

## The Glory of Glory

Paul was a man who could never forget the matter of glory: not only God's glory, but our glory, the glory God would give to His beloved. It was not only the glory He would give to His beloved Son, but also the glory he would give to His beloved sons. His business, so to speak, is glory. Paul speaks of Him as 'the Father of glory'. Some translate this phrase as 'the glorious Father', and this is beautiful for it stirs us to see this Father of ours all resplendent, in the hues and lights of the splendour of glory, yet the first translation is the better one. He is the Source and Founder, and Giver of all glory. The Father's glory is that of the Son, and the glory of the Spirit derives from the Father and the Son. What is more, He gives glory to every living thing, and even to every astral and terrestrial body, and beyond the astral to all things celestial. Look if we will at the given glory of all things. What a sum of beauty they make, in their creation by Him.

For not all flesh is alike, but there is one kind for men, another for animals, another for birds, and another for fish. There are celestial bodies and there are terrestrial bodies; but the glory of the celestial is one, and the glory of the terrestrial is another. There is one glory of the sun, and another glory of the moon, and another glory of the stars; for star differs from star in glory (I Corinthians 15:39-41).

Some human minds are pits, places of darkness where no glory shines. Some minds are shrivelled and mean and behold no glory in anything. As a man thinks in his heart so is he, and to the unbelieving all things are corrupt and defiled. Yet, rightly known the shrivelled mind and the unbelieving heart are shrinking from their own glory, given by God, stamped and sealed in the creation. How sad of persons to shrink from their own glory. When Jacob had become a man of mature moral being he felt free to address himself—that is, his true inner being—as 'My glory!' So did others in Israel as they realised the glory God had given them in creation, and when they had marred that, had re-given them in redemption, and even beyond the initial glory which had been theirs in Eden.

What is entrancing, what is stunning to the human mind, what surpasses human imagination is Paul's statement regarding the glory which will one day be ours:

So is it with the resurrection of the dead. What is sown is perishable, what is raised is imperishable. It is sown in dishonor, it is raised in glory. It is sown in weakness, it is raised in power. It is sown a physical body, it is raised a spiritual body. If there is a physical body, there is also a spiritual body. Thus it is written, 'The first man Adam became a living being'; the last Adam became a life-giving

spirit. But it is not the spiritual which is first but the physical, and then the spiritual. The first man was from the earth, a man of dust; the second man is from heaven. As was the man of dust, so are those who are of the dust; and as is the man of heaven, so are those who are of heaven. Just as we have borne the image of the man of dust, we shall also bear the image of the man of heaven. I tell you this, brethren: flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God, nor does the perishable inherit the imperishable (I Corinthians 15:42–50).

I once spoke to a doctor who was the founder of Palliative Care in his State, and, anxious to glean all I could from him, since palliative care is a wonderful thing, I asked him a question. ‘Is not your aim in palliative care to bring the terminally ill to come to terms with their mortality?’ He agreed that it was. Then I said to him, ‘Is it not better to bring them to terms with their immortality?’ At that his eyes shone. Only some months earlier he had come to know Christ, and he exclaimed, with joy, ‘In one sentence you have changed my whole principle of palliative care’.

‘Bring people to terms with their immortality!’ That is what Paul has done in the passage quoted above. Note the fugal use of the word glory here. God has given everything its own glory, each to its own. I smile when I see owners of Jack Russell dogs marvel at the liveliness of their pets, at the vivacity and loyalty and affection of the small creatures, and they think there is nothing like a Jack Russell; but then the glory apportioned to each is much the same in every case. Yet it is a glory on which we can reasonably depend. Each bird, each butterfly, each planet, each and all has its glory, and what a glory it all adds up to—the agronomical sum of the glory of all objects and all subjects!

Yet for human beings—each man and each woman—there is a glory which surpasses description. Paul acknowledges that by creation we all bear the image of Adam—and how glorious that man must have been! We bear the image of the earthly. It came from dust but God gave it a special glory as it pleased Him. It was a glory which the writings of Israel said was of a thrilling nature. God put all things under Man’s feet, crowning him with glory and honour and not excepting anything in the creation. So great the glory of Man!

Yes, but this glory of which we now speak is the heightening of the beauty of that which derives from dust and subsides, ultimately, ‘into the dust from whence it came’. For Man to speak of immortality seems to be but a pathetic longing, a wishful thinking of unbased human hope. ‘Not so’, says Paul, who somewhere states firmly that ‘[God] alone has immortality’. ‘Not so’, says Paul, for ‘As was the man of dust, so are those who are of the dust; and as is the man of heaven, so are those who are of heaven. Just as we have borne the image of the man of dust, we shall also bear the image of the man of heaven.’

He is saying plainly that all we have before us is disintegration into dust. That is what bearing the image of Man means: first living human glory, and then dust! Ah, yes, but his message is that a man came from heaven and a man went to heaven. He came as

the Son of God and the Word of God, and he came in order to be a man, and he lived and died and rose again to be the man of heaven, and in himself to give to all to have the glory they could never had though they were Adam himself. 'We shall also bear the image of the man of heaven.' This makes us shake our heads with astonishment and joy. 'What glory!' we exclaim.

Now this is a glory which will speak powerfully to a person under palliative care, and it will give him a hope no ideology can give, and no human concept of life beyond the grave. Yet it is not designed only for palliative care patients. It is designed for all human creatures who forfeited their glory in Adam, and had it restored in Christ. Restored? Yes, and more than restored, for the glory which the Father of glory gives us in Christ is greater than Adam ever had, yes, even when he was unfallen. To think that we will bear the image of the Man of heaven is enough to raise our so often fainting and despairing human spirits: enough to cause them to soar into the heavenlies where they can see they are already seated with Christ. It spurs them on to spurn the human glory of human, egotistical making, and to opt for the promised eternal glory. The glory that shall be is the glory which now determines that our motives be pure and simple and humble.

See what love the Father has given us, that we should be called children of God; and so we are. The reason why the world does not know us is that it did not know him. Beloved, we are God's children now; it does not yet appear what we shall be, but we know that when he appears we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is (I John 3:1, 3).

I think we should concentrate on this glory. To do so is to concentrate on Christ and accordingly to be changed *now* from one stage of glory to another. Then beyond the order of death we will see the effulgence of his glory, and the mysterious fugal melody of glory which has attended our hearts and minds in so many beautiful and hidden ways will throb out in that effulgence, that glory which shall be ours.

*G. Bingham, April 1999.*