

# “He Is Able”

Matthew 20:17-28



June 10 2007

Dr. Paul T. Eckel

*“He is able”*

(Hebrews 2:18, 7:25, Jude 24, Philippians 3: 21,  
II Timothy 1:12, Ephesians 3:20)

# He Is Able

## ***“He is able”***

(Hebrews 2:18, 7:25, Jude 24, Philippians 3: 21,  
II Timothy 1:12, Ephesians 3:20)

When I was a teenager in Sunday School we seemed to sing this hymn a lot – “‘Are Ye Able?’ Said the Master.” Do you remember it? It is based on the Scripture we’ve just read. Jesus asks James and John, “*Are you able to drink the cup that I am about to drink?*”

They answered confidently, “*We are able.*”

Youth tend to love this kind of talk! I guess that’s why we bellowed out the chorus, “Lord, we are able, our spirits are Thine...”

But trotting out *our own* abilities is not the distinctive note of the gospel. A maturing Christian comes to realize it’s not about *me*, it’s about Christ! *He* – not *me!* – is the powerful One.

That’s why over and again the Bible points to Jesus and declares resolutely “*He is able!*”

## **Able to Help**

Hebrews 2:18 certainly puts it this way. The verse begins by telling us Jesus experienced human suffering and endured times of testing. Therefore, “*He is able to help those who are being tested.*”

“*Tested*” indeed! Things have a way of falling apart. The unlikely, the unexpected, the unthinkable happen. That’s the way life comes in this world and that’s why we claim the promise, Christ “*is able to help.*”

Here the word “*help*” literally means ‘to run to the cry of.’ What a picture! When you are being severely tested cry out to the Lord! The promise is, He will hear your cry and come to your aid.

But alas, we sometimes forget this. When times are hard a lot of us clam-up rather than cry-out. Our society is obsessed with privacy. Many pull down the blinds around their lives convinced no one else could possibly understand much less help.

Christians believe otherwise. We believe God understands! Our Lord has been through it all. He can finish your sentences before you do! That's why He is eager to 'run to the cry of' all who are being tested.

So cry out to the Lord in your times of need. "*He is able to help.*"

## **Able to Save**

But what if it's too late for that? What if you've already been tested and found wanting? Hebrews 7:25 offers a note of hope. It says, Christ "*is able for all time to save those who approach God through him.*"

The word 'saved' has fallen out of favor. Today, when Christian talk turns to 'being saved' it often draws a smirk. But ironically that supercilious smirk gives way to expressions of gratitude and relief when 'being saved' occurs *outside* the religious framework. Here's what I mean.

- There is no smirking when someone offers to save an unemployed person by giving him or her a job.
- There is no smirking when youngsters realize their parents have hung with them through a very tough period.
- There is no smirking when someone else forgives or covers the debt you could not possibly have repaid.
- There is no smirking when a physician's skill saves your life or that of a loved-one you almost lost.

Someone else is always saving us! This is an absolute fact. Odd isn't it that what we gratefully accept on the natural level we sometimes ridicule on the spiritual level. Jesus saves! This is still the good news. "*He is able*" to give to all who accept Him a new start, a new heart, a new hope.

The central message of the gospel remains, Jesus “*is able...to save.*”

## Able to Guard

Perhaps this reminder is for someone here in worship this morning. But others may complain, ‘Is that all Christianity is about, rescuing the fallen?’ What a dreary cycle! Well, Jude verse 24 puts a different slant on things. Listen, it says, “*He is able to keep you from falling.*”

There are about twenty different Greek words that can be translated ‘*keep.*’ The one used here has been carefully chosen. It means ‘to stand guard, to watch.’ Sometimes life itself depends on watching. In my college years I hiked some canyons in Arizona.

Once our guide told us, “Today, in some dangerous areas I am going to insist you watch my feet, how I place them and where. If you don’t follow me exactly, there could be painful consequences.” We watched!

Christ is able to help you keep your footing in a slippery and dangerous world. That’s why we sing:

“Christ of the upward way, my guide divine,  
Where Thou hast set Thy feet, may I place mine...”

Reclaim the habit, then, of asking Christ to keep you steady as you follow Him. The promise is, “*He is able to keep you from falling.*”

## Able to Subject

All this may be fine for personal faith, but what about the larger picture – this troubled world for instance? Philippians 3:21 speaks to this with confidence, “*He is able to subject all things to himself.*”

When Paul speaks of “*all things*” – as he does almost 100 times in his letters! – the apostle excludes nothing. He believes *everything* will finally be ‘subjected to Christ.’ “*To subject*” means ‘to be placed in order under.’

Here, then, is the promise. Christ “*is able*” to place in order under himself everything that is painful or broken or sinful. How Christ is going to accomplish this, we do not know. But of this we can be confident, “*He is able*” to do it! And here’s why we can be sure of this.

Jesus was crucified, but God raised him from the dead. What could possibly frustrate or defeat Him after that?

It’s a bit like D-day, celebrated this week for the sixty-third year. That massive allied invasion of Europe spelled the end of World War II. But, as ‘the Greatest Generation’ knows quite personally, many tough battles still lay ahead.

Christ’s life, death, and resurrection guarantee the final victory. Today we are engaged in mopping-up operations. Many of us wring out our mops in frustration over the plight of our world and the state of the church. But I take comfort in remembering our Lord is *not* wringing his hands. He is neither frustrated nor confused about our world, the church, or the future!

Trust in Christ’s present power and ultimate victory. We have been assured, “*He is able to subject all things to himself.*”

## **Able to Protect**

In the meantime Paul urges us to live, secure in the knowledge that Christ “*is able to guard until that day what I have entrusted to Him*” (II Tim 1:12)

The phrase “*what I have entrusted*” is business talk. Sometimes I joke with my bank teller, “Certainly appreciate you all keeping watch over *both* these dollars I’m depositing with you!”

Truth be told, I am grateful. I am confident my money will be kept safe behind steel vaults, burglar alarms, honest tellers and sound financial management. This is precisely the picture to put in your mind when you hear Paul speak about what he has “*entrusted to Christ.*”

Paul's image is this. 'I have made a deposit; it's very precious; it's *me!*' He says, I have deposited myself into Christ's safekeeping. In return the Lord has promised to guard eternally what I have entrusted to Him.

Depositing yourself into Christ's care means there is no need to be worried about today or anxious about tomorrow. Claim Paul's confidence for yourself, "*I know the One in whom I have put my trust.*"

Rest secure in the knowledge that Christ "*is able to guard...what has been entrusted to him*"

## **Able in Abundance**

What more need be said? A lavish promise! It spills out over the edges of Paul's benediction in Ephesians 3:20, and it sings its hope down the centuries right into our lives today.

Christ "*is able to do far more abundantly than all that we ask or even think.*"

Paul was in awe of God's lavish abundance. So much so, that he made up a new word for it, *huperekperissou*. This word is long and complicated because Paul crammed three words into one. *Perissos* means 'abundant.' *Ek* means 'super.' And *huper* means 'above and beyond.'

So catch the overtones of Paul's extravagant image! He says, Jesus 'is able to do super-abundantly, above and beyond anything we ask or even dream of...and then some more on top of that!'

There is no limit to what Christ is able to do in your life, in His church, and in this world. "*He is able*" far beyond our imagination!

But – and don't miss this! – Christ has chosen to work his abundance through people of faith like you and me. He is seeking your willingness and openness so that he can pour Himself *into* you and *through* you.

In our spiritual lives we sometimes settle for too little. Decide right now to lay claim to all the abundant gifts Christ offers. "*He is able*" to grant blessings that go beyond our wildest dreams!

# He Is Still Able

Why have we bothered to talk about these things today? Well, for one reason, it's timely. The media is all over this.

Did you catch the special television program that aired this past week – the one about Faith and Politics? Presidential candidates were interviewed about matters of personal faith. Now there's a surprising wrinkle on the American political scene!

Religion still matters to the vast majority of Americans. I've yet to hear complaints about this being an invasion of privacy, or objections being raised about the "establishment of religion" clause. Instead, there is a healthy recognition that responsible human life is involved with and informed by one's faith.

None of us is running for public office or at least not for the office of President. Most of us are challenged with simply running our lives, caring for our families, being responsible in our work, upholding honor and dignity and integrity. These challenges are as important as being President.

Moreover our international struggles include a religious component. We are wrestling with radical Islamic fundamentalism. Christians need to study and understand this enemy. But more importantly, we Christians need to be clear about what we believe and why we believe it.

Where you stand on matters of faith, then, is vital for your personal life and central to our global tensions. Among all the complexities of life in our world today, most of us have learned that mindlessly chanting "we are able" is a shaky foundation on which to keep our footing.

The gospel still insists and Christians still believe we are to take our stand on Christ the solid rock – "*He is able.*"



**Church of the Palms**

3224 Bee Ridge Road  
Sarasota, Florida 34239  
(941) 924-1323  
[www.churchofthepalms.org](http://www.churchofthepalms.org)