



SERMON TITLE: Amazing Promises

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SCRIPTURE: John 14:12-14

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"These things are written that you might believe that Jesus is the Christ" (John 20:31). This is how John concludes his biography of Jesus. He wanted the young, the old, the sick, the well, the despairing, the hopeful, the skeptics, the faithful, and whoever reads his account of Jesus to believe and trust him more fully. But what did John want them to believe? He wanted them to believe that Jesus alone brought eternal life into the present, broken world. And for all who enter this eternal life with God right now, we—like John—are exiles. For all who enter a relationship with Jesus, we will very likely be marginalized and dismissed because we follow him. So, what does it mean to believe? And how do we mature in believing? What does it mean to remain faithful to God when the pressure is on? These are the things that John will help us explore by showing us the glory and beauty of Jesus.

SERMON NOTES

All communication experts talk about how difficult it is to *hear* what someone is saying and rightly *interpret the meaning* of what they are saying. One such expert, Robert Katz, puts it this way: "Virtually every problem in human relations stems from a *difference in perception*—two or more people viewing the same situation in different ways." He explains how we have "perception filters" (my phrase) that sometimes hinder us from not really hearing the meaning of what someone is saying. Our past experiences, expectations, ideals, loyalties, likes, and dislikes color our interpretations of the real-life situations in which we find ourselves. Sometimes, our filters keep us from seeing what's really going on or from hearing what's really being said. This was one of the problems that Jesus' disciples faced around the Passover dinner table on the night in which Jesus was betrayed. Not only did they not understand much of anything Jesus was saying, but their beliefs and assumptions colored their expectations about the kind of Messiah, they thought Jesus "should" be. Their expectations also kept them from understanding the *amazing promises* Jesus was making them.

We are continuing our study in John 14—the Upper Room Discourse. This is Jesus' final will and testament to his apostles. Everything he says here has an *immediate application* to these 11 men, but it also has an *extended application* to all of Jesus' disciples all through history. (see his prayer in Jn17, especially v20). Jesus has told his disciples that he's leaving them. He's going back to the Father. They hear what he's saying, but they can't make any sense of it. Their beliefs and assumptions and expectations kept them from really hearing him. "Messiah's don't leave just before the revolution begins." "Messiahs don't die on Roman crosses." READ 14:1-14

The main theme in this text is Jesus and the Father. It's all through the passage— *The Father is in Me; I'm in the Father—if you've seen me, you've seen the Father—the Father will do this; I will do this*. The point is—a transition is about to take place. Jesus is saying, "I'm leaving, and I'm handing you off to the Father." Now, they have to trust God, who they can't see in the same way as they trust in Jesus, who they do see. This is why Jesus says, "If you have seen me, you have seen the Father." He will take care of you, provide for you, protect you, teach you just like I have done for you. But again, they did not understand what Jesus meant by what he was saying. So Jesus makes them two amazing promises in an attempt to calm their troubled hearts and to assure them that after he is gone, they will continue to experience his power and provision. READ vv12-14 again.

Basically, the two promises are: (1) Those who believe in me will do the works I have done and even greater works than I have done, and (2) I will do whatever you ask in my name. So how do you hear what Jesus says here? We typically hear these promises, and we try to make sense of them one of two ways. *First*, we hear/read these promises and then we interpret them through our "perception filter" of past experiences, the teachings of different churches, through our likes and dislikes or our wants and wishes. And we hear Jesus saying, "You can do everything I can do and more"—and—"I will do whatever you ask me to do, as long as you tack on to the end of your prayer request—"In Jesus' Name." A *second* way we hear these two amazing promises is that we run what Jesus says through our "perception filter," but we

don't have a clue as to how to interpret them b/c we don't really experience them the way they sound, and we come out the other side saying, "Huh?"

Three Rules for Interpreting Bible verses and Bible promises ~ First, submit your interpretation to the larger context of Scripture. You cannot rip verses out of context and make them stand alone. Second, submit your interpretation to the author or speaker's original intent. Here we want to understand Jesus' intent, his purpose in giving these men these promises. And also, here, (3) Submit your interpretation to what John, the author, wants you to believe about Jesus (cf 20:31). Put simply—The Bible cannot mean what it never meant. The Bible doesn't mean what you and I *think* it means—it means what God says it means. Bible verses and Bible promises are not formulas or magic sayings or incantations. Not all promises are "claimable." *Meaning*, we can't claim every promise we find in the Bible b/c many of them were not made TO us. Many promises were made to specific people living in specific times and places, and they were not meant to be ripped out of context and be "claimed" in any and every way we want to claim them.

Three Big Picture Observations about these promises to rightly interpret them ~ First, the two promises should be taken together, taken as a pair. Second, the two promises are given to those who are pursuing life and mission with Jesus. The larger context is this: Jesus is assuring his disciples that after he returns to the Father, he will return to them in the person of the HS. And then, he will be *with* them and *in* them as they carry his work forward in the world. So, Jesus is saying, "As you carry my work forward, you will do so in my power (v12) and with my provision (vv13-14). Therefore, third, these promises are not meant for our personal consumption. Jesus did not mean for these promises to be "blanket" promises that we can claim to make our lives healthier, wealthier, or more comfortable. *NO*, that was not Jesus' intent at all. Jesus made these promises to those who were going to be about his business—his business of carrying his mission forward in the world.

What does the first promise mean? (read v12) ~ This is a promise about power. The immediate application was to Jesus' apostles who, as we see in the book of Acts, carried his mission forward in Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, and to the ends of the earth (Acts 1:8). And, as they preached the Gospel, there were times when they did the very same kind of miracles that Jesus did (cf 2Cor12:12; Heb2:4). This is important—"greater" did not mean greater in *kind*, but greater in *extent*. Jesus ministered in a very small area and could only be in one place at a time. When the HS came to indwell the followers of Jesus, everywhere they went, Jesus went. One of the amazing things about this promise is that Jesus is saying the HS will come and empower you for global ministry.

What does the second promise mean? (read vv13-14) This is a promise about provision—about Jesus' continued provision. He's saying, "As you carry my work forward in the world, ask me for whatever you need, and if what you ask for is consistent with what I want done, then I will give it to you." This isn't a "cop-out" b/c this is not a "rub-the-Jesus lamp-three-times," and Genie Jesus will grant you whatever you wish for. No, this is a ministry promise—a promise that God's work will never lack God's resources. Ask God for wisdom; he'll give it to you. Ask God for boldness to share the Gospel; he'll give it to you. Ask God for clarity to take the next step; he'll give it to you. Ask God to speak through you—as you counsel someone, as you confront someone, as you seek to encourage someone—and he'll provide what you need to accomplish his work. Praying "in the name of Jesus" means praying for things that are *consistent with God's will, consistent with his purposes, consistent with Jesus' character, consistent with Jesus' mission, consistent with whatever work the Spirit wants done and is leading you to do each and every situation.*

Three Quick 'Take-Aways' ~ (1) You can never "claim" a promise based on what you "think" or want that promise to mean. (2) As we seek to carry Jesus' mission forward here in Greenville and around the world, we can absolutely, for certain, with confidence count on God to give us everything we need for the work he has called us to do. (3) Worship this Jesus—this Jesus who is so patient, so kind, so gracious, so merciful with all his troubled disciples—this Jesus who gives us the most amazing promises to assure us of his never-ending love and faithfulness. And who gave his life, to make those promises our reality.

Discussion Starters — Have someone read 14:1-14 —

- What are examples from your life when you heard someone say something that you thought you understood, but later, you realized that what you heard was not what they meant?
- How are our "perception filters" helpful? How do they sometimes hinder us from hearing what is really being said?

- What troubled Jesus' disciples at that last Passover meal? How did their "perception filters" about the Messiah keep them from hearing what Jesus was saying?
- Talk in your group about how and why the two promises in vv12-14 may not mean what they sound like they're saying.
- Why can we not "claim" these promises for our own personal wish-list of what we want to see God do in our lives?
- How can we rightly apply them? Take each one at a time.
- What else? What loose-ends are still dangling in your mind? How can this study help you be a better student of Scripture? What is your biggest "aha"? What is your big 'take-away'?