

Empowering Our Prayers

While We Wait, God Works Series, March 18 & 19, 2023 (WOW2) | John 14:12-14

Rob O'Neal, Senior Pastor

What is God doing while we are waiting for our coming Lord?

Astronomers had to wait a long time for the James Webb Space Telescope to start studying space.

The James Webb Space Telescope or JWST launched in December of 2021, unfolded in space, and reached its orbit over a million miles away on the dark side of the Earth's orbit.

JWST captures infrared light in a mirror more than 20 feet in diameter. It began broadcasting pictures back in the summer of last year. Here is a picture of a spiral galaxy taken by the telescope. You can see astounding detail.

Scientists are very excited. They should be. Planning for the James Webb Space Telescope began in the 1990s. In 1996 the plan was to launch a telescope in 2007. The telescope finally launched in 2021, nearly 15 years later than expected.

What were scientists doing while they waited?

Scientists were busy inventing, engineering, and solving problems.

The design for the James Webb Space Telescope relied on technologies that did not exist when the plan was made. Important work was happening.

We are waiting for our coming Lord.

After rising from the dead, Jesus ascended into heaven to be at the right hand of the Father.

Jesus is coming again to subdue his enemies, assert lordship over all creation, judge creation, recreate the cosmos, and resurrect his followers to live with him forever.

For now, we are waiting for Jesus to return. What is God doing while we wait?

While we wait, God works.

In John 14, Jesus told his disciples and us that he is working while we are waiting.

What is he doing? We've discovered so far in our study of John 14 that Jesus is preparing a place for us and revealing the Father to us.

Today we discover that Jesus is working through us and through our prayers

While we wait, God is empowering the prayers of believing disciples.

Jesus explains that while his disciples wait, God is empowering their prayers in John 14:12-14:

"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."

Because he is going to the Father, Jesus empowers the prayers of his disciples.

To understand what Jesus means, we need to go back to before Jesus' birth.

In John chapter one, we discover that Jesus is the eternal Son of God made flesh.

When the Son of God took on flesh, he became fully God AND fully human.

In Jesus' humanity before the resurrection, Jesus seems to have accepted certain limitations.

There are limitations to being human, like needing food and sleep.

Plus, Jesus was not everywhere, always, simultaneously. He was in one place.

Jesus even speaks about not knowing all things in his humanity.

When Jesus went to the Father, those limitations changed. Glorified and with the Father, Jesus empowers our prayers in a new way compared with his incarnation. In John 14:12-14 Jesus laid out us:

Four Truths About How Jesus Empowers Prayer While We Wait:

Truth #1: Jesus empowers the prayers of whoever believes in him.

When Jesus speaks about hearing and granting the prayers of "whoever believes in me," we hear the breadth of this promise quickly. Jesus will empower the prayers of "whoever." That sounds like incredibly good news.

The real force here, though, is on the concept of believing. Jesus empowers the prayers of whoever believes in him.

To believe implies to believe that Jesus is who he says he is, to trust him in ways that lead to action, and to place faith in him that turns into obedience.

Jesus empowers the prayers of those who believe him, trust him, and have faith in him.

Truth #2: Jesus empowers his disciples to do his work through prayer.

Specifically, Jesus says that whoever believes in him will do the works that he does.

What are Jesus' works? John is clear.

Jesus' work is teaching the truth. Jesus teaches about God and the Kingdom of God. Those who believe in him will also teach others about God, and he will empower us to do it.

Jesus' work is also the service he gives. Jesus laid down his life for his disciples, which came out in serving them. Jesus laid down his life for his disciples; it wasn't just on the cross, either. By serving his disciples, Jesus was laying his life down for them. Then Jesus tells his disciples and everyone who believes in him that they will do the same; he will empower us to serve and love one another just as he has done.

Jesus' work includes his miracles. Jesus performed signs that brought glory to God the Father and pointed to the fact that he is the Son of God. Then Jesus tells his disciples and everyone who believes in him that he will empower them to do things that give glory to God and help people to come to faith in Jesus, the Son of God.

Jesus empowers his disciples through prayer to have everything we need to do his work.

Truth #3: Jesus empowers his disciples through prayer to do greater works.

When Jesus promises that we will do greater works than **he has done**, what does he mean?

Jesus turned water into wine, fed crowds, cast out demons, healed, walked on water, calmed a storm, and raised the dead. Does he mean that disciples who believe in him will do these kinds of miracles, only bigger and better? Perhaps.

Plenty of us have seen things in answer to prayer that are big and that we can explain only by the miraculous intervention of God.

However, when Jesus says that we will do deeds that are greater than his, he is reminding us that bigger miracles are possible now. Since Jesus' death and resurrection, people can be forgiven of sin, given new life, adopted as children of God, and guaranteed resurrected life eternally. That's greater!

Plus, there are a lot of us now leading people to faith all over the world. That's greater, too!

That's at least part of what Jesus meant when he said that we would do greater works than he has done.

Truth #4: Jesus empowers prayers his disciples pray in his name.

Jesus is not giving us a magic formula here. He is not saying that if we use the phrase "in Jesus' name" at the end of a prayer, it is guaranteed.

We can pray a prayer like, "God, give me a million dollars in Jesus' name," and it won't happen.

Instead, Jesus is telling us to pray in fellowship with him.

Jesus is telling us to pursue his goals and to do his work.

Plus, he is telling us to pray in his will.

So, if we are walking with Jesus, obeying Jesus, doing his work, asking for what he wants, then that's praying in Jesus' name. Jesus empowers prayers his disciples pray in his name.

Action Step #1: Pray for the world mission.

During his earthly ministry, Jesus offered sight to a man born blind.

It happened in John chapter 9.

No one had ever seen anything like that before. A person born blind never received their sight. Clearly, a miracle had happened.

What was the point? This miracle demonstrated clearly that the power of God was at work.

The miracle gave glory to God and demonstrated the divinity of Jesus.

After Jesus' resurrection, Jesus' disciples offer eternal life, which is even greater than sight for a time.

Let's revisit the man born blind. He received his sight.

He experienced seeing the sunshine for the first time. He saw his parents' faces for the first time. He saw food, trees, and animals for the first time.

The man born blind likely spent much of the rest of his life with sight.

However, then the man born blind died.

If the man born blind truly became a disciple of Jesus, then he is with Jesus now.

He will one day be resurrected from the dead and see with entirely new eyes FOREVER!

Changing a person's circumstances for now is important. It may be miraculous.

Changing a person's destination for eternity is astounding. It is an even greater miracle.

Jesus' disciples are on a worldwide mission today that constitutes "greater works."

There are disciples of Jesus around the globe today, sharing the Good News about Jesus.

Slowly, one people group at a time, we are getting workers and Bibles into every ethno-linguistic group on the planet.

When we send disciples of Jesus into a region, they are offering forgiveness of sin, new life in Christ, and eternal life to people who were otherwise destined for eternal punishment.

Along the way, there are plenty of displays of power AND service that bring glory to God.

But to offer someone salvation is a greater work than walking on water.

And to offer salvation to millions of people around the globe regularly is truly miraculous.

Consider what God is doing right now in Northern Syria and Turkey.

Of course, you know and remember that there has been a devastating earthquake in Turkey and northern Syria. It has devastated buildings and entire cities.

We've got to speak discreetly here due to security concerns.

In the regions affected, there are Christians living in churches associated with our partners.

That means we have people living through the disaster and responding in real time to it.

Not only that, but more of our partners have sent teams and aid into the regions affected.

Teams have gone into the region delivering food, holding events for children, counseling people who are grieving and traumatized, and offering to pray with and for people.

And people are responding. I want to read this brief quote from a letter from one partner.

A group from our church has been ministering in the earthquake zone the past week. Slowly families began to trust us and explain their sorrows to us. Some told about their siblings, others their parents, others their children who were buried under the debris. An older woman came and painfully stated, "It is children who should bury their parents. It is very hard for parents to bury their children." She began to explain that she had found a family photo album among the wreckage. Her son and daughter had lost their lives. She was a very observant Muslim woman. She asked us where we were from and who we were ... we explained honestly that we were from the church. The lady responded, "Let it be. Let it be. Come sit. We love the prophet Jesus, too. Pray that those who are lost might be found." This very religious woman asked us to lay hands on her and pray.

God is moving!

Pray for Jesus to do greater works now through the world mission.

Jesus told us that he was going to the Father. Now, when we pray in Jesus' name, he hears and answers our prayers. He who preached the Good News of the Kingdom of God, washed his disciples' feet, and raised the dead promises that we will do his works and even greater works.

I want you to pray! Pray to God in Jesus' name, "God, please do even greater things right here and right now through our world-outreach partners around the world."

And I encourage you this weekend to make a covenant to pray.

Pray for the world mission.

Action Step #2: Pray for revival.

Revival started again at Asbury University recently.

You've probably heard about the spontaneous meeting that sprung up on campus.

It happened after a regular chapel service. A group of students stayed behind and kept praying after chapel was over.

Soon, more and more people were gathering, praying, singing, and teaching.

People were confessing sin, coming to faith, and hearing God speak.

Eventually, thousands of people were involved in a worship service that lasted continuously for weeks in the chapel at Asbury.

Since then, spontaneous meetings have broken out on other campuses and in other locations.

Is this the beginning of the next great awakening in our land? Who knows?

Something important happened at Asbury. Something important is happening among our young people. That's what we know.

What's happening may change our perception of Generation Z.

Demographers lump people into generations. You may have heard of the Greatest Generation (those who fought World War II) and the Baby Boomers (their children).

Now we have Generation Z, people born between 1997 and 2012.

If you listen to some people, Generation Z is broken and handicapped. People in Generation Z are depressed and anxious more often and in greater numbers than any other generation by far. With minds shaped by social media, they tend to be risk averse and to have difficulty socializing. There are multiple people sounding the alarm about them.¹

However, Generation Z is also the most spiritually sensitive, curious, and open generation in a very long time. They are open to the notion that there is a spiritual world because, to them, the material world does not seem to be all there is or to be enough. They are open to the idea that we can know and understand the spiritual world, while they do not assume that the answers they've heard so far are true. They are open to spiritual conversations.

So, it's no surprise to me that renewal, awakening, and revival might start in our day among the younger generation. Revival is possible in our day!

Pray for revival here and now in Jesus' name.

Jesus told us that he was going to his Father.

From that point forward, he was ready to pour out the Holy Spirit on his disciples and the world.

His work will continue. Even greater work will be done.

So, let's not pray small prayers. Let's pray big prayers in Jesus' name. Let's pray that God will shake the world with revival, and let's pray that he starts with Generation Z and reaches a generation that many are already calling "lost."

¹ <https://www.wsj.com/articles/the-national-crisis-of-generation-z-jonathan-haidt-social-media-performance-anxiety-fragility-gap-childhood-11672401345?page=1>

To see revival in our day would take a miracle. To reach Generation Z may take a miracle. We serve a risen Lord who works miracles, so let's pray for revival here and now in Jesus' name.

Action Step #3: Pray that God will use you to impact the world for Christ.

Jesus is talking to US.

Jesus directly addressed his disciples individually and collectively at the Last Supper.

He said to them, "Whatever you ask ..." and "If you ask ..."

However, Jesus was not simply addressing them as a closed group of eleven apostles.

Jesus was also talking to US!

Here at Valley, our calling is to cultivate disciples who impact the world for Christ.

There is a job we do together. We cultivate disciples. That means that we create the conditions where disciples can spring up and grow.

When we grow disciples of Jesus here at Valley, our vision is to see every single disciple of Jesus impact the world for Christ.

Our friends at Hartford City Mission show us how approachable, yet noble, that calling can be.

Dig a little deeper into the numbers we're sharing during World Outreach Week, and you'll see that what's happening at Hartford City Mission is really incredible and exciting.

Seventy-three young people and 13 parents received salvation in Jesus Christ.

I want you to think about what that means. It means that volunteers and staff at Hartford City Mission are doing the simple, important work of welcoming students, providing them with resources, teaching them, spending time with them, and listening to them.

And look at the results!

God is doing the miracle of changing today for a whole group of young people. That's big.

But the biggest, greatest work of all is happening as well. Seventy-three young people and 13 parents have seen their eternity changed. They have received forgiveness for their sin, they have been given new life, they have become sons and daughters of God, and they have eternal life.

That's what it looks like to impact the world for Christ. We change people's lives now AND we see God change people's eternity. That's the greater work Jesus said we'd do.

Jesus has not come back yet because there is still something to do.

Yes, Jesus is still preparing a place for us.

Yes, Jesus is still empowering our prayers.

But let's be honest. He doesn't need 2,000 years plus to get any job done. He's God.

What is God doing while we wait?

God is depopulating hell and populating the eternal Kingdom of God.

Clearly, there are people God has yet to reach, and he intends to reach them.

Jesus has not come back yet because there is still something to do.

There is something for YOU to do.

If you are a disciple of Jesus, this teaching applies to you.

Jesus has not come back yet because there is still something to do. God is working.

God can and will do some things entirely on his own without us.

However, God frequently chooses to work through us.

If God is working, and if God still has something to do, God will almost certainly do it through us.

Through YOU. There is something for YOU to do.

What is that thing? How will YOU impact the world for Christ?

Pray that God will use YOU to impact the world for Christ.