

## CLAIM THE PROMISE

The pages of the Old and the New Testament are punctuated with promises---all sorts of promises: God's offer of life and meaning to us. The New Testament is especially packed with promises---many of those promises from Jesus Himself. Listen to Him:

Because I live you will live also. I will never leave you nor forsake you. Come unto me all of you that labor and are heavy laden and I will give you rest. You shall receive power when the Holy Spirit is come upon you. One of the most fantastic promises of Jesus is in our scripture lesson for today, John 14:12. Listen again to what Jesus has to say, "I tell you the truth, anyone who has faith in me will do what I have been doing. He will do even greater things than these, because I am going to the Father."

Isn't that a breathtaking promise? If this is even remotely possible, then mustn't we admit that we have never taken Jesus seriously? The least we have to confess is that we have certainly been satisfied with far less than He has in mind for us as his followers. So I want to challenge you to claim this fantastic promise of Jesus himself- "Greater things than I have done will you do, because I am going to the father."

Isn't it amazing- how quickly we settle for less than what was promised, and for far less than is possible? So what ~~we~~<sup>do</sup> have we here in this word of Jesus? "Greater works than I have done will you do, because I go to the father."

The dramatic power of it becomes more pronounced when we keep in mind who said it. Jesus said it- the man who came to save the world. The man who forgave and loved, and washed his disciples' feet. The man who made the lame walk and the blind see. The man who ate with sinners and flung his life into the teeth of the raw and rampant prejudice of his day by conversing with the Samaritan woman at the well. The man who finished all the work God gave him to do- and is now seated at the right hand of the Father, crowned with glory and honor. Can you believe it? That's the Man- Jesus- who said to you and me, "Greater works than these will you do because I go to the father."

Do you believe it? Don't answer too quickly. Do you believe it enough to start the process in your mind of claiming that promise? Our problem is that we trust in Jesus in some things when we need to trust him with all things. Let me say that again. Our problem is that we trust Jesus in some

things when we need to trust him with all things. So today, I want to give you two things that give meaning to this promise of Jesus.

The first thing is this: You are more than you think you are. I believe this is at least a part of what Jesus is saying. “Greater things than I have done will you do because I go to the father.” You are more than you think you are.

I read recently of an elderly bachelor and an old maid who started going out together. Each had lived alone for many years. Gradually the old gentleman recognized a real fondness and a definite attachment to her. But he was shy and afraid to tell her his feelings. Finally one day he mustered up the courage to say, “Let’s get married!” Surprised, the woman threw up her hands and shouted, “That’s a wonderful idea- but who in the world would have us?”

It’s easy to sink into that kind of self-understanding. When I am feeling blue and down on myself, when depression threatens to turn the sky of my life into dark clouds of doom, I try to remember psalm 8:3-5. When I look at your heavens, the work of your fingers, the moon and the stars that you have established: what are human beings that you are mindful of them, mortals that you care for them? Yet you have made them a little lower than God, and crowned them with glory and honor.

But you keep asking the question, “How can I believe that I am more than I think I am?” listen! You are important to God. In fact you are a unique, unrepeatably miracle of God. You have that on the authority of God’s word. If you forget everything else I say to you today remember that. Talk about self-esteem—talk about knowing who you are. There is a place in God’s word—do you remember it? God said it, “Not even a sparrow falls to the earth without God noticing it—and you are of more value than sparrows. Even the hairs on your head are numbered.” That is what Christ said—that is the witness of the scripture. You are important to God. That means there is a place in God’s heart that only you can fill. Let me say that again. There is a place in God’s heart that only you can fill. That is the message of the Bible. God loves each one of us as though each one of us were the only person in the world to love. Did you get that? If you were the only person in the world, God would have still sent his son to save you. So will you claim the promise—“Greater things than I have done will you do because I go to the father?” You are more than you think you are.

Secondly: There is something you can be and do, but will never be and do apart from Jesus Christ. “Greater works than these will you do because I go to the Father.” There is something we can be and do but will never be and do apart from Jesus Christ. So where does our power come from? It

is fairly obvious, isn't it? There is something we can be and do but will never be and do apart from Jesus Christ.

None of us know all the struggles that are going on our various lives this morning. Very few of us are without some kind of struggle. These struggles run the gamut from addictions to bad relationships—from failures to a parent-child estrangement, from the loss of a loved one to the battle with a physical ailment yourself. None of our struggles are beyond the power of Jesus. There is something you can be and do but will never be and do apart from Jesus Christ.

Now the dynamic—the source of power for the realization of these things. Jesus links his amazing word, “Greater works than these will you do because I go to the Father” – he links that amazing word with his equally amazing promise about prayer, in verses 13&14 when he says, “Whatever you ask in my name I will do it, that the Father may be glorified in the Son; if you ask anything in my name, I will do it.”

Do you notice that he says the same thing twice? It is obvious that he wants that to register in our minds. So get the full impact of what Jesus wanted to convey. Pay close attention to the verb tense. Jesus didn't say, “Ask anything in my name and I might do.” He didn't say, “Ask anything in my name and I will probably do it.” Nor did he say, “Ask and there is a good chance that what you ask for you will get.” No, he was very emphatic: “Ask anything in my name and I will do it.”

Extravagant and unlimited it seems—but look closely. We need to register the fact that the promise Jesus gives us here is not unconditional. Rather this promise is explicitly and strictly limited. It is only what we ask for in Christ's name, only what we pray for his sake that he promises to give us. So we can confidently count on receiving what we ask for, only if what we ask will advance God's cause and bring God glory. That is what Jesus is saying: “Whatever you ask in my name I will do it, that the Father may be glorified in the Son.”

I am convinced of it—the primary reason most of us are not empowered to live more effective Christian lives is that we don't spend enough time in prayer. We trust Jesus with some things some of the time, when we need to trust him with all things all of the time. We don't believe Jesus when he said, “Greater things than I have done will you do because I go to the father.”

Note the phrase “Go to the Father.” What did Jesus promise he would do when he returned to the Father? He said he would send His Holy Spirit. And what would the Holy Spirit do? The Holy Spirit would give us power. That is one of those fantastic promises—“You will receive power when the Holy Spirit is come upon you.” Jesus said. And Paul said to the Ephesians that the very power, which raised Jesus from the dead, was available to us. That's the thing that moves us along in

beginning to grasp this fantastic promise of Jesus. The Holy Spirit that gave power to Christ is giving us power also.

Let me ask you a question. When was the last time you attempted something so great, so demanding, so kingdom-like that you knew you would fail unless you received the supernatural power of the Holy Spirit? When was the last time you heard the call of God to do something bold—and you followed boldly—knowing that the only way you could walk in the way you were being called was to be guided by the Holy Spirit? When was the last time this congregation asked itself, what is Jesus calling us to do in Clarence? Who is Jesus calling us to reach out to?

We Christians ought always to be attempting those things that we know we will fall flat on our face in attempting in attempting to do and will fail miserably unless the Holy Spirit intervenes and gives us the power. Remember something I said earlier. We trust Jesus with some things some of the time—when we need to trust him with all things all of the time.

If we are going to claim the promise—“Greater things than I have done will you do because I go to the Father”—we have to claim the fact that first; we are more than we think we are. And second, there is something we can be and do but will never be and do apart from Jesus Christ. And when we put those two claims into practice through a total surrender to the power of the Holy Spirit that is when we reach our full potential as Disciples of Christ.