

THE FUNCTION OF *ERGON* (WORK) AND *SĒMEION* (SIGN) IN JOHN 14:12 IN THE CONTEXT OF JOHN'S GOSPEL: A LEXICAL STUDY

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Abstract

Discussions on John 14:12 are summarized under qualitative and quantitative considerations of the verse. Qualitative interpretations conclude that believers in Jesus would do more marvelous works of wonder than Jesus did. On the other hand, quantitative interpretations conclude that those who believe in Jesus would do a greater number of works than Jesus. These interpretations pay attention to the lexical meaning of *meizon* (greater) in the context of John's gospel. This study, however, suggests that a study of John 14:12 should come to terms with the lexical and contextual meaning of the concept of *ergon* while distinguishing it from *sēmeion*, *dunameis* or *terata* in the Johannine gospel. In the end, it concludes that the passage does not mean that those who believe in Jesus would do more mighty works of wonder than him. Rather, they would do more numerous work (*ergon*) than Jesus since Jesus' earthly life was restricted both by temporal and spatial limitations. Some of these works done by those who believe in him would function as *sēmeion* when they point to eternal realities.

Keywords: Authority, Miracles, Signs, Wonders, Works

Introduction

It is no secret that the gospel of John is a selective narrative of the deeds and teachings of Jesus. This fact is revealed to the reader in the two conclusions of the gospel (20:30f and 21:25). These passages tell us that Jesus did many things that were not recorded. The few that were recorded have the aim of leading the reader to faith and salvation. Despite the selective nature of the narrative, the reader is inundated with numerous signs with which the author of the fourth gospel garnished his narrative. These signs are more than mere miracles since they "are non-verbal Christological signposts."¹ As signposts, they point to realities beyond them.² Beginning from the second chapter, we read of the first sign that Jesus performed, namely, the changing of water into wine at Cana in Galilee (2:1–11). It was this first sign, performed at the behest of his mother that led his disciples to believe in him. It also set the tone for the connection between sign and belief which runs through the course of the gospel and gives the Johannine gospel its distinctive flavor as the book of signs.

In talking about the mission of his disciples that would blossom after his ascension, Jesus declares that those who believe in him would do greater works (*meizona erga*) because he is going to the Father (John 14:12). From a qualitative point of view, John 14:12 has been interpreted to mean that the one who believes in Jesus could perform more profound miracles than those done by Jesus. On the other hand, some scholars

¹ D. A. Carson, *The Gospel According to John* (Leicester, England: Apollos, 1991), 495.

² For the thesis that the books of Exodus and Isaiah serve as the OT background for John's use of signs, see Andreas J. Köstenberger, "The Seventh Johannine Sign: A Study in John's Christology," *BBR* 5 (1995): 87–103.

conclude that the verse points to the fact that those who believe in Jesus could only perform more numerical miracles than Jesus. This is based on the fact that the earthly life of Jesus is limited. This is the quantitative interpretation of the verse. There is also an intersecting interpretation that tries to conflate these two schools of thought by concluding that a qualitative or quantitative interpretation is simplistic. It argues that the death and triumph of Jesus set the work of the believers on a different pedestal from the works that preceded it. These three strands of interpretation take off from a study of the meaning of *meizon* in John 14:12. This paper, on the other hand, argues that the operative concept in the verse is *ergon*. Understanding its meaning and relating it to the other 'sign concepts' in John's gospel open up a new vista of interpretation for John 14:12.

Some Conceptual Distinctions

John employs a combination of kindred words in narrating the deeds of Jesus. The most distinctive of these words are work (*ergon*) and sign (*sēmeion*). *Ergon* could mean anything ranging from effort, labor or toil.³ It could also mean performance, the result or object of employment, making, or working.⁴ Sometimes it means action or active zeal in contrast to idleness.⁵ In other words, "ergon is a general term for some sort of activity ... which receives its specific color from the context."⁶ It appears 27 times in John's gospel and depicts different things based on its usage in the context. As noted by Kim, "eighteen times out of 27, John applied the word to what Jesus had done."⁷ It could mean the work of redemption which Jesus has come to do (cf. 4:34). It could also refer to the entirety of the actions of Jesus (cf. 7:3; 10:32; 17:4, etc.). In 7:7 it means the works of the evil world. One could rightly interpret *ta erga tou theou* (the works of God) of 9:3 to mean the plan or purpose of God. In essence, in God's plan "the man born blind is to be instrumental in revealing the hidden purposes of God."⁸

Sēmeion is used 13 times in Matthew, 7 times in Mark, 11 times in Luke and 17 times in John. Ridderbos remarks that the word "has the meaning 'miraculous act', in keeping with the use of the word in the Septuagint... usually as a reference to the miracles and mighty deeds by which Israel was led out of Egypt and by which Moses was legitimized as one sent by God (e.g., Ex. 8:4ff.)."⁹ In two places in John, the term is used by the opponents of Jesus to request the performance of miracles (2:18; 6:30). Twice, Jesus used it to state the hardness of the hearts of his hearers (4:48; 6:26). Once, it is used to compare the works of Jesus and John the Baptist (10:41). In eleven instances, *sēmeion*

³ *Ergon* occurs 27 times in John as against its 9 occurrences in the synoptic gospels.

⁴ H. Cremer, s.v. "ergon" *Biblico-Theological Lexicon of New Testament Greek* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1977).

⁵ G. Bertram, "ergon, ktl, *ThDNT*, vol. 2, 635.

⁶ James A. Kleist, "'Ergon' in the Gospels," *The Catholic Biblical Quarterly*, Vol. 6, No. 1 (January, 1944), 63f.

⁷ Chul-Hae Kim, "Three Exegetical key points to interpret the Gospel of John," *Torch Trinity Journal* 4 (2001), 119.

⁸ Kleist, *Ergon*, 67.

⁹ H. Ridderbos, *The Gospel of John: A Theological Commentary*, Eerdmans Classic Biblical Commentaries Series (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2018), 113.

refers to the miracles of Christ.¹⁰ In other words, *sēmeion* could mean miracles in John's gospel.

The word *terata* appears only once in John in the context of the miraculous healing of the son of a nobleman (4:46–54). However, John never employed wonder (*dunameis*) which the Synoptists favored in reference to miracles.¹¹ These distinctions are important in considering the lexical import of *ergon* in the context of John 14:12 and the significance of *sēmeion* in the context of John's gospel.

Contextual and Syntactical Analysis of John 14:12

The statement about greater works comes within the framework of the farewell¹² actions and speeches of Jesus in John's gospel (13:1–17:26). These events are narrated in the context of the Last Supper Jesus had with his disciples. It was during this supper that Jesus washed the feet of his disciples (13:1–11). It was also during this meal that the treachery of Judas was foretold (13:21–30). After the exit of Judas from the supper hall, Jesus begins his discourse about his going to the Father and the attitude he expects from those who believe in him (13:33–15:25). Ridderbos acknowledges that “in 13:31ff. we have already encountered anticipations of themes that are variously elaborated in the farewell discourse.”¹³ For instance, in 13:36 Peter introduced the question of the destination of Jesus (with *hupagō*). The importance of the word *hupagō* (to go away, to depart) is felt again in 13:36d and in 14:4.5.28. This section is then concluded with the long prayer of Jesus for his followers (17:1–26).

The immediate context of our pericope begins in 14:1 and ends in 14:14. In these verses, Jesus tells his disciples to believe in him and in the Father and not to let their hearts be troubled (14:1). The central issue is belief in Jesus as the self-revelation of the Father. This is a sure way to be untroubled in the face of his departure. He goes on to explain to them the reasons for believing in him and in God. First, his going away from his disciples is to prepare a place for them in the Father's mansion (14:2). Secondly, after this preparation, he would come to take them so that they may be with him (14:3). This is reason enough for the disciples not to be afraid. The section is dominated by a question-and-response rhetoric. The teaching of Jesus about his going away (14:1–4) leads to the question of Thomas about knowing the way (14:5). This question leads to the answer of Jesus that he is the way, the truth and the life (14:6–7). Jesus' response to Thomas leads to a further question by Philip about the vision of the Father (14:8).

¹⁰ Kim, *Key Points*, 118f.

¹¹ It appeared 12 times in Matthew, 10 times in Mark, 15 times in Luke but never in John.

¹² Although Jesus promises his abiding presence with his disciples, scholars have referred to the pericope as the farewell discourse of Jesus because of its close connection with other farewell testaments in antiquity in both the Jewish and Greco-Roman world. Gn. 27:1–40; 47:29–50:14; 50:22–26; Deuteronomy 31–34; in the New Testament, Acts 20: 18ff.; 2 Timothy 4; and of course the Synoptic farewell discourse, Mark 13 par.). For a more extensive examination of the genre of farewell testaments, see M. Winter, *Die Abschiedsworte der Väter und das Vermächtnis Jesu. Gattungsgeschichtliche Untersuchungen der Vermächtnisrede im Blick auf Joh. 13-17* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1994).

¹³ Ridderbos, *Commentary*, 481.

Philip's query leads to another response by Jesus (14:9–14). It is a longer answer that reinforces Jesus' response to Thomas. The response of Jesus concludes with the assurance that whatever the disciples ask in Jesus' name he would do (14:13f). After this, the next discussion concerns the promise of the Holy Spirit (14:15ff).

The structure of John 14:1–14

Jesus' departure to prepare a home for his disciples (v.1–3)

The command to faith (v.1)

The many mansions in the Father's house (v.2)

The taking of the disciples to the Father's house (v.3)

Jesus' teaching about the way (vv.4–7)

Jesus' speech about the disciples knowing the way where he is going (v.4)

Thomas' inquiry about Jesus' destination and the way thereto (v.5)

Jesus' response to Thomas: I am the way, the truth and the life (vv.6–7)

Jesus' teaching about his unity with the Father (vv.8–14)

Philip's demand: show us the Father (v.8)

Jesus' reply (a): the Father speaks and works through Jesus (vv.9–11)

Jesus' reply (b): the work of Jesus is the work of his disciples (vv.12–14)

Theological Significance of the Syntactical Analysis

It is interesting to remark that the discussion which began with a sad note of departure (*hupagō*), concludes with a happy note of the abiding presence of Jesus. It is this abiding presence that makes the disciples' mission the same as the mission of Jesus. This agrees with the farewell discourse of Matthew and Acts¹⁴ which I shall develop in the course of this paper. It shows that whatever the disciples would accomplish is based on the presence of their Lord. In the words of Ridderbos,

the disciples are clearly addressed in terms of their apostolic calling as those who will continue Jesus' work on earth...and their joint witness, as those who have been with Jesus from the beginning, is too emphatically characterized as fundamental for the entire coming church (14:26,27; 15:16; 20:30, 31) for this to be valid. But all this is subsumed under the perspective of the continuing fellowship of the ascended Jesus with his disciples on earth and of the coming church that will believe in Jesus through their word.¹⁵

The unity between Jesus and the Father (14:9–11) is equally important. In the first place, it is the Father that speaks through Jesus (14:10). The proof for this are the *erga* which the disciples have obviously seen (14:11). The implication is that the Father is

¹⁴ Contra Ridderbos who argues that this discourse is distinguished from the great farewell discourse in the Synoptic Gospels. Ridderbos, *Commentary*, 482.

¹⁵ Ridderbos, *Commentary*, 482f.

responsible for both the words and the works made manifest in Jesus. To further confirm the veracity of his words, Jesus adds that those who believe in him will do the *erga* he is doing and even greater (14:12). The introduction of the statement about greater *erga* with ‘amen’ shows the binding effect of the pronouncement, while the *hoti* clause shows that his going to the Father is the reason the one who believes in him would do greater *erga* than him. This is a sign that Jesus abides with them always. The continuation of this presence is through the instrumentality of the Holy Spirit who will dwell in those who believe (14:17).¹⁶ In effect, what those who believe in Jesus would carry out is a continuation of the *erga* that Jesus has been doing in the name of the Father. Could this point to the fact that believers in Jesus would do more qualitative work or that they would do more quantitative work through his abiding presence?

Qualitative Interpretations of ‘Greater Works’ in John 14:12

The major conclusion of qualitative interpretations is that ‘greater’ means ‘better’ in terms of quality. This means that those who believe in Jesus would perform works that are qualitatively better than those performed by Jesus. Proponents of this view consider that the disciples of Jesus received the power to perform works that are more impressive than the ones performed by Jesus. Whatever Jesus did, his followers would surpass it, so goes the argument. Perhaps, one of the most recent proponents of this view is Steve Young.¹⁷ The inspiration for his argument comes from a lexical and contextual interrogation of John 14:12. He begins with a consideration of the range of meanings of the term *megas* (great). It is from this word that *meizon* and its plural, *meizona* are derived. He references Arndt and Gingrich in considering that within the New Testament, the usage of *megas* incorporates dimensionally large, above average in quantity or intensity, superior in importance, and unusual.¹⁸ Hence, *meizona erga* (greater works) should have the above under its range of meaning. For him, if the statement of Jesus is to be interpreted quantitatively, John would have applied the words *pleious* (cf. 4:41 and *pleiona* (cf. 7:31; 15:2) which are current in John’s gospel. From the above, Young concludes that the lexical import of *meizona erga* is qualitative.

Young also considers both the remote and proximate contexts of John 14:12 in his analysis. He sees the gospel of John as a book of two parts. While chapters 1–12 contain the book of signs, chapters 13–21 contain the book of glory. For him, the seven miracles contained in the book of signs are the works that Jesus is looking back to in 14:12. These works include the changing of water into wine, the healing of the son of a nobleman, the healing of the lame man at the pool of Bethsaida, the multiplication of the loaves,

¹⁶ There is an elaborate discussion of the unity of the farewell discourse in John 14–17. See J. Schneider, “Die Abschiedsrede Jesu. Ein Beitrag zur Frage der Composition von Johannes 13,31–17,26,” in *Gött und die Götter* (Festschrift for E. Fascher), 1958, 103–12, esp. p. 104. For the literary links between chapters 14–16 see Ridderbos, *Commentary*, 486.

¹⁷ S. Young, *A Lexical and Contextual Identification of the “Greater Works”* in John 14:12, Shepherds Theological Seminary, 2013.

¹⁸ S.v. *Megas, megale, mega*, W. F. Arndt and F. W. Gingrich, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and other Early Christian Literature* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1957). *Megas* also refers to something physically big or generally great in terms of stature. See H. G. Liddell and R. Scott, *A Greek-English Lexicon* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1968), s.v. *megas*.

Jesus walking on the sea, the healing of the man born blind and the raising of Lazarus from the dead. According to Young, these are the inferior works which those who believe in Jesus will surpass. He also argues that these works are the ones Jesus refers to in 14:10f. Going further, Young argues that the superior works are only possible because of Jesus' exaltation. Without giving examples of such works that could qualitatively surpass those of Jesus, Young concludes that *meizona* can only be interpreted qualitatively. For him, "since the *meizona erga* are only possible because "I go to the Father," they are of a different class than the *erga* already done during Jesus' earthly ministry."¹⁹ Other places where Young sees a qualitative usage of *meizona* in the Johannine corpus include John 1:50; 4:12; 5:20; 14:12; 5:36; 8:53; 1 John 5:9. Judging from the continuity of meaning in the usage of *meizona* in John's gospel, these passages support the view that the 'greater works' of 14:12 should be seen qualitatively.

Intermediate Interpretations of 'Greater Works' in John 14:12

The view of Carson seems to fall midway between a qualitative and quantitative interpretation of 'greater works in 14:12. I present his argument here since Young appealed to him as supporting the qualitative thesis. In appealing to Carson, Young selected this line from Carson that *meizona erga* (more works) "cannot simply mean *more* works . . . since there are perfectly good Greek ways of saying 'more', and since in any case the meaning would then be unbearably trite."²⁰ However, what Carson argues is that a qualitative or quantitative reading of the verse is simplistic. He argues that *greater works* is not a transparent expression and thus, not easy to interpret. Carson rules out a quantitative reading of the verse. For him, "it cannot simply mean *more* works in the sense that the church will do more things than Jesus did, since it embraces so many people over such a long period of time." His argument is that if Jesus was referring to this the author would have used another word for "more."

Carson also rules out a qualitative reading because "it is hard to imagine works that are more spectacular or supernatural than the raising of Lazarus from the dead, the multiplication of bread and the turning of water into wine."²¹ In another place, he wonders what kinds of miracles could possibly be classed as more spectacular than these."²² Hence, it would be wrong to invoke Carson as supporting the qualitative usage of 'greater works' in John 14:12. Carson tries to get around this impasse by considering two clues to the correct interpretation of the verse. The first is the clause *because I am going to the Father* (14:12). The second is the parallel in 5:20: 'For the Father loves the Son and shows him all he does. Yes, to your amazement he will show him even *greater things than these*' (*meizona toutōn*). For Carson,

The two clues point in the same direction. Jesus' disciples will perform greater works because he is going to the Father: this cannot mean that they will have greater scope for their activity because he will have faded from the scene and relinquished the turf to them, but that the very basis for their greater works is his

¹⁹ Young, *Identification*, 9f.

²⁰ Carson, *Gospel*, 495.

²¹ Carson, *Gospel*, 495.

²² D. A. Carson, "The Purpose of Signs and Wonders in the New Testament," in *Power Religion: The Selling Out of the Evangelical Church?* (ed. Michael Scott Horton; Chicago, Ill.:Moody, 1992), 89–118.

going to the Father. Their works become greater precisely because of the new order that has come about consequent on his going to the Father. Similarly, the context of 5:20 shows that the greater works the Father will show the Son, and that the Son will therefore manifest to his followers, are displays of resurrection and judgment (cf. 5:17, 24–26). This life-giving power of the Son depends in turn on the Son’s death, resurrection and exaltation.²³

Concluding, Carson remarks that it is only after the resurrection and exaltation of Jesus that the signs and works he performed during his earthly ministry could truly achieve their end. On the other hand, the works believers are to perform would be set in the framework of Jesus’ death and triumph, thereby immediately and truly revealing the son.²⁴ It is easy to see that Carson’s reading of the passage has only complicated matters. In order not to sound simplistic, he has made Jesus’ declaration almost unintelligible. If Jesus is not referring to the quality of works to be performed by those who believe in him, he should be referring to the quantity of works. Carson denies both.

Quantitative Interpretations of ‘Greater Works’ in John 14:12

A quantitative interpretation concludes that ‘greater’ means ‘more in quantity’. It means that the work to be done by those who believe in Jesus would be greater in number than the ones performed by Jesus. Ralph Harris is a prominent representative of this thought. In his submission, he concludes that “what was performed by Jesus could be multiplied in and through His disciples.”²⁵ This seems to be the interpretation of the passage that gained currency in the early church.²⁶ Since Jesus was only an individual who functioned within the geographical confines of Palestine, he was only able to do as much as an individual could do within the short span of life he lived. MacArthur seems to underline this view in his submission that “when the Lord spoke of His followers performing greater works, He was referring to the extent of the spiritual miracle of salvation. Jesus never preached outside of Palestine, yet His followers would spread the gospel throughout the world.”²⁷

This interpretation seems to be supported by the evidence of the New Testament. Even while Jesus was with his disciples, he gave them authority to perform wonders (cf. Mark 6:7 and par). Still during his earthly life the disciples reported that even the demons were subject to them (cf. Luke 10:17). The Acts of the Apostles also recorded the numerous wonders performed by the followers of Jesus. Beginning from the day of Pentecost, they performed works that put awe in the minds of the onlookers and increased the number of believers in Jesus (cf. Acts 2:43; 5:12). These wonders include the healing of the lame man at the beautiful gate (Acts 3), the punishment miracle on

²³ Carson, *Gospel*, 495.

²⁴ Carson, *Gospel*, 496.

²⁵ Ralph W. Harris (ed.), *The New Testament Study Bible: John* (Springfield, Mo.: The Complete Biblical Library, 1988), 399.

²⁶ See Andreas J. Köstenberger, “The ‘Greater Works’ of the Believer According to John 14:12,” *Did* (1994 – 1995), 36–45.

²⁷ John MacArthur, *John 12–21* (The MacArthur New Testament Commentary; Chicago, Ill.: Moody, 2008), 107.

Ananias and Sapphira (Acts 5:1–11), numerous healings and exorcisms (Acts 5:15–16), even with the handkerchiefs and aprons of Paul (Acts 19:12) and the deliverance of a slave girl in Philippi (Acts 16:16–18). It is evident that none of these qualitatively surpassed what Jesus did in the gospel accounts.²⁸ However, the command of Jesus to his followers to go to the whole world preaching the good news at least opens up the possibility of a quantitative interpretation of John 14:12. Perhaps, relating this verse to the *ergon* and *sēmeia* passages in John underscores the points already made.

John 14:12 and the *Ergon* and *Sēmeion* Passages in the Gospel.

Many scholars have come to the consensus that the gospel of John contains seven sign stories.²⁹ Most of these stories explicitly mention that Jesus performed the *sēmeia* or the *erga*. In some of the passages where the term *sēmeion* or *ergon* is not employed, the explanation that follows shows in detail that the miraculous action points to something greater than its very performance. This is what eminently qualifies it as a sign. The first narrated sign in the gospel is the turning of water into wine at Cana in Galilee (2:1–11). This passage which is peculiar to John is recorded as the beginning of the *sēmeia* which Jesus performed (2:11). In the present circumstance, “the first sign had the same purpose that all the subsequent signs will have, namely, *revelation about the person of Jesus*.”³⁰ It was because of this that his disciples believed in him. If one relates this episode to the promise made to Nathaniel in 1:50 one could conclude that this sign becomes one of the greater things which Jesus referred to. The motif of belief will be introduced again at the end of the gospel (20:31) as a fruit of the deeds of Jesus recorded in the gospel.

The second miraculous sign also took place in Cana in Galilee (4:46–54). It concerns the healing of the son of a nobleman. In 4:47, the nobleman requests Jesus to come down and heal his son. The use of the imperfect *ērōta* (was begging) indicates the persistence of the request. Although the persistence of the man already shows his faith, Jesus asks him if he would not believe unless he sees signs (*sēmeia*) and wonders (*terata*). It is only here that *sēmeion* and *terata* are used together in the gospels. It is only here that the gospel of John mentions wonder.³¹ This man believed (4:50) and his faith secured the healing of his son.³² The conclusion of the passage (4:54) notes that this was the second *sēmeion* that Jesus performed since he came from Judea to Galilee.

²⁸ Harris, *John*, 399.

²⁹ Rudolf Bultmann wrote of a sign source in his 1941 commentary. R. Bultmann, *Das Evangelium des Johannes*, KEK (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1941). Barely thirty years later, Robert Fortna named John the gospel of signs. R. T. Fortna, *The Gospel of Signs: A Reconstruction of the Narrative Source Underlying the Fourth Gospel* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1970). For Brown, in this book, the public ministry of Jesus is mainly in signs and word through which he shows himself as the revelation of the Father, only for him to be rejected. See Raymond E. Brown, *The Gospel according to John I–XII* (New York: Doubleday, 1966), CXXXVIII. This consensus is increasingly being interrogated. See S. Temple, “The Two Signs in the Fourth Gospel,” *Journal of Biblical Literature*, Vol. 81, No. 2 (Jun., 1962), 169–174. For him, the evangelist, through the naming of only two signs in chapter 2 and chapter four of his gospel, did not intentionally set out to record seven signs.

³⁰ Brown, *Commentary*, 103. Emphasis is original.

³¹ Brown thinks that the reticence in applying wonder to the miracles of Jesus is because “an overemphasis on the wondrous blinds the eye to the miracle’s ability to reveal who Jesus is.” Brown, *Commentary*, 191.

³² For E. Schweizer, the unity of the entire gospel is displayed here. See his “Die Heilung des Königlichen, Joh. 4:46–54,” *EvTh*, vol. 11 (1951/2), 64–71.

The combination of signs with the element of faith is very strong in this passage (cf. 4:52f) just like in the previous one.

The healing of the man who had suffered for thirty-eight years (5:1–9) does not explicitly employ the word *sēmeion*. Rather the encounter between Jesus and the Jews over this healing employs *ergon* in five places (5:17 [twice].20.36 [twice]). *Ergon* is used in these places to depict the actions of the Father which Jesus fulfills on earth. However, the explanation of the healing passage seems to imply that Jesus likened the sickness of this man to death, while the restoration of his health is akin to rising from the dead. In five places in this chapter (5:21.24.25.28.29), this connection is made. This implies that what Jesus did was an *ergon* that pointed to a reality beyond it. This *ergon* is a *sēmeion*.

The feeding of the five thousand men plus an uncounted number of women and children (6:1–15) should perhaps function as one of the greatest signs in the entire gospel. The beginning of the narrative informs the reader that large crowds were following Jesus because they had seen the signs (*sēmeia*) which he did by healing the sick (6:2). At the end of the story, the people saw the *sēmeion* which Jesus did and proclaimed him the Messiah who is to come into the world (6:14). Jesus' remark the next day that the people were seeking him not because they had seen the *sēmeia* but because of the bread they had eaten (6:26) confirms the multiplication as a great sign which Jesus gave to the people. Despite this, the Jewish leaders tragically ask for a sign as confirmation of Jesus' words (6:30). It means that they did not understand the significance of the loaves.³³ The implication of this sign is made evident when Jesus solemnly declared that he is the bread from heaven (6:35) or the bread of life (6:48) or the bread of life from heaven (6:51). This means that the multiplication of the loaves and fish to satisfy the material hunger of the people was pointing to the bread which gives spiritual nourishment to the soul, namely his body (6:51). The bread discourse in the synagogue is eloquent enough to show that the sign of the multiplication of loaves is a pointer to Jesus who is the bread that has come down from heaven which he will give for the life of the world (cf. 6:32ff., 48ff., 51ff).

The healing of the man born blind (9:1–7) is another great sign in the gospel of John. This healing utilizes the word *ergon* (9:3.4), to indicate that the blindness of the man is to manifest the work of God in him. Before performing the healing proper, Jesus announces himself as the light of the world (9:5). This announcement seems to be the prelude to the teaching on the meaning of the miracle that is about to unfold. After the miracle, the contrast between blindness and sight is developed (9:39–41). This bracketing of the miracle with the discourse over light and blindness shows that the healing is a sign pointing to the function of Jesus as the light of the world. Hence, the *ergon* here is a *sēmeion*. The disciples are also incorporated into these works (9:4) which must be accomplished now because of the approaching night in which no one can work.

³³ See Andreas J. Köstenberger, "John's Appropriation of Isaiah's Signs Theology: Implications for the Structure of John's Gospel," *Themelios* vol. 43, no. 3, (2018), 376–386.

Perhaps the mention of night is a reference to the limited time available to Jesus for work.

The final sign in the gospel of John is the raising of Lazarus from the dead (11:1–44). At the end of the narrative, the chief priests and the Pharisees were worried on what to do with Jesus because of the many signs (*sēmeia*) that he is doing (11:47). Not only is the word *sēmeia* important in the passage, the teaching on the resurrection (11:23–26) also shows that the raising of Lazarus from the dead is a pointer to the resurrection of those who believe in Jesus.

The passages x-rayed show that what Jesus does in the gospel of John are deeds that point to realities beyond them. This effectively makes them signs. The first conclusion of the gospel (20:31) informs the reader that Jesus performed many other *sēmeia* which are not written down. This effectively makes the gospel of John the gospel of signs. Those who believe in Jesus are invited to continue performing such actions. The continuation of these actions is because Jesus abides with them till the end. This echoes the farewell speeches of Jesus in both the gospel of Matthew and the Acts of the Apostles.

John 14:12 and the Farewell Discourses in Matthew and Acts

This promise of the continual work of Jesus by his followers in John 14:12 is relatable to the same promise in the missionary mandates in Matthew 28:18–20 and Acts 1:8. In the first case, Jesus announces that all authority in heaven and on earth has been given to him. He therefore, mandates his disciples with this same authority to go to the whole world and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit and also teaching them to observe all the things he had taught them. Finally, Jesus assures them of his abiding presence with them all till the end of the age.

There are many implications to be drawn from this pericope. First, Jesus' use of 'therefore' (Matt 28:19) "draws a conclusion from the gift of all authority bestowed upon Christ."³⁴ The meaning is that whatever the followers of Jesus would perform would draw from the authority given to Jesus by the Father. Secondly, the use of 'all' with reference to the authority of Jesus shows the universal dimension of this authority.³⁵ Thirdly, the quadruple use of 'all' in this short passage (all authority, make disciples of all, teach them all, I am with you all) underscores the comprehensive character of the task ahead.³⁶ Finally, to be noted is that "although all authority in heaven and on earth has been given to the risen Jesus, he bequeathed to his disciples the delegated authority of the making of disciples through teaching and baptism."³⁷ This in

³⁴ R. C. H. Lenski, *The Eisenach Gospel Selections* (Columbus, OH: The Lutheran Book Concern, 1928), 580.

³⁵ G. Tisera, *Universalism According to the Gospel of Matthew* (Frankfurt am Main, Peter Lang, 1993), 298.

³⁶ W. D. Davies and D. C. Allison, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel According to Saint Matthew III* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1991), 677.

³⁷ R. Onyenali, "The ethical Implication of the Emmanuel Motif in Matthew 28:20 in the Ministry of the Church," *Maryland Studies*, Vol. 18, June 2021, 138f.

no way qualifies to be something qualitatively bigger than the accomplished works of Jesus.

The content of Acts 1:8 is not different from that of Matthew 28:18-20. First, it is a summary of the entire book of Acts. As Blomberg rightly observes, it is “a miniature outline of the rest of the book and the progress of the gospel that Luke will record.”³⁸ As a crucial part of the prologue of the book, it “underlines the function of the apostles as witnesses.”³⁹ As witnesses (*martus*), the role of the followers of Jesus is to bear witness to his deeds and resurrection. The very content of their witnessing is also a *marturion*.⁴⁰ Through the unction of the spirit, they are now called to be witnesses of Jesus in many diverse ways. The followers of Jesus were eyewitnesses of the events of Jesus’ death, burial and resurrection (see Acts 2:32; 3:15; 5:32; 10:39; 13:31; 22:15). They are to bear witness to these by their words, dynamic deeds and in their very essence.⁴¹ Again, they are not called to do something more impressive than Jesus.

Conclusion

From the available data in the gospel of John, it seems fair to conclude that the *sēmeia* performed by Jesus could be classified as *erga*. In the same way, the *erga* done by Jesus could be seen as *sēmeia*, in some cases. Perhaps the healing of the man born blind brings out this combination clearly. Even though the miracle employs *ergon*, we have seen it as a great sign since it reveals the identity of Jesus as the light of the world. With this line of thought, one is led to infer that *sēmeion* is an interpretation of the *ergon* of Jesus. I agree with the conclusion of C. H. Dodd that “to the evangelist a *sēmeion* is not, in essence, a miraculous act, but a significant act, one which, for the seeing eye and the understanding mind, symbolizes eternal realities.”⁴² Those who believe in Jesus are incorporated to perform both the *sēmeia* and the *erga*. However, a subtle distinction needs to be made. While every *sēmeion* could qualify as *ergon*, it is not every *ergon* that qualifies as *sēmeion*. In the same way, it is not every *ergon* that qualifies as *dunamis*. Therefore, in as much as believers in Jesus are called to continue the work of Jesus, they can only multiply the *erga* or the *sēmeia* of Jesus since the earthly life of Jesus was limited to the confines of Palestine. Again, the temporal limitation of Jesus as a human being makes it imperative that his work should continue in his followers.

By implication, the employing of the word *ergon* in John 14:12 does not refer to miraculous works alone, but to the entirety of the work which the followers of Jesus

³⁸ Craig L. Blomberg, *From Pentecost to Patmos: An Introduction to Acts through Revelation* (Nashville: B&H Academic, 2006), 24

³⁹ E. J. Schnabel, *Acts* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2012), 65.

⁴⁰ In 1 Cor. 1:6 Paul employs *marturion* to refer to the message of the gospel. In this sense, the gospel is bearing witness to Christ.

⁴¹ Witness is given by words and deeds which are not to be set one against the other. The deed validates the word, but without the word the deed may be misinterpreted. The witness of the Apostles, both in words and signs, is subordinate to the Holy Spirit, sent by the Father to fulfill this task of witness (cf. John 15:26 ff; 1 John 5:7-10; Acts 5:32). Cf. Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue, *Dialogue and Proclamation: Reflection and Orientations on Interreligious Dialogue and the Proclamation of the Gospel of Jesus Christ*, (Rome, 1991), 59.

⁴² C. H. Dodd, *The Interpretation of the Fourth Gospel* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1968), 90.

will do in his name. This nullifies a quantitative appreciation of the verse. If this is to refer to the performance of greater wonders or signs by those who believe in him, it is to be wondered what signs believers in Jesus could perform that would surpass the raising of the dead and the opening of the eyes of a person born blind. The reason why his followers will do more *erga* than him is because he is going to the Father (14:13).

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