

# Spiritual Superpowers

By Rev. Barry C. Halterman, Bryn Athyn Cathedral – April 22, 2018

---

***“And these signs will follow those who believe: In My name they will cast out demons; they will speak with new tongues; they will take up serpents; and if they drink anything deadly, it will by no means hurt them; they will lay hands on the sick, and they will recover” (Mark 16:17-18).***

## Introduction

Why do we believe? What difference does it make to believe in the Lord? Why do we come to church on Sundays and read and study the teachings of the New Church? What difference does it make in our lives?

A simple answer is given in the work True Christianity #68: “The more we follow the divine design in the way we live, the more we receive power against evil and falsity from God's omnipotence, receive wisdom about goodness and truth from God's omniscience, and are in God because of God's omnipresence.”

The key message in this passage is that believing in the Lord and following Him gives us real spiritual power. Following the Lord doesn't give us worldly power. That is not the kind of power the Word teaches. Instead it gives us greater and more lasting powers, powers over the things which cause all pain and suffering in our lives. Following the Lord gives us power over evils and falsities in our lives and it gives us the power to help heal others. Following the Lord gives us spiritual superpowers.

The five powers listed in our text from the *Gospel of Mark* show us five specific kinds of spiritual superpowers we receive from the Lord when we follow him.

## Context

The text begins by setting out the problem: *“Later He appeared to the eleven as they sat at the table; and He rebuked their unbelief and hardness of heart, because they did not believe those who had seen Him after He had risen” (Mark 16:14)*. The disciples were doubting whether or not the Lord really was God and if He really rose from the dead like He said He would. But doubt alone isn't the problem. Sometimes we aren't sure about things in life and we wonder what to do. That's normal. Doubt becomes a problem when it stops us from acting. Faith isn't just something for our minds; it's for our lives. Faith is about how we live. If we really believe in something we will live according to it.

Because the disciples doubted and did not believe in Him they were not doing the things the Lord commanded them to do. He had told them to *“Go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature. He who believes and is baptized will be saved; but he who does not believe will be condemned” (Mark 16:15-16)*. To believe and be baptized means to follow the Lord and to work to become regenerated. The disciples were supposed to teach the truth to others so people could learn to follow the Lord and become regenerated. Without this the Christian Church would never have grown. The Lord exhorted them to carry out their mission and promised them special powers to accomplish their task.

The message to us is simple: we too need to not get paralyzed by doubts that keep us from following the Lord. We need to do as the disciples did by living by the truth and working on the process of regeneration to become reborn spiritually. We need to do what we promised at baptism by repenting and cleansing ourselves of evil and by regenerating, by ceasing to do evil and learning to do good. Just as the disciples were promised certain powers to help them in their task we get the corresponding spiritual powers when we follow the Lord. Each of the five things described in the story can give us a specific spiritual power.

One more thing about power before we look at specifically at those five spiritual superpowers described in the text. As we heard in the passage from *True Christian Religion* #68, we don't actually have any power on our own. All power is from the Lord. We can't actually control evil in our lives by ourselves. As we heard in that reading, our attempt to conquer evil by ourselves would be like a gnat trying to defeat a whale or a fly against a camel. We can't do it alone. The power is really the Lord's. But the good news is that "with God all things are possible." When we do things the Lord's way, according to the Lord's design, He gives us the power to overcome in our spiritual struggle against evils and falsities in our lives. It's the Lord's power in us and we can use it if we use it for good.

Now let's look more closely at those five spiritual powers available to those who follow the Lord.

#### Superpower 1: Power To Cast Out Demons

Literal meaning: During the disciples time people were literally possessed by demons. Demons actually controlled people's bodies. The Lord gave the disciples to power to literally cast demons out of people and set them free to be themselves again.

Spiritual meaning: The power to "cast out demons" means the power to remove evil from our lives. Everyone one of us has our own particular evils we are struggling with. These evils are the "personal demons" that we struggle with. What are some personal demons you struggle with? Uncontrolled anger? Justifying our own faults? Judging others harshly? Not being totally honest with other people or in our workplace? Lack of trust in the Lord? Lack of trust in others? Treating others as if they are beneath us? There are so many different evils that are like demons controlling our lives. Pick one. The Lord says He will give us power to cast those things out of or life. But how? How do we get rid of these personal demons?

The text says the disciples did it "in the name of the Lord." For us, casting out demons "in the name of the Lord" means we can only get rid of our personal demons by living according to the Lord's order and taking on the Lord's qualities. The Lord's "name" means all His qualities. Again, the Lord has all power and His power only comes to us and works through us when we take on His qualities. We need to use the Lord's qualities to counteract the demonic ones. When we feel hate we cast it out with love. We cast out deceit with truth, dishonesty with honesty, coveting with contentment, anger with peace, lust with chastity, and worry with trust.

#### Superpower 2: Power To Speak With New Tongues

Literal meaning: The story of the Pentecost in *The Book of Acts* (ch. 2) is a clear example of how this was literally true for the disciples. People from all over the ancient world came to Jerusalem which was a center for trade and they spoke the languages of their own country. The Lord performed a miracle through the disciples by enabling them to teach the foreigners who came to Jerusalem even

when the disciples didn't speak their language. When the disciples spoke their listeners heard them as if the disciples spoke their local language.

Spiritual meaning: "To speak with new tongues" means to speak with new affections, new ideas, and new insights into truth. When the demon/evil is cast out we don't speak his lies, his curses, his hypocrisy, his justifications anymore. Instead we speak with love, kindness, truthfulness, honesty, sincerity, new hope, new joy, new comfort, new insight. Think of a time when you have overcome something in your life. Going through it and overcoming gave you insight. You can now help others going through similar things by speaking in a new way about the truth, speaking with the new tongue of experience and insight.

### Superpower 3: Power To Take Up (Control) Serpents

Literal meaning: In the disciples' time, many people didn't like what the disciples were teaching and tried various means to kill them, including setting poisonous snakes on them. The Lord gave them the power to control the serpents before the serpents could bite them and infect them with poison.

Spiritual meaning: Serpents stand for our senses, so "to take up serpents" means to gain control over our sense-based thinking and the appetites of our senses. Believing in the Lord helps us see sense-based desires and thinking for what they are. Serpents are very good on the ground and they represent the lower things of life, our lower natures, our worldly and sensual appetites and concerns. We need to have these as part of us to keep us alive and to enjoy this world. But just as the serpent tempted Adam and Eve the serpent can gain control in our lives. The desire for material things, for worldly wealth and power, for pleasure can gain control of our lives and poison us.

The power to take up serpents is the power the Lord gives us to take control our desires before they become obsessions and addictions and to break free of them when they control us. When take a higher spiritual perspective and lay up treasures in heaven instead of earth we begin to overcome those serpents in our lives. We raise our minds beyond sense-based conclusions and think from spiritual principles. When the qualities of love of Lord and neighbor are guiding our intentions they control the lower passions and appetites.

### Superpower 4: Power To Drink Deadly Things (Poison)

Literal meaning: Similar to "taking up serpents," another one of the means people used to try to kill the disciples was to make them drink deadly poisons. The Lord made them immune to these poisons so they had no effect on them.

Spiritual meaning: "To drink deadly things and not be harmed" means having the ability to hear falsities and not be affected by them. Water represents truth and poisonous water represents the opposite of truth, which is falsity. When we follow the Lord we can hear and even be persuaded at times by false ideas, but we will not be hurt by them if we don't love them. As Jesus said, it is not what goes in the mouth that defiles us but what comes out (*Matthew 15:11*). It is not what we hear that defiles us but what we say and do with it. Truth is the antidote – it protects us. When we know what the Lord teaches and we follow what the Lord teaches we gain the power to see falsity for what it is and not let it poison our way of thinking and acting.

## Superpower 5: Power To Heal Others (by laying hands on them)

Literal meaning: The Lord gave the disciples the ability to heal sickness and disease. They didn't even have to know all the medical cures of the day, which were extremely limited anyway. All they had to do was lay their hands on the sick and they were made well. The Lord's healing power worked through their actions.

Spiritual meaning: To lay hands on the sick and have them recover is the ability to bring healing to other people's spirits. Everywhere in the Word "hands" stand for exercising and communicating one's power to another. The Lord gives us the power to communicate a truth or awaken a good affection or desire in someone else. Being a disciple involves fighting evil and falsity in our own lives and using what we have learned to help serve others.

There is a powerful passage in the book True Christianity (#457) that shows how important we are to the Lord's plan of bringing love to everyone: "God loves each and every human being, and because He cannot do good to them directly but only indirectly by means of other people, He therefore breathes into people His love" (*True Christianity #457*). The Lord created us to be agents for bringing His love into the world!

As we work to combat the demons in our lives, learn to speak from experience about how truth works in our life, gain a higher perspective over natural desires and passions, and reject falsities that we see, we gain a greater and greater ability to use these things for helping and healing others. We use our power from the Lord to do what is truly good and helpful to the people around us.

### Summary

This story of the five signs which follow belief teaches that we can gain power over the real issues in life when we follow the Lord and strive to do what He teaches. We gain power to get rid of the personal demons and evils we struggle with in our lives. We gain power to speak with new affections, new ideas, and new insights for ourselves and others. We gain power to control the lower sense-based thoughts and desires in our lives by keeping them in perspective and stopping them from rising up and harming our spiritual lives. With a firm foundation in the truth we gain power over the deadly and poisonous ideas that we sometimes get mixed up with in this messy world and we can take the antidote of truth from the Lord's Word to help us survive. And finally we can use what we know to gain a real powerful healing affect on others as we act from the truth and love the Lord gives us.

So there will be times when we doubt whether or not trying to do all these things to live a spiritual life is really helping. We will wonder if it is really worth it. If we pause to take a deeper look at our lives we can see the signs of spiritual power the Lord has given us and it can help increase our faith and increase our usefulness to the Lord and others. These signs of real spiritual power are confirmations that believing in the Lord and following His teachings really do lead to a better, happier, more controlled, more contented and more useful life.

*"And these signs will follow those who believe: In My name they will cast out demons; they will speak with new tongues; they will take up serpents; and if they drink anything deadly, it will by no means hurt them; they will lay hands on the sick, and they will recover" (Mark 16:17-18). Amen.*

## Lessons:

### **Mark 16:14-20**

14 Later He appeared to the eleven as they sat at the table; and He rebuked their unbelief and hardness of heart, because they did not believe those who had seen Him after He had risen. 15 And He said to them, "Go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature. 16 He who believes and is baptized will be saved; but he who does not believe will be condemned. 17 And these signs will follow those who believe: In My name they will cast out demons; they will speak with new tongues; 18 they will take up serpents; and if they drink anything deadly, it will by no means hurt them; they will lay hands on the sick, and they will recover. 19 So then, after the Lord had spoken to them, He was received up into heaven, and sat down at the right hand of God. 20 And they went out and preached everywhere, the Lord working with them and confirming the word through the accompanying signs. Amen."

### **2 Samuel 22:29-36**

29 "For You are my lamp, O Lord; The Lord shall enlighten my darkness. 30 For by You I can run against a troop; By my God I can leap over a wall. 31 As for God, His way is perfect; The word of the Lord is proven; He is a shield to all who trust in Him. 32 "For who is God, except the Lord? And who is a rock, except our God? 33 God is my strength and power, And He makes my way perfect. 34 He makes my feet like the feet of deer, And sets me on my high places. 35 He teaches my hands to make war, So that my arms can bend a bow of bronze. 36 "You have also given me the shield of Your salvation; Your gentleness has made me great.

### **True Christian Religion #68**

The more we follow the divine design in the way we live, the more we receive power against evil and falsity from God's omnipotence, receive wisdom about goodness and truth from God's omniscience, and are in God because of God's omnipresence. The more we follow the divine design in the way we live, the more power we receive from God's omnipotence to fight against forms of evil and falsity, because no one can resist evils or the falsities that go with them except God alone. All forms of evil and falsity are from hell. There they stick together as one thing, exactly the same way all forms of goodness and truth do in heaven.

As we said above [65], to God the totality of heaven is like one human being. On the other hand, hell is like one giant monster. Going against one evil and its falsity is going against that whole giant monster of hell - no one can do it except God, because he is omnipotent.

Clearly then, unless we seek help from God Almighty we have no more power of our own against evil and falsity than a fish has against the ocean, or a gnat against a whale, or a piece of dust against a mountain that is falling on it. On our own, the power we have against evil is much smaller than the power a locust has against an elephant or a fly against a camel. Furthermore, our power against evil and falsity is even weaker because we are born into evil. Evil cannot act against itself.

Therefore we have to follow the divine design in the way we live. We have to acknowledge God, his omnipotence, and our resulting safety from hell, and do our part to fight against the evil that is with us; this acknowledgment and this fighting go together as part of the divine design.