

Title: **WHEN THE LORD OF HOSTS
RETURNS TO ZION**

Text: Zechariah 8:1-23

Subject: *When God Sends Revival*

Date: Sunday Morning — December 17, 2006

Reading: *Zechariah 8:1-23*

Tape # Zechariah #45

Introduction:

We often hear people talk about revival and pray for revival; but that which men commonly consider times of revival seem to me to be little more than spasmodic fits of religion manifest in emotionalism and temporary works of religious devotion. The 8th chapter of Zechariah's prophecy is a declaration from God himself of what happens when the Lord of hosts returns to Zion. In verse 3 we read, "Thus saith the Lord, I am returned to Zion." Then, in the rest of the chapter, the Lord God tells us by his prophet that which always follows his return to Zion. The title of my message is — **WHEN THE LORD OF HOSTS RETURNS TO ZION.**

Of this much you can be sure: When the Lord God returns to do well to his chosen, his chosen shall return to him. Well might we pray, as the psalmists did (Psalm 80:3, 7, 19; 85:4-7).

(Psalms 80:3) "Turn us again, O God, and cause thy face to shine; and we shall be saved."

(Psalms 80:7) "Turn us again, O God of hosts, and cause thy face to shine; and we shall be saved."

(Psalms 80:19) "Turn us again, O LORD God of hosts, cause thy face to shine; and we shall be saved."

(Psalms 85:4-7) "Turn us, O God of our salvation, and cause thine anger toward us to cease. (5) Wilt thou be angry with us for ever? wilt thou draw out thine anger to all generations? (6) Wilt thou not revive us again: that thy people may rejoice in thee? (7) Show us thy mercy, O LORD, and grant us thy salvation."

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Let us be found praying as Jeremiah. “Turn thou me, and I shall be turned; for thou art the LORD my God” (Jeremiah 31:18) — “Turn thou us unto thee, O LORD, and we shall be turned; renew our days as of old” (Lamentations 5:21). If from our hearts we thus cry unto our God, **we will soon confess**, as Jeremiah did, “Surely after that I was turned, I repented” (Jeremiah 31:19).

Zechariah 8 teaches that there are certain, specific signs and marks of our Lord’s return to favor his church, tokens of mercy by which his return is observed. Just as the return of Spring is marked by the springing up of flowers and the singing of birds, so the return of God’s Holy Spirit to bless his church is marked by certain tokens of his goodness.

Let us pray that these tokens of his grace may be manifest in our midst, — that in these dark days the Lord may return unto his Jerusalem and be jealous for her with a great jealousy, — that he may work among us, with us, and in us in such a way that even Pharaoh’s magicians are forced to acknowledge that the work is by “the finger of God.” — “O God of our salvation...Wilt thou not revive us again: that thy people may rejoice in thee? Show us thy mercy, O LORD, and grant us thy salvation.”

GOSPEL PREACHED

When the Lord God returns in mercy, when he returns “to do well unto Jerusalem,” to make the chosen seed prosperous, to save his elect remnant, make the cursed a blessing and possessors of all grace, the very first token of his presence is this: — **He will cause the gospel of his grace to be preached.** — “The LORD shall send the rod of thy strength out of Zion: rule thou in the midst of thine enemies” (Psalm 110:2). — “The LORD also shall roar out of Zion, and utter his voice from Jerusalem; and the heavens and the earth shall shake: but the LORD will be the hope of his people, and the strength of the children of Israel” (Joel 3:16).— “And many people shall go and say, Come ye, and let us go up to the mountain of the LORD, to the house of the God of Jacob; and he will teach us of his ways, and we will walk in his paths: for out of Zion shall go forth the law, and the word of the LORD from Jerusalem” (Isaiah 2:3). — **That is exactly what the Lord God tells us his church will do when he returns to do well unto Jerusalem.** He will cause the gospel to be preached (vv. 15-17).

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(Zechariah 8:15-17) “So again have I thought in these days to do well unto Jerusalem and to the house of Judah: fear ye not. (16) These *are* the things that ye shall do; Speak ye every man the truth to his neighbour; execute the judgment of truth and peace in your gates: (17) And let none of you imagine evil in your hearts against his neighbour; and love no false oath: for all these *are things* that I hate, saith the LORD.”

Without question, it is good for us tell the truth and promote peace; but a careful examination of these words tell us plainly that the Lord is not merely telling us that he will make his people honest and peaceful. Certainly he does that; but many are rigidly honest who have no knowledge of God. Many are great promoters of peace who are total strangers to grace. — I think I recall an event back in 1969 called “The Woodstock Festival,” at which pot-heads ran around naked, smiling and crying, “Peace, brother, peace;” but I do not think anyone in the crowd was terribly concerned about righteousness.

When the Lord God here declares that he will “do well unto the house” of his chosen, causing his people to speak “**the truth**” to their neighbors, he explains what it is to speak the truth in the very next line. **To speak the truth is “to execute the judgment of peace” in the gates of Zion.**

- Notice, we are not here merely commanded to speak the truth. — Here the Lord God says, “When I have returned unto Zion, to do well unto Jerusalem, **this is what you shall do.** — “Speak ye every man the truth to his neighbor.”
- This is not a declaration that God’s people will suddenly quit lying and start telling the truth. No! God’s people are made honest by his saving grace. — **This is a declaration that when the Lord God returns to Zion, he will cause his church to proclaim Christ, who is ‘the Truth,’ to the world.** — The Truth is the revelation of God who is true in his Son, the Lord Jesus Christ, “the Truth.”

(1 John 1) “That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon, and our hands have handled, of the Word of life; (2) (For the life was manifested, and we have seen *it*, and bear witness, and show unto you that eternal life, which was with the Father, and was

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manifested unto us;) (3) That which we have seen and heard declare we unto you, that ye also may have fellowship with us: and truly our fellowship *is* with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ. (4) And these things write we unto you, that your joy may be full. (5) **This then is the message which we have heard of him, and declare unto you, that God is light, and in him is no darkness at all.** (6) **If we say that we have fellowship with him, and walk in darkness, we lie, and do not the truth:** (7) But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin. (8) If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. (9) If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us *our* sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. (10) If we say that we have not sinned, we make him a liar, and his word is not in us.”

- Look at verse 16 again. **The Lord God says that he will cause every one of his people to preach the gospel**, “to speak every man the truth.” — Every child of God is to publish and declare the truth of the gospel to the generation in which he lives.

In Mark 5:19 our Savior said, to the man out of whom he cast the demon, “Go home to thy friends and tell them how great things the Lord hath done for thee.” The Lord had shown great mercy to this poor sinner, setting him free from demons and from sin. Then he told him to go home to his family and friends and be his witness, to speak the truth to his neighbor. — Do not go home and begin to preach. — Do not go home and take up the great doctrines of grace and expound them. — Do not go home and strive to bring everyone to your views and beliefs. — Do not go home and condemn all who do not see what you see. — Go home and tell them what great things the Lord has done for you! Not what great things you have read or heard, or done, but what great things you have experienced!

This is the way to speak the truth. There never is a more interesting story than the story a person has experienced, lived, and felt. If you would really interest others and get their attention, tell them what great things the Lord has done *in* you and *for* you by his grace!

Notice, the Lord said, “Tell them what great things the Lord hath done.” The gospel we preach is a story of free grace. Not what we did, willed, or

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gave, but what he has done for us by his own free, sovereign, and undeserved mercy, love, and grace. He who has done great things for us, can do great things for them if he is pleased. And he is pleased to use the faithful witness of those who go and tell “how great things the Lord hath done for thee.”

Talk up the Lord Jesus! Talk up free grace! — **You cannot all be pastors and evangelists; but you can all speak the truth to your neighbor** by your personal witness to others, — by sending out missionaries, — by sending others to preach the gospel, — by sending out the Word. — Tapes — CDs — Videos — Literature — The Internet.

As I was preparing this message, I took the time to look up the stats on our **FreeGraceRadio** web page. In just over 10 weeks 10,000 sermons have been downloaded in 47 countries. — Has the Lord of hosts returned “to do well unto” Zion in this dark day? — I would say, he has indeed returned. He is indeed doing well!

(Joel 2:15-16) “Blow the trumpet in Zion, sanctify a fast, call a solemn assembly: (16) Gather the people, sanctify the congregation, assemble the elders, gather the children, and those that suck the breasts: let the bridegroom go forth of his chamber, and the bride out of her closet.”

- **To preach the gospel, to speak the truth, is to “execute the judgment of truth and peace.”**— Gospel preaching is the setting forth of Jesus Christ crucified before eternity bound sinners, in whom judgment has been executed to the full satisfaction of justice, establishing peace, “having made peace by the blood of his cross” (Colossians 1:20). In the crucified Christ “mercy and truth are met together; righteousness and peace have kissed each other” (Psalm 85:10).

Until the sinner is savingly acquainted with this, there can be no real peace to him. But, when the curse of the fall is taken away by the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, then is the believing soul blessed, both in basket and in store. Then, to use the figurative language of this chapter, the vine of ordinances, and the increase of bread, even the bread of life, and the dew of heaven, in all the blessings of covenant grace are poured out upon him. And the Spirit of grace dwelling in him causes him to hate every false way and

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love his brethren. This is the glorious consequence of the Lord Jesus coming to his own!

SINNERS SAVED

When the Lord of hosts has “returned unto Zion” “with great jealousy,” “to do well unto Jerusalem,” — when he causes his people to speak the truth, sinners shall be saved by his out-stretched arm of omnipotent grace, causing them to take hold on Christ the Savior, to take hold on the skirt of his righteousness, the skirt he spreads over them (vv. 20 and 23; Ruth 3:9; Ezekiel 16:8).

(Zechariah 8:20 and 23) “Thus saith the LORD of hosts; *It shall yet come to pass*, that there shall come people, and the inhabitants of many cities:...(23) “Thus saith the LORD of hosts; In those days *it shall come to pass*, that ten men shall take hold out of all languages of the nations, even shall take hold of the skirt of him that is a Jew, saying, We will go with you: for we have heard *that God is with you.*”

(Ruth 3:9) “And he said, Who *art* thou? And she answered, I *am* Ruth thine handmaid: spread therefore thy skirt over thine handmaid; for thou *art* a near kinsman.”

(Ezekiel 16:8) “Now when I passed by thee, and looked upon thee, behold, thy time *was* the time of love; and I spread my skirt over thee, and covered thy nakedness: yea, I sware unto thee, and entered into a covenant with thee, saith the Lord GOD, and thou becamest mine.”

LONGINGS FOR HIM

Look at Zechariah 8 again. In verses 21-22, the Lord God of hosts tells us of another token of his favor is the longings of his people for him. He tells us that when he has returned to Zion, he will cause his people to desire his worship.

(Zechariah 8:21-22) “And the inhabitants of one *city* shall go to another, saying, Let us go speedily to pray before the LORD, and to

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seek the LORD of hosts: I will go also. (22) Yea, many people and strong nations shall come to seek the LORD of hosts in Jerusalem, and to pray before the LORD.”

When the Lord Jesus visits his own in grace, the sure token of his presence will be the fact that his people no longer despise the assemblies of his saints for worship and no longer look upon the worship of God as a wearisome duty, but as a thing earnestly desired. When he turns to us to do us good, he turns us himself, causing us to highly value every means of grace, desiring grace to make good use of them.

The first cry of the people mentioned in our text is, “Let us go speedily to pray before the LORD.” That is not the enthusiastic statement of a zealous preacher trying to get people to come to church. That is what God himself has declared to be the sure token of his favor. Oh, blessed is that man, blessed is that woman who cannot get enough of the worship of God!

- Who cannot get enough of joining God’s saints in **prayer, praise, and worship**.
- Who cannot get enough of **the good news** of judgment finished, righteousness brought in, redemption obtained, and salvation accomplished!
- They cannot get enough of **Christ’s sweet presence** with his church (Matthew 18:20).
- They are **not so taken up with their own business** that they cannot devote themselves to God’s business.
- They are **not so occupied with the world’s pleasures** that they take no pleasure in things above.
- They **cannot get enough instruction** in the gospel. — John Gill tells me that the words “Let us go speedily to pray before the LORD, and to seek the LORD of hosts,” might be read, “Let us go speedily to seek the LORD, and **to seek doctrine from the LORD of hosts**.” That is another token of our God returning to his church, visiting his people with grace. He creates a desire in his people to learn the wonders of his grace and the mysteries of his gospel, longing to know his will and his way, to know more of Christ, and of life and salvation in him.

In verses 18 and 19 the Lord promises to make his worship a perpetual feast of joy and gladness. Isaiah describes the worship of God in that same way (Isaiah 25:6-9). When God’s people are most troubled with difficulties,

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the consolations of Christ most abound; and the very tears of grace are tears of holy joy to the believing soul.

(Isaiah 25:6-9) “And in this mountain shall the LORD of hosts make unto all people a feast of fat things, a feast of wines on the lees, of fat things full of marrow, of wines on the lees well refined. (7) And he will destroy in this mountain the face of the covering cast over all people, and the veil that is spread over all nations. (8) He will swallow up death in victory; and the Lord GOD will wipe away tears from off all faces; and the rebuke of his people shall he take away from off all the earth: for the LORD hath spoken *it*. (9) And it shall be said in that day, Lo, this *is* our God; we have waited for him, and he will save us: this *is* the LORD; we have waited for him, we will be glad and rejoice in his salvation.”

SPURGEON SAID, “The Lord’s coming near to any people will be sure to excite in them a longing to hear the Word. God sends impulses of enquiry over men’s minds and suddenly places of worship become crowded which were half empty before. Preachers, also, who were cold and dead become quickened and speak with earnestness and life. No doubt waves of religious movement pass over nations and peoples—and when God comes to a people the crest of that wave will be seen in this form—that the kingdom of Heaven becomes an object of interest and men press unto it!”

- When that strange preacher, **John the Baptist**, came preaching his strange doctrine of repentance toward God, crowds of people flocked into the wilderness to hear his message.
- When the risen Savior poured out his Spirit upon his church in the **Book of Acts**, the Apostles went everywhere preaching the Jesus and the resurrection, and multitudes thronged to hear the gospel.
- During the **Reformation** meetings were held under Gospel Oaks, in the open fields, and in small cottages, where hungry souls were fed by devoted preachers, preachers who gave their lives to the only business in the world worth a man’s life — Preaching the Gospel!
- During the **Great Awakening**, though churches everywhere barred their doors, George Whitefield prepared his sermons on horseback, as he rode from one cow pasture to another to preach the crucified Savior to needy souls.

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It is surely a token of God's grace and favor, a token of divine visitation, when needy souls, "seek the Lord of hosts," or as the margin translation reads, "entreat the face of the Lord" (Isaiah 12:1-6; 25:9).

(Isaiah 12) "And in that day thou shalt say, O LORD, I will praise thee: though thou wast angry with me, thine anger is turned away, and thou comfortedst me. (2) Behold, God *is* my salvation; I will trust, and not be afraid: for the LORD JEHOVAH *is* my strength and *my* song; he also is become my salvation. (3) Therefore with joy shall ye draw water out of the wells of salvation. (4) And in that day shall ye say, Praise the LORD, call upon his name, declare his doings among the people, make mention that his name is exalted. (5) Sing unto the LORD; for he hath done excellent things: this *is* known in all the earth. (6) Cry out and shout, thou inhabitant of Zion: for great *is* the Holy One of Israel in the midst of thee."

(Isaiah 25:9) "And it shall be said in that day, Lo, this *is* our God; we have waited for him, and he will save us: this *is* the LORD; we have waited for him, we will be glad and rejoice in his salvation."

As the forsaking of the assembling of the of ourselves together is a sure token of apostasy (Hebrews 10:25), so the love of worship, the love of the worship of God our Savior is a sure token of divine favor (Psalm 84).

(Psalms 84:1-2) "How amiable *are* thy tabernacles, O LORD of hosts! (2) My soul longeth, yea, even fainteth for the courts of the LORD: my heart and my flesh crieth out for the living God."

(Psalms 84:4) "Blessed *are* they that dwell in thy house: they will be still praising thee. Selah."

(Psalms 84:7) "They go from strength to strength, *every one of them* in Zion appeareth before God."

(Psalms 84:9-12) "Behold, O God our shield, and look upon the face of thine anointed. (10) For a day in thy courts *is* better than a thousand. I had rather be a doorkeeper (**The doorkeeper is the person who arrives first and leaves last.**) in the house of my God,

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than to dwell in the tents of wickedness. (11) For the LORD God *is* a sun and shield: the LORD will give grace and glory: no good *thing* will he withhold from them that walk uprightly. (12) O LORD of hosts, blessed *is* the man that trusteth in thee.”

REVIVED PULPIT

Here is another token of God’s favor. When he visits his people in grace, the Lord Jesus revives both the people and his preachers. I am not sure whether revival spreads from the pulpit to the pew, or from the pew to the pulpit, but in verse 21, when Zechariah heard God’s promise that “the inhabitants of one *city* shall go to another saying, Let us go speedily to pray before the LORD, and to seek the LORD of hosts,” he said, “I want to get in on that. — I will go also.”

This I know: — One of the surest tokens of Christ’s presence, one of the surest tokens of divine visitation is zealous, devoted gospel preachers. When the Lord God gives his churches pastors according to his own heart, who feed the people with knowledge and understanding, men who continually separate themselves unto the gospel, — men who, like Paul and Barnabas, gladly hazard their lives for the gospel, he has “returned unto Zion,” and has come “to do well unto Jerusalem.” — Spirit of God, make me such a preacher!

- Separated to the Gospel!
- Addicted to the Gospel!
- Devoted to your people!
- Devoted to the glory of God!
- Laboring day and night in the Word, in the Doctrine, in Pray, and in Preaching, with gladness of heart!

MUTUAL HELP

Our text reveals another sweet and sure token of the Lord of hosts having returned to his people in the out-pouring of his grace. When that happens, **God’s people stir one another, rouse one another, and mutually help one another, encouraging one another to worship him who loved us and gave himself for us.** — “The inhabitants of one *city* shall go to another saying, Let us go speedily to pray before the LORD, and to seek the LORD of hosts” (v. 21).

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They go to one another on purpose to encourage their brethren to go with them to the house of God. They put themselves out of the way to do it, walking from one city to another, just to encourage their brothers and sisters to meet them in the house of God! Their souls would feel a terrible emptiness, if the seat beside them was empty when they got to the meeting house. — “I was glad when they said unto me, Let us go into the house of the LORD” (Psalm 122:1).

You will notice that it is **not a pastor**, preacher or missionary who goes from one city to another, saying, “Let us go and pray,” **but the inhabitants**, themselves, made it their business to invite and persuade people to come, saying, “Let us go and pray unto the LORD.” They do it without having to be primed, pumped, pushed or pulled, because they want others to know and worship the Savior.

Believers love to bring others to the House of God because they want to do good to them. Did you ever notice how the little birds, when they find a pile of grain, begin to chatter and twitter as if calling all the other birds to come and feast? Believers are like that. Grace is generous. A man who is rich in faith feels himself richer when others have faith, too! As soon as we drink of the Water of Life, a sacred instinct within us causes us to cry, “Come.” “Ho, everyone that thirsts, come ye to the waters.”

(Revelation 22:17) “And the Spirit and the bride say, Come. And let him that heareth say, Come. And let him that is athirst come. And whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely.”

Notice this, too. — They went about the business of gathering people into the house of God with urgency. They said, “Let us go speedily to pray before the LORD” (v. 21; 2 Corinthians 5:11; Isaiah 55:6-8; Zephaniah 2:3).

(2 Corinthians 5:11) “Knowing therefore the terror of the Lord, we persuade men; but we are made manifest unto God; and I trust also are made manifest in your consciences.”

(Isaiah 55:6-8) “Seek ye the LORD while he may be found, call ye upon him while he is near: (7) Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts: and let him return unto the

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LORD, and he will have mercy upon him; and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon. (8) For my thoughts *are* not your thoughts, neither *are* your ways my ways, saith the LORD.”

(Zephaniah 2:3) “Seek ye the LORD, all ye meek of the earth, which have wrought his judgment; seek righteousness, seek meekness: it may be ye shall be hid in the day of the LORD’S anger.”

GOD’S GLORY

There is one more thing to which I must direct your attention. When the Lord God has turned to Zion, pouring out his grace upon us, everything is done with an eye to him, for his glory. — “Let us go speedily to pray before the Lord, and to seek the Lord of Hosts.”

- Not to be seen of men, but to see Christ.
- Not because it is a matter of convenience, but a matter of conviction.
- Not to build a church, but to worship God.
- Not to hear a man speak, but to hear the Spirit of God speak.
- Not to fulfill a duty, but to fulfill a desire.
- Not to give their testimony, but to hear God’s testimony.
- Not to be praised, but to praise.

For the glory of God my Savior, I say with Zechariah, “I will go also.” If nobody else will go, I will go. And if you go I will go with you. — “As for me and my house, we will serve the LORD.”

We have enjoyed the presence and blessing of our God in this place for many years. He has dealt with us in remarkable mercy. But I am jealous for you, with a godly jealousy. I urge you, my brothers and sisters in Christ, forsake not “the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is; but exhorting one another: and so much the more, as ye see the day approaching” (Hebrews 10:25). Let us make it our business to worship and serve our God and Savior. — “Let us go speedily to pray before the LORD, and to seek the LORD of hosts.”

- Those who seek him know their need of him.
- They seek him
- They seek him with all their hearts.

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- And they find him.

(Psalms 27:8) “*When thou saidst, Seek ye my face; my heart said unto thee, Thy face, LORD, will I seek.*”

(Psalms 119:2) “*Blessed are they that keep his testimonies, and that seek him with the whole heart.*”

(Deuteronomy 4:29) “*But if from thence thou shalt seek the LORD thy God, thou shalt find him, if thou seek him with all thy heart and with all thy soul.*”

(Jeremiah 29:10-14) “*For thus saith the LORD, That after seventy years be accomplished at Babylon I will visit you, and perform my good word toward you, in causing you to return to this place. (11) For I know the thoughts that I think toward you, saith the LORD, thoughts of peace, and not of evil, to give you an expected end. (12) Then shall ye call upon me, and ye shall go and pray unto me, and I will hearken unto you. (13) And ye shall seek me, and find me, when ye shall search for me with all your heart. (14) And I will be found of you, saith the LORD: and I will turn away your captivity, and I will gather you from all the nations, and from all the places whither I have driven you, saith the LORD; and I will bring you again into the place whence I caused you to be carried away captive.*”

I will finish my message as I began it.

(Psalms 80:19) “*Turn us again, O LORD God of hosts, cause thy face to shine; and we shall be saved.*”

(Psalms 85:4-7) “*Turn us, O God of our salvation, and cause thine anger toward us to cease. (5) Wilt thou be angry with us for ever? wilt thou draw out thine anger to all generations? (6) Wilt thou not revive us again: that thy people may rejoice in thee? (7) Show us thy mercy, O LORD, and grant us thy salvation.*”

O Lord Jesus, hasten the fulfillment of the promises you have given us by the mouth of your prophet Zechariah. Come forth in the sovereignty of

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your grace and power, conquering and to conquer, subduing your people to the scepter of your grace, calling your redeemed out of all languages of the nations. Make your Word effectual in the hearts of your chosen, causing them now to “take hold of the skirt of him that is a Jew, saying, we will go with you, for we have heard that God is with you of a truth.”

Amen.