**THE SILVER LINING - MESSAGES OF HOPE AND CHEER BY JOHN H. JOWETT**

**23. THE DIVINE ABILITY by JOHN H. JOWETT**

*"Now unto Him that is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that worketh in us, unto Him be glory in the Church by Christ Jesus throughout all ages, world without end. Amen."*

*Ephesians 3:20,21*

How is this doxology born? What are the circumstances which make it spring forth from the apostle's mind and heart? It is preceded by a glorious panorama of spiritual prospect. He has been feasting his eyes upon a vista of bewitching spiritual promise. Let us rehearse the glowing speech in which the vision is described: "That He would grant you, according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with might by His Spirit in the inner man: that Christ may dwell in your hearts by faith; that ye, being rooted and grounded in love, may be able to comprehend with all saints what is the breadth, and length, and depth, and height; and to know the love of Christ, which passeth knowledge, that ye might be filled with all the fullness of God." How rich and radiant is the passage! How overwhelming in its visions of glory! But is it all an idle dream? After basking in its splendour for a moment, do we inevitably return to the squalor and meagreness of the commonplace? Is it all a mirage, beautiful but not substantial? Is it a dream, lovely but unreal? Is it too good to be true? Can we enter the promised land? Can we be endowed with regal robes, and walk as kings and queens in the glorious country? Is there any power by which we can grasp the shining dignities? It is in answer to doubting questions of this kind that the apostle sings his doxology: "Now unto Him that is able to do." The doxology is occasioned by the thought of the dynamic which is ours in God. It is an ideal that may be realised. It is a vision that may be actualised. The promised land is a substantial country, and by the marvellous power of the Almighty the poorest child of time may enter into its possession. Now let us look at the details of the apostle's triumphant song.

"Now unto Him that is able to do." There is something so quiet, so easy, so tremendous in the contents of this word "do." It is not the noisy, obtrusive doings of a manufacturer; it is suggestive of an easy creation. Behind this word "do" there hides that other word "poem," and it is to the naturalness and ease which mark the creation of poetry that the term refers. There is nothing of noise and exertion in the making of a poem; it is a quiet birth; it is the emergence of mysterious power. The majority of us can make something that we call poetry, but the vital element is absent. We use the appropriate term in the word "make"; it is something manufactured; it is not suggestive of the coming of a flower or the appearance of a sunrise. The making of poetry results in artifice. It is like the making of artificial flowers, and we can see the supporting wire! I am trying to emphasise that behind this word "do" there is a stupendous and tremendous power, as quiet and as mighty as the power which hides in the birth of the morning. "He is able to do."

"Exceeding abundantly." Here Paul coins a word for his own peculiar use. It seems as though at times the Holy Spirit crowded such great and radiant revelations into the apostle's mind and heart that even the rich vocabulary at his disposal was not sufficient to express them. But when ordinary language fails Paul employs his own. There was no superlative at hand which could describe his sense of the overwhelming ability of God, and so he just constructed a word of his own, the intensity of which can only be suggested in our English phrase "exceeding abundantly." The power flows up, and out, and over! It is a spring, and therefore incalculable. We can measure the resources of a cistern; we can tell its capacity to a trifle. We can register the contents of a reservoir; at any moment we can tell how many gallons it contains. But who can measure the resources of a spring? It is to this spring-like quality in the Divine power, the exceeding abundance, the immeasurable quantity, that the apostle refers. We can bring our little vessels to the spring and take them away filled to overflowing, and the exceeding abundance remains. The "doing" of our God is an inexhaustible well.

"Above all we ask." The ability of God is beyond our prayers, beyond our largest prayers! I have been thinking of some of the petitions that have entered into my supplications innumerable times. What have I asked for? I have asked my God for forgiveness. I have asked my God for deliverance. I have asked Him for seasons of renewal. Sometimes I have thought that my asking was too presumptuous, it was even beyond the power of God to give. And yet here comes in the apostolic doxology. What I have asked for is as nothing compared to the ability of my God to give. I have asked for a cupful, and the ocean remains! I have asked for a sunbeam, and the sun abides! My best asking falls immeasurably short of my Father's giving. It is beyond all that we can ask.

"Or think." Then His ability is beyond even our imagination! Let us stretch our imaginations to the utmost! Let us seek to realise some of the promised splendours that are ours in Christ. Let our imagination soar amid the offered sublimities of the Word of God. What is it possible for us to become? Think of the splendours of holiness that may be ours! Think of the range of affection that may be ours! Think of the amplitude of service that may be ours! And when our imagination has almost wearied itself in the effort to conceive our possible dignities, let us hear the apostolic song,--"Above all that we can think!" I call to mind the men who have been supreme in holy imagination. I think of the marvellous imaginative power of John Bunyan, and his unique capacity for realising the splendours of the Unseen. But even when I have accompanied John Bunyan, and have been amazed at his power, beyond all his dreams and visions I hear the apostolic word:--"Above all that we can think." I remember Richard Baxter's "Saints' Everlasting Rest." I remember how he deals with the glories of our prospective home, how he seems to have been endowed with special vision for unveiling the raptures of the blessed. But when I have closed Richard Baxter's book in amazed inspiration, I hear the apostolic superlative--"Above all that we can think." When all our workings and all our thinkings are put together, and piled one upon another, like some stupendous Alpine height, the ability of our God towers above all, reaching away into the mists of the immeasurable.

How does this ability manifest itself toward us? What are the human conditions? "According to the power that worketh in us." A certain power on our side creates the possibility in which our God can clothe us with grace and spiritual strength. If our God is to do "exceeding abundantly above all that we can ask or think," there must be a certain power working on our side. There must be a certain energy on the human side, co-operating with the inconceivable strength of the Divine. What is the human power? The power of faith. And what is faith? Faith is a twofold constitution, the elements of which are in vital relation. It is an attitude and a venture. To sever the two is to destroy the life of both. We can no more divide the attitude and the venture and preserve their vitality than we can sustain life by the separation of flesh and blood.

And what is the attitude in faith? It is the upward looking of the soul to God. "I will lift up mine eyes unto the hills." "Mine eyes are toward the Lord." The soul looks upward into the face of God that it may discern His mind and hear His voice. And the second element in faith is the element of venture and risk. "I will walk in the paths of Thy commandments." Having heard the Lord's will, risk it! "Thy words were found and I did eat them." When I have discovered the mind of the Lord I must turn His counsel into life. I must incarnate it in conduct. I must take any risk and every risk, and boldly walk in the appointed way. The unity of these two elements constitutes the act of faith. When these are present in the soul, the soul opens out to the wondrous incoming of the Almighty God. When I am willing to risk, God is "able to do." When I surrender, He can impart. The greater my willingness, the richer the river of His grace. If I lose my life I shall find it. "According to your faith be it unto you." "He is able to do ... according to the power that worketh in us."

It is therefore evident that the act of faith implies the exercise of will. It is more than an emotion; it is an exercise. Before God can "do," my will must be operative. Our wills, however weak, must be on the side of God. "But I have got no will left!" Oh yes, you have! You can will yourself on to your knees. You can will yourself to pray. You can do more than that, you can take the initial steps in obedience. "Rise and walk!" And that was said to. an impotent man! But he made the effort to rise,- and in making the effort he enabled God "to do"! Use the will you have got. Our God will not carry us as logs. He will co-operate with sincere and endeavouring children. By these conditions we shall become heirs to the wonderful powers that are ours in Christ. There will be no stint in our resources; we shall feel everywhere and feel always that we are more than conquerors through Him that loves us.