

Sermon for Sunday, July 9, 1972 by Andrew A. Jumper, D.D., Pastor  
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"POWER BEYOND THE PARKING LOT"  
St. Luke 9:1-6, 10:1-12

Text: "And he called the twelve together and gave them power and authority over all demons and to cure diseases, and he sent them out to preach the kingdom of God and to heal." St. Luke 9:1-2

Not long ago one of my Elders dropped by the office and we got to talking about a mutual friend who had just had surgery. As it turned out this person had an inoperable malignancy. With deep feeling and emotion my Elder said to me, "If only we Christians had the power to go into that situation and really minister to that family!" What he said was a judgment on all of us who belong to the church. He was looking into a world in desperate need and there was nobody to send--at least there was nobody to send with power.

It wasn't very pleasant to face, but ever since I've had to ask myself, "Do we Christians have no power beyond the church parking lot?" Is Christianity just something we talk about within the walls of the church? When the sermon is over, the last hymn sung, the preacher greeted at the door, and we get in our car at the parking lot, do we carry any real power back into life? The more I thought about it, the more I began to dig into the New Testament and into the power that the early Christians had.

I discovered that the New Testament had two things to say about Christians. First, it said that they had authority. For example, in John 1:12 the Bible says, "But as many as received him, to them gave he the authority to become the Children of God." (Now, don't be fooled. Your translation may say "power" but the correct translation of the Greek word used there is "authority".) So the authority of the Christian came from believing in Jesus, in receiving Christ as our personal Savior.

Now, it seemed obvious to me that most of us would qualify for this authority. I suspect that there are very few of us this morning who do not believe in Jesus. We may not let him truly rule our lives, we may not truly surrender our hearts to him, we may not truly let him guide our actions, but at least we believe he is the Son of God and we believe he is our savior. We Christians, then, have authority.

But the second thing I discovered in the New Testament was that not only did those early Christians have authority, they also had power. For example, in the scripture that is our text for this morning we read, "And he called the twelve together and gave them power and authority over all demons and to cure diseases, and he sent them out to preach the kingdom of God and to heal." So, when Jesus sent his men out on a mission of mercy, when he sent them out to tell people about God, he gave them authority, but he also gave them power.

I discovered another interesting passage that really brought this home to me. In the last chapter of Luke, the writer records this scene: Jesus is with his disciples for the last time. He is on the point of ascending to heaven to be with the Father again. As he prepares to leave, he reminds the disciples of all that he has done and how he has died for men. He tells them that they are to go out into the whole world and tell men this good news. Now, we need to remember who these men are he is talking to. They are the same men who have been with him for three years. They have heard him preach and teach. They saw his crucifixion from afar. They have visited the empty tomb. They have been with the risen Jesus and have even touched the wounds in his hands and his side. They had already confessed, "Thou art the Christ, the Son of the Living God." But--and here is the strange thing--these men

who are believers and who have authority because they do believe--these same men are not ready to go tell the world about Jesus. Jesus says to them, "But stay in the city until you are clothed with power from on high." In other words, they have authority as children of God because they believe in Jesus, but they do not yet have the power they need to minister to the world. They are to stay in Jerusalem until they get that power.

The question I began to ask myself was this: do we Christians today have both the authority and the power? Do we have any power beyond the parking lot? Or, are we like those disciples, living between Easter and Pentecost, who have authority because we are believers, but having no power?

Do you think the church today has the sort of spiritual power that God means for it to have? When we look at the state of the church today it would appear that we don't have that power. All across the country church school attendance is dropping, giving to benevolences is declining, membership is dropping off, attendance in church is off badly and the percentage of Christians to the total world population is steadily declining. Surely we don't see much power there.

But let's make the question even more personal. Does our faith give us all the power we need to deal with life? When problems come, when irritants bleach and discolor the beauty of life, when things seem to go to pieces in our hands, is there power in our lives that enable us to deal effectively with these things? Do we ourselves really and truly have spiritual power to deal victoriously and triumphantly with life when we drive out of the church parking lot?

So, the early Christians had authority and power. They had authority as Children of God because they believed in Jesus as their personal savior. But where did they get the power? The answer is to be found in the first chapter of the Book of Acts. It is the same scene we mentioned a moment ago where Jesus is with his disciples for the last time but it is told in somewhat different words. As he prepares to return to heaven and to send his men out to win the world for Jesus, our Lord says to them, "But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and (then) you shall be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth."

Well, there it is. By believing in Jesus as our savior we have the authority as children of God. We receive power through the Holy Spirit whom Jesus sends. On the day of Pentecost, when the Holy Spirit had fallen upon the disciples, Peter stood up and preached the first Christian sermon. The Bible tells us that as he spoke, the hearts of the people were cut and they cried out, "Men and Brethren, what shall we do." And Peter told them they needed to have authority and power. He said, "Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins..." (that gives them authority to become children of God) "and," says Peter, "you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit." That gives them spiritual power!

I suspect most of us this morning are Christians. We are Christians in the sense that we have repented, we have believed in Jesus as the Son of God, we have received him into our hearts as our Savior. Yet, I also suspect that most of us are leading defeated lives this morning. We do not handle life very well. Trouble, sorrow and calamity knock us down. Life goes to pieces in our hands and we do not handle it very well. And the reason is we do not have the power of the Holy Spirit.

Would you like to have that power in your life this morning? Would you like to know how to be filled with the Holy Spirit? The Bible tells us there are three things

involved. Here is thing one: Scripture commands us to be filled with the Holy Spirit. In Ephesians 5:18 we read, "And do not get drunk with wine, for that is debauchery; but be filled with the Spirit." That is an imperative! That is a command! Be filled with the Spirit! So because Scripture commands us to be filled, we know it is God's will for every Christian.

Here is thing two: In I John 5:14 we read, "And this is the confidence which we have in him, that if we ask anything according to his will he hears us." Isn't that a wonderful promise? Whatever we ask of God that is in accord with his will, he hears us. God commands us to be filled with the Spirit so we know it is his will and if we ask him to do what is in accord with his will he does it.

Here is thing three: In I John 5:15 we read, "And if we know that he hears us in whatever we ask, we know that we have obtained the requests made of him." Well, that is another glorious promise! If we ask anything of God that is in his will, he hears us. And if he hears us, by faith we know that we get what we ask for.

That's simple enough, isn't it? It is God's will that we be filled with the Holy Spirit, so if we ask him to fill us he hears us. And if he hears us by faith we know that we get what we ask for. And if we as a church and as Christians are to have any power beyond the parking lot we must have authority by accepting Jesus as our Savior and we must have power by being filled with the Holy Spirit.

May I close with a word of warning? I have told you as simply as I know how to be filled with the Holy Spirit and to have the power of God at work in your life. You don't have to live a defeated life. You can have a vibrant, triumphant life as a Christian. But don't play games with God. If you don't truly intend to surrender your life to him, don't ask him to fill you with His Spirit. If you don't really want to be God's man or God's woman, if you don't really want to live the sort of life you know God wants you to live, if you don't intend to be the sort of person God calls you to be, don't ask Him to fill you with His Spirit. To do so is to sin against the Holy Spirit. And the Bible says that for sin against the Holy Spirit there is no forgiveness.

So be absolutely certain that you are ready to go where he wants you to go, to say what he wants you to say, to live as he wants you to live, to do what he wants you to do. Be absolutely sure that you are willing to put your life under his sovereign command. Be absolutely sure that you are willing, as St. Paul says, to be a fool for Jesus.

But if you are absolutely sure this morning let me offer you this promise. If you ask him to fill you and have faith that he will, you will never regret it. It will be the greatest and grandest moment in your life. You will, indeed, have power beyond the parking lot.