed them that one of them would soon **betray** him,

Revealed that Peter was going to **deny** him – not once, not twice, but three times before morning came,

And told them that he was going to be **going away**

It was in that context that he now tells them that after he has gone they will do not only the works that he had done but that they would do even greater works than he had done while on the earth

And upon closer inspection we see that the promise wasn't made just to the men standing in front of him at that moment but to *"whoever believes in me"* – which means that the promise is for us too

So the message of these three verses is –

The Lord promises that when we believe in him and pray in his name we will do greater works than he did

That should certainly serve as an encouragement for us but it often results more in head-scratching bewilderment, disappointment, and lost opportunities – because we don't rightly understand the power available to us

So let's dig into these verses and look first at our **potential**, then we will look at our **promise**, and then lastly we will look at some **practical truths** we face as we to accept these truths and try to put them into practice

I. The Believer's Potential

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

Let's start then by looking at our potential as we see it in [verse 12](#)

And the best way we can begin to gain a proper understanding of the passage is by defining some terms

First of all, we notice that this promise is given to "*whoever believes in me*" so it seems logical to ask "What is meant by 'believes'?"

Belief unto salvation

As I have already alluded to it means the belief that leads to salvation so we would rightly conclude that this promise of the potential to do greater works than Jesus did is exclusively for **born-again believers** –

Those who have believed in Jesus Christ and are trusting in him for their salvation and reconciliation to God

God has not made this promise to all people – just those who are his adopted children

Belief that results in action

That much seems fairly obvious but there is another facet to the phrase "*believes in me*" which is also crucial to our doing these greater works and that is the belief that it is possible which results in action

When I was a great deal younger I joined together with a group of guys and we formed a power-lifting club

And we used to say – "If the mind doesn't believe it; the body can't heave it"

This of course meant that you had to approach every lift with the confidence that lifting the weight was possible or you would psyche yourself out and fail – and if the doubt was strong enough you probably wouldn't even try the lift at all

And I think that is a big part of what Jesus meant when he said the person who would do these greater works would be the one who believes – **belief that results in action is necessary or nothing will be done**

Doubts

But, if we're honest we have a hard time believing that it's possible for us to even approach doing what Jesus did let alone doing even "*greater works*" than he did

So let's next endeavor to understand what Jesus meant by the phrase, "*greater works*"

Miracles

Face it, when we think of the "works" of Jesus our minds automatically go to the **miracles** that Jesus performed

And we realize that not only have we never walked on water, or fed a multitude, caused the blind to see or the lame to walk, or cured leprosy with a word or raised someone from the dead or any of the other miraculous things Jesus did, but we don't know of anyone since the apostles who have done so either

As we saw when we recently went through our series on the book of Acts, miracles occurred primarily as a means of authenticating God's message and as we look throughout Scripture we see the same –

That miracles came in clusters at times of change whenever there was need for authentication of God's message

And the miracles were never done without being accompanied by the message because they were never the focus

So we saw how the apostles were used by God to facilitate various miracles of healing and exorcism of demons and the like – they even raised people from the dead on occasion – all as they took the message to new audiences

But then we saw the miracles becoming less frequent until eventually they seem to have ceased altogether

And while we would never want to be guilty of putting God in a box by declaring that miracles aren't possible today

Clearly performing miracles couldn't be what Jesus had in mind when he said believers would do greater works than he had done

Our mission

So what are the works that we are to perform?

Jesus gives us a clue at the end of **verse 12** when he says *“because I am going to the Father”*

And from those words we can discern that the greater works have to do with **Jesus’ death, resurrection, and exaltation**

Then we see in **verses 16-17** just a little further down in our passage here in John 14 that Jesus promised his disciples that they would be receiving the Holy Spirit to indwell them and to help them after he was gone back to the Father

So we can deduce that the greater works have something to do with **the indwelling power of the Holy Spirit**

Then, when we consider **Acts 1:1-2** where we saw how our job is to continue what *“Jesus began to do and to teach until he was taken up [to the Father]”*

And how in **Acts 1:8** Jesus told his disciples that they would receive the Holy Spirit who would help them be his witnesses throughout the world

We understand that the “works” that Jesus did and that we will continue and the “greater works” that those who believe will do have to do with **the spreading of the gospel and its power to transform lives as the disciples of Jesus Christ continue to make more disciples**

Success

Consider just how quickly this promise was realized in the life of Peter when in Acts 2 his first sermon at Pentecost resulted in 3,000 people being saved –

Which was probably more than Jesus saw converted during his entire three years of ministry

Then the book of Acts tells how the gospel continued to spread outward – first around Jerusalem and Judea, to Samaria, and ultimately to the Gentiles throughout the Roman Empire

And since the first century the works of the disciples of Jesus have continued to build through the years as technological and educational advances have allowed us to expand the reach of the gospel to ever increasing areas and people groups

So while our works have not been greater in terms of sensationalism or kind than those of Jesus – no one can deny they most definitely have been greater in terms of magnitude and sphere of influence

II. The Believer's Promise

Turning now to **verse 13** we see Jesus make a **promise** that further explains how believers will realize their potential to do even greater works than he did

Whatever you ask in my name, this will I do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son. If you ask me anything in my name I will do it.

This verse tells us that the greater works are possible because **Jesus will do the work** in response to the prayers of his people

Misuse

Sadly, this verse has been taken out of context and twisted to mean things that Jesus never intended and many people over the years have been hurt as a result

The health and wealth crowd likes to point to this verse and claim that Jesus *must* do whatever we ask as long as we ask for it in his name so we can ask for all manner of personal pleasures or passions and have them divinely delivered

And they reduce Almighty God to something akin to a divine version of Amazon Prime

And people have been devastated and turned from the faith because their prayers have gone unfulfilled causing them to determined that God is either a liar or an incompetent who is unworthy of their devotion

In my name

To rightly understand the promise Jesus in making here we need to first understand what “*in my name*” means

We are prone to end every prayer by saying something like, “in Jesus’ name we pray, amen”

But the words, “in Jesus’ name” are not meant to be some formula or magic words that we simply tack onto the end as a talisman in order to assure us that our prayers will be answered the way we want them to be

To actually pray in the name of Jesus is to pray as Jesus would pray

In other words, the prayer and the requests it contains must be **in accordance with the character of Jesus** and **limited to what Jesus himself would pray for**

Some of you may remember the minor stir that was caused by a soldier’s greeting when U.S. troops captured Saddam Hussein

After Hussein had revealed his identity the soldier replied, “President Bush sends his regards”

The only thing was, President Bush hadn’t sent his regards and he never authorized the soldier to speak on his behalf so the soldier couldn’t rightly speak those words “in the name of” President Bush

The incident caused a brief ruckus that was soon calmed when President Bush graciously let the poor soldier off the hook and the whole matter was largely forgotten

But it serves to show how speaking in someone’s name is a serious matter especially if that someone is the President of the U.S. – and even more so if that person is the King of kings of whose name God’s Word says is above every name (**Philippians 2:9**)

A request then must be in line with Jesus’ mind, his mission, and his motivation if it is to be considered truly asked in Jesus’ name

Asking for our needs and wants

John Piper [show picture] has written that instead of using prayer as a wartime walkie-talkie to call in supplies for the battle, we have turned it into an intercom to ask for more comforts in the den

That's not to say that we should never pray for our needs – of course we should because God wants us to come to him with our needs and even our wants but they shouldn't be our first priority in prayer

Jesus exemplified that when the disciples asked him to teach them to pray in **Matthew 6:11** and he prayed *"Give us this day our daily bread"* but before that in **verse 10** he said we should pray **for God's kingdom to come and his will to be done on earth as it is in heaven**

And Jesus also taught a little further along in **Matthew 6:31-32** that we shouldn't be anxious about our physical needs even as we ask for them because God knows we need them

Jesus' Mind and Mission

And then in **Matthew 6:33** he said *"But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness and all these things will be added to you"*

Which reveals God's mission in the world which is to bring glory to himself, restore creation to its original splendor, and provide salvation for sinners

Looking back at **John 14:10** we see that the mind and mission of Jesus were the same as those of the Father

And in **1Corinthians 2:16** Paul writes of believers, "...we have the mind of Christ"

God has revealed his plan, his purpose, and his perspective to us in his Word and he has sent his Holy Spirit to help us understand it so that we can pray in accordance with it and assure that our works will further it

I encourage you to spend some time in 1Corinthians 12 which contains powerful insight into understanding the **mind** of Christ

Jesus' motivation

Next we see that Jesus reveals his motivation in **verse 13** when he says he will do as he promised, *"that the Father may be glorified in the Son"*

Jesus lived his entire life in order to bring glory to his Father in heaven

Look at **John 17:4** where Jesus summed up his earthly life in his prayer to the Father –

I glorified you on earth, having accomplished the work that you gave me to do.

In other words, Jesus was motivated to do the will of his Father and our prayers must reflect that same motivation in order for us to avail ourselves of this promise

So, in our prayers we are to put ourselves in a posture of submission to God's will and ask him to accomplish his will through us

We must do our best to pray as we think Jesus would have us pray and we ask for what we think he would want in order to see his mission fulfilled in and through us even as we admit that we may be wrong

And we can do so with the utmost confidence that as we pray according to his will; he will honor his promise to do whatever we ask

But what are we to think when it doesn't seem to work?

What about the times when we pray according to what we truly believe must surely be the will of God and yet he doesn't do what we ask

That's the rub isn't it? And even if we don't have the experience ourselves I can virtually guarantee that you will run into someone who has and they will challenge you on the veracity of this promise

So let's turn our attention to some **practical truths** that have a direct impact on this promise that we must understand and accept

III. Some Practical Truths

First, we have to understand that sometimes what we think must surely be God's will turns out not to be

Frankly, there are times when the way God works baffles us because we don't know what he is doing and so we can't understand why he doesn't answer our prayers

- We know that God's Word in **2Peter 3:9** tells us that God's wish is that everyone would come to a saving knowledge of his Son

And many a believer has prayed fervently for lost friends, neighbors, and family members only to see them refuse with some of them going to their graves in their state of unbelief

And we have to recognize that God loves those people even more than we do and accept the somewhat bitter truth that God will be glorified as he righteously demonstrates his justice in the end

- I'm sure Paul thought that God would want to remove his "thorn in the flesh" when he pleaded three times with the Lord seeking to have it taken away as we read in **2Corinthians 12**

After all it was Satanic in origin and a hindrance to Paul's ministry – why wouldn't it be God's will to remove it

But it wasn't – God had a different plan in mind that brought him more glory because as we read in **2Corinthians 12:9** the Lord told Paul – *"My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness."*

Paul believed that God would be glorified by removing his thorn but God said he would be even more glorified by allowing it to remain

We need to remember that we often don't see things as God sees them as because his thoughts and ways are higher than ours as we see in **Isaiah 55:8-9**

Second, God sometimes acts in ways that don't make sense to us until later

When Kathy and I moved to Delavan some years ago we had prayed about our plans and we believed that we were in the center of God's will

I had just begun preparing for vocational ministry and we were moving to lower our monthly obligations to make the financial numbers work out in spite of our greatly reduced income

So we were dismayed when time after time houses we fail to close on houses that we knew we could afford and that we believed would meet our needs – in spite of our asking God to direct us

It didn't make sense to us why God was continually denying our prayers until he showed us what he had in mind for us all along and graced us with a house that we wouldn't have believed possible

And the experience served to grow our faith in ways that finding the perfect house immediately never would have

Because we learned that God will answer and his promise to us will be fulfilled but not necessarily according to our timetable

Third, sometimes we give up too soon

In Luke 11 Jesus told his disciples about the importune neighbor who continued knocking on his neighbor's door until he got the bread he needed

In Luke 18 Jesus in teaching his disciples about prayer again taught them to be persistent in praying until they got an answer by telling them of the persistent widow and the unjust judge

Jesus modeled this persistence in the Garden of Gethsemane when he fervently prayed three times for God to remove the cup of the cross from him

And we've already considered how Paul asked three times for God to remove his thorn in the flesh and I have no doubt he would have kept on asking if God hadn't answered, "no"

Why does God require persistence?

God doesn't need to be badgered or nagged into giving us what we want but he doesn't always respond immediately either. Sometimes God requires us to keep on asking so that we strengthen our "prayer muscles" and truly consider what it is we're praying for.

How often do we launch a casual prayer toward heaven without truly considering if what we are asking for is in God's will or in our best interest and only in hindsight realize how fortunate we are that God didn't give us what we asked?

And if God were like a vending machine that dispensed whatever we asked for it whenever we asked for it; it wouldn't be long before we began to take God for granted and our relationship with him would suffer as our only communication would be "gimme"

So when God makes us continue asking we have the opportunity to draw closer to God, to seek his heart, and to consider what God would want and then refine and distill our requests accordingly to better align with his will.

And sometimes we will find that we are praying contrary to his will so we must always be ready to submit to God's will should it be different than we thought.

That was Jesus' posture in the Garden – he prayed until he sweated blood but always with a heart that was willing to be submissive to his Father's will in the end.

Fourth, God doesn't answer according to our faith

That's the cop out of the health and wealth hucksters –

The tell the disappointed petitioner of God, "You didn't ask with enough faith"

Look again at what John 14:12-14 says and notice that the only restrictions on the promise are being a believer and asking in Jesus' name.

"Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever believes in me will also do the works that I do; and greater works than these will he do, because I am going to the Father. Whatever you ask in my name, this I will do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son. If you ask me anything in my name, I will do it."

There is no mention here of having the right amount or kind of faith – just enough faith to ask in the first place.

How many of you recognize the name Dr. Spencer Silver? **[show picture]**

Dr. Silver was a scientist at 3M who set out to develop a super-strong adhesive and instead, quite by accident, developed one of the weakest glues ever.

Far from being a failure, the value of that weak glue was eventually recognized and exploited and Dr. Silver became the father of the Post-It Note.

Faith also doesn't need to be super-strong to be effective because it's not the size or strength of the faith but the object of the faith that matters and even the weakest faith in God that results in action will be rewarded.

Conclusion

God's power is unlimited and the Lord promised to put that power to work for us in the pursuit of our mission when we ask

It's a wonderful promise that is available to all who believe and as we avail ourselves of it our potential is limited only by God's power which means our potential for success is limitless

But we need to be sure that we are asking in accordance with God's will so that we can truly say that we are asking in Jesus' name

That means that we must draw close to him through the Word so that we understand as much of his will as we possibly can so that we might ask aright

And then we must be **persistent while remaining patient,**

We must be **teachable and open to refining our requests,**

We must be **submissive to God's will as he continues to reveal it,**

And lastly, we must understand that the Lord honors his promises even when we don't see the results because God never fails

Look with me at [1John 5:14-15](#) as we conclude

And this is the confidence that we have toward him, that if we ask anything according to his will he hears us. And if we know that he hears us in whatever we ask, we know that we have the requests that we have asked of him.

Let's pray