

Sermon #62 — *Isaiah Series*

Title: **THE NAKED PREACHER**

Text: Isaiah 20:1-6

Subject: *The Meaning of Isaiah's Nakedness*

Readings: *Mark Medley and Rex Bartley*

Introduction:

The title of my message is — **THE NAKED PREACHER**. That ought to get your attention. I'll guarantee you that if you were to post a video of a naked man preaching on YouTube tonight it would go viral, have a million hits before sunrise tomorrow, and be publicized by every major news media in the world tomorrow night. — Would to God the message he has given me for you might get such attention. — **THE NAKED PREACHER**. — That's my subject. Our text will be the 20th chapter of the Gospel of Isaiah — Isaiah 20:1-6.

(Isaiah 20:1-6) “In the year that Tartan came unto Ashdod, (when Sargon the king of Assyria sent him,) and fought against Ashdod, and took it; (2) At the same time spake the LORD by Isaiah the son of Amoz, saying, Go and loose the sackcloth from off thy loins, and put off thy shoe from thy foot. And he did so, walking naked and

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barefoot. (3) And the LORD said, Like as my servant Isaiah hath walked naked and barefoot three years *for* a sign and wonder upon Egypt and upon Ethiopia; (4) So shall the king of Assyria lead away the Egyptians prisoners, and the Ethiopians captives, young and old, naked and barefoot, even with *their* buttocks uncovered, to the shame of Egypt. (5) And they shall be afraid and ashamed of Ethiopia their expectation, and of Egypt their glory. (6) And the inhabitant of this isle shall say in that day, Behold, such *is* our expectation, whither we flee for help to be delivered from the king of Assyria: and how shall we escape?”

CONTEXT

This, prophecy, though coming at a later time, refers to the same subject addressed in chapters 18 and 19. Those chapters showed the method of grace whereby God stripped and peeled his elect before he clothed them.

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The context of chapter 20 relates to those days when Ethiopia, Egypt, and Israel were made to realize that their hopes and expectations were dashed to pieces and they had no help from anything or anyone on the earth.

MEANINGFUL SIGNS

God's prophets were sometimes required to do very unusual things, sometimes strange and even repulsive things in the eyes of men, to vividly portray and enforce the message they delivered.

- **Ezekiel was required to lay on his side**, first on his left for 390 days and then on his right for 40 days. Each of the 390 days represented the 390 years of Israel's open rebellion in turning to idolatry in setting up the calves at Dan and Bethel. The 40 days on his right side represent the 40 years of idolatry under Manasseh's wicked, idolatrous reign in Judah. It was a sign of judgment and of mercy, a sign of impending wrath and of hope. — **Ezekiel was required to lay on his side as one man bearing the sins of**

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many and bearing them to the full extent of their just punishment, all the while eating barley cakes baked with dung as a man unclean (Ezekiel 4:4-17). — That is exactly what the Lord Jesus did for his people (2 Corinthians. 5:21).

- In Ezekiel 24:15-27 we read that God's prophet's wife was killed by the hand of the Lord and he was forbidden to weep or mourn, but was required to go about his business as usual as the man of God in his hour. It was a sign of judgment and of mercy, declaring how the Lord God makes himself known to his elect, taking away their carnal joys and carnal hopes, that we might find hope for our souls and the everlasting joy of faith in Christ.
- God's prophet Hosea was required of God to take a prostitute to be his wife (Hosea 1-3). When she left him and went back to her prostitution, he secretly provided for her and protected her. Then, when she was worn out and made useless and worthless to anyone, even to

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herself, Hosea redeemed her from bondage, delivered her from her woe, won her love to himself, and brought her home. — Why? — **That he might vividly demonstrate both our sin as displayed in Gomer and the love of God for his elect displayed in Hosea.**

Even so, in this 20th chapter of Isaiah, God's prophet Isaiah was required to walk around naked and barefoot for three years to teach Israel and us three things by the forceful, vivid, unforgettable picture.

1. We are shamefully naked sinners before the holy Lord God.
2. There is no hope for our souls in any man, none in us, and none in any other.
3. Our only hope is in God our Savior.

Proposition: Whatever your soul's need is, the arm of flesh is impotent. God alone can help. God alone can deliver. God alone can save.

(Jeremiah 3:23) “Truly in vain *is salvation hoped for* from the hills, *and from* the multitude of

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mountains: truly in the LORD our God *is* the salvation of Israel.”

That is the message of Isaiah 20. Let's look at this strange prophecy together. May God the Holy Ghost whose words these are be our Teacher. May he be pleased to effectually apply them to your heart and mine by his omnipotent mercy and almighty grace, for Christ's sake. Let me show you the meaning of Isaiah's sign.

GOD'S METHOD OF GRACE

1st — **Isaiah was required to walk around naked for three years to give us a picture of God's method of grace.** — *“In the year that Tartan came unto Ashdod, (when Sargon the king of Assyria sent him,) and fought against Ashdod, and took it”* (v. 1). — **This describes the time when the Assyrians conquered the Philistine city of Ashdod. Isaiah's sign is a response to this victory of Assyria over Ashdod.** The invasion and conquest took place in 711 B.C. That is the historic setting. The Philistines were both neighbors and thorns to Israel. The

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Philistines had been Israel's enemies throughout their history. They were a mighty, warring people, feared by everyone. The fall of Ashdod, a Philistine city, to the Assyrians seems to have stricken Israel with terror. They began to think, "We're next. We need protection." So, they turned to Ethiopia and Egypt for help.

- Not to Jehovah, but to Ethiopia!
- Not to God, but to Egypt!

ISAIAH'S SIGN

So, the Lord God commanded his prophet to do something very unusual for a sign, a sign to Ethiopia, a sign to Egypt, and a sign to Israel. — *"At the same time spake the LORD by Isaiah the son of Amoz, saying, Go and loose the sackcloth from off thy loins, and put off thy shoe from thy foot. And he did so, walking naked and barefoot."* (v. 2).

Obviously, **Isaiah had been wearing sackcloth, the common clothes of mourning.** If you read again the woes he pronounced against Moab, Damascus, Ethiopia, and Egypt in chapters 15-19, delivering the

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burden of God he was sent to deliver, you can picture him. — **Isaiah was no ordinary prophet.**

- He was a broken man (chapter 6).
- He was a heavy-hearted preacher.
- He knew he spoke for God.
- He knew his business was about eternal matters.
- He knew that he spoke and wrote the very word of God to eternity-bound sinners under the sentence of divine judgment!

What the prophet is commanded to do is designed to show us by a forceful, unforgettable picture the natural estate in which God's elect are found. The picture is intended to remind us that we are a fallen people: stripped, naked, shameful, and utterly without power. And there is no one who can help us. All those to whom we think we might look for help, all to whom we imagine we might look for hope are as naked, shameful, and helpless as we are (v. 2-3).

(Isaiah 20:2-3) “At the same time spake the LORD by Isaiah the son of Amoz, saying, Go and loose the sackcloth from off thy loins, and put off thy shoe from thy foot. And he did so,

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walking naked and barefoot. (3) And the LORD said, Like as my servant Isaiah hath walked naked and barefoot three years *for* a sign and wonder upon Egypt and upon Ethiopia.”

HOPELESSNESS AND SHAME

These three nations (Egypt, Ethiopia, and Israel) who, in the end, will be recipients of grace and mercy are a trinity of hopelessness. Each had counted on the other, forming alliances to help one another. — Now, they are naked, helpless, in the dust, and without hope. John Trapp, commenting on this passage, wrote...

“So dealeth the devil with all his wretched captives, whom he driveth away hellward, naked and barefoot with their buttocks uncovered, the shame of their nakedness exposed to public view for want of the white raiment of Christ’s righteousness that they might be clothed.”

While that is certainly true, this chapter is talking about God’s method of grace. Here, the Lord God

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is showing us how he brings chosen, redeemed sinners to Christ. **You are probably thinking**, “Bro. Don, How does the picture of a barefooted, naked preacher say anything about that?” I’m glad you asked.

Was he buck-naked? Maybe he was, but probably not. He was commanded to remove his sackcloth, his clothes of mourning. My guess is that he stripped down to his loincloth, his underwear. My thought is that Isaiah did not walk around naked every day, all day long, summer and winter, for three years. Rather, he probably frequently made such appearances every day for three years.

- What mockery he must have endured!
- What shame he must have felt!

The term buck-naked or butt-naked probably has its origins in the practice of nations in earlier days of stripping captives to their loincloths, exposing their buttocks, and thereby publicly humiliating them. We see an example of that in the way the Ammonites treated David’s servants (2 Samuel 10:1-5).

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(2 Samuel 10:4-5) “Wherefore Hanun took David’s servants, and shaved off the one half of their beards, and cut off their garments in the middle, *even* to their buttocks, and sent them away. (5) When they told *it* unto David, he sent to meet them, because the men were greatly ashamed: and the king said, Tarry at Jericho until your beards be grown, and *then* return.”

Illustration: *Guantanamo Bay Islamic Prisoners*

Such was the case with Egypt and Ethiopia. But for them, being humiliated was part and parcel with the method of grace (v. 4). So it always is with God’s elect in all nations and in all ages (Psalm 107:1-43).

(Isaiah 20:4) “So shall the king of Assyria lead away the Egyptians prisoners, and the Ethiopians captives, young and old, naked and barefoot, even with *their* buttocks uncovered, to the shame of Egypt.”

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(Psalm 107:10-16) “Such as sit in darkness and in the shadow of death, *being* bound in affliction and iron; (11) Because they rebelled against the words of God, and contemned the counsel of the most High: (12) Therefore he brought down their heart with labour; they fell down, and *there was* none to help. (13) Then they cried unto the LORD in their trouble, *and* he saved them out of their distresses. (14) He brought them out of darkness and the shadow of death, and brake their bands in sunder. (15) Oh, that *men* would praise the LORD *for* his goodness, and *for* his wonderful works to the children of men! (16) For he hath broken the gates of brass, and cut the bars of iron in sunder.”

This is God’s method of grace. When God comes in the saving operations of his grace this is what he does.

- Before God sets you free, he will bring you into captivity. — “*Prisoners of hope*” (Zechariah 9:12; Isaiah 61:1).

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(Isaiah 61:1) “The Spirit of the Lord GOD *is* upon me; because the LORD hath anointed me to preach good tidings unto the meek; he hath sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to *them that are* bound.”

- Before the Lord God clothes you with the garments of salvation, he will strip you of your imaginary self-righteousness and expose your sin and shame, as one butt-naked before him. — Adam in the Garden.
- Before the Lord gives you the strength of his grace, he will make you know your weakness.
- Before he gives you hope in Christ, God is going to destroy your refuge of lies (Isaiah 28:14-20).

(Isaiah 28:14-20) “Wherefore hear the word of the LORD, ye scornful men, that rule this people which *is* in Jerusalem. (15) Because ye have said, We have made a covenant with death, and

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with hell are we at agreement; when the overflowing scourge shall pass through, it shall not come unto us: for we have made lies our refuge, and under falsehood have we hid ourselves: (16) Therefore thus saith the Lord GOD, Behold, I lay in Zion for a foundation a stone, a tried stone, a precious corner *stone*, a sure foundation: he that believeth shall not make haste. (17) Judgment also will I lay to the line, and righteousness to the plummet: and the hail shall sweep away the refuge of lies, and the waters shall overflow the hiding place. (18) And your covenant with death shall be disannulled, and your agreement with hell shall not stand; when the overflowing scourge shall pass through, then ye shall be trodden down by it. (19) From the time that it goeth forth it shall take you: for morning by morning shall it pass over, by day and by night: and it shall be a vexation only *to* understand the report. (20) For the bed is shorter than that *a man* can stretch himself *on it*: and the covering narrower than that he can wrap himself *in it*.”

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NO HELP IN MAN

2nd — **Isaiah was required to walk around naked and barefoot for three years to teach God’s Israel in all ages that “Salvation is of the LORD,” that there is no hope in man, and no help to be had from man.**

“The arm of flesh will fail you,
You dare not trust your own!”

(Isaiah 20:2-5) “At the same time spake the LORD by Isaiah the son of Amoz, saying, Go and loose the sackcloth from off thy loins, and put off thy shoe from thy foot. And he did so, walking naked and barefoot. (3) And the LORD said, Like as my servant Isaiah hath walked naked and barefoot three years *for* a sign and wonder upon Egypt and upon Ethiopia; (4) So shall the king of Assyria lead away the Egyptians prisoners, and the Ethiopians captives, young and old, naked and barefoot, even with *their* buttocks uncovered, to the shame of Egypt. (5)

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And they shall be afraid and ashamed of Ethiopia their expectation, and of Egypt their glory.”

Hear me, now, my brothers and sisters in Christ. **As it is true in the matter of salvation it is true in all the affairs of life.** Whatever your trial, whatever your trouble, whatever your need, trust the Lord, not your own arm or the arm of any other. Our deliverance is God’s work.

- Not Ours!
- Not Others’!
- But God’s Alone!

(Proverbs 3:5-6) “Trust in the LORD with all thine heart; and lean not unto thine own understanding. (6) In all thy ways acknowledge him, and he shall direct thy paths.”

(Psalm 20:7) “Some *trust* in chariots, and some in horses: but we will remember the name of the LORD our God.”

(Isaiah 28:17-18) “Judgment also will I lay to the line, and righteousness to the plummet: and the

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hail shall sweep away the refuge of lies, and the waters shall overflow the hiding place. (18) And your covenant with death shall be disannulled, and your agreement with hell shall not stand; when the overflowing scourge shall pass through, then ye shall be trodden down by it.”

(Isaiah 30:1-7) “Woe to the rebellious children, saith the LORD, that take counsel, but not of me; and that cover with a covering, but not of my spirit, that they may add sin to sin: (2) That walk to go down into Egypt, and have not asked at my mouth; to strengthen themselves in the strength of Pharaoh, and to trust in the shadow of Egypt! (3) Therefore, shall the strength of Pharaoh be your shame, and the trust in the shadow of Egypt *your* confusion. (4) For his princes were at Zoan, and his ambassadors came to Hanes. (5) They were all ashamed of a people *that* could not profit them, nor be an help nor profit, but a shame, and a reproach. (6) The burden of the beasts of the south: into the land of trouble and anguish, from whence *come* the young and old lion, the viper and fiery flying serpent, they will

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carry their riches upon the shoulders of young asses, and their treasures upon the bunches of camels, to a people *that* shall not profit *them*. (7) For the Egyptians shall help in vain, and to no purpose: therefore, have I cried concerning this, Their strength *is* to sit still.”

(Isaiah 30:15-17) “For thus saith the Lord GOD, the Holy One of Israel; In returning and rest shall ye be saved; in quietness and in confidence shall be your strength: and ye would not. (16) But ye said, No; for we will flee upon horses; therefore, shall ye flee: and, We will ride upon the swift; therefore, shall they that pursue you be swift.”

(Isaiah 31:1-3) “Woe to them that go down to Egypt for help; and stay on horses, and trust in chariots, because *they are* many; and in horsemen, because they are very strong; but they look not unto the Holy One of Israel, neither seek the LORD! (2) Yet he also *is* wise, and will bring evil, and will not call back his words: but will arise against the house of the evildoers, and against the help of them that work iniquity. (3)

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Now the Egyptians *are* men, and not God; and their horses flesh, and not spirit. When the LORD shall stretch out his hand, both he that helpeth shall fall, and he that is holpen shall fall down, and they all shall fail together.”

(Jeremiah 17:5-8) “Thus saith the LORD; Cursed *be* the man that trusteth in man, and maketh flesh his arm, and whose heart departeth from the LORD. (6) For he shall be like the heath in the desert, and shall not see when good cometh; but shall inhabit the parched places in the wilderness, *in* a salt land and not inhabited. (7) Blessed *is* the man that trusteth in the LORD, and whose hope the LORD is. (8) For he shall be as a tree planted by the waters, and *that* spreadeth out her roots by the river, and shall not see when heat cometh, but her leaf shall be green; and shall not be careful in the year of drought, neither shall cease from yielding fruit.”

(Psalm 121:1-6) “I will lift up mine eyes unto the hills, from whence cometh my help. (2) My help *cometh* from the LORD, which made heaven and

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earth. (3) He will not suffer thy foot to be moved: he that keepeth thee will not slumber. (4) Behold, he that keepeth Israel shall neither slumber nor sleep. (5) The LORD *is* thy keeper: the LORD *is* thy shade upon thy right hand. (6) The sun shall not smite thee by day, nor the moon by night.”

HELPLESS PREACHER

3rd — Isaiah, walking around naked and barefoot for three years, was a thunderous voice to the people he loved, the people for whom he labored, saying, “There’s no hope for you in me. I can’t help you any more than Ethiopia or Egypt.” —

Isaiah was commanded of God to take off his clothes of mourning. All that and all they see is the man of God, stripped naked and barefoot. Even the faithful, highly esteemed prophet of God could do nothing for them. They were at the mercy of the sovereign Lord of Host, who does as he pleases, in heaven and earth, in the seas and in all the deep places, who has mercy on whom he will have mercy.

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The Lord God was systematically destroying their every hope before their eyes. What is left for them? Only this — if God does not show mercy they must be hopelessly and forever lost. I am here to tell you exactly that. You are in God's hands not mine, God's hands not your own, God's hands not any man's!

Isaiah's being commanded to remove his sackcloth was to show that the captivity of Israel and Judah was just as much a part of the deliverance of God's people as was their deliverance itself. Isaiah was not to mourn any longer, as if he might be viewed as one who was at a loss. He served the true and living God and he showed that by his nakedness. He was declaring, by his lack of wardrobe, that if help is to come, it must come from God and not men.

Isaiah's nakedness was a continual reminder that God was the author of Israel's sorrow and the only remedy for it. It must have been an eerie thing to see. In the midst of their suffering, the only one who had a word from God, walked naked in their midst, not mourning, but bowing to the will of God,

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fully aware that he was a reminder that in men there is no help (Isaiah 2:22; Psalm 146:3).

(Isaiah 2:22) “Cease ye from man, whose breath *is* in his nostrils: for wherein is he to be accounted of?”

(Psalm 46:3) “Put not your trust in princes, *nor* in the son of man, in whom *there is* no help.”

As all things that are addressed in the Old Testament, this naked preacher’s message is addressed to us in this Gospel Age. It is to be heard by us in this, the acceptable year of our Lord.

Here is a people in great trouble. Their hope is clean gone and the ability in their flesh is wiped away. They have no one to look to who can help. They are the elect, but do not yet know it, because they are not yet delivered. — Maybe I am talking to one such right now. Maybe to many! — You see, God’s elect are in the same boat as all others by nature: naked, helpless, shameful, and hopeless!

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But there walks among them a preacher, a man of God. Up till now has walked in mourner's clothes, but now walks naked and barefoot. **He is a man just like you!** I stand here, naked and barefoot, to tell you plainly that this preacher cannot deliver you. I cannot help you.

- Don't look to me!
- Don't put your trust in me!
- Don't hang your hope on me!

This scenario has repeated itself time and time again in the life of the men God has called to preach the gospel. They can do nothing to deliver a man when God had put him in dire straits (1 Corinthians 3:5-7; 15:9-10).

(1 Corinthians 3:5-7) “Who then is Paul, and who *is* Apollos, but ministers by whom ye believed, even as the Lord gave to every man? (6) I have planted, Apollos watered; but God gave the increase. (7) So then neither is he that planteth anything, neither he that watereth; but God that giveth the increase.”

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(1 Corinthians 15:9-10) “For I am the least of the apostles, that am not meet to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God. (10) But by the grace of God I am what I am: and his grace which *was bestowed* upon me was not in vain; but I laboured more abundantly than they all: yet not I, but the grace of God which was with me.”

Religion’s preachers see one in dire straits as a grand opportunity for soul winning. They erroneously think that man’s extremity is religion’s opportunity. But the truth is — If God has brought a man to nothing another man can do nothing for him.

The gospel preacher, when called to these situations, strips off his clothes of mourning and comes naked and barefoot to the troubled one. He comes resigned that needs of your soul are beyond his ability to help. He comes as one in the same sad circumstance as you. — A man who knows that if help is to come he cannot provide it, — Heaven must intervene!

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We can identify with the supplicant because we are in the same place. I know that people call the preacher and that's fine. He is glad to show up. But he shows up knowing that, no matter what he does or says, he has nothing to offer. — That is what it is to be naked and barefoot. His silence screams inability and he would have men know this. — “*So then neither is he that planteth anything, neither he that watereth; but God that giveth the increase*”.

When God elect are stripped and left in utter need, they may call the preacher. He will come, but when he arrives, he will have no cornucopia of band-aid solutions. He will appear as you do, utterly needy himself, and his barefoot nakedness will be a declaration that salvation is not of men, nor of the will of men, nor of the flesh, but of God. In reality, this is his command from God — “*Walk naked and barefoot!*” — Tell my people to seek the Lord. — God is the only one who can help!

Illustrations: *Mark Henson's Comments*
Sandy Parks' Conversion

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Faithful gospel preachers know their impotence by experience. We are shut up to mercy and grace just you. How fully effectual God's grace is! God has chosen weak and helpless, naked and barefoot vessels to remind the needy that "*help cometh from the LORD*" (Psalm 121).

ONE ESCAPE

4th — Look at Isaiah 20:6 and **let me answer the question there asked by those whose expectation in the flesh God graciously takes away.**

(Isaiah 20:6) "And the inhabitant of this isle shall say in that day, Behold, such *is* our expectation, whither we flee for help to be delivered from the king of Assyria: and how shall we escape?"

Now, if you will turn to Hebrew 2, I will show you God's answer.

(Hebrews 2:1-3) "Therefore we ought to give the more earnest heed to the things which we have

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heard, lest at any time we should let *them* slip. (2) For if the word spoken by angels was stedfast, and every transgression and disobedience received a just recompence of reward; (3) How shall we escape, if we neglect so great salvation; which at the first began to be spoken by the Lord, and was confirmed unto us by them that heard *him*.”

(Isaiah 45:22) “Look unto me, and be ye saved, all the ends of the earth: for I *am* God, and *there is none else*.”

Isaiah’s barefoot nakedness points us to another prophet — Christ our Prophet.

- Stripped Naked
- Put to Shame
- Mocked and Scorned
- Almighty to Save

(1 Corinthians 10:13) “There hath no temptation taken you, but such as is common to man: but God *is* faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able; but will with the

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temptation also make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear *it*.”

(2 Corinthians 12:9) “And he said unto me, My grace is sufficient for thee: for my strength is made perfect in weakness. Most gladly therefore will I rather glory in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me.”

Amen.