

## XII. The Holy Spirit in Biblical Perspective

### *Led by the Spirit*

“The Last Sermon from the Last Supper – Empowered Prayer”

John 14:12–14

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May 8, 2016 – Morning sermon

We are in John 14 in the Upper Room Discourse, the concluding farewell sermon our Savior preaches. John 14:12–14 says [12] *“Truly (Amen), truly (amen), 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. [13] Whatever you ask in my name, this I will do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son. [14] If you ask me anything in my name, I will do it.* The grass withers, the flower fades, God’s Word abides forever and by His grace and mercy may His Word be preached for you.

This is the sixth sermon of our Savior recorded for us and it’s an unusual sermon in that Jesus doesn’t start in the Upper Room with the sermon. The other five sermons of Jesus recorded are found in the book of Matthew. When you get to the Upper Room Discourse it starts off with an interesting moment. When Jesus gets there the Disciples are having an argument of who is the greatest and how does Jesus deal with this? He grabs a towel and a basin, starts doing the work of a slave and washes their feet. Then He tells them ‘if your Master does this how much more blessed will you be if you do this in one another’s life.’ Then He gives them a new commandment.

They are at the epicenter of New Testament Christianity. They are in the Upper Room where He does the Last Passover, the Lord’s Supper, where He will make His appearance on the day of His resurrection which one week later He’ll make an appearance there again and the Disciples will return there and be filled with the Holy Spirit. The Gospel will not be contained in that Upper Room for it will burst out with 3,000 converted and then begin to expand throughout the whole world. It is in this place that He now introduces His Upper Room Discourse with this statement – There is a new commandment I give you that you love one another even as I have loved you.

Now it’s not a new commandment to love one another for that is all in the Bible but it’s a new commandment to love one another as I have loved you. I have loved you in the power of the Spirit. I have loved you with an unmerited, relentless and sacrificial love. Now that you have seen this love in Me and My Spirit will be upon you, now you love one another with this undeserving, unmerited, sacrificial, relentless love that we bring in the name of Christ to one another and from one another into the world. Then Jesus shows His love again because sitting before Him are twelve people – one will deny Him, one is going to betray Him and ten are going to flee Him out of fear.

What does He do? He will certainly instruct them not to fear but He will give them another command as to how you don’t fear. He does that in John 14. He tells them to believe in God which is a statement of fact and then He gives them a command, ‘believe in Me.’ [6] *Jesus said to him, “I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me,”* John 14:6. The antidote of fear is the undying, unstoppable love of Christ. Believe in Me, who I am and what I do to save you from your sins and what I will do to keep you saved from your sins and what I’m going to do to take you from the presence of sin and My presence

because I'm going away to prepare a place for you but I'm coming again for you, so believe in Me.

After He says that then the sermon is interrupted. These people have obviously not been taught to hear a sermon yet because they decide to break in. First Thomas says "Lord, we don't even know where You're going." Jesus says, 'I am the way, the truth and the life and you're going to the Father through Me and I'm going to prepare that place for you. You put your trust in Me. The answer to your fears is Me. The answer to your going is Me. I am the way and without a way there is no going. I am the truth and without a truth there is no knowing. I am the life and without a life there is no living.'

Then Philip breaks in and says "If we're going to the Father through You and You're preparing this place, then show us the Father" and Jesus again says 'I am the answer to that question too.' Have you noticed how everything keeps coming back to Jesus? Jesus says "Philip, have I been with you so long that you don't know that you have seen the Father through Me? I spoke from the Father. I did the works of the Father." He is referring to the things He did continually in ministry. In other words, you saw the Father for the Father is in Me and I'm sent from the Father. I am in the Father so if you have seen Me you have seen the Father.

There are three Persons in the Trinity yet they are ultimately and completely identified with each other even as they fulfill their particular offices as Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Jesus says 'I have done the works of the Father and if you've heard Me speak then you've heard the words of the Father. You have heard Me speak the testimony of the Father. Have you seen the love of the Father in what I have done in your life?' After He finishes that He says "Amen, amen, I say to you whoever believes in Me..." Any individual who believes in Me will also do the work that I do and not only that but greater works will he do because I am going to the Father.

Then He gives the means by which this is accomplished. He says in John 14:13-14  
[13] *Whatever you ask in my name, this I will do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son.*  
[14] *If you ask me anything in my name, I will do it.* Before we go further here I want to say that whenever truth is sung or confessed or read or preached God's people can participate in that if they desire to do so with a statement of affirmation. That statement of participation and affirmation is the word *amen*. You may put us over a Pentecostal revival by mentioning it a second time, amen and amen. Not sure what a third time would do so I won't even mention that one. Notice that when you hear truth sung, read, preached, you can affirm it but when Jesus speaks He doesn't put the 'amen' after what He says but before because everything He says is the truth. So what is it that He is saying to us that He puts a double 'amen' to?

I believe this text is at one and the same time the most unused (underused) and abused (misused) text in the Scripture. That is just my opinion. So I want us to understand it and then I want us to embrace it. What is He fully saying here and promising? There are two promises that He is making in this text. Promise number one is the empowered life for Christ. When Jesus ascends and goes to the Father after what He has done victoriously on the cross, with all that authority having fulfilled His ministry of humiliation – paying for our sins and redeeming us on the cross – now with His ministry of exaltation He tells us that not only will we do His works but you will do greater works than these. This is what has been wrongly used in contemporary Christianity. So what is He saying in that promise? Before I get to this, here is His second promise. His second promise which is directly tied to the first is the empowered prayer life in Christ. Whatever you ask in My name I will do it. This is another text that is unused, misused or abused in drastic ways.

I want to give you the premises that surround this that are absolutely crucial to understand it. We don't want to fall short of the promise and we don't want to misuse it or abuse it. When Jesus makes these statements He has a connecting tissue to something that He has already said. He knows their hearts are going to be fearful and troubled and He tells them 'Do not let your hearts be troubled, believe in God and believe in Me.' Now look at what He says in John 14:12, whoever believes in Me... Why would you have a troubled heart and more than that for whoever believes in Me? Not only is this the antidote to anxiety to cast all of this on Him, because He is greater than your fears and He cares for you, but you will do the works He did for the Father and they will be greater works than those. So let's try and understand this from the text.

Philip tells Jesus to show them the Father now look at John 14:10–11 which says [10] *Do you not believe that I am in the Father and the Father is in me? The words that I say to you I do not speak on my own authority, but the Father who dwells in me does his works. [11] Believe me that I am in the Father and the Father is in me, or else believe on account of the works themselves.* According to this His words are directly related to His works.

The abuse of this text is that it says that Jesus did miracles and people think that means those in Jesus can do a miracle. I believe God works miracles. I believe God is doing great miracles. I believe God does miracles through a praying people but what I don't believe is that the text is telling you that every believer is a miracle worker. When He speaks of works as miracles in the Bible there are usually two other words assigned to it as well – signs, wonders and miracles. This text is not telling you that whoever believes in Him becomes a miracle worker. You can pray for miracles and God does miracles.

When you look at the book of Acts people didn't just jump out and starting walking on water. Not everyone could walk up to a grave and tell people to come out of it. The works are defined in the text. Jesus told them if they wanted to know that He was in the Father and the Father was in Him, then did you hear His words and works? The work He is talking about is grabbing a towel and basin. When He would touch the leper when no one else would, that is the work His people are going to do. The work of telling others they can be set free and have the work of grace in their lives where they are no longer under the guilt and power of sin and can kill the very acts of sin in their lives, is the work that His people will do. You will do those works even greater than Me.

Can I actually do greater works quality wise than Jesus? No. Then what is born out in the book of Acts? What has been born out in church history? It is that whoever believes will do His works and that is to take His Word with truth and spread it with acts and deeds of love that are relentless, undeserving, and sacrificial. How does that show up? Those are the works that He is talking about here. It is not that we can all walk around and start our own tent revival miracle working moment. That is an abuse of it. Then if you go out and think you can do a miracle and it doesn't happen you will end up blaming the person who didn't believe enough. I've seen it happen.

I faced this in the very first death I faced as a pastor. He was 23 years old and his name was John. He had just been married and we went to Covenant College together. When I became a student pastor I became his pastor. He was getting his degrees to be a missionary out in the field and all of a sudden a knot came up on his arm that they took out. They found out it was malignant. It came back and they had to take it out again and it happened again. Then finally they had to take his whole arm off. At the next visit the cancer was all over him. I'm sitting next to his bedside holding his hand with his dear wife on the other side with her head resting on his

shoulder on the side he had no arm and in walks a preacher. He says “John, I heard about your situation” and as he lays his hands on John he says ‘if you have enough faith we can get rid of this cancer, just have enough faith.’ What is John going to say? Yes! The cancer didn’t leave and the preacher says ‘John, you’re not believing enough.’

You want to know what I did? It is the only time in my life that I have physically laid hands on someone in the name of the Lord that wasn’t praying for him and I put him outside the hospital room. I wished I could have grabbed that preacher’s legs and made a wish but I didn’t do that. This was an abuse of this text that the preacher was quoting. Here is a young man who is moments away from facing his God, trusting that Jesus is His Lord and Savior by faith and there is another man telling him he doesn’t have enough faith to get rid of a cancer and his whole life is resting by faith in Christ. What kind of comfort is that you are giving him? It was an undermining of this young man’s life as he was about to step into eternity.

That is not what this text is saying. This text is saying something glorious that we don’t use but the answer isn’t to make it say something that it is not saying. Then we abuse it and abuse people by abusing it. This text is not telling you that when you come to Jesus that all adversity and problems are removed and anytime you have enough faith you can remove any adversity in this life that comes your way. This passage is saying that if you believe in Me, I will empower you so that even in a broken world with a broken body and all the brokenness around it, you will be able to do what I did. You are going to bring the truth of the Gospel in Word and deed in love and you’ll do it in even greater works than Me.

Where did Jesus go? He went to Palestine but those who follow Jesus will go to nation after nation after nation. Jesus touched hundreds but His body of Christ will touch millions for Christ. You’ll see men and women who become more than conquerors and even though they are persecuted in Christ they are more than conquerors. They stay faithful to the Word and even bless those who persecute them. When I go to the Father I’ll pour out My Spirit and you’ll see it go from nation to nation to nation. It will go to the whole world. That’s what those who believe in Me will do. That is what He promises.

So how will that happen? I have already said it. You can’t do it without the Holy Spirit. He will not only give you power but He will give you the avenue to that power. It is an empowered prayer life that whatever you ask in My name this I will do that the Father may be glorified in the Son. This is another misused text. This is not a text that gives you in the name of prayer a blank check but you do get a cashier’s check because this check has certain modifiers on it. There are two of them. The first is whatever you ask in My name I will do. The second modifier is that the Father is glorified in the Son. Our God has promised this unbelievable resource called the power of prayer that He unleashes His power upon, in and through His people as they come before Him on their knees.

In other words, you are going to do greater works but your first move is not to work. Your first move is not your feet. Your first move is your knees. When you see these dear people who take the Gospel out to the city of Birmingham on Wednesday nights, they’re not just checking a box. Before they go out they get together in the fellowship hall and pray because if the Lord doesn’t go with them then nothing will happen. If the Lord goes with them then you’ll be amazed at what happens. Who does the Lord go with? It is those who call upon Him. Don’t miss this. Ask and you shall receive. Knock and the door shall be opened. If you ask for an egg you won’t get a snake. If you ask for bread you don’t get a stone. If evil fathers are that gracious how much more will your heavenly Father give you the Holy Spirit when you ask Him.

The assumption is when you understand the Christian life, mission and message there is anything you can ask for but the one thing you always ask for and that you seek with empowered prayer is power from God in prayer – the Holy Spirit. That is dominate, penetrating, modifying, ever present request in the life of those who understand the power of prayer, is calling upon God for power through prayer and the presence and power of the Holy Spirit. I'm thankful for the elders who meet with me every Sunday morning to pray with me. I'm not just checking a box because I can't do what I'm called to do here without the presence and power of the Holy Spirit. It's no accident that about a third of our session meetings are committed to intercessory prayer. It's no accident there is a green chair that represents the legacy of this church of people praying. This is no ritual.

God, by Your Holy Spirit will You come and meet with us. I know You're here but would You come with power? It's no accident that when Jesus is ascending to go to the Father will pour out His Spirit. Why does Jesus go to the Father? It is because He has done the work. He has triumphed. He couldn't go back to the Father until He had accomplished the work the Father sent Him to do. When He ascends in triumph then it says He poured forth His Spirit. Then He told His followers to go and be His witnesses in Judea, Samaria and the utter most parts of the world but don't go to your feet, go to your knees. Go back to that Upper Room and go to prayer. Then the power of God fell upon them and then the twelve became 120, then 3,000, then 5,000 and then everyday people were being added because their first move was toward the throne of grace – not to get things from God but to get to God that God would get a hold of them. That is why they went to prayer.

So what kind of prayer do we have? We have prayer in Jesus' Name and that means three things when you pray in Jesus' Name. One it means Father I'm appearing before You, not in my authority or anyone else's but I come in the authority of Jesus Christ who had bid me come and cleared the way for me with His blood and His righteousness. Secondly, when you name something you define it. In the Bible you named your child in what you longed for that child's life to be. When you name something you show authority over it and you define it. So you are putting the authority of Jesus on your prayers and as far as I can tell, knowing God's revealed Word I am praying about anything but not any way for I pray about whatever it is, the way Jesus would have me to pray about it as He reveals in His Word.

One time there was a commercial on TV that was trying to promote good works among manufacturers and there was this man who was working in a car factory who had just made a fender for the car. He walked out, showed everyone the fender and then turned it around and it said 'made by Joe Smith.' Then there was someone who made a cake and it said it was made by whoever the baker was. In everything in our life we want to put Jesus' name on it and when we have our prayers as far as I can tell Jesus' name is on this one. This is the way He would pray about it. The third thing about praying in Jesus' name means access. Anywhere, anytime, and for anything we have direct access to God. We're not just trying to get things from God, we are getting to God that God can get to us. That is why and how we pray.

There is another modifier. Not only do you pray in Jesus' name but you are praying that God would be glorified in His Son. The request that we make that Jesus says He affirms for those prayer requests, honor Christ to the glory of Father. If you ask anything in My name I will do it that the Father will be glorified in His Son. That means we are bringing before God the request that is not about us but from us about Him. Do you realize the task before us? Here are people that are lost, headed to a Christ-less eternity and God has called us to reach them. When

we go to them with the Gospel, we are going to people who were like we were, dead in their sins. We need the power of God.

So before we go to them and not instead of going to them, we go to God first. God, would You give us power of persistence, insistence, and persuasion to go to them? We are doing stuff we can't do on our own. It is impossible. To think we can take the Gospel to the whole world that is wholly against you? We have been called to do it but yet we know what is impossible with us that we can do through Christ who strengthens us, so send us power from the Holy Spirit for we are going to do it for Your glory.

Dear friends, do you know the neighbors who live around you or people you work with or go to school with? Do you know any or all who don't know Christ and are headed for a Christ-less eternity? Then would we not take the Gospel to them but would we not first go to Christ that we would take the Gospel with courage and compassion, with boldness and humility, with truth and love. Holy Spirit, come and use me, and go before me to meet with them that I might be able to speak to them. Open my mouth and their heart. Who is on your list? Do you have a list? Are you concerned about your country? Are you praying for our only hope which is an awakening and a revival? It won't come because of some great personality that rises up through a celebrity preacher. It comes through the power of the Holy Spirit. I'm not saying He doesn't use preachers or evangelists or individuals but this won't come without the Holy Spirit. Have we called upon the Holy Spirit for those greater works to be done in and through us and be among us for His glory and honor?

Here is the takeaway. A failure to pray reveals either an ignorance of God's promises or an unawareness of the impossible nature of our God-given mission or an arrogance of self-reliance. I have said this just out of personal conviction over the last three weeks, working through this – why don't I pray the way I ought to pray? Either I am not aware of the promises of God that He brings power or I'm not aware of the nature of what I'm about to do or I actually think I can pull this off without Him or I'm so arrogant that I think I can do it without Him. If you were to come to me and ask me if I was to rely on the grace of God and the power of the Holy Spirit I would say 'yes.' I know confessionally I would give the right answer but operationally do I operate like an atheist or do I pray.

My dear brother Al Baker says 'do I have that intolerable burden not only for the lost, not only for a Gospel awakening, not only for my country, not only for the nations of the world, but do I first of all have an intolerable burden for God to send His Spirit with power upon me.' You shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, then You shall be My witnesses in Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria and the utter most parts of the world. Do I have that intolerable burden for His presence? I have a promise. God, please help me pursue the empowered life by pursuing the empowered prayer life for Your glory and the name of Jesus so that we can take this Gospel to the world doing the works of speaking truth and love the way Jesus did and greater than Jesus because look at the body of Christ that is spread throughout all of the world.

We can go from Birmingham to Alabama to North America to the world. God, send Your power upon us that we don't just do the right things but that we're able to do them in the power and presence of the Holy Spirit through powerful prayer. You have not because you ask not and when you do ask you ask wrongly. God, help us to ask rightly, in the name of Christ, for the glory of the Father, in the preeminence of Christ and by faith in Christ with our eyes fixed upon Him so that we see this Gospel work going to the nations. God, our nations desperately needs it.

I come with confidence because ‘amen, amen’ I say to you the One who went to the cross and saved me from my sins, He is the One who gave me these promises. The One who is going away to prepare a place for me is the One who is coming again to bring me to be with Him. It is He who gave me those promises. The One who has gone to the Father and shows me the Father is the One who gave me those promises. This isn’t just anybody who is making this promise. This is the Lord of glory who sends His Spirit who was upon Him to us to be upon us and says watch for greater works will you do as you call upon Me in My Name for the power of the Holy Spirit to the glory of the Father. Watch what I have for you to do but come to Me. Then the church will say come. For the power of the Spirit we would say come.

Some of you reading this do not yet know Jesus. I’m pleading with you today not to leave without Jesus Christ and the presence of the Holy Spirit because you don’t have to. I don’t care how much money you have or don’t have, how much your own or don’t own for everything in this world is ultimately powerless because it won’t get you by death or the judgment seat or through the brokenness of life but there is Someone who will take you from faith to faith to glory with power. The adversity is not disappearing but you can become more than a conqueror through Christ and His presence by His Spirit. Come, let’s pray.

Prayer:

Father, thank You for the moments we could spend in Your Word today. Thank You for this glorious, wonderful, precious promises of an empowered life in the Holy Spirit and now we know why the rest of Jesus’ sermon is going to be about the Holy Spirit. It is because this empowered life is the power of the Holy Spirit in us. This empowered prayer is for the purpose of calling upon the Holy Spirit to be in us and yes we can pray about anything and everything but that one request that fills our soul – Spirit of the living God come upon us. Mold me, make me, use me, fill me. Father, if there is one reading this that has not yet come to Christ, by Your power may they rise up from the cemetery of sin to the glorious triumph of the risen Christ, forgiven and empowered by Your Spirit. If you want to talk with someone please contact me at Briarwood at (205) 776-5200 for it would be a great privilege to introduce to you the One who saves His people and loves them all the way into eternity. I pray this in Jesus’ Name, Amen.

Power Point

## TWO PROMISES

- I. An Empowered Life for Christ
- II. An Empowered Prayer Life in Christ

## TWO PROPOSITIONS

- I. Pursue the Empowered Life and the greater works for the Risen Christ.
- II. Pursue the Priority of Empowered Prayer for God’s glory in Christ.

## LIFE TAKEAWAY

A failure to pray reveals either an ignorance of God’s promises, an unawareness of the impossible nature of our God-given mission, or an arrogance of self-reliance.