

Ineffably Sublime

Recently, I believe it was in the evening service, we sang the song, *Crown Him with Many Crowns*. In the fourth verse of that hymn, we find these words:

*Crown him the Lord of years, the potentate of time,
Creator of the rolling spheres, ineffably sublime.
All heal, Redeemer, hail, for you have died for me;
Your praise shall never, never fail throughout eternity.*

A few years ago in another church, after we sang these words as a doxology, a member of the congregation approached me and said, "I sang those words, but I had no idea what I was singing." I understood why, for there are words in that verse that we rarely, if ever, use day to day.

I didn't know exactly what they meant, but our daughter looked them up and explained them. A "potentate" is someone who is very powerful. We get our word, "potent," from the same Latin root word. "Sublime" is a word that we might have heard. I recall hearing it in a commercial once, perhaps to describe some sort of dessert. It tasted sublime, which means that it was absolutely wonderful. They used the word "sublime," but they did not say "ineffably sublime." That's the word that gives me the most trouble, for I have never heard "ineffably" used except for in this song. Maybe back in 1851, when the song was written, Matthew Bridge, the author of the words, made a trip to the local library to find words in the thesaurus that would help him write the song. Or, more likely, they used the word, "ineffably," more often than we do now.

"Ineffably" means something like "in a way that causes so much emotion that we cannot put into words what we are feeling." That phrase doesn't fit very well into the metre of the song, so the author had to say "ineffably." Maybe there have been times when we were so full of emotion that we could barely speak. I could say, "My feelings were ineffable when my daughter was born, and I first held her in my arms." I didn't have the words to express how I felt. Or, as a friend told me when he met the woman who was to become his wife, he found her so beautiful that he was beyond tongue tied. Sometimes we find ourselves unable to express our emotions because what we are experiencing is beyond description. When Matthew Bridge contemplated who Jesus is and what he has done, his emotions ran so deep that they were beyond description.

As I worked through the definition of these words, I began to see that the words, "ineffably sublime," connect two very different ideas. The verse I quoted above speaks of Jesus being the Lord of years, meaning that there never was and never will be a time when he is not sovereign over all. He is the "potentate of time," meaning that he has always and always will be more powerful than any other power or authority who has existed or will exist. He is the creator of the rolling spheres, not only earth but also of the planets and the stars. The incredible number of spheres located in what we call outer space is

beyond our comprehension, and they were created through the one we know as Jesus. When we contemplate who Jesus is, we certainly should be in awe, for he rules over all that he has made.

But what follows the words, “ineffably sublime,” is what is truly amazing. The verse continues: *All hail Redeemer hail, for you have died for me.* If we had never heard the teachings of the Bible before and if we were told that the one through whom all things were created and who rules over the entirety of all that is came to this earth and died on the cross so that we could be saved, we would wonder at that. Can it really be true that God the Son, who has always existed, became the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world and he did it through his death? This is what is ineffably sublime, according to the author of this song.

If we do not find this outstandingly amazing, and if this does not make us tongue-tied and if we do not feel any emotion because of what happened 2000 years ago, then we have either become so accustomed to the gospel that it has become almost humdrum, or we don’t really understand who Jesus is and what he has done. But if we do understand, and if we have taken time to contemplate what Jesus has done for us, then we can say with Matthew Bridge that our praise shall never, never fail through all eternity. When we realize for the first time or when we contemplate again the import of what God the Son did by taking on human nature and become Jesus, the Saviour, we cannot help but turn to praise, and that praise will never, never fail for we will live for all eternity.

When I was a young adult, I attended a Bible study there, and most of us there had grown up in the church. I forget what it was that we were talking about, but I do remember that the discussion had deteriorated into a rather heated theological debate about some important aspect of biblical truth. Almost all of us had grown up in the church, but one guy had recently become a Christian. After the debate had continued for some time, he, with tears in his eyes and a broken voice said to us in words something like this, “You’ve grown up knowing these truths, and they have become commonplace to you, and you argue and talk about them as if they are just points to be debated. You don’t know how wonderful the gift of God’s grace that you have experience all your life is. And you have forgotten how wonderfully amazing it is that God sent his Son to this world to die for our sins.” He couldn’t express his emotions as he contemplated what Jesus had done, but they were truly ineffable, for what Jesus did is absolutely sublime. We who had grown up knowing and trusting in Jesus were rebuked that evening, and rightly so. Sadly, when he was overcome by emotion, he left the room, and someone commented that he was over-reacting. Reflecting on this years later, I don’t think he was. He was trying to express how indescribable God’s grace is, and he wanted us to have the same emotions as well.

Jesus, the Potentate of time, Creator of the rolling spheres died for me. He is truly ineffably sublime. Our praise may never, ever fail for all eternity.

Pastor Gary