

The Fruitfulness of Faith

John 14:7-14

When I was in college I had an interesting approach to my educational experience. Though I was motivated by getting good grades, I was just as motivated to just not look stupid in my classes. And so my basic approach in almost all of my classes was to try to be unnoticed; to sort of stay out of the mix. I would avoid getting to know my professors. I would sit way in the back of room to lessen my chances of getting called upon. It was dumb, I know, but this was my approach.

As I look back on it now I realize that I missed out on a lot of what I could have experienced and learned in my education because of this approach. I was just sort of settling and getting by. It really wasn't a great approach for a college experience.

It is possible to do the same thing in life - to sort of settle and get by. We can put our heads down in life and just hold on until we escape this world and move on to the next. But God does not want any of us to settle for that kind of life. He doesn't want any of us to be hiding back in the corner just holding on until this life is over. No. He wants us in the middle of important stuff. He wants our lives to count. He wants us to experience the fruitfulness of faith.

In the passage that we are looking at today, it is clear that this is what Jesus wants for the disciples as well. Jesus has told the disciples that he is going to be leaving them. And when he leaves, he doesn't want them to just settle. He doesn't want them to just go back to their old lives on hold on until heaven. He is calling them up to a life of faith. He wants them to see that they can lead lives of fruitfulness if they will believe. In fact, Jesus knows that they **MUST** live lives of fruitfulness because his only plan for extending the kingdom of God is to do it through believers.

We are looking at John 14:7-14 today. In this passage we see Jesus talking about the fruitfulness of faith. The first thing Jesus says is that

I. By faith you can truly know God (vv. 7-11)

Verse 7:

⁷ "If you had known Me, you would have known My Father also; from now on you know Him, and have seen Him."

To know Him is to know God. This comment elicits a question from Philip:

⁸ Philip said to Him, "Lord, show us the Father, and it is enough for us."

Though Philip's desire is commendable, it reveals that the disciples had failed to grasp the truth that in seeing Jesus they had seen the Father. And so Jesus replies:

⁹ *Jesus said to him, "Have I been so long with you, and yet you have not come to know Me, Philip? He who has seen Me has seen the Father; how do you say, 'Show us the Father'?"*

Jesus answers Philip's question with questions. In these questions there is a gentle rebuke for the disciples' spiritual blindness. Jesus had been with the disciples for three years. During this time they had seen his miracles and His teaching before the crowds, but they had also had all of the up close and personal time with Jesus and yet they still missed the truth that Jesus revealed the Father. And so Jesus makes explicit what he thought they should know - *He who has seen Me has seen the Father.*

Jesus goes on to drive home this point that they can truly know God because of their relationship with him. Verse 10:

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 initiative, but the Father abiding in Me does His works.*

When Jesus says, *I am in the Father, and the Father is in Me*, this is a linguistic way to describe the complete unity that they had with each other. To know one is to know the other. And so Jesus asks them, *Do you not believe?* Do you not believe that the Father and me share this kind of unity so that to know one is to know the other?

The proof of this unity is found in the words and the works of Jesus. The words Jesus spoke were not spoken on His own initiative, but rather they came from the Father. He tells them that it is the Father abiding in him that does His works.

And so Jesus urges the disciples to believe. He says:

¹¹ *"Believe Me that I am in the Father, and the Father in Me; otherwise believe on account of the works themselves.*

Jesus wants them to believe the truth of what he is saying. He wants them to believe that Jesus and the Father are so united that to know one is to know the other. But if they can't believe solely based on his words, He tells them to *believe on account of the works themselves.*

A major emphasis in John's gospel is recounting the works that Jesus did and the meaning of those works. Things like turning water into wine, his healing miracles, the feeding the 5000, or walking on the water were signs that pointed to who Jesus was. The disciples had seen these things. These works pointed to the truth that the Father was in Jesus doing His works. And they point to the truth that to know Jesus is to know the Father.

By faith, you can truly know God through Jesus Christ. If you live with any sense that it is not really possible for you to truly know God, Jesus is saying to you, believe. You can

know God through me. Obviously, we don't have the privilege that the disciples did of seeing Jesus firsthand, but we do have their testimony of their experience with Jesus. Listen to how John expresses this in 1 John 1:

¹What was from the beginning, what we have heard, what we have seen with our eyes, what we have looked at and touched with our hands, concerning the Word of Life— ²and the life was manifested, and we have seen and testify and proclaim to you the eternal life, which was with the Father and was manifested to us—³what we have seen and heard we proclaim to you also.

Jesus entered human history as a man and he revealed himself to some. They heard him with their ears. They saw him with their eyes. They touched him with their hands. And they wrote and gave testimony about what they saw and heard. That's what we have in the gospels. Through their writings we learn what Jesus is like. And in doing so we can know the Father.

This past week as I began to meditate on this truth that in seeing Jesus, I'm seeing the Father, I found myself reading the Scriptures a bit differently. When I saw something Jesus did or an aspect of his character, I sort of said to myself, "That is what God is like." And it's true. It was a small thing, but I found it helpful in how I understand and think about God.

Let me encourage you to intentionally make this connection. When you read about Jesus - something about his character or how he acts and responds - remind yourself that this is what the Father is like. When you see that Jesus never tires of meeting needs (Matt. 6:31-34), know that the Father will never tire of meeting your needs. When you read that Jesus felt compassion for the distressed and downcast (Matt. 9:36), know that God feels that same compassion. When Jesus says that he is gentle and humble in heart (Matt. 11:29), know that that is God's heart for you too. Seek to make the intentional connection that what you see in Jesus is true of God.

By faith, you can truly know God. And I believe it is that knowledge of God that moves us to the fruitfulness of faith. Jesus goes on to say that:

II. By faith you can powerfully serve God (vv. 12-14)

Not only can you know God deeply, you can serve him and bear much fruit for him. Jesus says:

¹² "Truly, truly, I say to you, he who believes in Me, the works that I do shall he do also; and greater works than these shall he do; because I go to the Father.

This is an amazing promise isn't it? If you believe in Jesus you will do the works he did and not only that, you will do greater works!

Your first response might be to think that obviously this is a promise for just the disciples. But when Jesus says, *he who believes in Me*, he is using a general term that cannot be taken to be limited to just the disciples. It applies to anyone who believes in Jesus. It applies to you if you are a believer in Jesus.

So, what does this mean that we will do the works Jesus did and even *greater works*? How can this be? Jesus did some pretty great works. One way people have explained this is that the greater works refers to "more works." In other words, as the church has spread around the world and existed across time we have reached far more people than Jesus did. And certainly this is true, but in the context, when Jesus says "*the works that I do*" he is talking about his works, which includes his miraculous works. And so greater works cannot just mean "more works."

So that forces us to ask, "Is Jesus really saying that we will do more spectacular works than He did?" This seems to have some problems too right? What could be more spectacular than walking on the water or raising Lazarus from the dead? Kind of hard to top that.

One of the clues is found in the phrase, *because I go to the Father*. Jesus' going to the Father is the basis for the greater works. What is the connection between Jesus' going to the Father and our greater works? When Jesus says *because I go to the Father*, he has in view his sacrificial death, his resurrection and ultimately his ascension back to God's right hand. When Jesus returns to the Father, he then pours out the Holy Spirit on all believers to empower them. These actions ultimately usher in a new age; a new phase in the history of redemption. And so all of our works are done in the context of Jesus' finished work on the cross and his resurrection and ascension.

While Jesus was on earth, his works were not done in the context of His completed work of redemption and so they could not accomplish their true end until after Jesus had risen from the dead and been exalted. During his earthly ministry Jesus' words and deeds were somewhat veiled, even to his closest followers. This passage is a case in point for that. But post-resurrection, every word and deed done by the church is done in the context of Jesus' finished work and so there is greater revelation of who Jesus is, there is great kingdom power and clarity.

It is similar to what Jesus said about John the Baptist in Matthew 11:11:

¹¹ *"Truly, I say to you, among those born of women there has not arisen anyone greater than John the Baptist; yet he who is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he."*

Though we read about John the Baptist in the New Testament, he was essentially an prophet ministering under the old covenant. The kingdom of heaven had not yet been ushered in by the finished his work of Christ. But post-resurrection, any who believe in Jesus are part of this kingdom of heaven and as a participant in that new covenant even

the least is greater than John. It is a very similar thing that is going on when Jesus says we will do greater works.

Now, as we move on, Jesus talks about one of the ways that we participate in these greater works. He says:

¹³ *"And whatever you ask in My name, that will I do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son."* ¹⁴ *"If you ask Me anything in My name, I will do it."*

One of the ways that we participate in the greater works is through prayer. Ask anything in Jesus' name and he says *I will do it*. This is additional clarification about these greater works. The contrast is not between the disciples works and Jesus' works, but rather between what Jesus did in his ministry in the flesh and now what He continues to do through his disciples, including us.

And so we are to ask and he will do it. In fact he says that we can ask *whatever* (v. 13); we can ask *anything* (v. 14) and he will do it. But there is a qualification. Our prayers must be offered in his name. What does that mean?

Well, it isn't a kind of magical phrase that once spoken at the end of a prayer forces Jesus to answer our prayers. In fact, you can pray in Jesus' name without saying it at the end of a prayer. H. Bingham Hunter in his book *The God Who Hears* describes it this way. Prayer in Jesus' name is prayer based on the merits of Christ - we can only come to God because of Christ. It is prayer offered by believers who are obedient - they abide in Jesus and His words abide in them. And it is prayer that ultimately Jesus himself would have asked - it is prayer that is consistent with Jesus' character and purpose. In other words, it is prayer that is according to God's will. When we pray according to God's will, he will do it.

Finally, notice what the result of this kind of prayer is. We pray according to God's will. And Jesus does it. And then ultimately, God is *glorified in the Son*. That is the fruit of this kind of prayer. Our prayers are part of how we can powerfully serve God and bring glory to him. It is part of the fruitfulness of faith.

Jesus wants us to believe this. He wants you to believe this. He wants you to be in the mix of important stuff, of continuing his ministry in this world through your prayers. Yes, it can be hard for us to get our minds around how prayer works when we are talking about a sovereign God. But it is clear that we are being invited to pray and to partner with Jesus in continuing his works on this earth through prayer.

And so, let me encourage you with a couple of thoughts. First, seek to live a life in Jesus' name. Seek him. Walk with him. Submit to him in all of life. Fill your mind with his words. A lot of what we are going to be learning in the rest of the upper room discourse is about living life in Jesus' name. And then out of that kind of life, pray; pray in Jesus' name.

I shared this story at our Life Group leader's training in January. At the end of the fall I had been stressing over Life Groups for this spring. Would there be enough? One need was for a young career group. There were a couple of women ready to help lead this, but I also needed a guy to help lead. I had been busy to to people and thinking and looking through the directory one more time, but I was coming up empty. Eventually, one morning I found myself praying about it. I finally came to the point of asking God to show up and work. And it was in the midst of that prayer that a guy's name came to my mind. I hadn't thought about him at all in this role before, but when his name came to mind there was sense of "this might be the guy." I emailed him and in a pretty short time he replied that God had been redirecting his ministry involvement from a campus group to Faith and he'd been praying about how he could serve and mentor others. He's helping lead one of our groups right now.

Someone has said, "When man works, man works. When man prays, God works." I had been working on this issue. But I don't think I'd been praying. But when I prayed, Jesus worked. He answered. And I gave praise to God in my heart. God was glorified. The question that came to my mind after that answer was, "Why don't I pray more?" . Why don't we take Jesus up on his invitation?

This is part of the fruitfulness of faith that God invites us into. God doesn't want any of us to settle. He wants us in the mix of things. He wants us in the middle of important things. He wants our lives to count. One of the ways we can engage this kind of life is through prayer.

Is it possible that God is waiting for us, for our prayers, in order that He might unleash some amazing works here in Manhattan, in our families, in our places of work and school, in our neighborhoods? Is it possible that God is holding back until we pray? Now, I know that God is sovereign and all of that, but in his sovereignty he has so ordained it that he does his works through our prayers.

¹³ "And whatever you ask in My name, that will I do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son. ¹⁴ "If you ask Me anything in My name, I will do it.

Will you live a life of fruitfulness by believing Jesus and praying?

Amen.