

The Profane, Wicked Prince Overturned, and the Rightful King Set Up

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"I will overturn, overturn, overturn it: and it shall be no more, until he come whose right it is; and I will give it him."
Ezekiel 21:27

I shall have to call your attention, for a few moments, to the literal meaning and historical connection of these words; for, as I have explained in a sermon recently published, the spiritual and experimental interpretation of the word of God must always be based upon and coincide with the literal. If, then, we look at the verses which immediately precede our text, we shall find these words: "And thou, profane wicked prince of Israel, whose day is come, when iniquity shall have an end. Thus saith the Lord God: Remove the diadem, and take off the crown: this shall not be the same: exalt him that is low, and abase him that is high." (Ezekiel 21:25, 26.) This prince of Israel, against whom this severe denunciation was launched, that this diadem should be removed and his crown taken off, was king Zedekiah; and you will observe that he is stamped by two expressive marks, "profane," and "wicked." I shall consider the last mark first as requiring less explanation. He is called "a wicked" prince, then, on account of his generally wicked and profligate life, and especially, as we read in the last chapter of the Second of Chronicles, because "he did that which was evil in the sight of the Lord his God, and humbled not himself before Jeremiah the prophet, speaking from the mouth of the Lord." But he is also called a "profane" prince; and his profanity consisted mainly in the breaking of a covenant on two distinct occasions—one made with God, and the other made with man in the name of

the Lord.

As regards the first, we find it recorded by the prophet Jeremiah (34:7-9), that when the king of Babylon's army had taken all the cities of Judah except Lachish, Azekah, and Jerusalem, Zedekiah made a covenant with all the people at Jerusalem, in the name of the Lord, that every man should let his man-servant, and every man his maid-servant, being a Hebrew or a Hebrewess, go free. But afterwards, when Nebuchadnezzar raised the siege of Jerusalem to fight against Pharaoh Hophra, who had come out of Egypt with a great army to its relief, the princes and the people, believing that all danger was now over, repented of the covenant of reformation which they had made, and caused every man his servant and every man his handmaid, whom they had set at liberty, to return into servitude. (Jer. 34:9-11.) Now, this breach of the covenant with God, which had been solemnly attested and ratified by cutting a calf in twain and passing between the two parts thereof, Zedekiah sanctioned, and, therefore, was a profane prince as breaking his covenant with God.

But he was also "profane" by breaking another covenant made with man in the name of the Lord, for he had made a covenant with the King of Babylon, that he would be faithful to him as his liege Lord, and then had broken that covenant by swearing allegiance to the King of Egypt. In order to understand this point a little more clearly, you must bear in mind that the land of Canaan was at this time a bone of contention between two mighty empires—the mighty empire of Assyria, on the east, and the might empire of Egypt on the south; and that these were contending together to which of them it should permanently belong; for not only was it a very populous and fruitful land, but it lay adjacent to the Mediterranean, that great highway of nations, and to those

two wealthy marts of commerce, Tyre and Sidon, and therefore was coveted by these two great empires as a very important possession. Now sometimes the King of Egypt prevailed, and sometimes the King of Assyria; and therefore it was a temptation to the Kings of Judah sometimes to favour one to get rid of the other, and sometimes to favour that empire most which could most powerfully defend them against the other. Zedekiah owed his throne and crown to Nebuchadnezzar; for when the King of Babylon took Jerusalem, he made him King in the room of Jehoiachin, and at the same time exacted from him a solemn oath that he would be true and faithful to him. But seven years afterwards Zedekiah sent ambassadors into Egypt to make a confederacy with Pharaoh Hophra, and thus broke his oath which he had sworn in the name of the Lord his God unto the King of Babylon. We find, therefore, the Lord thus speaking of him: "But he rebelled against him in sending his ambassadors into Egypt, that they might give him horses and much people. Shall he prosper? shall he escape that doeth such things? or shall he break the covenant, and be delivered? As I live, saith the Lord God, surely in the place where the king dwelleth that made him king, whose oath he despised, and whose covenant he brake, even with him in the midst of Babylon he shall die." (Ezek. 17:15, 16.) It was then because he had thus broken his covenant on these two distinct occasions that he is called by the Lord a "profane" prince; Now against this profane, wicked prince the Lord utters, in the words which I have already quoted, a very severe denunciation. He declares that "his day was come, when his iniquity should have an end." He had borne with him until he would bear with him no more. He would now, therefore, remove the diadem from off his brow, and take the crown from off his head; which was accomplished, when in the eleventh year of his reign Jerusalem was carried by storm, Zedekiah himself, when he had fled from the city by

night, overtaken in the plains of Jericho, and brought before the king, whose covenant he had broken, who slew his sons before his face, put out his eyes, and bound him with chains to carry him to Babylon. Then God abased him that was high. And not only so, but he overturned, overturned, overturned his kingdom itself so thoroughly, by the slaughter of his sons, the destruction of his city, and the 70 years' captivity which ensued, that the kingdom of Judah was utterly put an end to, and there never was afterwards a Jewish king to reign in Jerusalem, until he came whose right it was, and over whose cross, though rejected of men, Pilate wrote, "Jesus of Nazareth, King of the Jews;" for this was the King who was to come, to whom the throne by right belonged, and to whom God had promised to give it for an everlasting possession; as the angel said to Mary: "He shall be great, and shall be called the Son of the Highest: and the Lord God shall give unto him the throne of his father David: and he shall reign over the house of Jacob for ever; and of his kingdom there shall be no end." (Luke 1:32, 33.)

I am sorry to have been obliged to take up so much of our time with all this literal explanation; but it is necessary, not only for its own sake, to understand the historical connection of our text, but also that I may build consistently upon it a spiritual and experimental interpretation. With this explanation, then, I now come to our text. "I will overturn, overturn, overturn it: and it shall be no more, until he come whose right it is; and I will give it him."

I think you will see in these words, if, at least, you see with me, three things: —

I.—*First*, a triple *denunciation*: "I will overturn, overturn, overturn it."

II.—*Secondly, a positive declaration:* "It shall be no more, until he come whose right it is."

III.—*Thirdly, a gracious promise:* "And I will give it him."

I.—I have shown you the literal meaning and historical connection of the text; but what you want to know, and what I hope to set before you this morning, is its spiritual and experimental interpretation.

It contains, I said, in the first place, a *denunciation* against a wicked, profane prince, whose diadem is to be removed and crown taken off, and himself to be overturned with a threefold overturning, so that his reign should be put a thorough end to, and his kingdom so destroyed that none should occupy it, until he should come whose right it is. Looking around you, and above all looking into your own heart, can you find any such profane, wicked prince of Israel, who has had a long day of rule and government, and whose iniquity has gone to great lengths, but whose day, the day of his overthrow, is now come, and whose iniquity at last has an end? Is it anybody in this congregation, any particular person, whose wickedness and profanity I am come here to denounce, any secret hypocrite or loose-living professor whom I am sent to expose? No; none but your own profane, wicked self; for is not this the prince who has for a long series of years put the diadem round his own brow, and bound upon his own head the crown of glory that belongs to the Lord? Surely your own conscience will convince you that you are the man; and you will therefore go with me, as I shall endeavour to show how, in the case of the Lord's people, he will overturn, overturn, overturn the rule and dominion of this profane, wicked prince; and how he will remove the diadem and take off the crown from his most unworthy brow, and abase him that is high, until he has

made room in the conscience for him to come whose right it is, that he may fulfil the promise, "I will give it him."

You will observe that the word "overturn" is thrice repeated. Now I do not say that because the words "I will overturn, overturn, overturn," are repeated these three times, it necessarily means that there are three distinct overthrows of self, as symbolised by the profane, wicked prince, though it is somewhat remarkable that literally and historically there were three distinct captures of Jerusalem by Nebuchadnezzar, and three distinct captivities into Babylon. It may be merely an emphatic form of expression, as "O earth, earth, earth, hear the words of the Lord," and "The temple of the Lord, the temple of the Lord, the temple of the Lord are we," in both of which passages the threefold repetition is merely an emphatic form of language. But as I find it thus thrice repeated, and as there were, as I have hinted, three captures of Jerusalem, and three captivities into Babylon, I shall take it simply as it stands before me, as descriptive of three distinct overthrows of King Self by the power of God; removing the diadem from his brow, and taking the crown off his head.

To do this then more thoroughly and completely, I shall endeavour to trace out the experience of a living soul from the very first commencement of the work of grace; and I hope in doing so, that you who have had some experimental dealings of God upon your soul may be able more or less clearly to find a witness in your own experience that you have gone through some, if not all, of these three overthrows.

i. I will take, then, a child of God on whom he has fixed his eternal purposes of love and mercy, and commence with him at that period of his life when the Lord is about to begin a

work of grace upon his soul. I shall pass by his infancy and childhood, though there doubtless were then marks of his being "preserved in Christ" before called, and sometimes in a very signal way, and come to that special epoch of his life just before the Lord begins to work with power upon his conscience. I do not wish to lay down a certain standard for the Lord to work by, for he is a sovereign, and works all things according to the counsel of his own will; but you will generally find, before he begins to work with power upon a man's conscience, that he deals with him in some conspicuous manner in a way of *providence*. Though providence is not grace, though the leadings and dealings of God with a man as regards the things of this life, are not the same by any means as the leadings and teachings of God in a spiritual and experimental way, yet the one often run into the other. And as the preparation of the heart of man and the answer of the tongue are both of the Lord, so he often prepares the way for spiritual teachings and experimental dealings, by leading his people into a peculiar path in providence.

1. This profane, wicked prince is now then sitting upon his throne, and settling himself, as he thinks, firmly upon it. I call him a "profane, wicked prince," for though he may not be actually wicked in life, or profane in conversation, yet he is both so in the sight of God, and as spiritually viewed. And you will bear in mind that I am not speaking of the man, but of self in the man; for what is self but the very essence of our corrupt nature? Besides which, is it not very wicked in self to set itself up in the heart in the place of God? And is not self "profane" as well as wicked, not merely as full of rebellious and blasphemous thoughts, but as breaking God's covenant in a Holy Law? Has it not often made vows, promises, and resolutions, and broken them all? And what is it now doing but binding the diadem of pride round its brow,

and putting the crown of earthly glory on its head? But God says, in the actings of his providence towards the man who is doing this, "Thy day is come, when iniquity shall have an end. Remove the diadem, and take off the crown." Nor is he long in executing his sentence. View then the man in whom this profane, wicked prince still rules, full of youth, health, and good spirits. He means to be very prosperous and very happy; to spend his days in pleasure, and his years in enjoyment. This is his resolution. He is setting before himself a course of prosperity in business, and a life thoroughly immersed in all that nature admires and loves; but with neither of which God has anything to do; for God is not in all his thoughts. But though he has nothing to do with God, and means, if he can help it, to have nothing to do with him, God means to do with him; for he has purposes of mercy and grace towards him. There is One whose right it is to sit upon the throne of his heart, for he has bought him with his blood; and this throne he will not share with the wicked, profane prince. The Lord begins now, therefore, to deal with him in a marked way in providence, to make room, so to speak, for the power of his grace. He was looking forward to success in business, and when he had amassed sufficient to live comfortably without it, he would then retire from it to spend a life of ease and pleasure. But he is unexpectedly cast upon a bed of sickness. While he was promising to himself days of prosperity and years of pleasure, he is, instead of his former health and strength, stretched for months or years upon a bed of pain and languishing; and thus all his worldly expectations of happiness and pleasure, of prosperity and success, are broken and crushed.

2. Or it may be that the Lord sees fit to blight his tenderest affections; to bring upon him some painful, cutting disappointment, which shall strike at the very roots of all earthly happiness; and instead of enjoying the pleasures of

life and revelling; as he expected, in an elysium of earthly delight, he has nothing before him but gloom, melancholy, and disappointment.

3. Or it may be he embarks in business, and instead of prospering, getting on in life, and succeeding to almost the extent of his desires and wishes, a blight comes over the whole scene: nothing goes well with him, and he has little else but a succession of losses and crosses. If he is a farmer, his crops are blighted, his cattle die, prices are low and rents high; and he has nothing but anxiety and disappointment, in spite of all his industry and economy. If he is a tradesman, he finds others succeed in business where he cannot, rival shops opened against him, customers fall off, and he meets with such heavy losses, that he often fears he must put up his shutters.

4. Or if he has a family, he shall have grievous family afflictions; children torn from him in their childhood or youth; or when grown up, turning out extravagant, idle, and profligate; and thus wherever he turns he finds little else but a blank, sorrow, and vexation.

Now all this time, without perhaps his knowing it, God is at work with him. He is breaking down the rule and reign of this wicked, profane prince; for he cannot sit as he used to do comfortably upon his throne. The diadem of pleasure which he had bound round his brow, and the crown of honour which he had set upon his head, become loosened and shaken, and ready to drop off; for with all these earthly disappointments there shall come at times over him an unspeakable feeling of anxiety and gloom; he can scarcely tell why it is, or whence it is, but he goes about sad, moping, and melancholy, and yet scarcely able to explain the reason why it is not with him as it used to be. If he go with his former young companions,

he has no pleasure in their company, but is rather saddened by their mirth; if he try to take comfort in the enjoyments of life, and seem for a time to forget his sorrow, he comes home with a burdened conscience. Wherever he goes, and whatever he does, the hand of God seems gone out against him, and he can take happiness in nothing.

Now in all this the Lord is secretly and mysteriously acting in his first overturn; for he is now overturning profane, wicked self; he is taking off the diadem and removing the crown from all carnal expectations of pleasure in the things of time and sense; he is abasing him who is high, and bringing him down by laying a load upon his back, of which he scarcely himself knows the cause. But though he may not see it himself, others can see it in him and for him, that a very great change has taken place in him, and that he is not the man that he was. If he had been engaged in any wicked way openly or secretly, it is put a stop to; if he has been profane, it has come to an end. A something has been wrought in his conscience which has made it sore and tender, and he can now no longer trifle with God and his own soul. The diadem is removed, the crown is fallen from his head, and profane, wicked self no longer sits undisturbed upon the throne of his heart.

ii. But now comes the second overturn. He begins to see and feel that there is something more to be thought about than business and pleasure. He had not cared to think much about religion, and had perhaps rather scoffed at it and despised it. But now, whether he will or no, religion seems to occupy his constant thoughts, and the solemn matters of eternity rest with great weight and power upon his spirit. This inward change compels an outward one. He breaks off his old habits, leaves his companions, forsakes the haunts of pleasure or gaiety and goes moping and mourning along under a load

laid upon his conscience, under the heavy burden of sin and guilt. For the Lord is now at work more clearly and powerfully upon his conscience. He is convincing him of sin, bringing to light his iniquity, setting his secret sins in the light of his countenance, bringing him to judgment, arraying his transgressions before his eyes, and sending the curses and sentence of a holy law into his conscience. But what is the effect of all this? He sets to work. He will be very religious, and he sets the law before his eyes, and feels resolved that he will fulfil it to the utmost. He will not slack his hand night or day, but will try to do his duty to God and man, whatever it cost him. He will read the Scriptures, go to a place of worship, will in every way endeavour to please God by obeying his commands; he will watch his looks, his words, his thoughts, his actions; and will endeavour, to the utmost of his power, to please and serve God.

But the Lord is faithful to his word. He has said "I will overturn, overturn, overturn." This building, therefore, shall not stand, this tower of Babel shall not reach to heaven, this legal righteousness which he is seeking to erect and stand upon for eternity shall not endure the lightning of God's wrath and the terror of his frown.

1. The first thing that God does, then, is to overturn his *righteousness*, for this is the grand point of controversy between God and man, as we see in the case of Job, and in those of whom Paul says, "that they being ignorant of God's righteousness, and going about to establish their own righteousness, have not submitted themselves unto the righteousness of God." There must, therefore, be an overturning of this *righteousness*, a taking away of its diadem, a removing of its crown, an abasing of it as being high. And this is done by that work of the Holy Spirit in the heart which brings to light every secret sin, and passes a

sentence of condemnation upon every iniquity as it is brought into judgment.

2. "Well," but the man says, "I will try again. I cannot get on as I could wish, that I well know; for I find sin mixed with all I do; but I will try again if I cannot do it better next time. Surely I am not altogether without some strength to obey; I am not altogether, as I have heard ministers represent—thoroughly helpless and hopeless." So he tries his own strength again to see what he can do by praying more heartily, reading the Scriptures more intently, watching his eyes, and ears, and tongue, and feet, and hands more narrowly. But as he is now a very diligent and attentive hearer of the word, he is told again and again from the pulpit that he must believe in Christ—that there is no other way of salvation but through him. This is perhaps a new sound to him; but it is commended to his conscience as true and scriptural, and therefore he tries with all his might to believe. But he finds he can no more believe in the Son of God than he can create a world. And he also finds that as he cannot believe, so he cannot repent; for he can no more cause a godly tear to flow down his cheeks than he can create a new sun and plant him in the sky. But this brings with it an increasing burden, for he begins to find that he can no more take away the burden of guilt from his conscience than he could remove a mountain; and can no more take despondency and despair out of his heart than he could cause the sun to move from its place. Thus, as by the condemnation of a holy law there was an overturning of his righteousness, so here there is an overturning of his *strength*. This is removing the diadem and taking the crown off all creature power and ability, shearing off its locks and making the once great giant to grind, as a forlorn captive; in the prison house.

3. And now comes the overturning of his *wisdom*. The Scriptures seem all darkness to him, and he himself, like poor Job, "full of confusion." If he read he cannot understand the meaning of the word of God; if he hear he cannot get any comfort from the preaching, or reconcile it with his own experience; if he meet with the family of God there seems nothing communicated by their conversation to cast a light upon his path, or encourage him to believe that God is dealing with his soul. Thus all his wisdom fails as well as his righteousness and strength. Here is the overturn. Here is removing the diadem, and taking off the crown, abasing him that is high, and bringing him down into the dust. You will observe that hitherto I have been assuming that the man is not under the sound of truth, and that this has much increased his perplexity and confusion. I shall now, then, show how he is brought to know the truth and to make a profession of it. The Lord, then, after a time shall be pleased to bring him under the sound of truth—a preached gospel, or cause some book to fall into his hands which shews the way of salvation as spiritually and experimentally made known, or lead him into the company of his people, who speak a new language. Now as he has passed through many sharp and severe exercises, and has lost his strength, and wisdom, and righteousness in this overturning of profane and wicked self, he begins to have an ear to hear God's truth. It falls very sweetly upon his ears, that the blood of Jesus cleanseth from all sin; that his righteousness freely and perfectly justifies; that salvation is all of sovereign grace; that where God has begun a good work he certainly will carry it on; and that whom he loveth, he loveth to the end. And as those glad tidings are thus sounded in his ears, they will sometimes make sweet melody in his heart; he receives them as from the mouth of God; and he feels that there is it peculiar and divine blessedness in the sacred truth of God. Now, as faith cometh by hearing and hearing by the word of God, he finds

a secret faith drawn out to embrace the Lord Jesus Christ as his only hope; and as by the actings of faith upon him, hope is thus raised up and strengthened to anchor within the veil, so every now and then as the Lord is presented to his view as the sole object of his faith and hope, he gets glimpses and glances of his lovely face; and every look of his love strengthens him to embrace the Son of God in faith and affection as the chiefest among ten thousand and the altogether lovely. Christ being thus revealed to his heart, he gets a manifested union with him, and being thus in Christ, becomes a new creature, comes into a new world, has new thoughts and feelings, desires and affections, so that with him old things are now passed away, behold, all things are become new.

As thus brought out into the light, life, and liberty of the gospel, he thinks that all his troubles are now come to an end, and that he shall spend his days in prosperity and his years in pleasure. But those, though they are his thoughts, are not the Lord's thoughts; and therefore there is in store another overturn; for as the Lord overturned his *profane* self, and overturned his *righteous* self, so now he has to overturn his *holy*, or rather his *presumptuous* self.

iii. Let me explain myself here, lest any mistake my meaning, or think I am speaking a word against that holiness without which no man shall see the Lord. As distinct from this, there is a fleshly holiness which we usually strive to attain unto after we have obtained some knowledge of salvation, had been blessed with a living faith in Christ. It is this false, this fleshly holiness which has to be overturned; for the man of whom I am speaking does not yet see what a poor, needy creature he is. He is not yet fully and thoroughly stripped and emptied of all his own strength, wisdom, and righteousness; and though under the law he lost a great deal of all these,

yet he has been secretly gathering them up afresh under the gospel, and under the idea of evangelical holiness, has been secretly seeking to establish his own righteousness. At least he has not yet been made to see and feel that Jesus must be all in all *in* him as well as all and all *to* him. Thence comes the necessity of the third overturn, which is to lay him low in the dust of self-abasement by opening up the dark and dismal scene within, when the Lord the Spirit brings to light the secret iniquities of his fallen nature, when God allows Satan to tempt him or assail him with his fiery darts, and set on fire all the combustible material he carries with him. As these things are brought to light; as sin and Satan rage within; as his own heart, like the troubled sea, casts up mire and dirt; as the Lord hides his face and leaves him to grapple with his foes and fears, he is overturning him for the third time. He is removing the diadem of profession which he had secretly bound round his brow, he is taking away the crown of glorying in himself with which he had crowned himself, as thinking he had got to the consummation of all that was to be known, felt, and believed.

But what an overturn is this, that all his religion should be thrown into confusion, and that he should be plunged once more into the dust of self-abasement, by being thus stripped of almost everything that before he had enjoyed. Is not this an overturn indeed, and in a sense almost greater than the two preceding? But depend upon it that the Lord will go on overturning, overturning, overturning this profane and wicked prince until he has accomplished the threefold overthrow of self; until he has made us to see and feel that in spite of all we may have experienced in times past; in spite of all the visitations of Jesus to the soul; in spite of all the manifestations of his mercy, goodness, and love; in spite of all the dealings of the Spirit of God with our conscience, if left to ourselves, we are just as empty, just as weak, just as

helpless, just as sinful as before. And what do we learn from all this? That nothing but sovereign grace can save our soul; nothing but manifested mercy can give us any hope; nothing but blood applied to the conscience can take away our guilt or ease our burden; and nothing but love shed abroad in the heart can be a sweet balm and cordial against all the ills of life. You may perhaps think yourself cruelly and severely dealt with in all this, but listen to the words: "Remove the diadem and take off the crown," and see whether you cannot approve of that sentence being executed, even though it may so sharply try, or so deeply cut you. What, shall this profane, wicked prince, wretched self, be idolised and set up in any shape on the throne of the heart? Shall this covenant breaker, this profane wretch who has broken both law and gospel, this monster self, bind the diadem round its brow and put the crown upon its head which belongs to Jesus alone, that it may be exalted, esteemed, admired, adored instead of him, that you may worship your own religion, and fall in love with your own knowledge, attainments, gifts, and experience? "No," says the Lord; "I will never suffer it. Remove the diadem and take off the crown." If you think of crowning king self, whether worldly self or religious self, profane self or professing self; if ever you attempt to put the diadem round your own brow and the crown of self-exaltation upon your own head, hear what God speaks to you with his withering voice: "Remove the diadem and take off the crown. No creature shall stand boasting and exulting in vain-confidence before the eyes of my terrible Majesty. I will never give my glory to another. No man shall rejoice in his own wisdom, strength, or righteousness;" for, "Thus saith the Lord, Let not the wise man glory in his wisdom, neither let the mighty man glory in his might, let not the rich man glory in his riches: but let him that glorieth glory in this, that he understandeth and knoweth me, that I am the Lord which exercise lovingkindness, judgment, and righteousness, in the

earth: for in these things I delight, saith the Lord." (Jeremiah 9:23, 24.)

II.—But when the Lord has done this work of overturning the profane and wicked prince, and abasing him that is high, room is made for the *positive declaration* which I said I should bring before you in the second place: It shall be no more until he come *whose right it is.*"

This was fulfilled literally. There never was a king of Judah after Zedekiah was taken captive to Babylon. There were indeed governors sent from Babylon after the captivity was over, and a remnant returned to their own land, such as Nehemiah, who is called the Tirshatha (or "governor," margin, Nehem. 7:65); and then afterwards the high priests, or the Maccabean princes exercised authority; but the Jewish nation never had afterwards a king of the family of David to reign over them, nor any one in authority who bore that title; so that literally and truly there never was a king of Judah who sat upon the throne at Jerusalem, between Zedekiah being taken to Babylon and the Lord Jesus Christ coming in the flesh.

But I have to apply this spiritually and experimentally. When the Lord the Spirit had taken the diadem off self, and removed its crown, he never afterwards lets any one sit upon the throne of the affections but Jesus, for he has said, "It shall be no more until he comes whose right it is." And is there any one else who has a right to us? Consider first, that as the Son of God, he is heir of all things, and that besides this original right, now as exalted to the right hand of God, all things are put under his feet as Mediator. Thus, both from original right and meritorious gift, he can lay claim to his people both in body and soul, to all they are in providence and to all they are in grace. He can say, "This body of thine

is mine, for I have taken thy nature unto union with my divine Person; this soul of thine is mine, for I have redeemed it by my precious blood; this property of thine is mine, for power being given to me over all things both in heaven and earth, I gave it thee, and I can take it from thee; this family of thine is mine, for all that thou hast belongs to me. I have a right to it all, for I am not only heir of all things, but my people have been bought by me that they might be eternally mine." Thus, as the Apostle says, "Ye are not your own, for ye are bought with a price." Christ has laid down his life for his sheep, and by purchasing them, has made them his own, as well as by the original donation of the Father: "Thine they were, and thou gavest them me." If, then, Jesus has this right to us both by gift and purchase, self has no right to reign over us; sin has no right to have dominion in us; the world has no right to rule in our affections; pride has no right to lord it over our hearts; and self-righteousness has no right to establish itself in our conscience. The right was taken away from them all when the Lord Jesus Christ came to buy us with his blood, and when he came in power to our soul to make himself known by his grace. If, therefore, in defiance of his revealed will and word, we choose to gratify our pride and self-righteousness, carnality and worldly-mindedness, and thus take the crown off him to where it belongs and set it upon our own head, we shall have again to come under the sentence, "Remove the diadem and take off the crown. I will abase him that is high, and exalt him that is low. I will overturn, overturn, overturn it until he come again whose right it is;" for he says: "I have bought this people with my precious blood. They are mine body and soul. I am training them for heaven, making them meet for the inheritance of the saints in light, and conforming them to my image, that they may reign with me in glory." And shall self, upstart self, stand in the way of all these wise and gracious purposes, and say, "I will put the diadem of glory round my own brow; I will

set the crown of honour upon my own head?" "No," says the Lord, "I will not suffer that. Remove the diadem and take off the crown. I will overturn, overturn, overturn it again and again, until he come once more whose right it is."

And what he says he does. It is not with him a mere word, but, as I have called it, a *positive declaration*. If this, then, be so, I may well ask, how does it work for and in us, and what is its fruit and effect? When we begin to find the diadem taken away and the crown removed, and self, that was high, abased, then comes the fulfilment of the word: "Exalt him that is low," for this runs side by side with "Abase him that is high." When, then, we catch a glimpse by faith of the glorious Person of the Son of God, or get a gleam by divine teaching of his exaltation to the right hand of the Father, and that it is his most blessed right to be all in all to us, and all in all in us, and all in all for us; when too we can see by faith that this dear Son of God came down from heaven to earth to bear our sins in his own body on the tree; that he shed his precious blood to redeem us from a burning hell, and wrought out a righteousness in which we could stand fully and freely justified, and is now risen from the dead, and gone up on high, to be our Intercessor with the Father, able to save to the uttermost all that come unto God by him, can we not then say, "Has not he a right to be all in all to me? Shall any one else take his place in my affections? Shall any rival stand between me and Jesus? Shall I allow self in any form, profane or professing, to interfere with the claims of his gracious Majesty, and shall I set up my miserable doings, my miserable righteousness, my miserable strength, and my miserable holiness in competition with the Son of God and what he has done and suffered to save my soul from the pit of hell? Perish the thought!" It is in this way that we not only see but acknowledge that he has a right to us; and how glad we are that he should come and claim his right, and say, "I

have loved thee with an everlasting love, and wedded thee to myself in an everlasting covenant; I loved thee when thou wast in thy blood, cast out in the open field in the day that thou wast born. And now I come and claim thee to be mine." Just as a man who is engaged to a young woman may whisper in her ear, "We have been long engaged. We have pledged to each other our mutual troth. We have mutually promised to live together through life. Now I am come to claim your promise and to take possession of you as my bride." Will this be an unwelcome word? Will it not rather fall like sweet music upon her ear? Will it not draw forth all the love of her heart, and will she, can she say? "Nay! Wait a more convenient time. It will do quite as well next year." She can have no love for him if such be her answer. And even if, like the bride in the Canticles, her love may seem for a while to sleep (Song 5:2), may he not press his right as well as his love? If he has plighted his troth, and she has plighted hers, has he not a right to her? So when the Lord comes into the soul in any manifestation of his mercy and love, has he not a right as its rightful Lord, as well as his love, as its espoused husband? And the soul under the sweet influences of his grace, will acknowledge both his right and his love, and say to him, "Thou art my Lord; thou art my husband; thou hast a right to me, and I acknowledge thy claim; and I acknowledge it gladly; for it is a claim not only of right, but of love."

Now, as long as this goes on happily and comfortably between the Lord and the soul, there is no contention between them. But alas! these seasons rarely last long; for there is that in our hearts which is ever prompting us to depart from him. It is with us as he said of old: "My people are bent upon backsliding." This backsliding heart of ours is ever wandering after its idols, and is too prone to the commission of those two evils of which the Lord complains. "For my people have committed two evils; they have

forsaken me the fountain of living waters, and hewed them out cisterns, broken cisterns, that can hold no water." (Jer. 2:13.) But he is a jealous God. He will not allow us to serve him partially; he will not take half a heart. Therefore, when we begin again to set up self in any shape or form, anything contrary to his grace or glory, which we always do when we depart from him, then comes again the withering sentence: "Remove the diadem and take off the crown. I will overturn, overturn, overturn it, until he come whose right it is. All your schemes of earthly joy; all your plans of fancied happiness; all expectations based upon self, whether worldly or religious; all you think, say, or do that is not consistent with the reign of my grace in your heart, I will overturn it all, that he may come whose right it is."

Now, under those overturnings, and especially as being so continually repeated, the soul often sinks very low, for they bring our backslidings to remembrance, and the Lord seems to say by them: "Hast thou not procured this to thyself?" There is nothing so cutting as the remembrance of backsliding against a good and holy God. There is nothing so wounding to a tender conscience as having sinned against manifested mercy and revealed salvation. It seems almost like doing despite to the Spirit of grace; almost like trampling under foot the blood of the covenant whereby we were sanctified, and treating our best friend worse than his very enemies treated him. And as these things are brought to mind, and laid upon the conscience with weight and power, they will sometimes sink us very low into despondency and gloom, so as almost to take away our very hope.

But the Lord is very merciful and compassionate to those who fear his name. He regards the prayer of the destitute, and will not despise their cry. He listens to the sighs and confessions of the penitent heart and broken, contrite spirit;

and thus, though he will ever abase him that is high, he will exalt him that is low. He will never give up his rightful claim to his people. If he has bought us with his precious blood, he will never suffer that purchase to be annulled by the malice of Satan or by the wickedness of our own nature. How striking are those words, "Thou hast played the harlot with many lovers; yet return again to me, saith the Lord." And again, "Turn, O backsliding children, saith the Lord, for I am married unto you." "Return, ye backsliding children, and I will heal your backslidings." And shall we not answer, "Behold, we come unto thee, for thou art the Lord our God? Truly in vain is salvation hoped for from the hills, and from the multitude of mountains: truly in the Lord our God is the salvation of Israel." (Jer. 3:23.)

III.—And this leads us to our last point—the *gracious promise*: "And I will give it him."

Our Lord was, literally and truly, the King of the Jews, for he was lineally descended from David, according to the genealogies given in the Gospels. Therefore, when Pilate said, "Art thou a King?" he replied, "Thou sayest;" that is, according to the Hebrew idiom, "sayest rightly that I am a King. To this end was I born." Though he added, "My kingdom is not of this world." This claim Pilate acknowledged, by setting over his head: "Jesus of Nazareth, King of the Jews." Nor would he alter it at the instigation of the chief priests, but answered, "What I have written I have written," as if God meant it to stand. Thus this title stood, and being written in Hebrew and Greek, and Latin, it asserted his dominion as King, not only of the Jews, but of all the world. Of this kingdom Daniel spoke in vision. "I saw in the night visions, and, behold, one like the Son of man came with the clouds of heaven, and came to the Ancient of days, and they brought him near before him. And these was given him

dominion, and glory, and a kingdom, that all people, nations, and languages, should serve him: his dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and his kingdom that which shall not be destroyed." (Dan. 7:13, 14.) Into the nature of this kingdom I shall not enter. Time will decide whether that prophecy will be literally fulfilled, or whether it is to be explained only spiritually. Sufficient for us for the present, it is, that he reigns now in glory at the right hand of the Father, and that, in this sense, according to the parable, he is gone "to receive for himself a kingdom, and to return." (Luke 19:12.) This kingdom the Father has given him, and in giving him the kingdom, he gave with it all the persons of his people into his hand, that he might say, at the last day, "Of those whom thou hast given me I have lost none." There will not be wanting at the last day any one of those whom the Father gave to him in the eternal covenant. There will not be any left behind for want of his power to save, or for the want of his grace to superabound over the superaboundings of sin. They will all stand in their white robes, with palms in their hands, singing for ever and ever the praises of the Lamb. But if sin and self, the world or Satan, could pluck any vessel of mercy out of the Lord's hand, how could he say to the Father at the last day, "Behold I and the children which thou hast given me: Of those whom thou gavest me have I lost none!" Whatever doubts, therefore, or fears, gloom, or despondency may, from time to time, possess the mind of his tried, exercised children; whatever snares sin or Satan may lay for their feet; however low they may sink in their feelings, yea, like Jonah, even into the very belly of hell; yet of all which God gave him, he will lose none. Not a hair of their head shall perish. Every member of his mystical body shall be presented complete with their glorious Head. How clear, how full, how absolute the promise of the Father, "I will give it him." If, then, the Father has given you to Jesus, put you into his Almighty

hands, that he might redeem you with his precious blood, sanctify you by his Spirit and grace, conform you to his image, make you to walk in his footsteps, and bring you at last to heavenly glory, he will never forsake or forget either his own covenant, or the sacred work upon your heart which he has begun.

But that we may gather up the comfort of it, not rest in the mere doctrine, but taste, handle, and realise its blessedness and its power, how important it is for you to be able to trace out, with more or less clearness and distinctness, God's dealings with your soul, that you may have good ground to believe that he has wrought a saving work upon your heart.

Let me ask you, then, if, as I was this morning tracing out these three overturnings, you could find some solemn echo in your own bosom to show that you have experienced some, if not all, these things for yourselves? Could you look back, for instance, and see how the Lord overturned, it may have been years ago, all your prospects of happiness, disappointed all your expectations, brought a blight and gloom over everything in which you anticipated pleasure, and laid upon you sadness and sorrow? Can you next call to mind the time when you began to think in earnest about religion; when the things of God, and eternal realities, first pressed with great weight and power upon your mind; how you searched the Scriptures, got by yourself into secret places, sought the Lord with many tears, poured out your heart before him, wrestled earnestly with him, confessing your sins, and seeking mercy at his hand? Can you see how, in one way or other, the Lord overturned all your righteousness, wisdom, and strength? And then, can you look back to some memorable time when, under the preached word, or upon your knees, or in reading the Scriptures, or a book written by a gracious man, there shone a ray of divine light into your soul, in which the glory

of the Son of God was seen, in which his grace was felt, in which his power was manifested, his blood revealed, and his love in some measure shed abroad in your heart? Or if you cannot say altogether as much as this, can you recollect how hope first sprang up in your soul, as your faith was drawn out to embrace the Son of God, and what tender, warm feelings of affection flowed out as his mercy flowed in? Can you also recollect how spiritually minded you were at that time, and how your heart was set on heavenly things, so that earth seemed to lose all its charms, and heaven to be seen in all its glory, as the only thing worth desiring? Can you not also trace how a cloud seemed to come over all this work; how sin was brought to light, your iniquities stirred up to their lowest depth, Satan let loose upon you, the evils of your heart to work up with renewed strength, so that it seemed as if all you had experienced were a delusion, and you could scarcely entertain a hope in God's mercy? But then you would see how from time to time the Lord revived his work upon your soul; gave you a promise, a whisper, a testimony; broke in upon you under the ministry of the word, or upon your knees, or through conversation with some of his people, and made you once more believe, rejoice, hope, and love.

Now, if you have experienced, in some measure, what I have thus laid down, you will be able also to trace out how through it all there has been a constant overturning, a constant removing of the diadem and taking off the crown, and a constant abasing of him that is high. Directly self began to spring up to some height of strength, wisdom, or righteousness; directly the world began to open up its alluring charms; directly pride began to work in your carnal mind; then once more came the sentence: "Overturn, overturn, overturn it. Remove the diadem and take off the crown. I will abase him that is high." But again, when you

got into a low spot, finding no place low enough for your feet, no self-abasement too great under a sight and sense of your dreadful sins and backslidings, no corner too humble for you to crawl into and lie before God, then you began to find that he whose right it is came once more, and said, "This soul is mine, bought with my precious blood, clothed in my glorious righteousness, taught by my Holy Spirit, taken possession of by my love and grace; shall this redeemed and regenerated soul perish under its own deceivings? Shall sin have dominion over it? Shall Satan lay snares to entangle it, and carry it away to perdition? No; the kingdom has been given to me of my Father, and I will maintain it in the heart of all my redeemed."

The grand thing, therefore, for you and me is to have some evidence that we have a true work of grace begun upon our heart; that we have the fear of God in our conscience; that we have the life of God in our soul; that we do know something of divine things by divine teaching, and have some experience of the truth of God in our own bosom. And if we have that, then whatever difficulties or trials we may have to go through; however often the Lord may overturn, overturn, overturn us, remove the diadem and take off the crown, he will never take away himself; he will never remove the diadem from his own brow, or take the crown of glory from his own head, which he would do if he allowed sin and Satan to reign and rule in his people. He has bound the diadem round his own brow, and put the crown upon his own head; and if sin, Satan, or the world could steal a sheep out of his fold, or pluck a vessel of mercy out of his hand, it would be as if he stretched forth his hand to pluck the diadem of glory from off the Redeemer's brow, and strike the crown of honour from off the head of the King of kings and Lord of lords. As, therefore, he will not suffer self to wear the diadem, nor man to bear the crown, so he will be equally

jealous of his own honour and glory. He will no more suffer the diadem to be taken off his brow, and the crown of glory swept from his brow, than he will suffer the creature to adorn itself with either. This is our security. If we had to bind the diadem of grace round our own brow, and set the crown of glory upon our own head, we should fail in every attempt. But when we see the diadem of grace and glory bound round the Redeemer's brow, then we are willing it should be so, that God may have all the praise, and all the honour, and all the glory of our salvation; and we can feelingly say, "He has a right to it. I am not my own. I am bought with a price. All I have is his. O that he would take care of me: take care of my body, take care of my soul; hold me fast and firm in his blessed hands; keep me from evil, that it may not grieve me; work in me all the good pleasure of his will and the work of faith with power, and save me in himself with an everlasting salvation."

How sounds your heart with this? Do these words make any sweet melody in your soul? Is there that faith in the Son of God, that hope in his mercy, and love to his name, that you desire nothing so much as his presence and his love shed abroad in your heart? Do you constantly apply to his atoning blood for pardon? Do you continually seek shelter beneath his righteousness to justify? Do you again and again cast your weary soul upon him that is able to save to the uttermost? Do you hang upon him, twine round him, and cleave to him with purpose of heart; and even, if he seem to thrust you away, do you press more firmly on, because without him you feel you must for ever perish?

Now look at these things; examine them in the light of Scripture and your experience; and see what testimony you have in your own conscience that the Lord has wrought that in your soul which shall be for your eternal salvation. For

these are not matters to be trifled with; they are not things to be heard in a passing visit, and then utterly forgotten; they are not like the autumnal leaf blown away by the first wind; not mere vain trifles, to pass away with the day and not affect our souls for all eternity. These are weighty matters, for they affect our soul's eternal interest; and it is with us whether heaven or hell be our destined end—whether to be tormented with devils for ever and ever in an abyss of eternal woe, or to mount up to a throne of glory, to see our blessed Lord face to face as he is, and rejoice with saints for ever and ever in the realms of eternal bliss.