

## CHAPTER SIX

# THE “GREATER WORKS” OF THE BELIEVER ACCORDING TO JOHN 14:12\*

### *Introduction*

The reference to the “greater works” of the believer in John 14:12 is one of the most puzzling passages in the entire Gospel. Indeed, one wonders in what sense Jesus’ followers could be said to accomplish greater things than their Lord. Surely this assertion is so startling that it is hard to imagine the later community having produced it.<sup>1</sup> In the light of the dif-

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\*This essay first appeared in *Didaskalia* 6 (1995): 36–45 and is reprinted with permission.

<sup>1</sup>The idea that Jesus’ followers will be given power to perform marvelous works is found in many New Testament writings (cf. e.g. Mark 11:23–24 par. Matt 21:21–22; Matt 17:20; Luke 17:6; Acts 3:6; 5:1–11; 9:34, 40; etc.; cf. also Mark 16:17–18). The standard commentaries generally seem to assume the authenticity of the logion in John 14:12. Even J. Louis Martyn, in contending that “[t]he paradox presented by Jesus’ promise that his work on earth will be continued because he is going to the Father is ‘solved’ by his return in the person of the Paraclete,” appears to presuppose the saying’s genuineness (*History and Theology in the Fourth Gospel* [2d ed.; New York: Harper & Row, 1979], 148). Barnabas Lindars, *The Gospel of John* (NCBC; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1992 [1972]), 48 identifies the logia introduced by the formula “Truly, truly, I say to you” as traditional. He notes that scholars as diverse as Joachim Jeremias and Ernst Käsemann maintain that this formula certainly goes back to Jesus himself. This has been challenged by Victor Hasler, *Amen: Redaktionsgeschichtliche Untersuchung zur Einführungsformel der Herrenworte “Wahrlich, ich sage euch”* (Zurich/Stuttgart: Gotthelf, 1969) and Klaus Berger, *Die Amen-Worte Jesu. Eine Untersuchung zum Problem der Legitimation in apokalyptischer Rede* (BZNW 39; Berlin: W. de Gruyter, 1970). Lindars concludes, however, that these logia “preserve very primitive, and for the most part certainly authentic, tradition of the words of Jesus.” R. F. Collins, *These Things Have Been Written. Studies on the Fourth Gospel* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991), 144 considers these sayings a “Johannine trademark” indicating that “the evangelist is passing along a saying acknowledged within the Johannine community as a logion traditionally ascribed to Jesus.” Cf. also the discussion by

difficulties the present passage creates for interpretation, it is surprising that there is only one recent article on the “greater works” reference in John 14:12.<sup>2</sup> Moreover, a perusal of commentaries on John’s Gospel suggests that the “greater works” reference in the Fourth Gospel is frequently interpreted in the light of the description of the early church’s mission in the book of Acts. This practice, however, tends to obscure the function of the “greater works” passage within Johannine theology. As will be seen, when placed in the larger framework of the Gospel’s depiction of Jesus’ and of the disciples’ task, the passage retains a distinctness that refuses to be facilely harmonized with the narrative of the book of Acts.

A second observation renders the present passage extremely relevant for the life of the contemporary church. In recent discussion, the “greater works” have often been understood in terms of “signs and wonders,” with interpreters finding in Jesus’ prediction of his disciples’ “greater works” support for the expectation of frequent miraculous acts performed by believers.<sup>3</sup> The question arises whether such a theology is in fact set forth by John. In order to determine this, one has to study the passage itself in greater detail, as well as to ascertain its place within the larger framework of Johannine “signs” and “works” terminology and theology. The answer to this question will have a significant bearing on how the church today conceives of its mission and of the nature of its life and calling.

The present essay takes its starting point from the intertextual relationships linking the “greater works” passage with other passages in John’s Gospel with similar wording or similar theological or terminological content. After a brief survey of the history of interpretation of the reference to believers’ “greater works” in John, an effort will be made to develop an

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Gary M. Burge, *The Anointed Community. The Holy Spirit in the Johannine Tradition* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987), 62–67; and the following note.

<sup>2</sup>Christian Dietzfelbinger, “Die größeren Werke (Joh 14.12f.),” *NTS* 35 (1989): 27–47. This author’s contribution is severely limited by the fact that he denies entirely the historicity of the statement given in John 14:12, attributing it instead to the post-Easter community (38). The criterion of dissimilarity, however, strongly suggests this to be an authentic dominical logion. Cf. also D. A. Carson, *The Gospel According to John* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991), 496, n. 1; and id., “Historical Tradition in the Fourth Gospel: After Dodd, What?” in *Gospel Perspectives. Studies of History and Tradition in the Four Gospels* (Vol. II; ed. R. T. France and David Wenham; Sheffield: JSOT, 1981), 83–145, esp. 126–29.

<sup>3</sup>Cf. D. A. Carson, “The Purpose of Signs and Wonders in the New Testament,” in *Power Religion* (ed. Michael S. Horton; Chicago: Moody, 1992), 89–118.

interpretation of the passage that is unencumbered by extratextual presuppositions stemming from a reading of the book of Acts or from contemporary ecclesiological paradigms. Subsequently, implications will be drawn from the present study's findings for the self-understanding and practice of the contemporary church's task and mission.

### *The Larger Framework for Interpreting John 14:12*

#### *History of Interpretation*

From the patristic period onward, the "greater works" have been interpreted as the missionary successes of the disciples.<sup>4</sup> The Fathers as well as medieval commentators understood the "greater works" as referring to the miracles performed by the apostles accompanying their missionary activities. Later the idea of the extension of faith and salvation gained greater prominence. Thus Augustine and Aquinas saw in the "greater works" a reference to justification and sanctification.

As a screening of commentaries written in this century shows, this tendency of reading John's "greater works" reference in relation to the book of Acts persists. Only occasionally, voices have been raised calling for an appreciation of the passage in its own right. Before considering the reference in greater detail, it will be helpful to look briefly at the Fourth Gospel's larger description of the disciples' task and mission in relation to those of Jesus.<sup>5</sup>

#### *Signs and Works Terminology in John*

While Jesus' task is referred to in John's Gospel in terms of "work(s)" or "signs," the range for the disciples' task is much more limited. The disciples do not perform any "signs," nor is there mention of their "work" (sg.). Even reference to the disciples' "works" (pl.) is limited to the passage at hand (14:12). The question therefore arises what is the significance of John's more extensive characterization of Jesus' task, and especially of his restriction of the working of "signs" to Jesus.<sup>6</sup> This is captured well by

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<sup>4</sup>Cf. Rudolf Bultmann, *The Gospel of John* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1971), 610; Rudolf Schnackenburg, *The Gospel According to St. John* (Vol. 3; New York: Crossroad, 1990 [1975]), 412, n. 76.

<sup>5</sup>For a more thorough treatment, see Chapter 4 of my *The Missions of Jesus and the Disciples According to the Fourth Gospel* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1998).

<sup>6</sup>For a thorough treatment of the Johannine signs, see my "The Seventh Johannine Sign: A Study in John's Christology," *BBR* 5 (1995): 87-103; for

Schnackenburg who writes,

Thus the later heralds of the faith can only recount, attest and recall the revelation given by Jesus in "signs" (and words), which becomes thereby "present" in their own day. It is presupposed implicitly that he who once wrought these "signs" on earth has in the meantime been glorified, that he still lives and still effects the salvation of believers. But his revelation, as a historical and eschatological event, is closed, and it only remains to explain it further, disclose its riches and explicitate [sic] its full truth.<sup>7</sup>

John appears to perceive Jesus' working of "signs" from a salvation-historical vantage point that views these "signs" as primarily directed toward the Jewish nation. Since Jesus' exaltation is presented in John as the event that makes possible the universalization of the gospel message, the "signs" are confined to the time prior to Jesus' "hour," i.e. his "glorification" at the cross.<sup>8</sup>

The "signs" also have an important revelatory function that is inextricably related to Jesus' function in making the Father known (cf. 1:14, 18 with 2:11). Thus there appears to be a relationship between the Fourth Gospel's signs and the characterization of Jesus as "the Word," i.e. God's self-expression (cf. 1:1, 14), as well as with Jesus' "I am" sayings (cf. 6:35, 51; 8:12=9:5; 10:7, 9; 10:11, 14; 11:25; 14:6; and 15:1, 5). In a variety of ways, Jesus' signs point to his Messianic mission, especially to his Messianic authority, demonstrating kaleidoscopically Jesus' person and work which are of unique and decisive salvation-historical significance.

Moreover, in their function of authenticating God's messenger (i.e. his agent, prophet, the unique Son), the Fourth Gospel's signs build upon the prophetic-symbolic dimension of the "signs" that had increasingly moved into the foreground in the development of this concept in Old Testament revelation.<sup>9</sup> While Moses' working of "signs and wonders" at the exodus gave significant attention to the miraculous nature of such works, "signs" during the later prophetic era focused more on the symbolic content of such events, with the miraculous element retreating into

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 bibliographical references, see there note 1. Only the most salient features of John's "signs" theology can be given here.

<sup>7</sup>Cf. Schnackenburg, *The Gospel According to St. John* (Vol. 1; New York: Crossroad, 1990 [1965]), 524.

<sup>8</sup>Cf. Köstenberger, "Seventh Johannine Sign."

<sup>9</sup>Cf. *ibid.*

the background (cf. e.g. Isa 20:2–3; Ezek 4:1–3).<sup>10</sup> Seen against this backdrop, the Messiah is shown in John to perform signs that include predictive as well as symbolic elements and thus, if fulfilled, have the potential of authenticating Jesus as God's true messenger, indeed as the Christ, the Son of God (cf. 20:30–31). Johannine "signs" are thus foreshadowing the fulfillment, or reality, to which they point. The changing of water into wine looks forward to Jesus' bringing of Messianic joy to his community; the temple cleansing indicates both the judgment of the Jewish nation and the replacement of the temple as the central place of worship with worship directed toward the crucified and risen Lord;<sup>11</sup> Jesus' feeding of the multitude anticipates his provision of eternal life through his substitutionary sacrifice; and Jesus' raising of Lazarus points to Jesus' own resurrection.

One further notes a dynamic in the Fourth Gospel from initial to ever greater demonstrations of Jesus' Messianic authority, so that the final sign, i.e. Jesus' raising of Lazarus, provides climactic evidence for Jesus' Messianic claims. The signs thus play an important part in John's emphasis on the Jews' obduracy and the divine sovereignty displayed in Jesus' Messianic mission (cf. John 1–12).<sup>12</sup>

In the light of these observations, it becomes clear why John did not extend the working of "signs" to Jesus' followers. The signs' sole purpose in John is their authentication of Jesus as God's Messiah (cf. esp. 20:30–31; cf. also 7:31). They are therefore linked inextricably to Jesus, and to Jesus alone, during this particular phase of salvation-history, with special reference to Jesus' mission to the Jews (cf. 12:37–43). After Jesus' ascension, there will be room for the working of "signs (and wonders)" by the apostles in order to authenticate their own function in preaching the gospel of the resurrected Jesus (cf. the book of Acts), but this era is not in John's view in his presentation of the Messianic "signs."

While John is indeed concerned to show the relevance of Jesus' earthly ministry for the later community, he does not therefore blend

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<sup>10</sup>Cf. F. Stolz, "Zeichen und Wunder. Die prophetische Legitimation und ihre Geschichte," ZTK 69 (1972): 125–44.

<sup>11</sup>Cf. Köstenberger, "Seventh Johannine Sign."

<sup>12</sup>Cf. Craig A. Evans, "Obduracy and the Lord's Servant: Some Observations on the Use of the Old Testament in the Fourth Gospel," in *Early Jewish and Christian Exegesis: Studies in Memory of William Hugh Brownlee* (ed. Craig A. Evans and William F. Stinespring; Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1987), 221–36; D. A. Carson, *Divine Sovereignty and Human Responsibility. Biblical Perspectives in Tension* (Atlanta: John Knox, 1981).

these eras in such a way as to blur salvation-historical lines.<sup>13</sup> By applying “signs” terminology also to the disciples, however, John would have opened up the possibility of transferring the Messianic overtones resonating with his “signs” terminology in reference to Jesus also to Jesus’ followers, a transfer that he made every effort to avoid. In fact, John emphasizes that the disciples would reap what they did *not* sow (cf. 4:38), disavowing them any part in making possible their own mission and maintaining a clear distinction between the eras of Jesus’ predecessors, of Jesus, and of the apostolic mission.

Other references to the disciples’ future task, likewise, accentuate the foundational nature of Jesus’ work. Thus Jesus’ commissioning of his disciples to go and bear fruit (15:16) depends on their remaining in the “vine,” i.e. Jesus, while Jesus’ sending of his followers in 20:21 is predicated upon his own work, i.e. his death and resurrection (cf. 20:19–20). For John, the disciples’ mission consists, not in duplicating Jesus’ mission or task, but in bearing witness to it as Jesus’ representatives (13:16, 20; 15:26–27; 16:8–11; 17:18; 20:21–23).

The care taken by John in nuancing his terminology in such a way as to avoid any improper theological implications needs to be kept in mind when one considers John’s reference to the disciples’ “greater works” to which we now turn. It is apparent that “works” terminology in John is considerably broader than the “miraculous” (cf. e.g. 5:36; 9:3–4; 10:25, 38; 14:11; 15:24). Indeed, in Jesus’ own consciousness, there is no dichotomy between the natural and the supernatural, a distinction so dear to post-Enlightenment thought. In John, Jesus’ “works” are therefore, together with his “words” (cf. e.g. 14:10–12; 15:22–24), part of Jesus’ overall ministry. While Jesus’ works frequently have a miraculous component, John deemphasizes this element by focusing on the symbolism inherent in those works and by labelling certain works of Jesus as “signs.”

### *The Greater Works of the Believer*

Two elements require a decisive recasting of the interpretation of the present passage over against the traditional understanding which conceives of the “greater works” as the disciples’ missionary successes narrated in the book of Acts: (1) passages with similar wording and import, such as

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<sup>13</sup>Cf. D. A. Carson, “Understanding Misunderstandings in the Fourth Gospel,” *TynB* 33 (1982): 59–89; Eugene E. Lemcio, *The Past of Jesus in the Gospels* (SNTSMS 68; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991).

1:50 or 5:20; and (2) the phrase immediately following the reference, i.e. “because I am going to the Father” in 14:12c.<sup>14</sup> Both of these elements bring into sharp focus the need to view the reference within the framework of Johannine eschatology.

*The Eschatological Framework*

In 1:50, Jesus is quoted as prophesying that Nathanael, the true Israelite, will see “greater things than these” (μείζω τούτων), a phrase similar to 14:12. This reference to eschatological events regarding the Son of Man appears to reveal a significant conceptual similarity with Matt 11:11 where Jesus is quoted as maintaining that, “Among those born of women no one greater has arisen than John the Baptist; yet the least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he.”<sup>15</sup> These parallels suggest that the “greater works” of the believer in 14:12 should be understood within an eschatological framework, i.e. as part of a new salvation-historical period inaugurated by Jesus’ own completed work (cf. 17:4; 19:30).

Another important parallel is 5:20, the “parable of the apprenticed son.” There it is said that the son will do the works of his master, and that Jesus’ audience will see him do even greater things than the ones it had already witnessed (μείζονα τούτων).<sup>16</sup> The statement in 14:12 likewise indicates that the disciples will do the works of their master once their time of apprenticeship is completed. Significantly, they will not merely do the same works, but even greater works than their master, because Jesus will have gone to the Father.<sup>17</sup>

The reason elicited in the passage itself for Jesus’ pronouncement of believers’ “greater works” is his own “going to the Father,” an euphemism

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<sup>14</sup>Cf. Dietzfelbinger, “Größeren Werke,” 28, who observes the common deficiency of older German interpretations to be their failure to grasp the eschatological dimension undergirding the statement in John 14:12: “Sie klären den Begriff ‘größere Werke’ nicht oder nicht konsequent genug aus dem johanneischen Sprachgebrauch (s. vor allem 5.20ff.) und sie lassen die Wendung ‘denn ich gehe zum Vater’ und den in ihr sich aussprechenden Zukunftsaspekt nicht mit dem nötigen Nachdruck zur Geltung kommen.”

<sup>15</sup>Cf. F. F. Bruce, *The Hard Sayings of Jesus* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1983), 112–14; D. A. Carson, *The Farewell Discourse and Final Prayer of Jesus* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1980), 42.

<sup>16</sup>Cf. Lindars, *Gospel of John*, 475.

<sup>17</sup>Note also the Fourth Gospel’s “forerunner motif” which connects John the Baptist with Jesus, and Jesus with the Spirit and the disciples. See also 13:16; 15:13, 20. Cf. Burge, *Anointed Community*, 23–25.

for his crucifixion and resurrection (14:12c).<sup>18</sup> This statement points to the fact that Jesus' "glorification" would inaugurate a new order, i.e. that of his followers' mission carried on in the power of the Spirit. As Barrett comments, "The death and exaltation of Jesus are the condition of the church's mission."<sup>19</sup> In fact, as this author maintains, "Thus the 'greater works' are directly dependent upon the 'going' of Jesus, since before the consummation of the work of Jesus in his ascent to the Father all that he did was necessarily incomplete. The work of the disciples on the other hand lies after the moment of fulfillment . . . Their works are greater not because they themselves are greater but because Jesus' work is now complete."<sup>20</sup>

Thus the disciples' "greater works" are not simply *more* works; nor are they merely *more spectacular* works or "miracles" (this would be hard to imagine in the light of the care taken by John to accentuate the amazing nature of Jesus' works). Neither is the primary reference in John to raw numbers of converts made or to the larger geographical dimension of the disciples' mission.<sup>21</sup> John's focus is rather on the substantially superior quality of works performed in the era subsequent to the period of the earthly Jesus, without elaborating upon the specific shape such works will take. Indeed, as Brown notes, John's emphasis is less on the marvelous character of the "greater works" and more on their eschatological dimension.<sup>22</sup>

*The Disciples' Mission in Relation to  
the Missions of Jesus and the Spirit*

Remarkably, the reference in 14:12 elevates the future work of the believer, in a sense, above Jesus' "signs" narrated in John 1–12.<sup>23</sup> Setting Jesus' own work in relation to that of his followers subsequent to Jesus'

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<sup>18</sup>Cf. esp. Godfrey Carruthers Nicholson, *Death as Departure. The Johannine Descent-Ascent Schema* (SBLDS 63; Chico, CA: Scholars Press, 1983).

<sup>19</sup>Cf. C. K. Barrett, *The Gospel According to St. John* (2nd ed.; Philadelphia: Westminster, 1978), 460.

<sup>20</sup>Ibid.

<sup>21</sup>Cf. George R. Beasley-Murray, *John* (WBC; Waco, TX: Word, 1987); Bultmann, *Gospel of St. John*; Carson, *Gospel According to John*, *ad loc.*

<sup>22</sup>Cf. Raymond E. Brown, *The Gospel According to John* (Vol. 2; New York: Doubleday, 1970), 633.

<sup>23</sup>Note that the reference to "greater works" in 14:12 is not limited to the followers of the earthly Jesus but pertains to every believer (ὁ πιστεύων).

crucifixion and resurrection, John emphasizes the foundational significance of Jesus' work for the church's mission. Indeed, Jesus is the sower of the eschatological harvest (cf. 4:34–38), the grain of wheat that falls into the ground and dies (cf. 12:24). Only in the age of the Spirit, however, will Jesus' followers reap the fruit of Jesus' work and gather the eschatological harvest made possible by it, thus accomplishing "greater works" even than Jesus himself during his earthly mission.

Significantly, the primary distinction in 14:12 is not between Jesus and his followers, but between the mission of the earthly and of the exalted Jesus. As Beasley-Murray contends,

The contrast accordingly is not between Jesus and his disciples in their respective ministries, but between Jesus with his disciples in the limited circumstances of his earthly ministry and the risen Christ with his disciples in the post-Easter situation. Then the limitations of the Incarnation will no longer apply, redemption will have been won for the world, the kingdom of God opened for humanity, and the disciples equipped for a ministry in power to the nations.<sup>24</sup>

This author points to John's emphasis on "the continuing ministry of the Lord with and through his disciples, by whom the glorification of the Father in the Son will be continued."<sup>25</sup> Indeed, "the disciples go forth to their mission and seek the Lord's aid therein, and in response to their prayers *he* will do through them 'greater things' than in the days of his flesh, 'that the Father may be glorified in the Son'—in the powerful mission that *he* continues!"<sup>26</sup>

John's acknowledgment of the disciples' misunderstandings before the giving of the Spirit underscores the fact that it is the *Spirit* who accounts for the disciples' later understanding and ability. It is he who continues the revelation and work of Jesus who is now exalted. This keeps the Messiah from being just a past chapter of history that fades forever from living memory. The Spirit's mission will be manifold: he will teach the disciples all things and bring to their remembrance all that Jesus had said to them (14:26); he will bear witness to Jesus (15:26); he will convict the world regarding its sin of unbelief in Jesus, its lack of righteousness, and its judgment (16:8–11);<sup>27</sup> he will guide the disciples into all truth

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<sup>24</sup>Cf. Beasley-Murray, *John*, 255.

<sup>25</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>26</sup>*Ibid.*, 380.

<sup>27</sup>Cf. D. A. Carson, "The Function of the Paraclete in John 16:7–11," *JBL* 98 (1979): 547–66.

and declare to them the things to come (16:13); thus he will glorify Jesus by taking what is Jesus' and declaring it to his followers (16:14). Consequently, the Spirit ensures that Jesus' work continues in his disciples, legitimizing their work owing to their association with Jesus the Messiah who is now exalted.<sup>28</sup>

It may be concluded that the "greater works" of John 14:12 are the activities of believers, still future from the vantage point of the earthly Jesus, that will be based on Jesus' accomplished Messianic mission. Viewed from an eschatological perspective, these works will be "greater" than Jesus', since they will take place in a different, more advanced phase of God's economy of salvation. At the same time, there is an essential continuity between Jesus' earthly mission *for* his followers and the mission of the exalted Jesus *through* his followers. The "greater works" are thus works *of the exalted Christ* through believers.

#### *Implications for the Fourth Gospel's Structure and Authorship*

The interpretive insights gained above have important structural implications for John's Gospel. Since the purpose statement in 20:30–31 sets chaps. 13–20 in the context of chaps. 1–12, one should view chaps. 13–20 as well as chaps. 1–12 as seeking to show that the Messiah is Jesus.<sup>29</sup> To the "signs" of the earthly Jesus are thus added the "greater works" of the exalted Jesus through his followers. John closes the gap between 30 and 90 CE by interpreting the work of the Christian community as the continued work of the exalted Messiah. Nevertheless, he begins his presentation by setting forth the earthly Jesus' Messianic signs for the Jewish people. Indeed, it is impossible to believe in the exalted Christ operative in the contemporary community without believing in the Son sent from the Father, the heaven-sent, "signs"-working, Coming and Returning One, the "lifted-up" Son of Man who descended from heaven and who ascended back into heaven.

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<sup>28</sup>Dietzfelbinger, "Größeren Werke," 44–46, unduly dichotomizes "the old Jesus tradition" and the new revelation provided for the community by the Paraklete. The Fourth Gospel rather suggests that it is the task of the Spirit *both* to remind the disciples of Jesus' words *and* to guide them into all truth, thus pointing to a deep underlying continuity between Jesus' words and the Spirit's teaching.

<sup>29</sup>Regarding this rendering, see D. A. Carson, "The Purpose of the Fourth Gospel: Jn 20:31 Reconsidered," *JBL* 106 (1987): 639–51; and the critique by Gordon D. Fee, "On the Text and Meaning of John 20.30–31," in *The Four Gospels 1992. Festschrift Frans Neirynck* (BETL C; ed. F. van Segbroeck, C. M. Tuckett, G. van Belle, J. Verheyden; Leuven: University Press, 1992), 2193–2205.

Finally, the profound reflection on the limitations of following the earthly Jesus *before* his being "lifted up" appears to reveal an acquaintance both with the time and person of the earthly Jesus. It suggests that the author was one who himself followed Jesus during his earthly ministry, and that he now functions as a "witness" who experienced the limitations of this kind of following and who was subsequently led by the Spirit into an understanding of the true identity of Jesus as the Messiah. The Fourth Gospel may therefore be taken to represent the product of a disciple who knew from his own experience the difference between the pre- and the post-glorification eras, and who for this reason is able to emphasize, for later believers, the importance of understanding the true significance of Jesus' person, words, and works (cf. esp. 20:17, 29; cf. also 2:22; 12:16; 14:26).

#### *Implications for the Contemporary Church*

If the above interpretation is correct, the emphasis in John's reference to the believer's "greater works" is eschatological. Works done in the era subsequent to that of the earthly Jesus are greater, not because of the human being doing them, but owing to Jesus' exalted position with the Father and to his complete authority, as well as on account of Jesus' answering of the disciples' prayers in his name and his sending of the Spirit as a helping presence for his followers.

In the light of John's avoidance of "signs" terminology with reference to the disciples, and in the light of the fact that the emphasis of "works" terminology likewise is not necessarily, nor even primarily, on the miraculous (as in "signs and wonders"), one should caution against using John 14:12 in support for a theology that advocates the expectation of a believer's working of miracles today. The issue is not so much that is it possible to exclude this notion entirely from the Johannine reference as to demonstrate that such a theology was clearly not central in John's intention.

His concern rather lay in showing that the works of a believer would of necessity be superior to those of the earthly Jesus since they would be based on Jesus' finished work and thus be able to administer its full benefits while drawing on the full range of spiritual resources made available by the exalted Jesus in answer to prayer through the Spirit. The church's understanding of its own mission should thus glean from the present passage the importance of an individual believer's, and the entire church's, full reliance on Jesus in the gospel proclamation and the need to draw consistently on the spiritual resources required for the church's mission.

The passage should also foster a better understanding of the church's position in salvation-history. Believers should conceive of their roles, not in terms of their own, but in relation to Jesus. They are to witness to *him*, expounding the significance of Jesus' work and the forgiveness available for repentant sinners, humbly pointing to the work *Jesus* has done rather than focusing on their own. This stands in marked contrast to the subjectivism, sensationalism, and self-centeredness found in some segments of the North-American church.

Indeed, John 14:12 reflects Jesus' consciousness of his own salvation-historical position. With amazing humility, he predicts that his followers' works will be, at least in some respect, greater than his own. May we today be inspired by, and emulate, our Lord's humility as we seek to bring the gospel to a sinful world, a world that is, despite its sin, loved by God who sent his only Son to offer it salvation.