

## DISCOURSE XXI.\*

WE have had, through the providence of God, so good and so seasonable a word unto the present occasion, that there is no need, as well as but little time, to offer any thing farther unto you. Yet a few words in compliance with what we have heard, may not be altogether unseasonable, or unuseful.

Our business and duty is to set forth the sufferings and death of our Lord Jesus Christ, and therein principally to call to mind his love. What you have heard may very well occasion us to think of that passage of the apostle, wherein he earnestly prays for them.

EPH. iii. 19.—*And to know the love of Christ which passeth knowledge.*

This is a peculiar kind of expression; the meaning is, that we may know that experimentally which we cannot know comprehensively; that we may know that in its power and effects, which we cannot comprehend in its nature and depths. A weary person may receive refreshment from a spring, who cannot fathom the depths of the ocean from whence it doth proceed. And if we would have our hearts in this ordinance, and at other times, affected with the love of Christ, which is the thing we are to aim at (to know his love, and to experience the power of it), it is of great advantage to us to consider, that it is such a love as passes knowledge, that our faith concerning it must issue in admiration, not comprehension.

I shall name two or three things that may give a little sense of this love as it passes knowledge.

1. The love of Christ is the fountain and spring of all the glory that is in heaven, or shall be there unto all eternity. God's eternal glory is eternally the same; 'from everlasting to everlasting thou art God;' but all the created glory that is in heaven, or that ever shall be there, springs out of the love of Christ. It is true, the angels were not redeemed by him, but they were confirmed by him. They

\* Delivered October 29, 1676.

were not recovered out of a lost estate by him, but they were continued in their first estate by him. Hence it is that God 'gathered all things in heaven and earth unto a head in him;' Eph. i. 10. And there is a great deal to the same purpose in that expression of the apostle, when he had mentioned principalities and powers, Col. i. 17. 'In him all things consist;' they have their consistence in him. All would dissolve and fall to nothing, if they had not their consistence in Jesus Christ. Certainly this is a love that passes knowledge, that is the fountain and spring of all the glory that is in heaven. If God help us by faith to look within the veil, and to take a view of all those glories where-with the holy God is encompassed, we shall see that this love is the fountain and spring of them, the interposition of Christ saved the creation, and brought in that everlasting glory that shall dwell in heaven. God knows this love, God understands the way of it; but as to us it passes knowledge.

Again, 2. This love of Christ passes the comprehension and knowledge of angels; and therefore Peter tells us, 1 Epist. i. 12. speaking of the sufferings of Christ and the glory that followed, 'Which things,' says he, 'the angels desire to' bow down and 'look into.' The angels in heaven live in an admiration of the love of Christ unto sinners, that is, that love he expressed in suffering, and in the glory that did ensue. And O! what thoughts ought we to have of this love, who have all the benefits of it? The angels had no benefit by the sufferings of Christ, but their benefit and advantage ensued on the assumption of the human nature to bring the creation into a consistence, and his interposition between God and all his creatures. They admire and adore it. What ought such poor creatures as we are to do? It may well be said to pass our knowledge, for it passes the knowledge of all the angels in heaven.

3. It passes knowledge, in that the effects of it in Christ himself pass all our knowledge and comprehension.

To give but two instances: (1.) His condescension to assume our human nature passes all our comprehension. No man can fully understand the mystery of the assumption of our nature into the personal subsistence of the Son of God. Some dispute whether we shall understand the mystery of

the incarnation in heaven; here we believe it. It is love which passes knowledge that the eternal Son of God should take our nature into personal union with himself; it is that we may admire and ought to admire; and God help us, we are such poor earthly creatures that we cannot admire it as we ought; though it be much in our nature to admire what we cannot comprehend.

(2.) We cannot fully understand his passion and sufferings. God alone knows what is in the curse of the law; we do not know it. God alone knows what is the true desert of sin; it cannot be fully understood by any but himself. They who undergo it must suffer to eternity; there is no end; they never see, never knew what sin deserved. How do we know then what Christ suffered, when the punishment due to our sin, when all our iniquities met upon him, with the curse of the law? God only knows what is in these things; the fruits and effects of this love in himself, in his incarnation and passion, are past our knowledge, therefore the love itself surpasses our knowledge.

4. Give me leave to say, The very fruits of it in ourselves do pass knowledge. No man that lives knows what there is in these three general heads of the fruits of Christ's love, in justification and pardon of sin, in the renovation and sanctification of our natures, and in the inhabitation and consolations of the Holy Spirit. No man living can find out these things to perfection. None of us fully understands and comprehends what it is to be justified in the sight of God, to have sin pardoned, to have our natures renewed, and transformed into the likeness of God, and to have the Holy Ghost dwell in us. The love of Christ therefore passes all knowledge, for the very fruits of it in ourselves are beyond what we can comprehend; there is a greatness in them we cannot reach unto. Why then, my brethren, let us labour to have our hearts affected with this love. If God would be pleased to give unto every one of us some sense and impression of the greatness of this love of Christ, glance it into our hearts, beam it upon us in this ordinance, we should have cause to bless him all the days of our lives. The faith and light of it issue in admiration; the light of glory will bring us to comprehension. Let us have such a sense as may cause us to admire what we cannot now comprehend.

(1.) I could speak something, but I will not now, to the actings of faith in admiration; it being the proper nature of faith to issue itself in the admiration of that which is infinite. If we can get our souls up to a holy admiration of this love, we have some gracious sense of it upon our hearts, if we can go no farther.

(2.) Let us learn to run up all the mercies we are partakers of, whatsoever it be we value, to the proper spring, 'who loved me, and gave himself for me.' If we have any relief, or supply, or refreshment of soul, in a sense of pardon of sin, in spiritual light or consolation, pray let us exercise ourselves to run up all these things to the fountain: it is all from the love of Christ, that unspeakable love which passes knowledge.

(3.) In this let us be ashamed, seeing the love of Christ to us is such as passes our knowledge, our love to him is so weak, that sometimes we know not whether we have any or not. For this let us be greatly humbled. This is not the way to answer that love which passes knowledge, to know not whether we love Christ again or not. Let us be ashamed for our want of love.

And lastly, Let us abound in praise and thanksgiving for his love, and all the fruits of it.

For my part I do not know, whether that vision in Rev. v. 9. does express the rejoicing of the church above, or the duty of the church below; but both I am sure are of so near affinity, that apply it to which you will, you do not miss it. And what do they there? why, it is said, 'They sang a new song, saying, Thou art worthy to take the book and to open the seals of it; for thou wast slain, and hast redeemed us to God by thy blood out of every kindred, and tongue, and people, and nation; and hast made us unto our God kings and priests,' &c. And it is said again, 'Worthy is the Lamb that was slain to receive power, and riches, and wisdom, and strength, and honour, and glory, and blessing;' and again he repeats it in ver. 13. I say, I know not whether this be a representation of the rejoicing of the church above, or a representation of the duty of the church below; but I can conclude from it, that the enjoyment of the one and the duty of the other, consists greatly in continual giving praise and thanksgiving to Christ for his unspeakable love in our redemption.