

SUPERPOWER

Superman, the comic book character who launched *super-power* terminology in the modern world. “Superpower” is power...with a twist.

Power: possession of control, authority, or influence over others –making people do what you want them to do. Coveted around the world. Not a new phenomenon. Alexander the Great, Caesar Augustus, Cleopatra, all could take their places alongside any example you can find in the modern world.

Superpower is different, it's *energizing* power. That's the twist. Energizes people, as in the case of Clark Kent/Superman, to do extraordinary things.

You know who launched superpower terminology in my world? Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit energized people to do extraordinary things. And you can be sure there's a twist.

Flying, invisibility, super-human strength, glowing golden lassoes. Expected superpowers in the modern world.

“...a good man, full of the Holy Spirit and faith.”¹ Not exactly the super hero description...agreed. And that's another twist, power in the kingdom of God is altogether different than power in our world. Jesus was very clear about superpowers in God's Kingdom, and most of them had to do with serving God and serving people.

A good man, full of the Holy Spirit and faith is a description of me in Acts Chapter 11 Verse 24. Holy Spirit lived in me 24/7, permeated my thought pattern, gave me guidance, inner strength, wisdom. It was through him that I had influence in the early church. And when you peel back some layers, see behind the scenes of the stories, you can see how much the Holy Spirit used these super powers.

Saul, the feared murderer of Christians, had a super natural conversion. And with it, a new name, Paul. Paul came to Jerusalem. But the Christians there, are you kidding? He

¹ Acts 11:24

hunted them, they weren't falling for some "conversion" story. Saul, a true Jesus follower? They weren't buying it. Can you blame them?

Enter the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit stepped in with his plan, he had me personally bring Paul to the apostles and church leaders. Put yourself in their shoes. This man murdered Christians. Hell-bent on stamping out every Jesus follower. And now he stands right there in front of them. What to do? The Holy Spirit empowered me...super-powered me, to do something extraordinary; I confronted the justifiable fears in the hearts and minds of my fellow Christians. And overcame them. Literally changed their minds on a very hot life-and-death topic. Their life, their death! This event ignited the incredibly powerful partnership Paul would go on to have with the early church. A partnership that has shaped Jesus followers throughout all history. Shaped you.

Paul and I would go on to work together in some crazy situations. With the power of Holy Spirit, of course. Paul. He would go to the synagogue and make the case to the people that Jesus was the Messiah and the Son of God. Just lay it all out. And in our culture at that time, this was an impossible task. Through the power of his words, Paul explained what Holy Spirit was revealing to the world at that time. The people...They got it. They saw it, they believed. Energized by his superpower! Paul moved them to think beyond their narrow mindsets to see the bigger picture. Not *his* power, but the power given to him by and through the Holy Spirit. Energizing an ordinary man to do extraordinary things.

Paul told people about Holy Spirit. In fact, the Second Missionary Journey? Timothy, who was traveling with us at the time, needed to hear about Holy Spirit. So, Paul told him exactly what Jesus told his followers. The Holy Spirit would be sent to help them...forever. The Holy Spirit would teach them all things and remind them of things Jesus had told them. Jesus said the Holy Spirit would be with them and be in them.

Timothy, totally mystified asks, "What does it mean to have the Holy Spirit in you?" Paul just looks at him, those piercing eyes, a little twinkle in them, "Timothy, it means he is in you. In you. That's what it means."

(Barnabas laughs) Timothy wanted to understand what can only be experienced, and Paul couldn't convey what words cannot express.

Neither Paul nor I were there when the Holy Spirit first came to the disciples. But we both knew the story, Peter saw to that. Jesus had been with his followers for about forty days after his resurrection, and then had been taken to into heaven. His followers gathered in Jerusalem to fast and pray. They are all in one big room. Praying. A wind... blows into the room, like a gush of wind. Fire...separate flames, tongues of a flame of fire

appear resting over each person's head. Each person is filled with the Holy Spirit, and they begin to speak in foreign languages. Each one begins to tell about Jesus in these languages. People were from all over, so many languages represented, and they were hearing their own language. It was extraordinary and, and... I don't what else. Just awesome. Peter goes out to the crowds of people near the temple and preaches up a storm, it was a powerful sermon. Thousands of people come to believe Jesus as Messiah and Son of God that day, and then were baptized.

In Peter's sermon, he reminded people of the prophet Joel who had prophesied that God would pour out his Spirit on his servants. Pour it out... overflowing pour it out, more than filling you! That was exactly what was happening. Super power for everyone.

I told Paul about Peter and John after the day of Pentecost. They taught about Jesus in the Temple and when the Jewish leaders opposed them, Peter was filled with the Holy Spirit. He *defied* their orders to quit teaching about Jesus, and taught about Jesus.² Superpower. The Holy Spirit filled everyone there.³ Definitely high points. But, to be fair, there were low points.

One of my superpowers is generosity. Not exactly flying or invisibility... a kingdom super power. I owned some land. The early group of Christians needed help. Financial help. So, I sold my land and gave it to the Apostles to distribute to the poor. Imagine my sadness when I told Paul about Ananias and Saphira. They did the same thing, sold some land, gave the money to the church. But... well, Ananias lied to the Holy Spirit about how much he gave, and he died. Peter asked a second time to Saphira, and she stuck to the lie. Fell down, dead instantly. That incident demonstrated to the early believers the importance of being obedient to God and to respect his apostles.⁴

Paul and I had many occasions to stand in awe of the Holy Spirit through the years. We saw how the Holy Spirit empowered every believer, and how he was involved in every aspect of the growing church.

Peter was the first to take the Good News of Jesus outside of the Jewish community. "Outside" was just not done. We didn't even think about it. Why would we? We were the people God had used throughout history. Holy Spirit was changing the rules we'd always lived by. And he was empowering us to be open to the change.

² Acts 4:8

³ Acts 4:31

⁴ Acts 5:1-11

Peter took the message to a Roman centurion, Cornelius, and his household. When he started speaking, the Holy Spirit filled them as he had the disciples in the beginning. Peter said, "If God gave them the same gift he gave us who believed in the Lord Jesus Christ, who was I to think that I could stand in God's way."⁵

Peter's personal revelation was a key to understanding the Holy Spirit was for everyone. Not "Jewish" everyone, but "everyone" everyone. That was the true super power of the Holy Spirit. Any person, from anywhere could be filled by the Holy Spirit to worship God and join him in the work of his kingdom. And it was a gift. Didn't have to earned, or ethnically qualified, or fought and wrestled out of someone else's hands.

The power of this heavenly kingdom was, and is, unlike any power the world had ever seen. And its true super-powered superheroes? Servants of God.

⁵ Acts 11:15-17