

THE PERSONAL CHARACTER OF JEREMIAH THE PROPHET

A SERMON

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“And they shall fight against you; but they shall not prevail against you; for I am with you, says the Lord, to deliver you.” Jeremiah 1:19

THE Lord Jesus Christ was never himself taken by surprise. All the opposition he was to meet with was predicted, and therefore when it came to pass, he met it as that with which he was acquainted before it came to pass. Nay, the precise way in which he should be treated in connection with his death he himself described and defined before he came to the same. But it is not so with us. We, whenever anything occurs we do not expect, are apt to be amazed, as though it was a strange thing, as though it was something that never occurred in the church before; as though no Christian man or Christian woman was ever before subjected to the kind of calamity or kind of trouble with which we are overtaken. And thus, it is that we are often taken by surprise. But never mind; there is hope in this thing, and the hope is that the Lord is never taken by surprise, and that he is with every one of his own, as he here says, for that is implied, for what he says to one he says to all; he is with them to deliver them, and in all their afflictions he is afflicted; the angel of his presence saves them, and what is done unto them, good or bad, is done unto him. Oh, how far we fall short in our understanding of the privileges of a real Christian! Why, such a one, that has the Lord on his side, all his heart and all his soul, God concerning such rests in his love, understands everything that pertains unto them. Let us, then, come to our text, and pray the Lord to guide us a few moments in speaking upon the same and in listening to the same; for if he is not pleased to be with the speaker and with the hearer, there is no good done. There is no gift that any man may possess, much less my poor, weak, stammering way of setting forth these things, can do any good to the souls of men if the Lord himself is not pleased to apply the same by his Spirit and by his power.

There are then, I think, three things we may notice here. The first is the character to which this text belongs. Let us describe, first, *the personal character of Jeremiah*, and then see how far as we go along our personal character answers to the personal character of Jeremiah. Secondly, *the tribulations with which he met*, as declared in our text; for it was as certain that he should have tribulation as it was that he should have consolation, for they both stand in the positive form, “They shall fight against you,” they shall do it; so that there must be this tribulation to encounter. And then, thirdly and lastly, *the fulfilment of the words*, “I am with you, to deliver you.”

I notice, then, first, *the personal character of Jeremiah*. And it is a very great thing, a great privilege, to be able to understand the personal character of the ancients, especially those that are set forth as patterns of what Christians shall be down to the end of time. For there is no difference in the kind of religion from the first unto the last. Christ was the Alpha and Omega of Abel, and he will be the Alpha and Omega of the last sinner that shall by his mercy be gathered in. I will then take, very concisely, a fourfold view of the character of Jeremiah. First, he was one that was known unto the Lord; second, sanctified by the Lord; third, ordained by the Lord to that which the Lord had for him; and then, fourth, he was a man of stability. First, then, he was a man associated with the knowledge of God. It is true Jeremiah was constituted a Christian even before he was born; but that will not at all hinder our comparing his character with our own; because that which the Lord constituted him, that he continues. And here is one of the excellences of the religion of the Son of God. When the Lord is pleased to quicken a soul from death, he does it by an incorruptible seed, "Born again of an incorruptible seed, that lives and abides forever." Now, then, the Lord showed to Jeremiah that he had taken knowledge of him, "I knew you; I knew you." And what does this imply? Why, we must take the word of God to guide us in this, what it implies. And the word of God stands upon the matter thus: "Elect according to the foreknowledge of God the Father." And therefore, the Lord knowing Jeremiah implies that he had taken an elective notice of him, that he had chosen him to eternal life, to eternal salvation. Oh, my hearer, what a delightful truth is this election, especially if we look at the character of it, that it is an election of grace; and if we look at the basis of it, first, that it is the knowledge of God, that he knew what he was choosing! He did not do as we do in life; we choose a thousand things without knowing at the time what we are choosing, and so very frequently make mistakes. But it was not so with the Lord; when he chose a poor sinner, he knew what that sinner would be by Adams fall; he knew all about him. Thus, then, his knowledge was one basis of election. And that is a comfort to us, a very great comfort; and I must linger upon it just for a moment. We often find in human life one saying to another, "If I had known so much about you as I do now, I would have had nothing to do with you. If I had known what a shabby house this was, I would not have taken it. If I had known how badly this business would have been done, I would not have chosen it." We hear this frequently. Now all this is entirely for want of that knowledge which of course no creature can possess. Now the Lord, when he made choice of you, all those evils of which you are the subject, he knew as much about them when he chose you as he does now; and those evils could not hinder his choosing you, for it was an election of grace. The basis of it, first, then was his intimate knowledge of you. And another basis of it was his love. He would not have chosen you if he had not loved you. Now let us square matters as we go along. This is a part of the character of Jeremiah; and if you go to the 31st and 33rd chapters of Jeremiah, you will see that he is led in those chapters by the Holy Spirit to carry out this great truth of the sovereignty of God in detail, showing up the glorious consequences thereof. Now, then, this is one foundation upon which the Lord's people must rest, namely, that of electing grace in Christ Jesus the Lord. There is no other way in which we can have any real hope. Now just take away, for instance, election; take it away, and leave the sinner without this; what else could have given you to Christ? If grace had not given you to Christ, nothing else could; if the Lord himself had not imputed your sins to Christ, you could not have done so; you are eighteen hundred years, more than eighteen hundred years, too late for that. If the Lord had not set to your account the righteousness of his dear Son, you could not have done so; and if the Lord had not chosen you, thus given you to Christ by this act of eternal election, can you think of anything else that could have done it? Ah! say you, but what is to become of the others? That is not your business,

really, I am sorry to have to tell you just to mind your own business; and that is the best thing you can do, just mind your own business, that is the best way. And just ask yourself, for I like homework, just ask yourself, If the Lord had not chosen me, could I ever have done anything as a ground upon which I could have been entitled in any way to his favor? And if you know your own heart, and know what you are in the eye of God's law, you will know you could not, and the consequence will be, there will be a renunciation of all confidence in the flesh. You are not called upon to answer all the hard questions that men may put; it is enough for you to know these three things: first, that election, eternal election by grace, is a doctrine of the Bible, a doctrine of the new covenant, a doctrine confirmed by the Lord Jesus Christ; and the second is for you to receive it in the love of it; that is the next thing; and the third is for you to abide undeviatingly decided for it, never move from it. Do not associate yourself with that system that says and unsays, says and unsays. It is true we are told by our duty-faith ministers that we *hypers* preach a gospel that is one-sided, that it has only one side to it; and so they bring in duty-faith, and make it the duty of all savingly to believe in Christ, and that is what they call having another side to it. But I do thank the Lord that such a doctrine is not of God, and I do thank the Lord that our gospel has two sides to it. Our gospel says, "He that believes shall be saved;" that is one side; "and he that believes not shall be damned;" that is the other side. "The Lord has mercy upon whom he will have mercy;" that is one side; "and whom he will he hardens;" that is the other side. "Come, you blessed of my Father," one side; "go, you cursed," is the other side. The righteous is one side, the wicked the other side. The cloud has the dark side; that is where the Egyptians are; the other is the light side, where the Israelites are. So, then, it is for us to know that nothing, no, nothing but electing grace could give us to Christ. Well, then, say you, suppose now I know that to be a Bible truth, and suppose I love it, as I see that I could not have been given to Christ in any other way, and suppose I stand out decided for it, cling to it; suppose I do that, what of that? That will just prove you are one of them; for if your name were not in the book of life, in the first place you would not have understood the truth, consequently you would not have understood that Bible truth; secondly, you would not have received it in the love of it; and thirdly, you would not have stood out for it; for if the Lord had not chosen you, he would not have shown you this great secret; it is one of the mysteries of the gospel, and so you will cling to it, and understand it, and rejoice in it. Now what do you Wesleyans say, for instance, for there are often some Wesleyans here on Wednesday night, glad to see you, it will do you no harm, what do you say to this? Do you not read in the Scriptures, "Rejoice that your names are written in heaven?" and does it not say that they were written in the Lamb's book of life from the foundation of the world? What do you say to that? Oh, we don't take any notice of it. But you ought to; you know "all scripture is given by inspiration of God and is profitable." Now if the Lord is pleased to bring home that with power, and say to you, "Rejoice that your names are written in heaven," you will say, Dear me! that is enough, for if my name is written in heaven, then it is all right. When was it written there, Lord? So, you will read the Holy Scriptures, and you will find it was written there from the foundation of the world. And then, of course, farewell for ever to everything contrary to electing grace. This is one part, then, of Jeremiah's character, that he thus stood in the foreknowledge, sovereign choice, of the blessed God. As to the effect of this doctrine, I will not stop to notice it; but I will notice one thing. Wherein lay all the miseries of the Jewish nation. What was the cause of all the wretchedness and the ultimate captivity into which they came? What was the cause of the famine, the pestilence, the wild beasts, the sword, from which they suffered, and so far, suffered, as you are aware, as to eat their infants, and eat one another? Now what did all this originate in? In the simple fact of their losing sight of the sovereignty of God, that had chosen them in preference to any other nation. Losing sight of that, they departed

from that God that had so chosen them, gave the honor to other gods, and thereby brought upon themselves all the miseries described in the word. Oh, what a mercy that the new covenant chosen people cannot do this! They being led by the Spirit of God, they are led by him to a better covenant, established upon better promises, or else we should apostatize just the same, should bring upon ourselves swift destruction, should bring upon ourselves eternal damnation. But no, this election is of grace, is in Christ, is for ultimate purposes; therefore, when the Holy Spirit once makes the soul acquainted with this election in Christ, the soul receives it, abides by it, and holds it as one of the truths and doctrines of God, by which that soul renounces all confidence in the flesh, and cleaves unto the Lord alone. I will say no more upon that.

The next feature in Jeremiah's character was, that he was a sanctified man. "I have sanctified you." And how was he sanctified? Why, he was sanctified as the Savior describes, "Sanctify them through your truth." And he, receiving the truth of mediation (only to go to his 33rd chapter, and see how beautifully he was established in the eternal priesthood of Christ, the mediation of Christ), there was Jeremiah, thus sanctified, set apart. So that in this sanctification, if I can describe it, he had the spirit of the new covenant, which he speaks in his 31st chapter so beautifully of, "Behold, the days come, says the Lord, that I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel, and with the house of Judah; this shall be the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel: After those days, says the Lord, I will put my law" meaning the law of faith and love, "in their inward parts, and write it in their hearts; and will be their God, and they shall be my people." He was thus sanctified unto God; he had the spirit of the new covenant. I do not like to be harsh, but I must not fear men; for the Lord says in this chapter, "Be not dismayed at their faces, lest I confound you before them." Now I say the duty-faith man does not hold the spirit and does not possess the spirit of the new covenant in its purity, because he associates with the new covenant a creature responsibility, where no creature responsibility exists; the free-willer does not possess the spirit of the new covenant. Now this sanctification, then, is nothing else but the spirit of the new covenant, the spirit of adoption, the spirit of God. And I feel anxious to make this matter clear. You know what the word says, "As for me, this is my covenant with them, says the Lord; My Spirit that is upon you" that is, Christ, "and my words which I have put into your mouth shall not depart out of your mouth" they did not, "nor out of the mouth of your seed" the apostles, "nor out of the mouth of your seed's seed, says the Lord, from henceforth and forever." A sanctified man, therefore, is a man that is brought to receive the priesthood of Christ in its new covenant order, in its eternal perfection. Now that man becomes what the world calls a very narrow-minded man. You might as well take that man to a theatre as to take him to hear a free-will gospel; you might as well take him to a fair as to hear a duty-faith gospel. Why, he says, there is nothing for me. And that man is dissatisfied; he is severed from it all. He has the spirit of the new covenant, and it is in the new covenant that God is his Father; there he cries, "Abba, Father." It is in the new covenant that Christ is his Elder Brother; there he says, "My beloved is mine, and I am his." It is in the new covenant that the Holy Spirit is perfectly at liberty to do as he pleases and to give to every man severally as he will. Thus, by this sanctification the man is brought into the liberty of the gospel, his feet made like hinds' feet, and here he lives, and here he stands, without sin, without fault, without spot, without blemish, without blame; there he stands in the sunlight of mediatorial perfection, not a spot, not a fault laid to his charge; he comes up before God in the atonement of Christ, the righteousness of Christ, the likeness of Christ; sin forgiven and sin forgotten, and there he stands ready to live, ready to die, fit for any place except hell, he is not fit for that, he will never go, there; no, bless the Lord. This sanctification, then, makes a man one in his spirit with the new covenant.

Jeremiah was also ordained to his position. What a mercy! not only chosen by grace, sanctified, brought into the spirit of the new covenant, but ordained. Now this decree carries with it the idea, not only of eternity, but of immutability. "We have obtained an inheritance, being predestinated according to the purpose of Him who works all things after the counsel of His own will." This brings us, then, to immutability. Here is electing grace; happy the man that knows his need of it, that receives it in the love of it, stands out for it. Here is mediatorial perfection, by which we are sanctified, saved, and held free from sin. Here is immutability. You will observe that there is no superfluity about this; we need it all, we need it all. Suppose electing grace had chosen us; suppose we stand, by the eternal priesthood of Christ, free from all law charges, yet, without Divine immutability, without the immutability of His counsel, there would then be no certainty of our coming into possession of the happy consequences of what Jesus Christ has done. Therefore, in addition to electing grace and mediatorial perfection, we need the immutability of God. O my hearer, "blessed are the poor in spirit;" blessed are the poor and needy. What a mercy, however bitter the experience may be, however tried the person may be, to bring the sinner down so low! He says, electing grace, mediatorial perfection; immutability, these are my peaceable habitations, these are my sure foundations; and if these foundations be destroyed, what can the righteous do? They must be destroyed also. Well, now, what do you say? Is this your character? Do you love electing grace? Is your hope in mediatorial perfection, as shown in the 33rd chapter of this book, and many other scriptures as well? And is your hope also, in connection with this, in divine immutability? Oh, what a changing world is this! but with our God there is no shadow of turning. But one more feature in the character of Jeremiah; he is here described as a defended city, an iron pillar, and a brazen wall. I do like that, and truly like that. As a defended city. I think I am as weak a creature as ever lived, but I don't believe that God will ever so leave me as to suffer all the powers of earth, and hell, and the world, put together, to move me one inch from his truth. No, if you were to do to me as they did to Laurentius in the third century, broil me on a gridiron, cut me up and make mincemeat of me, there is my poor old body of skin and bone, there it is, do what you like with it, before I believe God would suffer me to move one inch from these blessed truths. And as an iron pillar and brazen walls. "They shall fight against you." Ah, we will down with these walls. You will not, though. We will move this pillar, and make it, like the tower of Pisa, lean on one side. No, you won't, though. We will soften these brazen walls. Never, never, never. Their faces are like flint, and they will look at their mightiest foes, and smile at all their puny attempts; for if God be for us, who then can be against us? I like stability of character. What makes stability? Why, the way in which you come by the truth; if you have come by it by a logical process, you will logical out again; if it be with you a matter of mere opinion, your opinion may change before you die: you may change your religion a hundred times without you yourself being changed once. But if the truth be held as a matter of necessity, why, the question is this, and it is a poser to the adversary, "Lord, to whom shall I go? You have the words of eternal life." Oh, it is a nice thing to stand firm; I know it is so with me. I feel in my soul I can honestly say so. I look at electing grace, I feel to hold it so tight, somehow or another. I cling to mediatorial perfection; I hold the yea and amen promises; I walk in the light of these shining orbs; I move through these paradisiacal fields; I go into these green pastures and beside these still waters. And if these great truths come from heaven, I am sure I shall be at home in heaven, for I am at home with them even now, and:

"If such the sweetness of the streams,
What must the fountain be?"

“Unstable as water, you shall not excel.” Never mind, some of you ministers, some of your puffy, clean-footed, Pharisaic, self-conceited hearers, who say, “We will leave if you go too far.” Never mind that, you go right on. Never mind whose neck you break, never mind whom you knock down, never mind, rush right on with the chariot of salvation, burn every house down you meet with, drive them about, show them no quarter, and leave them no refuge but Christ Jesus the Lord; stand to no repairs, be no man’s servant; no, if they do not like it let them leave it; and if there is any life in them they will come creeping back again like Naaman by-and-bye. Ah, yes, they will. Some of you, you came to hear me some years ago; quite shocked, were not you? Yes, you had got your religious formalities, and you went through them as regularly as any old horse his mill round every day. By-and-bye some terrible adversity sets in, breaks up your religious machinery, your heart begins to rebel, your piety proves to be a cobweb. You go to your parson he is no use; he tells you how pious and humble you ought to be. He is no use. You go and hear your pious minister, there he is with his long face and his long gospel, a very short one, rather, and his long, formal prayer, cannot do you any good; and you then go to hear some poor, weak, clumsy sort of preacher, that is sent with oil and with wine, and strength to carry you, pours in the oil, pours in the wine, takes you up into a place of safety, sympathizes with you, melts your heart, endears the Savior, opens heaven’s gates. Never the like of it before in all my life. I am sure the minister must have made a mistake, or else the Lord has brought me to the wrong place, for I never deserved it. No, he meant to teach you, you cannot deserve any of it; for all the time you thought you deserved anything, or could deserve anything, you were deceived; but now you are brought to know the truth and to rejoice in it, and the truth becomes dear to you; and you have been an out-and-out *hyper* ever since, have not you? Yes, say you, and I mean to be too. That’s right. All the promises are to the mountains of Israel; you will get no pasture without the mountains of Israel, no sunshine without the mountains of Israel. When you get up there, you see the clouds rolling beneath your feet, while there is eternal sunshine settling on your head. Let us have, then, stability. This is the character, then, of Jeremiah. First, he was one with electing grace; second, he was one with mediatorial perfection; third, he was one with immutability, and fourth, he stood so firm that nothing could move him from the truth.

Secondly, I notice *the tribulations with which he met*. “They shall fight against you.” How did they fight against him? First, by the old-fashioned plan. What was that? say you. Why, gave him a bad name, to be sure. They said he was a traitor to his country, that he encouraged Nebuchadnezzar, encouraged the Babylonians, an enemy to his country. “Report, say they, and we will report it.” And poor Jeremiah did not like it. “Woe is me, my mother” parcel of nonsense! you do not want to go home to your mother, I should think, do you? What’s the matter? “that you have borne me a man of strife and a man of contention to the whole earth.” Never mind, Jeremiah, the Lord is with you. I dare say he felt like the rest of us, “I will not speak in the name of the Lord anymore.” Yes, you will, by-and-bye. Then he says, “Cursed be the day wherein I was born.” He could not bear his trouble as well as the shepherd of Salisbury Plain, that never murmured at anything. I know not what I should do myself, if some of these weaknesses were not put-upon record. So then they took his good name away; there was not such a bad man in all the land as Jeremiah was; kings were against him, princes were against him, and the priests as a matter of course, and the prophets as a matter of course, were, against, him; the false prophets and the people were against him. And what did they do? They got him into prison. You would not like that, would you? Ah, they began to cackle over him. “Ah, we have got him into prison.” Do you think they would put him into prison if there wasn’t something wrong somewhere? If you had been there you would have been

much tried. Some of you people of God, you have your troubles. Well, Jeremiah was before you. And if your trouble be not exactly in the same form, yet perhaps there is something in it rather mortifies you before men. Never mind; it may humble your pride, it may bring you down, but it will endear the Savior, and the Lord will take occasion thereby to show the riches of his grace. Well, then they got him into the stocks; got him out of prison, got him into the stocks again, and they would have killed him, but the Lord raised up some good feelings in the minds of some of them; would not let them kill him. So it is, people sometimes do us a good deal of harm, but the Lord raises up a friend for us here and there, counteracts the harm, and we gain instead of losing by it. Well, then after that they got him into a dungeon, not a very pleasant one; then they got him out of that, then they got him into a prison again, that is the fourth time. Then when they got him out of that, they got him into a worse place than ever, into a dungeon, where in a little time he must have died. But Ebed-melech, the Ethiopian, one that feared the Lord, at the hazard of his life, went in unto the king, and gained permission to get Jeremiah up out of the dungeon. And how kindly he did it! threw down some old rotten rags, all he could get, and said, "Put these under your arm holes under the cords." I am anxious not only to get you out, but to do it without hurting you. Now that is very nice, when people do you a kindness without hurting you; I always think that is so nice. When people do you a kindness, and storm at you, and say, "Don't come to me again; I have done you one kindness, don't come again," that spoils it, that hurts you. And so, they got Jeremiah up out of the dungeon without any harm. See, then, the tribulation. "In the world you shall have tribulation." Thus, then, they fought against him, as our text says, and prevailed in many respects. So, don't you suppose that the Lord is against you because your adversary gains dominion sometimes to a certain extent over you. No; stand still; hold fast electing grace, hold fast mediatorial perfection, hold fast immutability, stand fast yourself in the faith; for all these tribulations are for the trial of your faith, that your faith may be found unto praise, and honor, and glory, at the appearing of Jesus Christ. And if you ask how it is found unto praise and honor, the answer is, by holding fast his truth. If the Lord commit to me his truth today, by-and-bye, in a few years' time, he comes to reckon with me, and I say, "Lord, here is your blessed truth; I have profited by it, it has done me much good; your two talents you gave me have gained two more talents." "Well done, you good and faithful servant." Whereas if I say, "Well, Lord, I considered those talents not safe to trade with, so I buried them in the earth, wrapped them up in a napkin, took great care of them, and so I have traded with something else; I have preached something else. It's all very well for us clergymen to have these doctrines in our minds, but they are not safe to be trusted among the people, so I have not traded with these talents; I have traded with something else." "You wicked and slothful servant; why, you might have put the money into the bank." "But then it would have got into circulation, and I thought it was not right to circulate such things, so I would not put it into the bank." "Then bind him hand and foot and cast him into outer darkness." That is the unprofitable servant. But the man that holds fast the truth, and can testify that he profits thereby, that is the man that will give a good account of himself at the last. Here, then, is the character of Jeremiah; one with electing grace, one with mediatorial perfection, one with immutability, firm in these things. And here he is, cast out and hated by the world, but the Lord was with him to deliver him. The latter part of his life, as we see, was pretty rough; tossed about a good deal.

But we will now, lastly, see where Jeremiah was at the end of his life, or near the end; and if we find that he was at the end where he was at the beginning, as regards God's truth, then we shall see the fulfilment of our text, "They shall not prevail against you;" that is, they shall not prevail

against you to sever you from the truth, to falsify your predictions and testimonies, or to sever you from the truth; but I will dwell chiefly upon that one thought, because, everything is wrapped up in that. They shall not prevail against you to sever you from the truth. The truth is your shield, and though you may be knocked down a thousand times, you are not beaten until you give up your shield; and when you give up your shield you are beaten; when a man gives up the truth he is beaten then, it is over with him then, once give up the truth. Let us see now where Jeremiah was at the end. And if go to him about forty- or fifty-years' time after our text. See how he was then; that is a good time to stand fast, you know, that is. Now I go to his 50th chapter and let us see where he is in that chapter. I first find him in sweet association with a perpetual covenant, 5th verse, "a perpetual covenant that shall not be forgotten." So, he has not given this up; there he is in his old age. God grant that every precious soul here, as you grow old, may be found in the same sweet association. David was found there in his dying hour. "He has made with me an everlasting covenant, ordered in all things and sure. This is all my salvation and all my desire, though he make it not to grow." Then I go to the 20th verse of the same 50th chapter, and Jeremiah hangs out another light, just to show us where he is. The first is that of a perpetual covenant, the second is that of sin's abolition. "In those days, and in that time, says the Lord, the iniquity of Israel shall be sought for, and there shall be none; and the sins of Judah, and they shall not be found; for I will pardon them whom I reserve." There is Jeremiah in his old age in sweet association with a perpetual covenant and with sin's abolition; that is a good place to be in. Then I go to the 30th verse of the same chapter, and there I find him in sweet association with the efficiency of eternal redemption. "Their Redeemer is strong, the Lord of hosts is his name; he shall thoroughly plead their cause," not half do it, "that he may give rest to the land, and disquiet the inhabitants of Babylon." So, there is something for us to aim at in old age. Then I go to the 51st chapter 5th verse; there he hangs out another light, and I can see his face in the light that he holds in his hand, can see him smiling, and he says, "For Israel has not been forsaken, nor Judah of his God, of the Lord of hosts; though their land" the whole land of Canaan, "was filled with sin against the Holy One of Israel;" that is, the apostate body of people had filled the land with idolatry against the Holy One of Israel. But God will not forsake the believer because of the unbelief of the apostate. Shall the unbelief of the apostate make the faith of God without effect? Then I go to the 10th verse of the same chapter, and he seems more and more delighted as he goes on. "The Lord has brought forth our righteousness;" come, and let us declare in Zion what wonderful things we have done? Jeremiah the aged knew better, "Come, and let us declare in Zion the work of the Lord our God," in working out a righteousness for us.