

Our God Is Able

Scripture reading: Romans 8:28-39

Song- "Teach me Lord to wait"

You cannot escape the pictures. It has been an amazing, unsettling week. Hurricane Katrina brought incredible damage to property and brought unbelievable suffering to so many lives. It is staggering to think about what happened and what is happening. It is chaos. From the man who lost the grip of his wife's hand as their home split in half and both the woman and house disappeared, to the Superdome and Convention Center's ugliness, Chaos has reigned for most of this week.

Words are not sufficient to describe the chaotic week. But perhaps Psalm 69 gets us started:

"Save me, O God, for the waters have come up to my neck. I sink in the miry depths where there is no foothold. I have come into the deep waters and the floods engulf me. I am worn out calling for help, my throat is parched. My eyes fail looking for my God...But I pray to you, O Lord, in the time of your favor, in your great love, O God, answer me with your sure salvation. Restore me from the mire, do not let me sink, deliver me from those who hate me, from the deep waters. Do not let the floodwaters engulf me or the depths swallow me up, or the pit close its mouth over me. Answer me, O Lord, out of the goodness of your love, in your great mercy turn to me. Do not hide your face from your servant answer me quickly, for I am in trouble. Come near and rescue me. Redeem me because of my foes." (Psalm 69:1-3, 13-18)

I must admit that I'm not a very good wait-er. I sense that I'm in pretty good company.

- How many of you have ever gotten in line at the grocery store and then kept track of where you'd be had you chosen the other line? (Also the tollbooth)
- How many of you have ever stopped for gas only to fill your tank halfway because the pump was so slow?

We really don't like to wait!

- I don't like waiting on test to come back for people I love.
- I don't like waiting on the teenager to return when there's ice on the road.
- I don't like waiting outside an ICU
- Dare I say, I don't like waiting on God

I just don't like waiting!

Some Katrina aftermath headlines:

Reuters

[Thousands wait to be evacuated from the Superdome in New Orleans on Friday.](#)

Nightly News (NBC)

- **Relief supplies arrive in New Orleans**

Sept. 2: In New Orleans, as people grew more desperate and angry, finally a convoy of aid trucks and air-conditioned buses crept into the center of the city.

- **Hope amid the misery**

Thousands are still stranded, food, water and troops arrive

Superdome evacuation halted

2,000 remaining refugees remain calm despite putrid conditions

NEW ORLEANS - National Guard members halted the evacuation of the Superdome early Saturday after buses transporting the refugees of Hurricane Katrina stopped rolling.

About 2,000 people remained in the stadium and could be there until Sunday, according to the Texas Air National Guard. They had hoped to evacuate the last of the crowd before dawn Saturday.

Guard members said they were told only that the buses had stopped coming and to close down the area where the buses were loaded.

The problem with getting older is you see more clearly how fallen our world is. We're reminded at times like this that we don't live in a protective bubble. Paul lists seven of the pins that are constantly busting our bubbles in Romans 8:35:

Trouble, hardship, persecution, famine, nakedness, danger and the sword.

It is at times like these that I'm reminded that the world is full of illness, abandonment, loss and grief, hunger, financial ruin, and death. The sooner you face these negative realities, the better off you are! We are not living in the Garden of Eden!

Christian counselor Larry Crabb writes:

Modern Christianity, in dramatic reversal of its biblical form, promises to relieve the pain of living in a fallen world. The message, whether it's from fundamentalists requiring us to live by a favored set of rules or from charismatics urging a deeper surrender to the Spirit's power, is too often the same: The promise of bliss is for now! Complete satisfaction can be ours this side of heaven. Like Crabb, I disagree that God promises us bliss, now!

This morning I want you to listen excerpts of another man's sermon. (recorded in 1963)

Jude 24 "To Him who is able to keep you from falling"

Martin Luther King Jr.

At the center of the Christian faith is the conviction that there is a God of power who is able to do exceedingly abundant things in nature and in history. This conviction is stressed over and over again in the Old and New Testaments. The God whom we worship is not a weak and incompetent God. God is able to beat back gigantic waves of opposition and to bring low-- prodigious mountains of evil. **This ringing testimony of the Christian faith is that God is able.**

There are those who seek to convince us that only man is able. Their attempts to substitute a human centered universe for a God centered universe is not new. It had its modern beginnings in the Renaissance and subsequently in the Age of Reason, when some men gradually came to feel that God

was an unnecessary item on the agenda of life. In these periods others questioned whether God was any longer relevant. The laboratory began to replace the church, and the scientist became a substitute for the prophet. Not a few joined Swinburne in singing a new anthem: "Glory to Man in the highest! For Man is the master of all things." ...man is able?

But alas! Something has shaken the faith of those who have made the scientific laboratory "the new cathedral of men's hopes." The instruments which yesterday were worshipped today contain cosmic death, threatening to plunge all of us into the abyss of annihilation. Man is not able to save himself or the world. Unless he is guided by God's spirit, his newfound scientific power will become a devastating Frankenstein monster that will bring to ashes his earthly life.

At times other forces cause us to question the ableness of God. The stark and colossal reality of evil in the world - what Keats calls "the giant agony of the world;" ruthless floods and tornadoes that wipe away people as though they were weeds in an open field; ills like insanity plaguing some individuals from birth and reducing their days to tragic cycles of meaninglessness, the madness of war and the barbarity of man's inhumanity to man--why, we ask do these things occur if God is able to prevent them? This problem, namely, the problem of evil, has always plagued the mind of man. I would limit my response to an assertion that much of the evil we experience is caused by man's folly and ignorance and also by the misuse of his freedom. Beyond this I can say only that there is and always will be a penumbra of mystery surrounding God. What appears at the moment to be evil may have a purpose that our finite minds are incapable of comprehending. So in spite of the presence of evil and the doubts that lurk in our minds, we shall wish not to surrender the conviction that our God is able.

Let us notice, first, that God is able to sustain the vast scope of the physical universe.

...[So] before we are consumed too greatly by our man-centered arrogance, let us take a broader look at the universe. Will we not soon discover that our man-made instruments seem barely to be moving in comparison to the movement of the God-created solar system? Think about the fact, for instance, that the earth is circling the sun so fast that the fastest jet would be left sixty-six thousand miles behind in the first hour of a space race. In the past seven minutes we have been hurled more than eight thousand miles through space. Or consider the sun which science tells us is the center of the solar system. Our earth revolves around this cosmic ball of fire once each year, traveling 584,000,000 miles at the rate of 66,700 miles per hour. By this time tomorrow we shall be 1,600,000 miles from where we are this hundredth of a second. The sun, which seems to be remarkably near, is 93,000,000 miles from the earth. Six months from now we shall be on the other side of the sun-- 93,000,000 miles beyond it--and in a year from now we shall have been swung completely around it and back to where we are right now. So when we behold the illimitable expanse of space, in which we are compelled to measure stellar distance in light years and in which heavenly bodies travel at incredible speeds, we are forced to look beyond man and affirm anew that **God is able**.

God is able to conquer the evils of history. His control is never usurped. If at times we despair because of the relatively slow progress being made in ending racial discrimination and if we become disappointed because of the undue cautiousness of the federal government, let us gain new heart in the fact that God is able. In our sometimes difficult and often lonesome walk up freedom's road, we do not walk alone. God walks with us. He has placed within the very structure of the universe certain absolute moral laws. We can neither defy nor break them, they will break us. The forces of evil may temporarily conquer truth, but truth will ultimately conquer its conqueror. **Our God is able**.

Let us notice finally that God is able to give us interior resources to confront us in the trials and difficulties of life. Each of us faces circumstances in life, which compel us to carry heavy burdens or sorrow. Adversity assails us with hurricane force. Glowing sunrises are transformed into darkest night. Our highest hopes are blasted and our noblest dreams are shattered.

Christianity has never overlooked these experiences. They come inevitably. Like the rhythmic alternation in the natural order, life has the glittering sunlight of its summers and the piercing chill of winters. Days of unutterable joy are followed by days of overwhelming sorrow. Life brings periods of flooding and periods of drought. When these dark hours of life emerge, many cry out with Paul Laurence Dunbar:

"A crust of bread and a corner to sleep in, A minute to smile and an hour to weep in, A pint of joy and a peck of trouble, And never a laugh but the moans come double; And that is life!"

Admitting the weighty problems and staggering disappointments, Christianity affirms that **God is able** to give us the power to meet them. **He is able** to give us the inner equilibrium to stand tall amid the trials and burdens of life. **He is able** to provide inner peace amid outer storms. This inner stability of the man of faith is Christ's chief legacy to his disciples. He offers neither material resources nor a magical formula that exempts us from suffering and persecution, but he brings an imperishable gift: "Peace I leave you." This is the peace which passeth all human understanding.

At times we may feel that we do not need God, but on the day when the storms of disappointment rage, the winds of disaster blow, and the tidal waves of grief beat against our lives, if we do not have a deep and patient faith our emotional lives will be ripped to shreds. There is so much frustration in the world because we have relied on gods rather than God.

- We have genuflected before the god of science only to find that it has given us the atomic bomb, producing fears and anxieties that science can never mitigate.
- We have worshipped the god of pleasure only to discover that thrills play out and sensations are short lived.
- We have bowed before the god of money only to learn that there are such things as love and friendship that money cannot buy and that in a world of possible depressions, stock market crashes, and bad business investments, money is a rather uncertain deity.
- These transitory gods are not able to save us or bring happiness to the human heart.

Only God is able. ...With this faith we can transform bleak and desolate valleys into sunlit paths of joy and bring new light into the dark caverns of pessimism.

- Is someone here moving toward the twilight of life and fearful of that which we call death? Why be afraid? **God is able.**
- Is someone here on the brink of despair because of the death of a loved one, the breaking of a marriage, of the waywardness of a child? Why despair? **God is able** to give you the power to endure that, which cannot be changed.
- Is someone here anxious because of bad health? Why be anxious? Come what may, **God is able.**

...When our days become dreary with low hovering clouds and our nights become even darker than a thousand midnights, let us remember that there is a great benign Power in the universe whose name is God, and **He is able** to make a way out of no way, and transform dark yesterdays into bright

tomorrows. This is our hope for becoming better [people]. This is our mandate for seeking to make a better world.

Our hope is in the God who is in control of all things. We take refuge in Romans 8:28-30 **And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose. 29For those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the likeness of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brothers. 30And those he predestined, he also called; those he called, he also justified; those he justified, he also glorified.**

This is a great verse, but often mistranslated. Some of us have pinned all kinds of bad things on the will of God. Paul is not telling us that everything that happens is ultimately because it was God's will. Paul isn't even telling us that God can use bad things to produce good, though I don't disagree that God does so. However, he is making the bold claim that God is moving history toward a grand conclusion.

The God who has known us, predestined us to be like Christ, called us, and justified us has also declared our glory-- a glory that we haven't fully received yet. This is a rugged promise from God to his people and especially those who have cried their eyes out with grief and hope.

So, how do we wait?

We wait in hope, and with endurance and in confidence.

Why do we wait?

Because we know that "our God is able!"

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