

Worldwide Challenge

April, 1975



SPECIAL SECTION
**In the Midst of Gloom,
Hope for God's People**

'Whatever You Ask In My Name'

by Ron Dunn

Second in a two-part series.

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If I arrived home some evening, walked into the living room, turned on the light switch and nothing happened, I would know immediately that there was something wrong with my part of making the electricity work. Either I haven't paid the bill, or there's a burned out circuit or a burned out bulb. But it would be ridiculous for me to say that electricity was a failure. I don't pass judgment on electricity simply on the basis of my personal experience.

In contrast, it is interesting to see the assumptions of a great many Christians today who, when the experience of their daily lives and ministries doesn't correspond to what the Bible promises, will say, "Well, Jesus must not have meant what He said" or "We are just not to expect God to work today as He worked then." However, I do not get that idea from the Bible.

If our experience is not corresponding to what the Bible says, then there is something wrong — not with the Bible, but with our experience. So when I come to a promise in the Word of God that is not being fulfilled in my life, I begin to ask the Lord, "How can this become real to me?"

Some time ago I had to come face to face with one of the most fantastic promises that Jesus Christ ever made. It is found in the Gospel of John, chapter 14, verse 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."

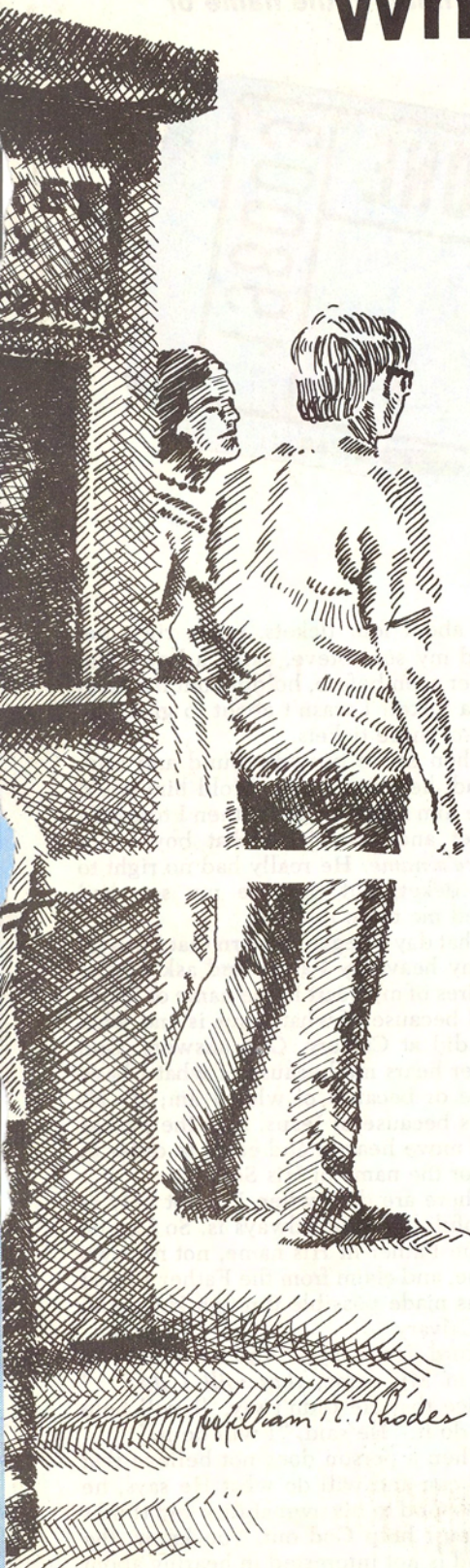
First of all, just to think that in the life of each Christian, from the youngest to the oldest, is the potential of *equaling*

the works of Jesus — that in itself is enough to put you on shouting grounds. But then Jesus said: "And greater works than these shall he do. . . ." And so there is also the potential in the life of each Christian to *exceed the works of Jesus*. Why? Because He was going to leave the earth, no longer to be bound by time and space, and would then return in the person of the Holy Spirit to live within them.

There have been people who thought that Jesus' promise meant that we would build greater organizations than He did. After all, Jesus started out with 12 men and ended up with 11. His little team was not much to boast about, so men look around at their gigantic organizations and wealthy denominations and say, "We've exceeded the works of Jesus." That is not what Jesus meant.

Other people have said that Jesus was saying our influence would be greater than His. And it's true that the church today has a great deal more influence than the New Testament church had. But though the early church didn't have enough influence to keep Peter out of jail, they had enough power to pray him out — and they did it! We have a great deal of influence today, but we don't have a great deal of power. I don't believe Jesus was talking about influence.

So what was He referring to when He said that we would exceed His works? I believe that the answer is found in the verse which directly follows that promise, John 14:13: "And whatever you ask in My name, that will I do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son." The two verses are connected by the word "and," which tells me that Jesus



meant for them to be related. The phrase "whatever you ask in My name" causes me to be convinced that Jesus intended the greater works to be done *in answer to believing prayer*. Prayer is the key to miracles.

John 15:16 reinforces my conviction: "You did not choose Me, but I chose you, and appointed you, that you should go and bear fruit, and that your fruit should remain; that whatever you ask of the Father in My name, He may give to you."

PRAYERFUL

God has chosen us for two reasons: that we would bear fruit and that whatever we would ask in His name, it would be done. Being fruitful means that we must be prayerful. And so, the way that we are to equal and excel the works of Jesus is through a life of believing prayer that results in fruitfulness.

This principle is illustrated so profoundly by what happened on the day of Pentecost after the resurrection when, in one fell swoop, the disciples both equaled and exceeded the works of Jesus. They had been praying for 10 days. Then Peter stood up, preached and 3,000 people became Christians.

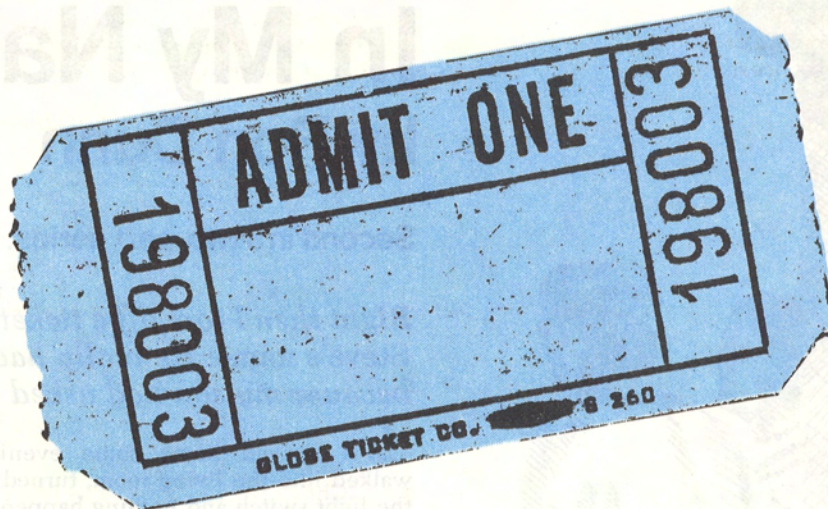
But the one thing that we are not doing in the Christian ministry today is praying. We concoct our little recipes of programs, then add a dash of prayer for favor. There are some important points that most of us have not yet learned: Prayer is not preparation for work; prayer is work. Prayer is not substitution for work; it is work.

I want to share with you four things about this matter of prayer that I believe are crucial to our understanding of how Jesus wants us to pray.

First, remember that in John 14:13 Jesus says, "*And whatever you ask . . .*" Often we wonder, "What can I pray for? How much can I pray for?" But when Jesus encourages us to pray, He always uses limitless language — "whatever you ask." Some of us pray as though God had just declared bankruptcy, but I believe that He is honored and glorified when we ask for bigger things of Him.

Several years ago, when our church started a round-the-clock intercessory prayer ministry, I made a decision that no matter how big a request seemed to be, we would put it on the list and pray for it. The very first request had to do with a little boy who had drunk a bottle of cleaning fluid. The doctor had told the parents that if the boy lived, which

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he probably would not, he would be blind. The parents called and said, "Pray for complete healing."

When I heard this, I thought, "Lord, I wish we could just start out with something easy. Those people are going to pray and that boy's going to die, and then they're going to be discouraged." Can you imagine that? And I had just been preaching a series on the power of prayer. But we put the request on the list. Twenty-four hours later, the parents called and said that the child was completely healed. The doctor had called it a miracle, and God taught me a lesson.

IN HIS NAME

Second, Jesus emphasized "whatever you ask *in My name . . .*" For many years I did not understand what that phrase meant. I knew it was very important because Jesus continually reminds us to ask in His name. I also knew that it was not just a simple formula tacked on to the end of a prayer. So I began to ask the Lord to show me what it meant to pray in the name of Jesus.

Several years ago we took our three children to a county fair with my brother and his family. Pretty soon we realized that what the kids were most interested in was the rides, so I bought a roll of dime tickets. I would stand at the entrance of every ride and as the kids would come by, I would give a ticket to each one. We were standing at the entrance to the tilt-a-whirl, and I had given

out about four tickets, when right behind my son, Steve, came a boy I had never seen before, holding out his hand for a ticket! I wasn't about to give him one of those tickets.

Then Steve turned around and said, "Dad, he's my friend. I told him you'd give him a ticket." Right then I tore off a ticket and gave it to that boy — *in Steve's name*. He really had no right to the ticket, but because my son had asked me to do it, I did.

That day I began to learn that I can go to my heavenly Father and ask for the desires of my heart in the name of Jesus. And because of what Jesus is and what He did at Calvary, God answers. God never hears me because of what I have done or because of what I am; it's always because of Jesus. And the Father will move heaven and earth in order to honor the name of His Son.

There are days when I'm not holy or faithful, but Jesus always is. So I come to the Father in His name, not my own name, and claim from the Father all that Jesus made possible through His death on Calvary.

Third, Jesus says, "And whatever you ask in My name, *that will I do . . .*" Notice that He didn't say, "I will help you do it." He said, "I will do it."

When a person does not believe that God can and will do what He says, he limits God to his own ability and thinks he must help God out. You know, the world is not interested in hearing about

what you've done for God. The world wants to know what God has done for you.

Finally, Jesus says that He will answer *"that the Father may be glorified in the Son."* That must be the motive of our praying. For example, God is not really concerned that I have 100 new people in my next service unless He can get glory through it — unless it is obvious that He did the work. When we pray in the power of the Holy Spirit, and God works, there's no doubt about who has done it. You just can't fake an answer to prayer.

About five years ago our church decided to have a pancake sale to raise money for our youth choir to take a \$4,000 tour. But on that Saturday when I drove up to the church and saw it covered with signs and looking like a carnival, I knew we had made a terrible mistake. People were cooking and eating pancakes because they wanted to "help God out." We raised \$2,000 that day.

BELIEVE GOD

The following Wednesday night I told my congregation that as long as I was pastor, we would never again have a sale to raise money. The Lord has promised to meet our needs. Then I said, "We are going to believe God for the other \$2,000."

Thursday afternoon, I felt led by the Spirit of God to pray specifically that one person would be willing to donate the money. I got up off my knees wondering who it was going to be. At six o'clock I walked into the house and the telephone rang. On the other end of the line was a young girl who had been married about three months. She and her husband were just barely getting by. She told me that an insurance company had given her \$3,000 after she had been in an auto wreck, that she still had \$2,000 of that in savings and felt led of God to give that to the youth tour. Then she said that her husband felt the same way.

In my wildest imagination, I would never have thought that that young couple would give us the money. But God will always take the route that brings Him greater glory.

We raised \$2,000 by pancakes, and \$2,000 by prayer. After we sold pancakes I thanked everybody who had had a part in that and then I worried that I might have forgotten somebody. When we raised \$2,000 by prayer, we just thanked the Lord, and He got all the

glory. Prayer works . . . when the motive of praying is that the Father be glorified in the Son.

In summary, if your life and ministry can be explained in human terms, then something is lacking. You need to come to the place where the only way to explain it is God. ☞



Ron Dunn, pastor of MacArthur Blvd. Baptist Church in Irving, Texas, is a popular speaker at many Campus Crusade conferences and training seminars.

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