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The End of the Mystery of the Incarnation Is the Glory of God

And God is glorified in the Son of Man.

JOHN 13.31

The incarnation of the Son of God, by which the glory of the Son of Man was procured, is the grandest mystery into which angels or the sons of men can inquire. If you regard the eternity of its purpose so constantly declared to have been before the foundation of the world, before the world began, the incarnation stands before us as one of the original projects (if I may so speak) of the Creator's mind, in order to the completion of that mighty work of creation which he was about to undertake; not an expedient to meet an accident, but an original intention, more ancient than creation itself, and to which the creation of being and the permission of sin were but as it were the necessary preparation. If you regard the awful mystery of the manifestation of this purpose, that the eternal Word of God, the uncreated substance of the eternal essence, did take into consubstantial and eternal union with himself the substance of fallen Adam, or I may say the very substance of the fallen earth, even the dust of the ground, to be united with it to redeem and glorify it, and for ever and ever to be manifest therein to all the universe of

God; it transcendeth all utterance, and passeth all comprehension, so very great is the mystery of God manifest in the flesh. Or, thirdly, if you regard the profound humiliation and most exquisite suffering in body and in spirit, which that man endured, in whom dwelt all the fulness of the God-head bodily, while the Word was made flesh and tabernacled amongst us; this endurance and humiliation, as we shall endeavour to set forth in our next discourse, is beyond all comprehension. Or if, fourthly, you regard the exaltation far above all principality and power, and every name that is named in heaven or on earth, into which the Son of Man, the woman's seed, the glorified dust of the ground, hath ascended up on high, for ever and for ever, to manifest in himself, and in his church, in like manner humbled, and in like manner to be glorified, the manifold riches of the grace and glory of God: I say, in whatever respect you consider the work of the incarnation, in its purpose, in its manifestation, or in its completion, it is, without all controversy, the mighty power and work of God; undertaken and undergone for far higher ends than are commonly discoursed of; for far higher ends than the redemption of the elect church, who I may say, are but the lively stones with which God buildeth up the work; but the work itself is no less than the manifestation of his own glory, and the eternal blessedness of all his obedient and dutiful creatures.

THE GLORIFICATION OF THE FATHER BY THE INCARNATE SON

Wherefore our Lord, contemplating in the text, and in various other passages of Scripture, the great crisis and turning-point of this mighty work, his death, burial, and descent into hell, by which the lowest depth was sounded, and the foundation of the eternal glory laid upon the unremovable rock beneath the waters of sin, which are to be baled out; he ever speaketh of it as if it had been the commencement of his Father's glory, saying, "Now is my Father glorified" (John 15.8) "[I] have glorified thee upon the earth" (John 17.4); "Father, glorify thy name" (John 12.24), and other such expressions, which surely signify to us that the glory of the eternal Godhead was in some remarkable way to receive increase and enlargement from the work, in the accomplishment of which Christ was travailing. It is of this subject,—the glory accruing unto the Father, or invisible God, from the work of the incarnation and death of Christ, that we are now to discourse, and for which, dear brethren, we have sought to prepare ourselves with much meditation, converse, and prayer these several weeks; and we do now publicly ask your prayers, that in times of such spiritual famine, the Lord would be pleased,

for your sakes, and for the sake of his church, to give us good store of wholesome and nourishing food, to the enlargement, enlivening, and edification of our souls, in the common faith.¹



THE GLORIFICATION OF GOD IN THE HUMANITY OF THE INCARNATE SON

Having thus examined the subject of “God glorified in Christ,” and shewn from Scripture the two parts whereof it consisteth, we proceed in this discourse to open the first, which is contained in these words, “Glory to God in the highest,” from which we would endeavour to set forth the glory which God himself hath derived from the Son of Man; or, in other words, the glory which the Godhead hath derived from his creature man, above and beyond all other creatures; on account of which he hath smelt such a sweet savour of manhood as to have taken the nature of man into fellowship with his own nature, and will exhibit his glorious divinity in the visible substance of manhood, through the endless ages of eternity. For this is what is implied in the words, “God is glorified in the Son of Man:” whereof the point is not, that he is glorified in the divinity of the Eternal Word, but in the humanity of his incarnate Son; in the Son of Man, not in the Son of God. We are now reverently to inquire how this cometh to pass: and may the Lord help our meditation, and give power unto our discourse!

Observe, then, first of all, my dearly-beloved brethren, that the eternal power and Godhead of Jehovah neither doth nor can suffer any the least change or alteration, increase or diminution, but it is essentially one and the same, yesterday, today, and for ever; as it is written, “Every good and every perfect gift cometh down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variableness nor shadow of turning” (James 1.17). He is the source and the fountain of all existence, from whom everything hath its being, according to the law of its being, which by him is decreed and appointed so as that it can never pass over or beyond it; but whereas other fountains are fed from their own streams, and all other causes sustained and reacted upon by their own effects, returning, as it were, for ever into the circle of that law under which they were formed; it is not so with the great original Former and First Cause of all things, who receiveth no help nor nourishment of his strength from any,

1. The omitted material examines a number of passages in which Irving sees a connection between the incarnation and the glory of God. This can be read in full in Irving, *CW* 5, 61–72.

or all, of the things which he hath created and made, being the self-existent, all-originating Will, which within itself, hath and all-perfect comprehension of all things which have been, which are, and which are yet to be.

Wherefore, in such passages as our text, wherein glory is said to have accrued unto God from the Son of Man, it cannot be meant that the eternal and unchangeable Majesty of heaven received any right or property in anything which before he had not possessed; but that by the peril and travail of that same great enterprise of his Son against the powers and potentates of evil, there did come forth into manifestation, that is, into the region of creation and of knowledge, some form of the divine nature and feature of the divine excellency, some secret of the divine counsels and everlasting monument of the divine power, which heretofore was undiscovered and undiscoverable, and to the creatures all the same as if it had not been. For, dear brethren, if you will but cut the cords and rise a little above the artificial structures which we raise upon the ground of God's clear and unobstructive word, you will at once perceive that, from the beginning, everything which hath been done by the Godhead, in the work of creation or of providence, or of regeneration, is but a discovering or revealing of that which was from all eternity beheld by God in his own Son, who is the express image of the person of God, in whom, as in a glass, he contemplateth all things, and beholdeth them as realities ere yet to any creature they have a being, ere yet there was a creature to whom they might be manifested.

This is the mystery of the Son's eternal and essential divinity in the bosom of the Father, that in him the Father beholdeth all things, all purposes, all possibilities, all realities, and in him enjoys them all with full and perfect fruition, ere ever they are, and while they are growing into outward being; yea, and into him shall recapitulate them all again, after they have run through their appointed transitions. Not that the things which are created shall ever again cease to be; for they were seen from eternity in the Son's fulness, and therefore must last for ever: nor that they shall be only as they were from everlasting in the being of the Son; but that they shall hereafter be outwardly existing, even as he, the Head of them all, shall be outwardly existing: they shall stand fast for ever in him, united in him, and by him preserved and protected from all encroachment and change; and by him led and directed in the worship and obedience of the Most High God.

And herein also consisteth the mystery of the Holy Ghost, that by his operation all things which from eternity have their reality in the Son become manifested in time and place, and are sustained in their outward manifestation; yea, even the Son himself became outwardly manifest in manhood by the power of the Holy Ghost, and by his power was exalted from the grave to his present supereminency. It is the mighty working of

the Holy Spirit which is conducting all things through the same perilous voyage of outward and separate existence, to reconduct them back again into a condition of outward stability and unchanging reality, such as by the Father from all eternity they were really and substantially seen in the person of his own Son, in the eternal Word, and all-perfect image of himself. The only change or alteration, therefore, consisteth in revelation or in manifestation: there is nothing which hath not been eternally known to, and present in, the Son; even the possibility of sin itself, which is, as it were, the chaotic basis out of which the manifestation of holiness and righteousness cometh. These remarks I throw out for the use of those who are of a higher mood, and delight to arise into the true mystery of the doctrine of the Trinity, and to understand the higher and more precious portions of the Word of God.

God's Accommodation to Human Limitation

But the same truth may be rendered more simple, and obvious to the meanest capacity, in the following way: If we could suppose anything to be added to God which was not in him nor pertained to him from everlasting, we must suppose that before such addition he was incomplete, or is now more than complete. If we could suppose anything to be recovered which was lost, or to be remembered which was forgotten, or to be reassumed which was rejected, to be reformed which was amiss, or to be changed which needed change, we must suppose mutation, or deviation, or disappointment in him who is the Rock of ages and refuge of all distressed things, the stability and support of all being, the eternal and unchangeable "I am," the same yesterday, today, and for ever, in whom there is no variableness nor shadow of turning. So that, when words of this import and signification are applied in the Holy Scriptures unto our God, as that he repenteth, and removeth, and restoreth, and reformeth that which he hath already constituted and done, they are but significant of the changes which the mutable universe, and we a part of it, are passing through in this our outward and separate voyage, until we shall be safely brought back and reconstituted in an unchangeable union to the Lord Jesus our Head. They are the words of human language, proper to express that imperfect and unstable condition in which all things at present are, and shall continue to be, until the days of restitution; and being applied to God, they express not any change in him, but in us who behold him. As we speak of the risings, and the settings, and the revolutions of the sun, though he abideth steadfast in the heavens, or hath but a motion which to the eye is imperceptible; as we speak of his being clouded and obscured and eclipsed, though he shineth with a constant brightness; and as we speak

of the irregularities of the heavenly motions, and the unsettledness of all sublunary things, though it be certain they do all obey a constant and invariable law, which neither is nor can be changed, save by the good will and pleasure of God;—speaking in all these instances in accommodation to the appearances which offer themselves to the sense, and against the realities which we discover by the reason: so speaketh God in Holy Scripture concerning himself, accommodating his word so that language which is necessary to man's present condition, and presenting himself as full of repentance towards him that repenteth, pure to the pure, and froward to the froward,² and upright to the upright; yet is it most certain that within, and under, this popular form of speech, there is also in his word a deeper revelation concerning the oneness and unchangeableness of his being, concerning the harmony of all his operation, and the great end of all his works; into which revelation of his steadfast and constant being he is ever seeking to draw men out of the changes and fluctuations in which he findeth them, and to which he doth assimilate and accommodate himself, in the first instance, by the only language which they are able to understand.

As any discreet man who would teach astronomy to unlettered and ignorant people must begin from the appearances of the heavens, and employ a language conformed thereto, until he shall have ascended with his disciples into the great principles of things; of the heaven's rest, and the earth's rotation; of the sun's central place, and the earth's revolution, and the regular motions of all the planets; after which, he employeth another language derived from the facts, and not from the appearances: so the teacher of divine truth must proceed, as indeed the Holy Spirit in the declaration of divine truth hath proceeded, beginning by the use of the popular language of God's repentance and changeableness towards us as we change towards him, which is the Arminianism of divine truth, mistaken by all the Methodists and the great body of our Evangelicals for the whole of it; but truly it is only the popular accommodation thereof, in order to lead the people into the true principles of God's unchangeableness, and the eternal sacrifice of his Son, of the eternal constitution of the church and the election of all saints in him, of their perseverance, their assurance, and certain glory, with all other the higher truths of the mystery of godliness, which are the truth, and alone entitled to the name of the truth; discarded though they be at present as high Calvinism, and ever decried as soul-destroying Antinomianism; yea, and all the subsidiary and subordinate language of entreaty and promise and condition, is only adopted for the purpose of introducing our waywardness to the knowledge of his counsels, which are one in their

2. A term to describe someone who is difficult to deal with; contrary.

purpose and regular in their progression, all leading to the one glorious end of manifesting unto his creatures the wonders of his eternal being, and securing them in the blessedness of the same. This manifestation of himself is the one end of creation, and of redemption, and of restitution; and I may also add, it is the one end of the permission of sin in the world, of an apostasy in the church, and of reprobation through eternity,—I say the chief and only end of all is the declaration of the essential glory of the Godhead.

The Irredeemable Apostasy of the Angels

Bearing these observations in mind, let us now proceed in the exposition of our doctrine, that by the incarnation glory was brought unto God in the highest, and shew how the manifestation of the divine glory did then, as it were, lift itself above the horizon, and begin to disperse the clouds and shadows of the night. From all that we know concerning creation, it appeareth, that before the human race was brought into being, sin had been permitted to enter, that through it the glory of the grace of God might more abundantly appear; for there are “angels which kept not their first estate” (Jude 1.6) and there are “elect angels” mentioned in the Scripture; whereby the glory of God’s creation was in a manner marred, his majesty insulted, and the bounds of his dominions sorely troubled and infested. And hitherto there was no mention of a remedy; and, I take it, there was no possibility of a remedy according to the angelic constitution of being, which being once fallen is for ever fallen. This is a mystery which I pretend not to fathom; but the fact is not the less certain that there is no redemption for the apostate angels. I am not called at present to enter into this, but would just observe in passing, that man was created a living soul, but the angels were created spirits; “who maketh his angels spirits” (Psalm 104.4); and hence it may arise, that they are not capable of any redemption; for it is continually said, that the sin against the Holy Spirit can never be forgiven.

Now it would seem to me, that a pure spirit in sinning, must sin against the law of its being, which, in the case of the angels, being the law of the Holy Spirit, is unpardonable. But however this may be, it is most certainly revealed that sin had been manifested, and no deliverance from it had yet been manifested; no grace, no mercy, no holiness, no glory, arising from the victory over and subjection of sin. It had broken in like a mighty tempest, and swept away a whole host of the subjects of our King; nay more, it had power to awaken insurrection in their own breasts, an in obedience to their own will to carry them away. The region of pure and mighty spirits, therefore, had become darkened; God’s glory in that work of creation obscured; and