



## The Spirit-Indwelt Church

Jonathan K. Dodson | John 14:12-17 | February 5, 2015

Our vision of being a gospel-centered, city-renewing church can, quite honestly, be overwhelming. Sunday liturgy, day-to-day community, costly discipleship, creative mission, all amidst the pace and pleasure of city life. All these things are great works but how do we do it all without going crazy? Jesus' answer in John 14, "I will leave...and send you a Helper." The helper is the Holy Spirit. This morning we're looking at Jesus' vision and Spirit-empowered to be a gospel-centered, city-renewing church.

### The Greater Works

In the first half of the Gospel of John, we're shown how Jesus is the fulfillment of Jewish hope (1-12). Then, the second half shows us how Jesus is the foundation for Christian faith (13-26). And right at the hinge of his whole biography, Jesus makes a very interesting promise, "[whoever believes in me will do greater works than me.](#)" Now how is that possible? Greater works than walking on water, raising the dead, atoning for the world? *What* could be possibly greater? Some would take a more *rational-historical* approach say the "greater works" are limited the unique work of Jesus' apostles. They spread the gospel through the known world, accompanied by miracles, to launch Christianity. That's an unrepeatable great work. Others take a more *supernatural-fanatical* approach saying these works apply to all Christians today, and they are the performance of miracles. They are greater because they are miraculous. There are problems with both views. The rational-historical person doesn't read Jesus closely enough, "[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](#)" (12). The greater works are promised to "whoever believes" in Christ. That means any believer in Jesus. This might tip us over the supernatural-fanatical end of things, but that too is a misreading. Notice in v. 12 there is a reason why we will do greater works. What is it? "[because I am going to the Father.](#)" So something about Jesus' return to the Father, triggers greater works. What is it? That's the wrong question. We need to ask, "When is it? Or what time is it?" *When* Jesus goes to the Father, the Spirit comes: [Nevertheless, I tell you the truth: it is to your advantage that I go away, for if I do not go away, the Helper will not come to you. But if I go, I will send him to you](#)" (17:7). ***When Jesus goes, the Spirit comes, and when the Spirit comes, history changes.*** How does history change? It becomes redemptive! Well, the Spirit originally created and renewed the world, together with the Father and the Son (Ps 104: 27-30). But the world falls into ruin when its caretakers, Adam and Eve, reject God's order. Now, after thousands of years, the Spirit is taking up his original creative and renewing purpose, but with *redemptive twist*. He will regenerate and reorder humanity and eventually all creation. The only way he can do this is if he comes after Jesus not before. Why? *Because the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus launches God's end-time renewal program for the world.* **Jesus came to make redemption possible; the Spirit makes it practical.** The Spirit puts the gospel message into men. He also puts it into creation, so that we can be reified and creation renewed to live as God's true humanity, a display of his glory in the world. If there was a viral outbreak that became pandemic, and scientists had to create a cure, the cure is Christ, but the Spirit is the syringe. The Spirit gets the redemptive work of Jesus into our

bloodstream so that we are no longer contaminated with constant sin but can live in and for him. So when Jesus says, we can do greater works because he is leaving, *he means that history is turning, and the syringe is coming, to inject God's Spirit into humanity to remake the world.* Unprecedented. *When Jesus goes, the Spirit comes, and when the Spirit comes, history changes.* How? Through the Spirit-empowered, redemptive works of his people, the church. So back to the works. Now that we know the when of the works—God's end-time renewal program for the world through the church in the Spirit, we can begin to understand the "what" of the works.

### The Spirit Strategy

Verses 13-17 show us three Spirit-led strategies that lead to the greater gospel works: prayer, obedience, and truth-telling. **Prayer:** "[Whatever you ask in my name, this I will do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son](#)" (13). Does this mean we can ask anything and God will do it? Wealth, prestige, healing? The fanatical approach says, yes, *if you have enough faith and if you claim it in Jesus' name.* Name it and claim it. But that's not what Jesus is saying. To ask "in Jesus' name" isn't to rehearse a magical incantation to get what you want. A name in Jewish culture represented a person's character and authority. So to ask in Jesus' name is to ask under his authority, and in his character. **It's praying for what the name represents:** redemption of friends, forgiveness of sins, reordering of injustice, city renewal. Ask anything in his name. **You can tell a person's mission by their prayers.** If all they ask for is for the kids to get well, to find a spouse, to do well on the test, and get a job, then the mission is self. But when the prayers are in his name, they'll expand to the city, to the world, asking God *with faith* to change the city socially, spiritually and culturally with the gospel of Jesus. We should be storming heaven with our requests, that the Spirit would apply redemptive benefits of Jesus to our city, neighbors. [Elcia's Question: Deeper & Further. And that's not gonna happen unless we ask! ] **Storm heaven with your prayers, and fill earth with your works.** We're also to pray for God to be glorified in the Son. "Pray in the Spirit at all times," St. Paul says, so do it. You want more people to experience the saving grace of God? Pray in the Spirit (*any nudge to pray comes from him*). Second piece to the Spirit's strategy is **obedience** to Christ: "[If you love me, you will keep my commands](#)" (15). If you love God, don't just read the Bible (rationalist) or take great risks for God (fanatical), obey Christ in the everyday stuff of life. **Obedience is realigning your humanity with Christ's humanity.** It is the imitation of Jesus, the mark of the new humanity. *Obedience acts on the gospel; it enfleshes the good news, shows the city who Christ really is.* But you can't obey what you don't know. What you don't remember. Read the Scriptures to be realigned with Christ. Obedience makes the church the theater of the gospel. And so does repentance. When you confess and turn from jealousy over what your girlfriend's house is like, and find contentment in Christ, you show the world a different humanity. You don't have to keep up. You can nod your head to this truth, but only the Spirit can put it on your heart. Paul says, "*Put to death the deeds of the flesh (old humanity), by the Spirit, so that you can live (new humanity)*" (Rom 8:23). If you want to really live, flourish, you have to make a choice, to axe the old way of living, and ask the Spirit for the new way of living. Spirit-empowered obedience. The third strategy is **truth-telling.** Where do I get that? In this discourse, the Holy Spirit is called the "Spirit of truth" three times (14:17, 15:26; 16:13). Not the Spirit of experience or emotion—powerful encounters,

which he certainly gives, but the Spirit of truth. I have two daughters, and they tend to be a bit more emotional than me. And when they get really wound up, I pull them aside and say, "Don't let your emotions push you around, put your faith in God." Many of us let our emotions put us around. We evaluate life based on what we feel. Good, good day. Bad, bad day. We are meant to thrive on principle or truth not emotion. If you're driven and you don't feel like reading the Bible guess what you gonna do? Not read the Bible. If you don't feel like serving the poor, guess what you won't. If you don't feel like serving your spouse, guess what? And we won't do greater works in the city. You were made to live by what's true. In the world, we might dodge telling someone the truth. A co-worker gives a bad presentation but you tell him it was good. A mother lets her kids destroy a neighbor's house, but you'd never dream of asking her to have them clean it. Why? *Because we care more about what people think than we care about people.* The church is supposed to be filled with truthful people. We have the Spirit of truth. *This means we're to take up the daily ministry of correcting, admonishing, encouraging, exhorting, affirming, edifying, and counseling one another, not with our opinion but in the truth.* But all too often we act as if we don't have the Spirit. We see someone making a poor decision in a dating relationship and all we can say is "I'll pray for you (and we don't)." We admire someone's service to the poor in your community, but you never tell them and make an excuse (for yourself). You notice someone in your life who is growing in character and grace, but don't affirm them. Why don't we tell the truth, correct in truth, exhort the truth, encourage in the truth? *Because we curve in on ourselves. Because we don't really exist for the community but for self. We love what people think about us more than we love people.* We're either too afraid or too comfortable to help others realign their humanity with Christ. *But Jesus has gone, and the Spirit has come, and history has changed, and we have the Spirit of truth!* So let's be a truth-telling people.

### **The Dwelling Spirit**

We've looked at three Spirit-led strategies that enable us to do greater works: prayer, obedience, truth-telling. Yet we find it so difficult. We're living in the wrong time. In the old age, the age before the Spirit. But in the new age, the Spirit indwells us, "[You know him, for he dwells with you and will be in you](#)" (17). He's taken up residence in us to reproduce the character and glory of Christ. We house glory. But the more you take in darkness, and pander to disobedience, and neglect prayer, the more you'll diminish that glory. A blazing light reduced to a flickering candle. Our Christianity becomes weak, unimpressive, and secular people eclipse our character. Why? We *quench* the Spirit of truth. How? By believing lies, not trusting what's true. Things like: God's angry at me. If I find a husband, I'll be happy. If I had nicer home, then I'd be hospitable. When we believe lies, it distorts our humanity, but when we believe what's true we straighten out. King David in Psalm 51 pleads with God to not take the Holy Spirit from him. Why? He'd been in darkness, committed adultery and murder. He knew disobedience quenches the Spirit. The Spirit withdraws, is cornered; he doesn't quit. [Teen & Dad] Maybe you don't feel close to God, or lack a sense of his love and greatness. Don't put that on him. Consider how many lies you've believed. You need the truth. It sets you free. The city needs the gospel; it sets them free. Who are you going to love? Yourself or others? How do you know? Are you speaking the truth? What if we became a truth-telling community? The church would look more like a theater of the gospel and less like a hospital of the broken. The healing light of Christ comes

through the lamp of truth. The curing agent of the gospel has to be injected by the Spirit of truth. Don't quench the Spirit; walk in the Spirit. The Spirit enable us to pray, empowers us to obey, and helps us tell the truth. Gospel truth. The truth about the story of the world and the story of our God. Jesus said, "I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Helper, to be with you forever. The Spirit will be with us forever" (16). Why? Won't our humanity be fully straight in the future, after God has made all things new? Well, yes, because we'll be fully suffused with the spirit. In the words of Paul regarding our resurrection the natural man will become the spiritual man, a spirit suffused humanity. But that's not the only reason. Remember the Spirit is a creator and renewer. With respect to creation, St. Basil said, the original cause is the Father, the creative cause the Son, and the perfecting cause, the Spirit. The Spirit of God will work through the new humanity *forever* perfecting creation, maturing it, fashioning structures out of rock, paintings out of color, technology out of science. The creative, Spirit of truth will be with the new humanity forever. The question is, "Will we show the world the Spirit now?"