

You Will Do Greater Things

Jonathan Rue

John 14:12

07.12.09

'The Outrageous Claims of Jesus' Series

Next weekend is Breathe festival 2009! Please remember that we won't be having JHouse next week. We have titled this year's Breathe Festival—Revolution—because the life, the teaching, and the ministry of Jesus were nothing short of a revolution; an overturning of the way the world works and a restoration to the way that God intended the world to be. Jesus was a revolutionary.

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Jesus the Revolutionary

He didn't simply fit into the well-oiled grooves of society. He cut across religious belief and practice. He cut across political allegiances. He cut across social norms and practices. Every word Jesus spoke, every person Jesus loved, every religious and social rule Jesus broke was an act of turning the world upside down--an act of revolution. But this is not what you'd expect of a revolution. There are no guns or propaganda or grabbing of power. This is the revolution of living is dying. The revolution of gaining is losing. The revolution of strength is weakness.

The revolution of Jesus centered around the central fact that God is King and ruler over all of the earth, not Caesar, not any political power, not any wealthy business man or religious leader. No one holds sovereign power of the earth, but God alone. And God is setting in motion the reclaiming of his territory. So Jesus came proclaiming the message of the Kingdom of God, an absolutely revolutionary message that God is the King over everything. We see this in Mark 1:14-15.

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Mark 1:14-15 (TNIV)

After John was put in prison, Jesus went into Galilee, proclaiming the good news of God. "The time has come," he said. "The Kingdom of God has come near. Repent and believe the good news!"

However, Jesus was sneaky in the way that he went about the business of revolution. He was incredibly subversive, but not overly combative. He had an odd strategy of getting the word out.

Let me ask you a question: If you were going to start a social/religious/political revolution, how would you go about it? How would you get things going?

You'd probably try to get the word out by buying lots of advertising and saturating the media outlets, do viral marketing online and hold huge events to gather people together. Jesus did none of this. His strategy for starting a revolution was to start healing some people. To start doing supernatural miracles. But this wasn't just a way to get people's attention, though it had that effect. The miracles that Jesus performed always had a purpose, they were an integral part of the revolution.

Jesus is preached the Kingdom of God and then Jesus demonstrated the Kingdom of God, bringing the kingdom to earth by performing signs and wonders because for him the authority, the message of the kingdom and the demonstration of the kingdom through miracles are all threads of the same cloth. The theologian Jurgen Moltmann describes it well when he says,

“Jesus’ healings are not supernatural miracles in a natural world. They are the only truly ‘natural’ things in a world that is unnatural, demonized and wounded.” –Jurgen Moltmann

So Jesus’ miracles are an integral part of the revolution of God restoring the world and reclaiming his rule over it.

The gospels record that Jesus healed the blind. He made the lame walk. He raised the dead. He cast out demons. He made the deaf hear. He made the mute talk. He cleansed leprosy and cured fever. He walked on water. He calmed the storm and multiplied food for crowds of 4000 and 5000, not including women and children. In other words, Jesus exercised power over nature. He exercised power over demons. He exercised power over disease. And he exercised power over death.

And interestingly, in Mark chapters 4 and 5, he accentuates Jesus’ power over these four different categories, one after another. Jesus calms the storm. And then Jesus casts out a bunch of demons from somebody and then Jesus raises a dead girl and then heals a sick woman. So Jesus is doing all of these amazing, incredible miracles as a part of his ministry, but he doesn't stop there. Jesus makes a statement that is so outrageous that Christians have been struggling with what this could mean for the last 2000 years. We've been doing a series on the outrageous claims of Jesus.

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Series Title Slide

And so we've looked at a number of outrageous claims. But tonight we're going to look at an outrageous claim of Jesus that he makes about us, his followers.

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Tonight's outrageous claim of Jesus:

John 14:12 (TNIV)

Very truly I tell you, all who have faith 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.

So he says that his followers will do even greater things than he did in reference to the working of miracles, of supernatural signs and wonders. And this statement is so crazy, so absurd that any of us could possibly do anything greater than Jesus who worked these amazing miracles, that we are going to spend the rest of the evening looking at this one single verse trying to understand what Jesus meant.

So as we open up God's word tonight, let's ask his presence to be with us.

Let's pray.

So let me set the stage for you of when Jesus is making this statement. We're in the upper room, sitting at the table with Jesus at the last supper. As the apostle John reports the events of that evening in his gospel, he gives us a lengthy discourse of Jesus. And in this long table talk, Jesus is repeating and emphasizing three things to his disciples. First he says I am going away. Secondly he says, you are staying to continue my work. Now for any revolutionary leader who dies or leaves the revolution, that is generally it. It's over once the main leader is taken out of the picture and it is a fantasy to think that it will go on. And that's why thirdly, Jesus says, you cannot do it alone so I'm sending you the Spirit. The Holy Spirit was the power behind all of the ministry that Jesus himself did, and he is promising that he will send that same spirit to us, so that we're not alone.

But then Jesus says this outrageous statement in verse 12. He doesn't just say that we will be able to continue through the power of the Spirit to maintain what he did. That would be hard enough. But he says that we will do even greater things.

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John 14:12 (TNIV)

Very truly I tell you, all who have faith 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.

Now there are four separate things going on that I'm going to blow apart this one single statement of Christ and we're going to take each of the four component parts, one at a time. The first of which is

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"all who have faith in me"

Now let's just stop here for a second. All who have faith in me. That's who Jesus is talking to, that's who he is talking about. It's not just the elite; the hand selected 12 disciples minus Judas, the betrayer. No, those who will do the works of Jesus are not the elite of the elite Christians. They're not the people that have the title and get to be on stage, on television, in front of thousands of people. It's not the people dressed in suits and fancy hats. It's not the people who get invited to the White House to give religious advice to the president. Those who Jesus is saying get to do the works of Jesus are everybody, all who have faith in me.

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"ALL who have faith in me"

So this is great news for you and for me. It's great news for you because if you are a follower of Jesus, if you have faith in Jesus, that means that you are authorized, you are credentialed, you have every qualification that you need to do the works of Jesus. To pray for somebody and see them healed. To pray to God about situations that are desperate and to see God break in in a radical way and do something. You have everything that you need to do that. That's the good news for you.

The good news for me, as a pastor, is that I don't carry the responsibility to have to do all of the works of Jesus for all of you. For much too long, that was a misunderstanding in the history of the church. It was thought that the religious clergy, the pastors and the priests were the ones whose responsibility it was to do the work of the ministry of the Kingdom. So, they were the ones that prayed for the sick. They were the ones that visited hospitals and visited people on their death bed and prayed. They were the ones that counseled couples that were having relationships difficulties in marriages that were falling apart. It had to be a pastor, had to be a priest. And it's tremendously freeing now to recognize that that was never the way the God intended the church to be structured. That his intention was that if you are a follower of Jesus, you are growing in Christ, you are growing in your maturity and looking more and more like Jesus, then you are authorized to do all of the works that Jesus did, to pray for people when they're sick, to give godly counsel based off of scripture to people that are in conflict, to people that are in marriage crisis.

Now it helps to go to somebody that knows a little bit more than you do in a specific area, but all of us as followers of Jesus get to do the work of the

Kingdom of God, get to do the works that Jesus did. Something that John Wimber used to say, the founder of the Vineyard, was that everybody gets to play. You don't have to sit on the sidelines. Christianity is not a spectator sport. Everybody gets to play.

And something else we can see this first statement of Jesus,

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“All who have faith in me”

is that we are instructed by Jesus to have faith *in him*. So many people have misunderstood this. And there is the branch of misunderstanding that has said, you must have faith in the works. So as long as you believe it, you name it and claim it, then the healing will be yours! And as long as you have faith in the work itself, in the physical miracle that you're hoping for, then that is how you achieve it.

But Jesus never said that. Jesus never said have faith in the works that I am doing. Jesus said have faith *in me*. Have faith *in me*. So our faith is always to be directed toward God and the sovereignty of God as we make our requests known to him and never direct it toward ourselves and our own ability to perform.

But unfortunately we miss this quite often. We get things turned around such that we begin to have faith in our own ability to fix our lives, our own ability to get ourselves to where we want to be. We even sugar coat our faith by twisting it into something that we do. So, I haven't gotten what I want because I haven't prayed enough or I haven't fasted enough. Or I'm not holy enough of a person and so God is withholding something from me. And so we twist it into something that I have to do and that it's my responsibility to do and the faith is directed toward my own ability to do it instead of directed toward God. Instead of recognizing that God is the one who can bring healing into the brokenness in our lives, that God is the one who can heal me of my addiction to alcohol. God is the one who can heal me of my addiction to pornography. God is the one who can heal me of my addiction to toxic relationships. Having faith in Jesus means that we really believe that he can change every part of our lives, even after we come to him and give him our lives.

Now some of you tonight might be still checking out Jesus. You haven't yet tasted of the goodness of relationship with Christ and felt the effects of the Holy Spirit changing and transforming your life. And maybe you've been following Jesus for 10 years and you've slipped into thinking, well this is it. Jesus rescued me. I'm going to heaven. I get to spend eternity with him, but I'm just limping along trying to help myself get over cycles and habits of sin and brokenness in my life.

I want to share with you something from Martyn Lloyd Jones, one of the greatest preachers of the last century in England. He said,

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Possibly one of the most devastating things that can happen to us as Christians is that we cease to expect anything to happen. I am not sure but that this is not one of our greatest troubles today. We come to our services and they are orderly, they are nice □ we come, we go □ and sometimes they are timed almost to the minute, and there it is. But that is not Christianity, my friend. Where is the Lord of glory? Where is the one sitting by the well? Are we expecting him? Do we anticipate this? Are we open to it? Are we aware that we are ever facing this glorious possibility of having the greatest surprise of our life?

Or let me put it like this. You may feel and say □ as many do □ ‘I was converted and became a Christian. I’ve grown □ yes, I’ve grown in knowledge, I’ve been reading books, I’ve been listening to sermons, but I’ve arrived now at a sort of peak and all I do is maintain that. For the rest of my life I will just go on like this.’

Now, my friend, you must get rid of that attitude; you must get rid of it once and for ever. That is ‘religion’, it is not Christianity. This is Christianity: the Lord appears! Suddenly, in the midst of the drudgery and the routine and the sameness and the dullness and the drabness, unexpectedly, surprisingly, he meets with you and he says something to you that changes the whole of your life and your outlook and lifts you to a level that you had never conceived could be possible for you.... Do not let the devil persuade you that you have got all you are going to get. —Martyn Lloyd-Jones

See having faith is more than just a belief that there is a God and accepting Christ’s sacrifice for our sins. Having faith is really believing that God can continue to transform and change you and can use you to transform and change others in this world as he brings his kingdom to bear here and now on this earth.

In the 16th century, Ignatius Loyola founded the Jesuits movement. The Jesuits were a religious order of the Catholic church that in the matter of a few decades began to expand so rapidly across Europe and the world that they became a massive influence for the Gospel worldwide. Their slogan was “Magis”, which means more. It is taken from the Latin phrase “Ad majorem Dei gloriam,” meaning “for the greater glory of God.” They were never satisfied with the amount of God’s kingdom that they were experiencing, they were always leaning forward for more.

The apostle Paul tells us in Ephesians, Chapter 3, verse 20, that:

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Ephesians 3:20 (TNIV)

[God]...is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us.

So as we approach Breathe next weekend, Joshua House, my hope is that we would have faith for what God desires to do in us and through us and with us as we seek His face and ask that he heal us. My prayer is that we would believe that there is more for us than we currently have received from the Lord. That we would have faith, all of us, would have faith in Jesus for the works that he wants to do in us. And through us. Look at this next part. He says all who have faith in me

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“will do the works I have been doing”

Now the works that John is describing here are of course his supernatural works, his miracles. This isn't just his teaching, this is the miracles, the healings, the raising of the dead, the multiplication of food, the visible signs of God's supernatural power in our midst. That's what Jesus means by the works that he has been doing. He tells us this the verse before when he says

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John 14:11 (TNIV)

Believe me when I say that I am in the Father and the Father is in me; or at least believe on the evidence of the works themselves.

So Jesus is saying don't just believe my words, look at the evidence of the works themselves. They are publically accessible knowledge. When he does a work, everybody can see it. If there's a man that has been paralyzed for 30 years sitting at the same place near the gate and Jesus comes and heals him, everybody that has seen that man for 30 years recognizes that Jesus has done a miraculous work. Those are the kinds of works that he is talking about here.

And that's exactly the kinds of works that he is saying we will do. Everyone who has faith in him will do the works that he has been doing. Have you ever read this passage and thought, what is he talking about? This is one of those passages that we can sort of speed read over. Because it sort of sounds religious. But if you ever come to it and think, what if Jesus really meant that? What if Jesus meant this statement as much as he meant the statement when he said, I am the way the truth and the life? What if this statement of Jesus was just as true as John 3:16.

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John 3:16 (TNIV)

For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.

Unfortunately because this scripture isn't as easy to believe in and practice as some of the other scriptures that we know and love in the Bible. What has happened is that for many of us, we've totally let this promise of Jesus shrivel and die in our life. We've never taken hold of this crucial, central aspect of what it means to follow and have faith in Jesus. Instead of taking Jesus' words and placing our faith in what he says, we have taken what he says and whittled it down into a thinned out set of doctrines that we have to sign off on. And we've called that faith.

But what Jesus invites us into is to not just have faith that he is the Son of God who is the only way to relationship in God when we receive the forgiveness of our sins that he earned on the cross for us, that is not the total circumference of our faith. Jesus invites us into a faith to do the works that he himself did—the miracles, the healings, the divine demonstrations of the Kingdom of God here and now on this earth.

Is that what faith means to you? Are you regularly leaning into this promise of Jesus to do supernatural works of the Kingdom of God as a part of what it means to have faith in Christ? Or is your faith simply a matter of receiving forgiveness from God for yourself, instead of stepping into the work of God for others? The works of Jesus were totally unselfish. He didn't do miracles for himself, though he probably ate of the bread and fish that he multiplied, and probably drank of the wine that he made at the wedding at Cana. But Jesus was the man for others. He spent his life caring about other people and doing what he could to help them to experience the KOG here and now.

When Jesus did a miracle, it was a demonstration of the Kingdom of God so that someone could taste a piece of what we will all experience in fullness one day when God sets all things right and makes all things new.

I like the way Tim Keller puts this. He is a pastor of a church in Manhattan and the author of a great book called, "The Reason for God", which if you're exploring a rational explanation for faith in God, you should pick up that book. But, here's what he says:

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"Jesus' miracles in particular were never magic tricks designed only to impress and coerce. You never see him say something like, 'You see that tree over there? Watch me make it burst into flames.' Instead he used miraculous power to heal the sick, feed the hungry and raise the dead. Why? We modern people think of miracles as the suspension of the natural order, but Jesus meant them to be the restoration of the natural order. The Bible tells us that God did not originally make the world to

have disease, hunger and death in it. Jesus has come to redeem where it is wrong and heal the world where it is broken. His miracles are not just proofs that he has power, but also wonderful foretastes of what he is going to do with that power.” --Tim Keller

Miracles are a foretaste of the fullness of what is to come.

And so we come to the most outrageous part of this whole statement. When Jesus says that not only will those who have faith in him do his works, but:

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“and they will do even greater things than these”

Now what is Jesus talking about here? Isn't it enough that all who have faith in Jesus will get to do the works that Jesus did, but now he's telling us it doesn't stop there, but he says you're going to do even greater things than I've done. So what things could possibly be greater than things Jesus did? A lot of ink has been spilled on this question over the last two thousand years as this is one of the most outrageous and difficult to understand things that Jesus ever said. So, I want to preface my words at this point in the talk with an acknowledgment of humility. As I outline two significant things that I think this passage is referring to.

The first of which is the simple fact that Jesus himself only did about three dozen miracles in his lifetime that were documented in the gospels. Now of course there were actually many more which were not recorded as John tells us in chapter 20.

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John 20:30-31 (TNIV)

Jesus performed many other signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not recorded in this book. 31 But these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.

So, Jesus did many miracles in addition to the ones that were recorded in the four gospels. However, when you think about the magnitude of the pain and suffering of humanity for the last two thousand years, the works that Jesus did in that three year window of his ministry were a drop in the bucket. And Jesus knew it. Jesus knew that healing a person and feeding a group of people there simply was not the fullness of God's redemptive work in the world. And so when Jesus left, he sent his Spirit to empower all of his followers to do the works that he did. And so the church for the last two thousand years has been following in the works of Jesus. And doing innumerable greater impact through their works than Jesus was able to do as one man here on earth. I think that's the first thing that Jesus meant by it.

And I think the second thing that Jesus meant is on a deeper level, a theological level. Jesus says they will do even greater things than these because I am going to the Father.

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“because I am going to the Father.”

So what Jesus is saying is, I’ve done a lot of great works here on earth, but my greatest work, the reason that I came to earth was to die on the cross for the sins of the world, that I might be resurrected from the dead and ascended to the right hand of the Father in heaven. That is the greatest work of Jesus, the work that all of his other works point forward toward. They are signs of the coming culmination of the work of Christ on the earth, and that is the redemption of all of humanity through his work on the cross and resurrection from the dead.

And now because Jesus is at the right hand of the Father in heaven, when we step into participating in the work of the Kingdom of God, when we by faith participate in the works of Jesus, we are actualizing and bringing to earth the resurrection power of the Kingdom of God that is changing life now. When Jesus healed the sick, it was a sign pointing to the healing that would come by way of the cross. When we pray for the sick and see God bring healing, we are seeing the actualization, the pulling into life now, the finished work of Jesus on the cross. And that’s why Jesus said they will do even greater things than these because I am going to the Father.

When Jesus went to the Father, he sent us the Holy Spirit and so now we are empowered by the Spirit of God to do the works that Jesus did.

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'The Outrageous Claims of Jesus' Series

Jesus the Revolutionary

Tonight's outrageous claim of Jesus:

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