

Give thanks to the Lord for he is good and his love endures forever. Amen.

“See, I will send my messenger, who will prepare the way before me. Then suddenly the Lord you are seeking will come to his temple; the messenger of the covenant, whom you desire, will come,” says the LORD Almighty.

² But who can endure the day of his coming? Who can stand when he appears? For he will be like a refiner’s fire or a launderer’s soap. ³ He will sit as a refiner and purifier of silver; he will purify the Levites and refine them like gold and silver. Then the LORD will have men who will bring offerings in righteousness, ⁴ and the offerings of Judah and Jerusalem will be acceptable to the LORD, as in days gone by, as in former years. **This is God’s Word.**

Dear Friends,

Are you ready? that is a question you might hear a lot in the next few weeks. Are you ready for that Christmas party that you are hosting this weekend? Are you ready for your family to show up and spend the holidays at your house? Are you ready for your trip to spend Christmas with your kids or someone else? Are you ready – have you gotten all your Christmas presents bought and wrapped?

All these things can create stress in our lives and it is easy to get overwhelmed by everything that needs to be done. So how do we avoid the stress? Preparation and planning. We know what is coming and when things have to be done so it helps to prepare and to put a plan in place. A plan to decorate and to shop and to bake and to clean and to get everything done in a timely manner. And when something unexpected pops up, taking time to change your plans and maybe even ask for help. When we plan it can help relieve a lot of the stress and bring us a peace that helps us enjoy the holidays and everything that goes along with them.

Preparation is key but things don’t always go as planned and that is okay – there is always next year and sometimes you just have to “make do.” But as we consider our sermon text, it talks about being prepared for something more serious than a party or a family gathering or other holiday events – as we confess in the Apostle’s Creed that, **“Christ is coming to judge the living and the dead.”** Malachi asks a chilling question, **“Who can stand – who can endure the day of his coming?”** Only the one who is prepared. The one who is prepared will enjoy peace on that day. So, **“Are You Prepared for Christ to Come?”** and as you prepare, **“Do You Trust Christ to Refine You?”**

I. Malachi was God’s messenger about 100 years after the Children of Israel returned from the Babylonian exile. When the people returned, there had been some spiritual issues – they were glad to be back in their own land but it took some urging by God’s prophets to get them to rebuild the temple and to resume regular worship. The people were faithful for a time but they wanted more. Many years earlier God had promised Abraham that he would give his descendants this land and make them into a great nation. The people had the land back but they weren’t anywhere close to being what they would consider a great nation. Their general attitude was, “Where is God? Why isn’t he blessing us and prospering us?”

It wasn't enough that God chose them to be his special people. It wasn't enough that God promised them heaven if they trusted and believed in him. They wanted God to come and give them earth too – everything to satisfy their desires. For some strange reason they thought they deserved it – that God somehow owed them. They were oblivious to the fact that God owes them absolutely nothing – matter of fact if God gave them what they deserved – they would receive judgment and punishment.

Malachi preached a lot of Law to the people to try and call them to repentance but as we consider our sermon text, he begins this portion of scripture with a gospel promise, **“See, I will send my messenger, who will prepare the way before me. Then suddenly the Lord you are seeking will come to his temple; the messenger of the covenant, whom you desire, will come,” says the LORD Almighty.** Where is God? Malachi tells them that he is coming but 1st he is going to send a messenger to prepare the way. Malachi is pointing ahead to when John the Baptist was going to prepare the way for Jesus. John's message was the same as what Malachi had been proclaiming – Repent and turn from your sinful ways. Look to the Lord for salvation.

Malachi goes on to tell them that after John appears then suddenly the Promised Messiah – the messenger of the covenant, whom they are waiting for – will appear. Jeremiah spoke about that covenant while the Children of Israel were in exile. At the heart of the covenant we find the Lord declaring, **“For I will forgive their wickedness and will remember their sins no more.”** God's blessing was all about forgiveness and salvation – not about power and glory here on this earth. God's covenant wasn't about gathering an abundance of earthly possessions but rather gathering around the cross.

That wasn't quite what the people wanted from God. It's easy for us to have the same kind of attitude. After all, we are God's chosen people too. He has called us to faith and speaks to us through his Word in much the same way. How many times, when things aren't going so well, have you asked yourself, “Where is God?” “Why doesn't he care about me?” How many times have you thought that you deserved better from God – after all you are one of his children?

It's so easy for us to forget that God doesn't owe us anything but because of his love and mercy he cares for us anyway. He loves us because he want's to and he provides for us according to his wisdom – not ours. And so the most important thing isn't what's in our wallet but rather what's in our heart – where is our focus.

Is our attitude all about, “What's in it for me?” or are we more about, “God has forgiven my sins and he loves me, so how can I reflect that love in my life.” I would hope and pray that it's the latter but I know from my own life that it's easy to get caught up in putting me first. Thankfully our God is more merciful than I and even though my heart doesn't always have the right attitude, my Lord is there to help correct it. That is why Malachi continues by talking about how the Lord refines us.

II. “But who can endure the day of his coming? Who can stand when he appears? For he will be like a refiner's fire or a launderer's soap.” In a way, Malachi echoes the words of King David in Psalm 24, “Who may ascend the hill of the LORD? Who may stand in his

holy place? ⁴ He who has clean hands and a pure heart, who does not lift up his soul to an idol or swear by what is false.” (Psalm 24:3-4). We know the answer is no one. No one can stand before the Lord or endure God’s judgment on his own. It would be easy to stop there and say, “What’s the point?” but consider all of what Malachi is telling us.

He talks about the refiner’s fire and the launderer’s soap. Our Savior’s grace in forgiveness burns away (refiner’s fire) and his mercy washes away (launderer’s soap) the guilt of our sins. And so, by the power of the gospel, we are able to stand purified before the LORD – holy and acceptable. Another way of putting it is that Christ by his death purifies us. He burns the impurity of our sins off of our record. This was a painless process for us, but hurt our Savior deeply as we consider that he endured the punishment of scourging, the pain of the nails, the torture of crucifixion and the abandonment of God on his soul. The pain of refining us was 100% on Christ. But that is what God’s love is all about – God’s love for you and for me in that our Savior did this to bring us forgiveness, life and salvation – not that we deserve it or have earned it but because of God’s love. That is the only way we can have everlasting peace with God and true contentment in our hearts – because of God’s love for us.

So what is our response? **“Then the LORD will have men who will bring offerings in righteousness, ⁴ and the offerings of Judah and Jerusalem will be acceptable to the LORD, as in days gone by, as in former years.”** A change of heart and how we view God. Our Savior redeemed us so that we can serve him and praise him. Malachi focuses in on praising God. We can do that with our offerings and with works of service for others.

I know you are busy planning and preparing for the Christmas holidays – we all are. But as you consider the words of Malachi, remember to include praising God in your plans. He is the one who helps us to keep everything in its proper perspective and as we worship and praise God, he brings us true peace and contentment.

May the Lord bring us peace today and always through this Advent season as he speaks to us through his Word. Amen.