

SERMON XX.

That in the ages to come he might shew the exceeding riches of his grace in his kindness toward us in Christ Jesus.—VER. 7.

WHEN I discerned that these words were the conclusion of that large and long continued discourse about man's salvation, first and last, which the Apostle had begun at the 18th verse of the first chapter and continued until now, and that the scope in these words was to hold forth God's great design therein, I concluded with myself thus, that these words must necessarily have the most vast and comprehensive sense, seeing into them all the parts of the foregoing discourse, as so many rivulets, fall and determine, as into a great sea. Now to shew forth the exceeding riches of grace, that that should be God's design is universally acknowledged, and the words themselves do hold it forth. But then this design of God's, to shew forth the exceeding riches of his grace, is said by interpreters to look three several ways.

First, Immediately to God himself, and to hold forth his utmost end, as it relates to himself and his own glory—namely, to set forth the exceeding riches of his grace in man's salvation; and that unlimitedly and generally, only exemplified in his kindness towards these Ephesians; the glory of his grace and riches of his grace to be such as is worthy in all ages to be celebrated: even as in the first chapter the Apostle had made the end and the burden of all in our salvation to be to the praise of his glory, and to the glory of his grace, as you often read it there.

Secondly, This design of God to magnify his grace is said to have a respect to all mankind in future ages, both of Jews and Gentiles, that God having shewn so much mercy, and so much grace, and so much kindness to these Ephesians, in converting them, whenas they lay in that miserable and inextricable condition with the rest of the world, his saving such as these with so great a salvation, is a pattern and an example—as the words *to shew forth* oftentimes signify—what a treasury of rich grace God had to bestow upon after-ages, which then he did begin to break up, and to give example of in these primitive converts.

Thirdly, It is also said that the design of God's shewing forth his grace here in the text doth respect these Ephesians and primitive Christians themselves, to have been added to raise up their expectations by what God had already done for them in themselves, (he had quickened them, when they were dead in sins and trespasses, together with Christ,) and what he had done for them in their head Christ, (he had in him raised them, and set them together in heavenly places, as the words before are;) that so by this their expectations might be raised what an exceeding riches of grace God had yet to be shewn to all eternity; that is, in all ages to come, in the world to come. So that the accomplishment of our salvation in heaven and after the day of judgment,—whereto the words before are but a preparation and a foundation,—is the meaning of these words.

I shall give you, in a word, the differences of all these senses, and compare them one with another.

The first sense makes the design to respect immediately the glory of God, to have a respect to him in all that he hath done about our salvation, to shew forth the riches of his grace.

The second makes the words to be intended for the comfort of future ages, in the mercy shewn to these.

The third, to be intended for the further personal comfort of these believers; by what God had done already, from thence to collect what infinite riches of mercy they were to expect in the world to come.

The first sense makes the words to be a doctrinal conclusion, holding forth God's whole and utmost design and contrivement about man's salvation, worthy to be celebrated in all ages.

The second makes the words to be as it were a note of encouragement, brought in by the way, as an inference, for the comfort of us that were to come and live after, that we may gather from his dealing with these Ephesians. And—

The third doth make them a use of application,—if I may so speak,—and to be a further enlargement upon what he had said of our salvation already, in the words before, of what great things afterwards were to be expected.

I have gone over all the words, and shewn you how that the coherence of the words before, and all the words in the text, will naturally and genuinely give themselves up to every one of these senses: so as indeed these words being the conclusion of the whole, I shall be exceeding loath to exclude any of them, if the one may consist with the other, as knowing by much experience how that the Scriptures have a various and comprehensive meaning.

But if you ask me now, which of all these senses I do in the first place refer to?—

I answer, clearly the first sense of all the rest; namely, that in these words is intended God's design, as it immediately respects the shewing forth or making known—which is all one, as Rollock well observeth—the glory of his grace. And my reasons are these:—

First, Because it is the most unlimited sense, and the most general.

Secondly, Because it is evident his scope is to set forth the final cause of man's salvation, and that in the heart of God. It is therefore to be preferred before the other two; for the second sense doth not make immediately God's glory to be the thing here so much shewn forth, as to be a note of encouragement to after-ages, that God would shew them the like grace. And the third sense doth not make it so much the final cause in the heart of God, as the event, the issue, the upshot, the conclusion of all that God pitched upon, the shewing forth of the riches of his grace. And then again, the two latter are more narrow and limited: the one is limited to the comfort of posterity; the other, to the comfort of these Ephesians, in the accomplishment of their salvation in heaven. But the first, which respects immediately the glory of God's free grace, is general, is universal, it is the whole adequate end of all men's salvation, and of all the parts of it whatsoever.

If you ask me, which of the two latter I prefer?—

I answer, the third. I shewed you, in the first sermon I made upon these words, my reasons that this interpretation was natural and genuine, viz., to interpret it of the manifestation of the riches of God's grace in the

world to come. Now I shall give you my reasons why I prefer that rather than the second, which would make the words to refer only to an encouragement to posterity that God in ages to come would shew the like grace that he had done to these Ephesians. And my reasons are these :—

First, Because if that second sense should be the only or the chief meaning, the words come in but as a parenthesis, or note of inference by the by ; they come in but as a use of encouragement from the former narration of what God had done for these Ephesians. But if the Apostle should go on here still to comfort the Ephesians themselves, and in them all believers, with what great things in heaven they are to expect, the riches of his grace to be manifested there, by what he had shewn already ; so the words come in more directly, they do not come in by the by, but more homogeneal, and in the way of a continued discourse made to the same persons, (so the former words were.) and concerning them also.

And then again, I prefer this third sense to the second, because his scope is to set out the final aim of God in man's salvation, as the words ' that he may shew ' do import, and the greatness of man's salvation in heaven, on which God will expend such riches of grace, being the ultimate issue and crown of all in God's intentions. Therefore, I say, this should be rather intended and held forth.

Thirdly, His scope would seem to be rather to magnify the thing—namely, salvation itself—which he is speaking of, and the greatness thereof, which God had designed us in the world to come, which should hold a proportion with those exceeding riches of grace which we had in this world, whereof God had given assurance in Christ, both at his resurrection and sitting in glory, as the words before shew. And this is rather the meaning than merely to shew by the by that God would shew the like riches of grace to others in time to come. My brethren, methinks when I look upon that interpretation only, it falls too low and too flat, in comparison of the other two, to come in to the end of a discourse which had contained the greatest things that the gospel doth afford about the salvation of man ; it would rather seem, therefore, to heighten the greatness of salvation itself.

Fourthly, That God would shew the like riches of grace unto all believers and others, is sufficiently implied in what he had done to these Ephesians, and it might be supposed. For these Ephesians are made the standard of all mankind for their natural misery and condition, in ver. 1–3, and so for their salvation in these. And therefore, although their example had not been propounded in a set way to confirm this to us, yet it is implied in the thing itself.

I have gone over, I say, all these senses, and I have shewn you that they are all in themselves such as both fully stand with the coherence, and do fully stand with these words which are here in this verse ; and I have interpreted every word in the verse to each of all these senses. For my part, I plainly and truly conceive, to deliver my own opinion of this and many other scriptures, that the Holy Ghost hath a comprehensive meaning, and he hath penned the words on purpose that all these might be taken in. If he had left out these words, ' in ages to come,' the truth is, then the words had plainly referred to the glory of God, simply the shewing forth of the glory of his grace ; but putting in that, and ' in his kindness toward us,' it makes the words to incline and to lean to this meaning, that he intends the comfort of posterity. And how it suiteth also with the perfection of salvation which he means to bestow in heaven, I shewed you in a whole sermon at large. I have weighed everything to the full, and I find nothing in the

one sense that will exclude the other, or in the words, that all these may not stand together. Unto all these three senses I shall now spend this discourse, in giving you observations thereupon, a story of observations. I gave you observations upon the first sense in the last discourse, and I shall now give you such observations as do give themselves up to the other two, which, for my part, I think are but two several degrees of accomplishment of the demonstration of grace: the one here, to millions of elect in after ages, whilst this life lasts; and the other to all his children, to break open a new treasury of grace in the world to come, and the one to succeed the other: even as you shall find many prophecies in the Old Testament, and in the Revelations also, to have several accomplishments.

Now then, to begin with that *second sense*,—namely, that God had pulled these Ephesians and those primitive Christians out of that condition of misery wherein they lay by nature, and had quickened them, and set them in heavenly places in Christ Jesus, that they might be examples, holding forth what riches of grace God under the gospel had begun to break up, and would shew to after-ages. The observations that do arise from this sense, as I have opened it to you, are these:—

First, That God doth give examples of his grace and mercy in others, to help our faith. God doth bless the consideration of what mercy he hath shewn to others, for the helping forward, if not the begetting of faith in us. There are promises of grace, and there are examples and patterns of grace; and the examples confirm those promises. That God hath riches of mercy in his own nature, there is one foundation of our faith; that he hath made large promises of mercy and grace to sinners indefinitely, and so put forth those riches out of himself, there is another confirmation and ground of our faith; and, thirdly, that he hath shewn riches of grace to others that have been as bad as we. Look now, as examples use to confirm rules, so do examples of mercy confirm our faith in promises. That he may shew forth, saith he, shew forth as in an example, as I shewed you in opening 1 Tim. i. 15, 'This is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptation, that Christ came into the world to save sinners;' there is his rule. 'Of whom I am chief;' there is his example. 'And for this cause I obtained mercy, that in me he might shew forth,' as in a pattern, 'all long-suffering unto others which should hereafter believe on him to everlasting life.'

Secondly, It affords this observation also: That the primitive Christians were intended as patterns of grace to us. He had shewn this mercy to these Ephesians, that he might shew forth in them the riches of his grace to all posterity afterwards. God did set them up as the great lights which after-ages should not exceed; they were the first-fruits, and after-ages should not exceed them, but be like to them. And therefore, you see, the apostles called upon Christians then to be followers of them; and so those that were first converted, others were the followers of them. In 1 Thess. i. 7, 'You were ensamples to all that believe in Macedonia and Achaia.' Those first Christians, God poured forth abundantly the riches of his grace upon them, and set them up as lights to all after-ages. And therefore, my brethren, let me exhort you to this. Read the story of the life of religion and Christianity in those primitive saints, read the Epistles of the apostles written to them; and there is nothing more effectual or more powerful to quicken your hearts in holiness than that. Sit down and view their graces, and those sparkles of light and holiness which break forth of their writings and of their examples, for God intended them as patterns unto us. But then—

Thirdly, God did not intend them only barely as examples or patterns,

but as pawns and pledges that he would go on as he had begun, in after-ages, to pour forth the riches of his grace. Paul's conversion was not only an example, but it was a pawn and a pledge, as he hath it in that 1 Tim. i. 16. And so is their conversion made here.

Now from hence, that it is not only a pattern, but a pawn and a pledge, you may raise these meditations to yourselves, viz.—

First, That the Scriptures of the New Testament are to continue in all ages, to the end of the world, and to be read and minded by Christians. For how shall God's making these Ephesians, and those primitive Christians, examples of his grace, and pawns and pledges of it, be apprehended to the comfort of posterity, unless that the Epistles themselves, and the story of these Christians, should continue, and be read, to the end of the world? It is evident,—I speak it to those that wickedly deny these truths, and make them but as other common writings that we see are lost in the vast gulf of time,—it is evident, I say, that before a word of this New Testament was written Christ meant it should be written; for saith he, in Matt. xxvi. 13, 'Where-soever this gospel shall be preached in the whole world, there shall also this that this woman hath done be told for a memorial of her;' and the Evangelists wrote not of a long while after. Saith Paul, in his first Epistle to Timothy, chap. vi. 13, 14, 'I charge thee that this commandment be kept until the appearing of our Lord Jesus Christ.' If the Epistle should not have continued, how could this commandment thus charged, not upon Timothy personally only, but upon all saints, and churches, and ministers to the end of the world, how could this be kept? And so likewise here, how could the conversion of these primitive Christians, yea, of these Ephesians, be intended by God, as the Apostle here writes of them to be, as examples and pledges of his grace to after ages, if that this Epistle was not ordained by God to be continued, and to be read in all ages throughout the Christian world, as indeed it is?

Secondly, It is not only what should be preached in all ages, but the words hold forth a promise that God would do the like. It is not only what we may comfortably ask at God's hands, because he hath shewed the like mercy in those primitive times, but it holds forth what we may confidently expect from him. The conversion of those primitive Christians, they were to God as the waters of Noah, as he himself speaks in the prophet, that he would convert of their posterity, as we see he hath done; for the Christian religion hath generally held its interest, though with much corruption, yet in the fundamentals, throughout the Christian world to this day; and where Jesus Christ did set in a foot for his kingdom, he hath kept that footing even till now. They have had, and might have, those that have and do tyrannise over them, as the Grecian Christians are by the Turks, but they remain Christians still, and even amongst those Grecians the fundamentals of Christianity are still professed. It was not only, I say, what should be preached, but what God would do, which is exceedingly comfortable to us. Therefore those primitive Christians were called the first-fruits, as we read of the 'first-fruits of Achaia;' and in the 1st chapter of this Epistle, ver. 12, there is mention made of 'us who first trusted in Christ.'

Fourthly, Let us consider, as a fourth head of observations out of these words, wherein the primitive Christians are patterns unto us, and that for our comforts.

1. They are patterns to us in respect of their natural condition. The Apostle had said they were dead in sins and trespasses, that they were chil-

dren of wrath, that they were slaves of Satan. So men in after-ages should be, and yet notwithstanding shall be pulled out of that condition, and quickened together with Christ. I was a blasphemer, saith Paul, but the grace of God abounded in me, as a pattern of long-suffering, *προς ὑποστυπωσιν*; so the word is in 1 Tim. i. 16. It had not been a pattern of long-suffering if he had not continued in that estate, as many of God's elect do. Here is our comfort. And it may speak likewise a word of encouragement to those that apprehend their natural condition; all these Ephesians are patterns unto thee even in that, and of God's dealing with them. The most in heaven were once as bad as thou art, they needed as much grace to save them as thou dost, and thou needest no more than they; the same sort of Christians that were then are now. Not many wise, but the foolish, and poor of the world, God chose then; so he doth now, he keeps to his pattern.

2. They are patterns of the like grace. Whatever might advance the riches of God's grace, therein they were patterns unto us.

3. They are patterns of the same grace, for sanctification, and pardoning, and all those privileges. We receive like precious faith with all those primitive Christians, yea, with the Apostles themselves; so Peter saith, 2 Peter i. 1. We have the same, or may have and obtain the same fellowship with the Father and with the Son which those primitive Christians and the Apostles themselves likewise had. So you have it in 1 John i. 3, 'That which we have seen and heard declare we unto you, that ye also may have fellowship with us; and truly our fellowship is with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ.' In Acts xv. 11, Peter, speaking in reference to them that were saved in former ages, saith, 'We believe that through the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ we shall be saved, even as they.' And so likewise we, even in these ages, we believe we shall be saved by the grace of God even as they. It is said even of the Apostles themselves, in Rom. viii. 23, that they 'received the first-fruits of the Spirit.'

Yea, let me add this to it, which is exceeding considerable, and it is the observation of one of the best commentators, Musculus. Wherein, saith he, are these Ephesians and primitive Christians patterns? Why, of the exceeding riches of the grace of God in the matter of salvation: in being quickened, in being converted, in having the same faith wrought in us, in having the same privileges, that we shall be raised up together with Christ, and sit together in heavenly places with him. But he doth not say they are patterns for their gifts in all things. It is for the exceeding riches of grace that concerneth salvation, my brethren, that these Christians are held forth as patterns to us. And the reason is clearly this, because that what concerns salvation is substantial, and all must come to the same union of the faith of the Son of God; as the Apostle saith, Eph. iv. And he hath therefore given pastors and teachers in all ages, and he hath kept his promise, for the pastors and teachers in all ages have kept the saints to the fundamentals of faith generally. But if the promise of the same extraordinary gifts which the Apostles had, as the gift of miracles and the like, which you have reckoned up in 1 Cor. xii., had been to all ages, certainly God would have given men in some age or other faith to have believed it; for God never gave a promise ordinary, that is, a promise that should always continue, but he gave faith ordinary. If therefore he had intended the bestowing of those gifts, and the promise of them for all ages to come, he would have given faith to some or other. Where is this faith of miracles, or who hath it, or who works them by virtue of that faith? Upon whom is the gift of tongues? And where are the signs of apostles as were then? No, my

brethren, it is for graces, it is for the substantial privileges of salvation, herein they are patterns indeed; 'that he might shew forth in ages to come the exceeding riches of his grace,' as the words are. And let me add this notion: that it is evident these extraordinary gifts were given for testimonies to settle the gospel at first. The Apostle, in Heb. ii. 3, clearly saith, that thus in the beginning of the gospel God did confirm it. 'At first,' saith he, 'it began to be spoken by the Lord, and was confirmed unto us by them that heard him; God also bearing them witness, both with signs and wonders, and with divers miracles and gifts of the Holy Ghost, according to his own will.' But now thus much common education doth do in the Christian world and in the church of Christ where religion is professed; for miracles then, what did they serve for? Not to beget a true faith, for that was the word, that was the promise. I say they served not to beget a true faith,—that is, a saving and justifying faith,—but to make men to attend to that word and to receive it, as that which might have truth in it. Now, I say, common education serves so far; it stands now instead of what miracles and extraordinary gifts did then.

Fifthly, Another meditation that ariseth from the interpretation of the words in this sense is this: You see the Apostle makes these Ephesians and other primitive Christians to be patterns to all ages to come. How comfortable is it to see how God hath fulfilled this promise! I confess this, that the reading of the writings of men in all ages hath always filled my heart with this comfort, that not only I see that God in all ages hath kept the fundamentals of Christianity that should save men, but that in all ages he hath still had a handful who have professed his truth and held forth his name, and have cleaved to the doctrine of free grace. We see, my brethren, how this promise hath been fulfilled; and in our age now we see the virtue of this very promise and prophecy which the Apostle here gives, in the preaching of the gospel and shining forth thereof from under the darkness of Popery, which had mingled with the grace of God abundance of corruption, even well-nigh to the overthrowing of it; I mean so to overthrow it as men should not have been saved, but that God did preserve so much truth as might save them, even under those corrupt opinions, whilst not held against light. We that live now in the sixteen hundred years or fifteen hundred years after Christ, as those that first began to preach the gospel with more clearness did, see this very promise and prophecy here fulfilled; God engaged himself that in the ages to come the riches of free grace should be laid open, and so he hath performed it.

And to our comfort we see wherein the main of reformation lies: it lies in opening the doctrine of the substantial of salvation, concerning the estate of man by nature, the work of conversion, the privileges we have in Christ; it lies in clearing the doctrine of free grace, and the way of faith which lays hold upon it. 'By grace ye are saved, through faith,' as it follows afterwards. We see the truth of this prophecy riseth up more and more to the view in the latter ages of the world, and we enjoy the fruit of it more clearly and fully than our forefathers did; and God will never leave till he hath brought his saints and children to that first pattern, to that doctrine of grace, in the purity and perfection of it, which was then taught.

You see likewise wherein the riches of the gospel lies. It lies in the doctrine of free grace, and therefore those that first preached it were called *Evangelici*, Gospellers, and their preaching was called a new gospel; because they did but begin to sever the grace of God from what was in man in point of salvation, which was abused by those blind guides that led the blind in those

former ages. And, my brethren, know this, that by virtue of this prophecy, the doctrine of free grace having begun to be cleared, and shining so abundantly upon us, it shall be cleared every day more and more to the end of the world; and as the Apostle saith, in Rom. xi., if the cutting off of the Jews be the riches of the world, what shall their restoring again be? The doctrine of free grace hath in all ages been opened and still cleared, and cleared more in these latter days than, as we find by the writings of men, it was in former ages. And in the latter days it shall clear up more and more; the nearer we come to the kingdom of glory, the more bright will the kingdom of grace shine. For Antichrist himself shall be destroyed by the brightness of the coming of Christ in the revelation of the gospel of him. God began sparingly in the world, and there was little of free grace taught; it was veiled and under types and ceremonies in the Old Testament, and before Moses; and it was called the law of Moses. That age of the world may rather be said to be under the law of nature, than under the law of grace; and Christ saith the law and the prophets were until John, but now the gospel is taught. God, I say, began sparingly, but he reserved to the ages to come the breaking open of the exceeding riches of his grace. As now he hath multitudes of elect, a catholic church, and saints over the Christian world, and hath had in all ages; so he also breaks up the doctrine of free grace more in their hearts.

Sixthly, Hath God engaged himself thus, when he converted these primitive Christians, to shew like riches of grace, exceeding riches of grace, not to that age only but to all ages to come, and still to the latter ages more than to the former? Then let this help your faith, and that in respect of yourselves. Did God shew grace to thee when he first turned thee to him; did he pardon thee then the sins of thy age past, out of the exceeding riches of his grace? He will continue, fear not, to shew mercy and to continue his grace in pardoning and keeping of thee for the residue of the age thou art to live. Thou seest he hath done it unto ages past, and hath promised to do it unto the ages to come to the end of the world. God is as rich as ever: and as the sun, that hath shined these five thousand years and upwards, hath as much light in it now as ever; so hath God of grace and mercy in him. Can God shew such mercy to the world that is evil and unthankful, to the world that hath persecuted his saints and children in all ages, that he still continueth to shew forth his grace age after age, as he doth, and cannot he shew mercy to thee for thy little span of time, having shewn thee so much mercy already? Certainly he will go on to do it, for he hath exceeding riches of grace for ages to come; so saith the Apostle here.

Lastly, I shall only add this meditation, out of these words interpreted in this second sense. When all these ages to come—that is, to the world's end—shall be run out; O my brethren, at the latter day, what an infinite riches of grace will appear that God had in him, which had saved men in all ages! When all men shall meet together, when all the accounts and reckonings of the world shall be given up, what a great expense will there be found that God hath been at, that in all ages he hath taken in so many and saved them; some as bad as these Ephesians were! And let the consideration of that help thy faith. If thou wert at the day of judgment, and sawest all the saints brought together before God, and all saying, We have committed these and these sins, and God hath pardoned us, and pardoned us all, (for that will be the conclusion of the accounts of the world;) when thou shalt see such riches of grace spent upon the saints in all ages, do but begin now and

by faith think of this, and never stand distrusting of God, as if thy case were worse than all these.

And so much now for that second interpretation, as it respecteth posterity, making the example of these Ephesians instances to posterity of the like grace and mercy.

I come now to the *third interpretation* and sense, which begins to take accomplishment when the other endeth; therefore I said that they are but several accomplishments of the same design. When God shall thus have shewn the exceeding riches of his grace unto his saints in all ages, in pulling them out of their natural condition, in converting them, in quickening them, and they shall all meet at the latter day together, and be gathered unto Jesus Christ; all this is for this end, that to the ages then to come afterwards, he may shew forth a hidden, an unknown treasury of grace, which he will break up in heaven and at the day of judgment, even unto eternity. The reasons for this interpretation are so strong, that if the other I gave last and this could not stand together, for my part I should certainly exclude the other, and embrace this. I gave you my reasons for it when I first opened it. The phrase here, 'in ages to come,' doth most naturally, according to what the Scripture saith, import the time of eternity, the ages of eternity in the world to come. Now the observations that flow from this interpretation I reduce to two heads:—

I. Such as set out to us something about heaven.

II. To shew how great that salvation must needs be, according to the scope of these words.

Concerning the first head, I give you these several particulars:—

First, That all the glory that God bestows upon his saints in the ages and world to come, and after the day of judgment, it is only grace that is the fountain of it. He shews forth therein his grace, yea, the exceeding riches of his grace. It is not only grace, but it is the perfection of grace, it is the richness of grace in the height, and the highest riches of it; it is the highest graciousness of grace, as I may so express it, to bestow heaven upon us. The Papists acknowledge grace in conversion; though they mingle much of man's will with it, yet they acknowledge a preventing grace. But when they come to speak of his going to heaven, there they thrust in merit; they do not make salvation to be of grace so much as conversion itself. But it is grace, and grace to eternity, and the height of grace. Rom. ix. 23, 'That God might make known the riches of his glory on the vessels of mercy.' The Apostle, you see, when he speaks of salvation and riches of glory, calls the subjects of it 'vessels of mercy.' And why? The coherence of the text here naturally clears it, and shews you why, when you are in heaven, you are eternally vessels of mercy, and all the riches of glory is therefore converted into the riches of mercy as the cause thereof. Why? Because you were once by nature children of wrath, and considered in yourselves you are ever so. As a man is to look upon himself after he is justified as ungodly in himself,—it is said of Abraham, that he believed on him that justifieth the ungodly,—so he is in himself to eternity. We were dead in sins and trespasses, we were children of wrath by nature, hell was our place. How came we hither then? It is the exceeding riches of his grace that pulls men out of that miserable condition, and sets them upon that height and top of blessedness and happiness in the world to come. It is thy mercy, say they in the Lamentations, that we are not consumed; thy mercies fail not. It is the mercy of God that we are not in hell; and when we are in heaven, it is mercy that hath

brought us thither ; and because we were once thus and thus in ourselves, it is mercy and grace that continues us there for ever.

There are two treasuries, to which there are continual additions by men's sinnings. Take wicked men ; they, as it is said in Rom. ii. 5, by abusing the goodness and long-suffering of God, treasure up unto themselves wrath against the day of wrath. Take godly men, or elect men rather ; though indeed they, by sinning before conversion, considered as in themselves, did treasure up wrath unto themselves, yet all their sins did but serve to make room for, and a capacity of a treasury of grace the greater, when salvation should come to be revealed to them. And all their sins after conversion still increase this treasury ; they need so much more of the riches of grace to save them. And therefore saith the Apostle here, that you who were dead in sins and trespasses, that you should be quickened and sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus, this shews and magnifies the exceeding riches of his grace in all that he will do to you, and for you, in the world to come. If I might compare heaven, and what God doth bestow upon us, and the glory there, with what he doth for us at our conversion ; then certainly, if the one must be acknowledged grace, as the Papists themselves do, the other must needs be much more, or as much every whit. We are as passive in all the glory bestowed upon us as we are in conversion. Our bodies are raised again out of the dust by that power that subdues all things, and they are raised up spiritual, glorious bodies, that we may be fitted for glory. Therefore the resurrection is called in Scripture a regeneration, even as well as conversion itself. And when our souls are filled with blessedness in heaven, they are passive rather in it ; nay, they are more passive, if it may be consisting with a liberty of will, and of a creature rational, and of understanding, than in all the actions of grace that here, when we are converted, are put forth. We say, we being acted by God, we act, and it is true in all the good we do in this life. But the blessedness put upon us in the world to come is rather a thing bestowed upon us, than acted by us ; we glorify God here, we are glorified of God hereafter. Therefore it must needs be grace, and exceeding riches of grace. So Christ saith, 'I have glorified thee upon earth.' He speaks actively, when he speaks of what he did in this world ; but when he comes to speak of the world to come, then saith he, 'Glorify me.' Therefore the Scripture, when it speaks of heaven, it speaks as if we were but passive there ; all that is bestowed upon us therefore is of grace. Mortality is said to be swallowed up of life ; and we are satiated with the river of his pleasure ; we are watered, it is poured upon us, as the word signifies in Ps. xxxvi. The joy that the Holy Ghost works in us, which is the earnest of heaven, we are recipients, if I may so express it, rather than actors in it.

O my brethren, hate Popery ; it is a cursed doctrine, that that wherein the height, the top, the riches, the graciousness of grace most appeareth, they should not only mingle works with it, but mingle them as merits too, as the cause thereof. That he might shew forth, saith the Apostle, the exceeding riches of his grace, in that world to come. There are many Papists that do indeed interpret these words of heaven ; but how do they mince it to salve up their own doctrine of merit ? What do they say ? It is true, God gives glory, say they, for the merits of men, and yet it is grace. Why ? Because that God doth glorify men far beyond their merits. Thank them for nothing ; so men are thrown into hell, and there punished less than they merit and deserve ; and so grace is as much seen in the one as in the other.

A *second* observation is this : That in the world to come, there are ages,

and many ages to come, in eternity. Unto the scriptures I gave you then, I shall only add that in 1 Tim. vi. 17, and compare it but with those other scriptures I gave you then. The Apostle, when he speaks of this world there, saith, 'Charge them that are rich in this world;' so we translate it: it is, 'in this age,' in this *now* world. He expresseth it in the singular number, and he speaks it plainly in opposition to the world to come, which, in ver. 19, we translate 'the time to come,' but in the original it is 'ages to come;' if he calls the one an age, he calls the other an age of ages. In Rom. xvi. 27, we translate it 'for ever,' but it is indeed 'for ages,' and so you have it in Eph. iii. 21. My brethren, the time of heaven, the eternity there, it is so vast that it is reckoned by ages, and by ages of ages. In this life here, time is reckoned by days and by years. 'The days of man,' they are so and so; and, 'Teach us to number our days;' and, 'The years of man are threescore and ten,' &c. They are easily numbered; for so the school-men use to distinguish the time that now is from that to come. The time that now is, is a duration that may be numbered, and that by days and months and years, because they are so few; few are the days of man, and fewer are the years of man, and therefore may be easily numbered. But the time of heaven is reckoned by ages, and by ages of ages, not by days and by years; and it passeth away so that, though it be ages, it is not numbered by ages of years, as our ages are, they are numbered in the lump rather; 'ages of ages.'

There is also this difference between God's eternity and ours. In this both of them agree, that as the essence of God is the same in all ages to eternity, so the substance of our souls and bodies will be still the same without alteration. But yet there is this difference betwixt his eternity and ours: his eternity is not divided into ages, as ours is. Why? Because, as Anselm well saith, speaking unto God, 'Thy eternity, O God, is always present to thee.' He possesseth the joys of all time in one instant continual; for all things, past, present, and to come, are present unto him. And as his immense being encompasseth all beings, so his immense duration doth all time, and there is but one *now* of eternity to him. But it is not so with us. *Nos habemus de nostra eternitate quod semper est futurum.* We have of our eternity that is still to come, for we can take in but, as creatures, one thing after another; and that is the reason why God hath appointed ages, eternity itself, to manifest the riches of his grace to us, for less will not serve the turn.

Thirdly, Another observation from this interpretation is this: That all our time spent in heaven shall be but passed away eternally in kindness. 'To shew forth,' saith he, 'in the ages to come, the exceeding riches of his grace in kindness.' It is not 'in *his* kindness,' but 'in kindness,' to set an emphasis on it, wholly in a way of kindness; it is *his* kindness too, for it is that makes heaven. I gave you an account of the addition, and the meaning of those words, when I opened them to this sense, that God doth not only shew his prerogative of grace for his own glory in heaven, but he doth all, bestows all, with the greatest heartiness, with the greatest kindness, with the greatest sweetness,—for the word implies all this,—with the greatest communicativeness of himself (rejoicing over us to do us good) that can be. As a king now is gracious to his subjects, but if he be of a loving disposition, he is kind to his wife, and all the grace he shews her is in kindness; so it is between God and his saints. All the converse we have with God in heaven, and all that God bestows upon us there, is with infinite familiarity and kindness and sweetness, and is so carried on; and therein doth lie, as to us, the height of blessedness. In Prov. xxvii. 9, Solomon call it 'the sweetness of

a man's friend,' for such the kindness of a friend is. You shall observe therefore, when heaven is spoken of, it is still spoken of in terms and words of kindness. Our Saviour Christ compares himself to a wooer, and that great day to be his marriage-day, and the church to be his bride, and he to be the bridegroom; and all that he doth there afterwards for ever is in the kindness of a bridegroom, in the heat, in the highest affection of love. He acts the part of a fresh wooer all along. When the new Jerusalem comes down from heaven, the bride is said to be made ready, and he, as a bridegroom, rejoiceth over his bride for ever, as the prophet speaks in Isa. lxii. 5, which indeed is a promise of the calling of the Jews, when God will take that people again into his marriage bed, yet so as in heaven it holds much more.

He continually acts the part of a bridegroom: saith he, 'I go to prepare a place for you;' as wooers do for their brides, to bring them home to their father's house: it is spoken in the language of kindness. And then he takes them, and brings them to his Father's house. 'In my Father's house are many mansions,' and there I will entertain you, saith he; all speaks kindness. In John xx. 17, when Mary would have come, and familiarly have embraced him, whether his feet or otherwise, saith he, 'Touch me not, for I am not yet ascended.' It is not a reproof, so much as a staying her from the present enjoyment, with the hint of a time wherein kindness was to be shewn yet to come; and is as if he had said, There is time enough, we shall be familiar in heaven; but now thou art to go about thy business, now tell my disciples that I am risen. This I take to be the best meaning of that place. In Ps. xxxvi. 7, 'How excellent,' or precious, 'is thy loving-kindness, O God!' He speaks of the loving-kindness which he shews to them that trust in him here, having compared this with that ordinary favour which he shews to man and beast in the words before, and shewing how it excels. But his shewing kindness indeed is yet to come, whereof this here is but the love-token; for what follows? 'They shall be abundantly satisfied with the fatness of thy house, and thou shalt make them drink'—it is a passive word, as I said before—'of the river of thy pleasures.' He speaks in the language of kindness shewn us, entertainment. Jesus Christ brings them to his Father's house, and there the best things he hath he brings forth; there they shall have a banquet, yea, the choicest banquet, that which God himself liveth upon. 'Thy pleasures,' saith he, he brings them all forth, because he spends the time in kindness. 'Henceforth,' saith Christ, 'I will not drink any more of the fruit of the vine, till I drink it new with you in my Father's kingdom.' This is all the language of kindness and of entertainment.

And this, my brethren, is it which makes the entertainment so sweet in heaven, all the cost and glory there so sweet; it is the kindness, the sweetness of a friend, and of God a father, and of Jesus Christ a bridegroom, that rejoiceth over us to do us good. In Prov. xv. 17, a dinner of herbs with love, how sweet is it! How much more to be at a continual feast, with the river of God's pleasures to drink thereof, and to be fed with the fatness of his house, and all this out of infinite loving-kindness! This is better than life, it is better than the glory and happiness itself, simply considered, for it is this which makes it to be blessedness. When you were first turned to God, how kind perhaps was God to you then, or have you found him in some passages of your lives! and you think, If God should be always thus kind to me, how would it ravish my heart! Thou shalt have enough of it in heaven. God is angry sometimes here, and seems to take things unkindly at our hands, but in heaven nothing but kindness. It is an

excellent place, and it is the meaning of it, in Ps. xxx. 5, 'His anger endureth but for a moment, but in his favour is life.' Life is there opposed to a moment; it is life for ever, eternal life. You have the like in Isa. liv. 8.

My brethren, in heaven there are no affections but love and kindness on both sides, on God's part, and ours. In us there is no affection else stirring. There is no sorrow for sin, though that be sweet, for all tears are wiped away from our eyes; there is no fear, for perfect love casteth out fear; there is no desire, for there is continual satisfaction.

There is nothing but these three things in a man,—the knowledge and sight of God, the love of God, and joy in God; there is this trinity, if I may so speak, of dispositions in the soul. On the other side, in God, though there be power, and justice, and all attributes in him, yet they all have a tincture of loving-kindness. Therefore God is not said so much to be wisdom, in respect of us, as love; where have you him called justice or power? But he is called love. And though God is all in all, and all in him is ours, yet it is all in loving-kindness. He shews forth the riches of his grace, in kindness towards us, in those ages to come, in Christ Jesus.

I might add this, *in Christ Jesus*; for though God be all in all in heaven, yet it is God's love in Christ to us that doth make the union everlasting, and is the foundation of it. The creature could not stand under that love of God, if it were not conveyed to us in Christ; it would be too weighty for it. God chose us in Christ at first, when he ordained us this glory in heaven, and therefore he continues to shew kindness towards us in heaven, and that in Christ, to everlasting.

The second head of observations I make out of these words, upon that third interpretation, is this: to shew you from hence how great a glory heaven is. I shall do it exceeding briefly.

First, You see it is called *riches*. When the Scripture speaks of heaven, it still speaks of the glory there under the notion of riches, under the notion of a treasury. 1 Tim. vi. 19, 'Laying up in store for themselves a good foundation for the time to come.' When our Lord and Saviour Christ speaks of heaven, still he expresseth it under the notion of treasure and riches. Matt. vi. 20, 'Thou shalt have treasures in heaven;' and Matt. xix. 21, Luke xii. 33, Mark x. 21, and Luke xviii. 22. It is the familiar language of Christ, and still he calls them treasures, in the plural number.

Secondly, They are called *exceeding riches of his grace*, to be shewn forth then, in comparison of what God hath done for us here; for, in the clear natural coherence of these words with the former, the scope is this. God, saith he, hath pulled you out of that natural condition you were in; he hath quickened you together with Christ already; he hath in Christ representatively raised you, and set you together in heaven, Christ having taken possession of that for you which for ever you shall enjoy. This, saith he, is but a foundation, it is all but a preparation that he may shew forth the exceeding riches of his grace in the ages to come. He had said. God was rich in mercy, in quickening them. 'God,' saith he, 'who is rich in mercy, for his great love wherewith he loved us, even when we were dead in sins, hath quickened us together with Christ,' ver. 4, 5. And in chap. i 7, that our sins are forgiven, he saith, it is 'according to the riches of his grace.' But what doth all this tend to that is done here in this life? It is but a foundation, it is but a preparation that he may shew forth the exceeding riches of his grace. He puts that in, when he comes to speak of heaven, that although God hath done much for us already, yet he hath hidden riches to shew forth then. Do but then consider with yourselves, my brethren, by what

God hath done for us here, and by what he had bestowed and expended upon these Ephesians, what a world of riches of grace, what a treasure that is that must be then broken up and shewn forth. Did it cost God nothing to pardon your sins? What expenses do you put him to every day? What riches of grace is there in pouring forth of his Spirit, in justification, in sanctification, in adoption?

And yet what are all these? What is pardon of sin to heaven? It is but so many riches buried in the foundation. What is the Spirit's pouring forth here? It is but the earnest of that riches which is to come. All that he hath done here, it is but that he might shew forth the exceeding riches of his grace on us, in ages to come, in kindness towards us in Christ Jesus. All that is done for us here, it is but like a lighter metal; as always in mines you shall have a lighter metal before you come to the mine itself. All the riches of grace expended upon us here, they are but that lighter metal to that great mine that is then to be broken up. 'That he might make known,' saith the Apostle, Rom. ix. 23, 'the riches of his glory on the vessels of mercy, which he had before prepared unto glory.' All that is done here, it is but a preparation to those riches of glory that are to be made known on the vessels of mercy. As the sorrows of this life are unto the wicked but the beginning of sorrows, so all that God doth for his saints in this life is but the beginning and the sprinklings of those riches he will expend to eternity, and which he hath laid up for them in heaven, as the Apostle phraseth it in Col. i. 5. Saith the Psalmist, Ps. xxiii. 6, speaking of this love, Mercy and loving-kindness shall follow me all my days. Take any of the elect children of God, what a world of mercy and loving-kindness doth follow him, and pursue him? Even as we are bid to follow after peace and to pursue it, so doth God pursue thee with loving-kindnesses, one after another; but when thou comest to 'ages to come,' loving-kindness shall overwhelm thee, swallow thee up.

My brethren, if God have done so great things in the bringing us to glory, as the preparation to it,—he did let us fall into sin, delivered us out of it, sent his Son to die for us,—if these be but the preparations, what will the riches be? And yet all this is but preparation, that he might shew forth the exceeding riches of his grace, in the ages to come, in kindness towards us in Christ Jesus.

Thirdly, What is it that God will expend upon us in heaven? He will expend upon us the *exceeding riches of his grace.*

My brethren, the exceeding riches of God's grace must be laid out in something which shall be proportionable to it. If a king should say, Go take all the riches in my kingdom, and expend it upon such an entertainment; if the maker of the entertainment be faithful and wise, the entertainment shall be suitable to those exceeding riches that are laid forth and expended. If we say that such or such a thing doth cost a man so much, we reckon it folly in him that is the purchaser or procurer of it at such a rate, if it do not hold some proportion to the cost. Now then, if God will shew forth the exceeding riches of his grace, that happiness and glory that must hold a proportion to this, and come up to it and be worthy of it, that entertainment which God himself is the maker of, and therefore he will not cast away any whit of his grace, but his saints shall have it out in glory, how great must that glory be! And it is to make a show, on purpose to shew forth. Saith God, I will shew how great a God I am, how gracious I am, how well I can love creatures, and how kind he will be when he meaneth to be kind. If Ahasuerus, being a great king, will make a

feast to shew the riches of his glorious kingdom, how great, how magnificent shall the feast be! If God will make creatures happy, and undertakes to do it, to shew forth the exceeding riches of his grace, and this before all ages, all men, when all the world is gathered together, how great must this glory be! And I beseech you consider who are the stewards of all these riches that are in God. Here is grace and loving-kindness; we are therefore like to be well entertained. You see grace is at the cost, and gives commission to loving-kindness to spare for nothing. If it be to shew forth the riches of grace, grace will be sure to provide for its own glory, to shew itself to the utmost; and when kindness towards us shall have the command of grace's purse, that will be sure to think nothing too good for us. If a prince should employ one to make entertainment that is of a profuse and prodigal spirit, and a deep observer and favourer of the persons to be entertained, he will be sure to lay on cost enough. Especially if the prince set open his coffers, and bid him take out whatever he will for that entertainment; what an entertainment will you expect shall be made by this man! Saith God to loving-kindness, Here is all my riches, take whatever you please. And, my brethren, to be sure that is profuse enough.

And then again, it is made God's ultimate design here of all he hath done for us; it was the first thing in his intention and thoughts, which he had in his eye as the end and conclusion of all. Therefore he did let us fall into sin, 'dead in sins and trespasses,' 'children of wrath;' therefore he sent Jesus Christ, therefore he quickened us in him, therefore he set us in heavenly places in him. What is the design, the ultimate end in God's heart of all this? That he might shew forth the exceeding riches of his grace in the ages to come. The truth is, this God that is rich in mercy, had so much riches by him that he thought of all profuse and expensive ways to lay it out; as if one should have so much riches by him that he knew not how to expend them. God might have brought us to heaven immediately, but he let us fall into sin, to draw out infinite riches in pardoning, and yet this is but by the way; what then is the goodness of God that is laid up for the sons of men for eternity!

Fourthly, It is so much riches of grace that God hath designed to bestow upon us in that world as requires ages to come to exhaust it. It is a notion of the highest comfort to us that God hath taken up so much love, the first moment he loved us, as requires eternity to manage it. Here you have a scripture for it: 'that he might shew forth,' even to eternity, 'the exceeding riches of his grace.' It was so much riches as required an eternity to manifest and to expend; so much riches as, though we shall ever be spending, they shall never be spent.

We say of hell, that the demerit of sin is such that therefore hell is to eternity, because that the creature cannot in a short time undergo all that wrath that is due to him for his sin, and therefore there is an eternity of time for him to suffer in. So it is here; we may truly say of heaven, of the riches of God's grace which he hath laid up for us, to spend upon us, it is so infinite a treasure that the creature being not able to take it in at once, must have ages to come to take it in.

My brethren, this is one of the highest exaggerations of the glory of heaven to us, that it is not only to eternity simply, but that it requires eternity to expend that which God hath designed to us. When thou comest to heaven, thou mayest, and thou mayest now by faith, say, Soul, take thy rest, thou hast goods laid up for many years, thou hast riches of grace laid up for ages of ages; which cannot be spent, spend as fast as thou canst.

In Ps. xxxvi. 9, speaking of heaven and of drinking of the river of God's pleasures, he calls God there the fountain of life; and why the fountain of life? Because the fountain is continually bubbling up new fresh water; it is ever doing of it. God himself hath infinite goodness in him which the creatures cannot take in at once; they are taking of it in eternally. All that God doth for us for ever is but the fulfilling of his good pleasure, as you have it in 2 Thess. i. 11. It is but filling up that good pleasure of his which he hath conceived towards us.

There are two things in God, simplicity of being, and infiniteness of being. Now although, by reason of the simplicity of his being, we see God at once every moment, and as his essence is simple, so that beatifical vision is one simple act; yet by reason of the infiniteness of his being, it is like sailing over an eternal sea, where you see nothing but sea, and yet you are to eternity sailing it over; you have a new horizon every hour's sail you sail. So is it here; therefore they are called rivers of pleasure, because in God and from God, by reason of his infiniteness, they are continually fresh. The Papists say that the saints in heaven see all things here below in God. What do our divines say to that? No, say they, it cannot be; though they see God, in whom all things are, and in whom all things may be seen, yet they do not see all things in God at once. The saints—even as Aquinas himself speaks, and reason acknowledgeth it too—see in God still things fresh, which they saw not in the beginning of their blessedness. The angels that see God's face in heaven, yet they stretch out their necks to learn continually even of the churches below the mysteries of Christ; much more in heaven.

My brethren, it is for *ages to come*; the infiniteness of this being of God holds us seeing, and knowing, and viewing over afresh even to eternity, and yet it is not, it cannot be comprehended by us; therefore ages to come are appointed.

Fifthly, It is in kindness towards *us*. My brethren, when God shall have shut out all the world, shut up all wicked men in hell, when he and his children shall be alone, and all the world besides excluded, and none else there but his children, and they all together with him, then will he break up the exceeding riches of his grace, and he hath reserved it unto that time.

Lastly, It is in kindness towards us in Christ Jesus, loving us with the same love wherewith he loved Christ Jesus. Look what glory he hath bestowed upon our head, the same he will bestow upon us, and with the same kindness, and how great must that needs be? Do but read the description of that glory, which the Apostle on purpose made of Christ, in the first chapter; out of the same kindness he will bestow the same glory upon us.

And so much now for observations upon that last sense and interpretation; and so I have done with this verse.