

## **“People and Power”**

### **Acts 2:1-13**

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Pentecost Sunday

If your child asked you for a substantial amount of money, what would you ask him or her? I'm sure several questions would come to mind, but I imagine you would begin with these. Why do you want this money? What do you want to do with it? I suspect your decision to grant their request would hinge on the answer to those questions.

Pentecost is about people and power. It is about God giving people power and lots of it. It is about people doing extraordinary things, the kind of things that make others take notice and investigate. That was certainly the case at Pentecost when the early disciples started talking in foreign languages, breaking down communication barriers. No one had ever witnessed this and the only explanation was that God's Spirit descended upon believers and gave them miraculous powers.

A week ago, I went downtown with a group from our church to attend a Celebration of Pentecost service at the Peachtree Christian Church. The Regional Council of Churches of Atlanta sponsored it. The guest speaker was the senior minister at The Riverside Church in New York City, Dr. James A. Forbes, Jr. The entire worship service was outstanding and Dr. Forbes certainly rose to the occasion.

In his sermon, he asked this question, “If the Holy Spirit's power descended upon us today, what would you do with it?” I have not gone a day since then without thinking about this question. It had a sharp barb that hooked me.

I think it is a legitimate question. I have the feeling that God's decision to grant us superhuman powers rests upon the answer to it.

I am confident that God wants to give us power from above as much as He did the early believers after the ascension of Jesus. Like all parents, He delights in giving good gifts to His children whom He loves.

Two weeks ago, Jackie and I attended our son-in-law's graduation from medical school. As many of you know, John and Amy are headed to New York City for a year where he will do his first year of residency at NYU in Manhattan. Then, they will move to Atlanta where John will do a residency in dermatology at Emory.

While at their home during John's graduation, he thanked me for helping Amy and him get through medical school. Jackie and I have not done a lot but we have kept the wolf from the door a time or two. I told him I appreciated his remarks and then told him, “John, one day you will realize what a delight it is to help your children. I do not know anything that brings me greater joy than helping you and Amy or any of my children when they need it. It excites me.”

I believe the same could be said of God. I think it pleases Him beyond words to give to His children. However, giving them the kind of power that Luke wrote about in Acts 2:1-13 demands an answer to the question, “What do you want to do with my power?”

Dr. Forbes went so far as to say that God would not send His power until He knew what we wanted to do with it. He is not interested in us neglecting or abusing His

power. The latter would create even more problems. We all know the results of power placed in the wrong hands. We see it everyday. This is why God wants to know our motives and intentions. “If the Holy Spirit’s power descended today, what would we do with it?”

**How would you answer that question?** Be careful and honest. Giving an answer that you think God wants to hear won’t fool Him if you are not sincere. He can see your heart, remember. So, how would you answer it today?

**What do I think God wants to hear that would unleash this wonder working power upon us?** I’ve given this a lot of thought since I heard Dr. Forbes.

I think God wants to know if we want His power to become a **better person**. If we want His power to overcome a bad habit, begin something good that we have been putting off, repair a relationship, rearrange priorities, remain faithful in the midst of adversity, resist temptation or to stand courageously upon our convictions, I think He will be inclined to grant it. Helping us become better people brings Him great delight.

I also think He wants to know if we want His power to make the **world a better place**. If we want His power to pursue peace and justice, I am convinced He is more than ready to give it to us. If we want His power to feed the hungry, clothe the naked, shelter the homeless, heal the sick, educate the ignorant, train the untrained, speak up for the voiceless, expose the corrupt, stamp out prejudice and resist evil, I think He is more than eager to grant it. If we want His power to spread the Gospel of Jesus Christ and advance His Kingdom instead of building ours, I believe He stands ready to give it.

I think the lack of power in our lives is not due to God’s indifference or inability, but our unwillingness to use it correctly. If you thought your children were going to misuse the money they asked for, would you give it to them? Would you give it to them knowing it would hurt them and those around them? Not if you are aware and responsible. Neither would God.

This morning, as we celebrate Pentecost, answer the question of the hour. “If the Holy Spirit’s power descended upon you today, what would you do with it?” The answer may reveal a lot of things to you.