"Our God Is Able"

[1 January 1956]
[Montgomery, Ala.]

With the boycott approaching its second month, King draws on two sermons by Frederick M. Meek to offer a message of hope to the people of Dexter. He reveals his own struggle in the midst of despair: "There are times that I get despondent, and wonder if it is worth it. But then something says to me deep down within that God is able." King acknowledges that God does not offer a problem-free life, but he concludes with words of encouragement: "If you have a proper faith in God he will give you something within which will help you to stand up amid your problems."

"Now unto Him that is able to keep you from falling—Jude 1:24" 2

This is the beginning of a New year. It is a time when the startling facts of yesterday and the heightening expectations of tomorrow join hands in the pressing urgency of today. There is no better way to begin this year than with the conviction that there is a God of Power Who is able to do exceeding abundantly thing in our lives and in the life of the universe. 3 To believe in and to live by the fact that "God is able" gives to transform life's impending sunsets into glittering sunrises. The conviction that "Our God is able" is a conviction stressed and exulted in, over and over again in both the New and Old Testaments. This conviction stands at the center of our Christian faith. Theologically, it is expressed in the doctrine of omnipotence of God. The God that we worship is not a weak God; He is not an incompetent God and consequently He is able to beat back gigantic mountains of opposition and to bring low prodigious hill tops of evil. 5 The ringing cry of the Christian faith is that our God is able.

There are times when each of us is forced to question the ableness of our God. When we notice the stark and colossal realities of evil—that something that Keats

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1 A Dexter program for 1 January 1956 indicates that King delivered this sermon. He filed copies of Meek's sermons in the same file folder as this document (Meek, "Our God Is Able, a sermon preached in Old South Church in Boston," 4 January 1953; Meek, "Perhaps Your God is Not Big Enough, a sermon preached in Old South Church in Boston," 11 October 1953). For a more developed version of this sermon, see King, Draft of Chapter XIII, "Our God Is Able," Strength to Love, July 1962–March 1963, pp. 527-534 in this volume.

2 "Now unto him that is able to keep you from falling, and to present you faultless before the presence of his glory with exceeding joy." This is also the biblical text for Meek's sermon "Our God Is Able."


4 Meek, "Our God Is Able." "Meanwhile 'Our God is able' is a conviction stressed and exulted in, over and over and over in the New Testament."

5 Meek, "Our God Is Able." "Believe me, it is not a weak God, it is not an incompetent God with Whom we have to deal." In his copy of Meek's sermon, King underlined this sentence and next to it wrote the Roman numeral I.
called "the giant agony of the world," when we notice the long [ruthlessness?] of earthquakes and tornadoes, when we behold ills like insanity that fall on individuals even at birth, when we are forced to experience the grim tragedies of war and man's inhumanity to man, we find ourselves asking, why does all of this exist if God is able to prevent it? This morning we are not able to go into the "whyness" of evil. Such a venture would require another sermon altogether. Yet we can say that in spite of these glaring dimensions of evil, and the occasional doubts that come to all of us there is the perennial conviction that "our God is able."

I Let us notice first that our God is able to sustain the vast scope of the cosmic order.

1. Living in an age when science has carved highways through the stratosphere, and almost totally annihilated distance, we are tempted to say only man is able.

2. We think about the fact that there are jet planes which fly at a rate of 1000 to 1500 miles per hour. That's faster than the speed of sound. You can see a jet coming, but it has passed you before you see hear it.

3. Many of the commercial airlines are now ordering jets. It will soon be possible to leave London at 1:00 P.M. and arrive in New York City the preceding 10:00 A.M. That's really moving. But when we look at this in terms of cosmic speed, this is barely moving.

4. Our earth is moving around the sun so fast that if the fastest jet racing it would be left behind 66 thousand miles in the first hour of the race.

5. Since I started talking to you about five minutes ago you and our earth have hurtled through space more than 5,500 miles.

6. We look out at the sun which astronomers tell us is the center of the universe. Our earth revolves around this sun once each year traveling 584,000,000 miles in that year at a rate of 66,700 miles per hour or 1,600,000 miles per [strikeout illegible] day.

7. This time tomorrow you will be 1,600,000 miles from where you are at this hundredth of a second.

8. There is the sun. It often looks near. But it is 93,000,000 miles from the earth. In six month we will be on the other side of that sun, 93,000,000 miles beyond it. And in a year from now we will have swung completely around it and back to where we are now.

9. We we notice the vastness of the cosmic order? we must cry out, "Our God is able."

II Let us notice again that God is able to subdue all the powers of evil.

1. One of the things that we notice about our universe is that it presents itself in a strange dualism, good and evil, right and wrong, light and darkness, happiness and pain, life and death. There is a tension or a strug-
gle at the core of the universe. All the great religions have discovered this conflict: Hinduism (illusion & reality), Zoroastrianism (light and darkness), Platonism (spirit and matter), traditional Judaism & Christianity (God & Satan).

(2) Yet you insist that in the long struggle between good and evil, good ultimately emerges as the victor. Evil must ultimately give way to the powerful, insurgent forces of Good.

(3) This is ultimately the hope that keeps us going. Much of my ministry has been given to fighting against social evil. There are times that I get despondent, and wonder if it is worth it. But then something says to me deep down within God is able, you need not worry. So this morning I say to you we must continue to struggle against evil, but don't worry, God is able. Don't worry about segregation. It will die because God is against it.

(4) Whenever God is against a thing it cannot survive. Give Victor Hugo's description of Waterloo. He asks, "Was it possible that Napoleon should win this battle?" I answer no, because of Wellington? No. But because of God, Waterloo is not a battle; it is a change in the front of the universe."

Waterloo is the symbol of the eternal doom of every Napoleon.

III

God is able, finally, to give us inner resources to confront the trials and difficulties of life.

(1) This is about all that religion can guarantee. I don't want to fool you this morning. I cannot say to you that if you have faith in God, you will have no problem, or misfortune, but I can say if you have a proper faith in God, he will give you something within which will help you to stand up amid your problems.

(2) Quite passage "all things work together." Give illustration of Seminary Professor.

AD CSKC Sermon file, folder 11, "Our God Is Able."

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8 Fosdick, "How Believe in a Good God in a World Like This?" in Living Under Tension (New York Harper & Brothers, 1941), p. 216. "All the great religions have so pictured life in terms of conflict. Hinduism called it a conflict between reality and illusion, Zoroastrianism a conflict between light and darkness, Platonism a conflict between spirit and matter, traditional Judaism and Christianity a conflict between God and Satan." A central element of Zoroastrianism, a religion founded in Persia as early as 1000 BCE, is the constant struggle between the evil spirit of darkness and the god of light and goodness.

9 Meek, "Perhaps Your God Is Not Big Enough." "Victor Hugo is describing the Battle of Waterloo. And Hugo concludes his description with these words: 'Was it possible that Napoleon should win this battle? I answer 'No.' Because of Wellington? 'No.' Because of Blucher? 'No.'—because of God. Waterloo is not a battle, it is a change in the front of the universe." See also Victor Hugo, Les Misérables (New York: A. L. Burt, 1862), pp. 337–338.

10 Romans 8:28 "And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose."