

*Malachi 3:1-4. "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. <sup>2</sup> 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. <sup>3</sup> 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, <sup>4</sup> and the offerings of Judah and Jerusalem will be acceptable to the LORD, as in days gone by, as in former years.*

**We are prepared for our Savior's coming by our LORD's call to repentance.**

- 1. Let God's church be refined and purified.**
- 2. Let us be prepared to meet our LORD in humility.**

A couple sneaks away from the family Christmas gathering to give and receive one last special gift. The man digs into his pocket and pulls out a small box and inside is brilliant silver pendent. 'Tis the season for such jewelry commercials. Each year a variation of the same type of scene is played out. You might have seen a number of such advertisements lately, or recall one from years gone by, and so you know that the final reveal is always one of impressive brilliance. A precious gold necklace, a gleaming silver band, an impressive ring, a spectacular display of silver or gold in held out and shines in breathtaking brilliance.

Have you ever took a moment during one of those ads to think about how that piece of silver or gold got to look the way it does? It is fascinating to think that such a treasure is a far departure from what that mineral looked like when it was extracted from the earth. Silver and gold ore are filled with impurities. A chunk of ore is filled with bits of valuable and precious metal, but large chunks of other rock and dirt and not so precious metals have to be removed to expose the brilliance that is buried and mixed inside. Often this is an intensive process. Gold and silver are purified in the intense heat of a furnace. Placed in a crucible the metal is heated to such a high temperature that the ore and the precious metal are separated. The dross, that is, the common and valueless rock, as well as the other impure metals float to the top and are then blown off from the mixture as that dross falls away to be burned up in the fire. It is a harsh process but through it the precious metals are purified, preserved, and treasured. Then they are eventually fashioned into the brilliant pieces that we see displayed.

In our lesson for today God reminds us of the all-important purification process that he puts us through. His calling us to daily repentance reminds us of the impurities that are imbedded in us and are removed under his careful watch. In his

grace he purifies us and prepares us for that glorious final reveal as he promises that he will reach down and pull us out of a world that is full of sin, he will cleanse us from our impurities, and he will present his believers as holy and blameless on the Last Day. What a glorious reveal that will be! And so **we are prepared for our Savior's coming by our LORD's call to repentance. Let God's church be refined and purified. Let us be prepared to meet our LORD in humility.**

As Malachi speaks the Word of the LORD God's people had become impure in very obvious ways. They had defiled the sanctuary of his temple with pagan gods and goddesses. Even those who served in God's house were corrupting his word and leading many astray. The priests were promoting false teaching and mixing God's Word with the lies of the day. Malachi writes in a previous chapter. ***"For the lips of a priest ought to preserve knowledge, and from his mouth men should seek instruction—because he is the messenger of the LORD Almighty. <sup>8</sup> But you have turned from the way and by your teaching have caused many to stumble; you have violated the covenant with Levi," says the LORD Almighty (Malachi 2:7 8).*** The people of God had become corrupted and their understanding of who the Messiah would be had become impure. They had turned the coming Messiah into a temporal savior and they waited with misplaced confidence in the fact that the Messiah would come and reward God's chosen people regardless of how they lived and acted. At the most, all they had to do was keep visiting the temple and see to it that certain rituals and customs were observed and they would be fine. After all, they were God's chosen people. They anticipated a shiny reward from a cheerful and benevolent God who inherently favored them, but God sent his prophet to warn them of something very different that would come from the hand of the LORD if things did not change.

And so this was God's warning that needed to be heard. The LORD was coming, but the prophet seems to say, *Judah and Jerusalem you ought to be careful what you wish for. "See, I will send my messenger."* God says. ***"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. <sup>2</sup> 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.*** The master of the temple would arrive, and what would he find? His arrival would be sudden and shocking for those who were not properly prepared. For the LORD would not come as a temporal and carefree Savior who would come to reward his people with all that glitters and shines despite their unfaithfulness. But the God-man Jesus Christ would come with a message of judgment for those who would not repent. One thinks immediately about the harsh words he spoke to the stubborn Pharisees, calling them "white-washed tombs" and a "brood of vipers". He was not afraid to speak harshly, but it was not just to the stubborn Pharisees but to anyone who would hear. Repent!

The message of repentance - the likes of which is heard through the message of the prophets, like Malachi, and John the Baptist, and others, including Jesus himself - is

an important reality check still today. It is the Holy LORD who comes to us in his Word. This is the master of the temple that will come again. This is the creator of all things who came to this earth. Our LORD comes and he is not simply a helpless babe who simply comes to make our spirits bright, or to be some sort of mystical being who comes into our lives simply to approve of anything that we do, or reward us, and give us what we want. And yet all too often this is the way that God formed and shaped and molded by people today. And we too can fall into this as well. God is often fashioned and shaped by arrogant and sinful people as a being who is there to do nothing more than to cater to our needs, to pat us on the back and inspire and encourage us. Like a genie in a bottle he answers to us. We can change his Word, we can live how we want, and we can still call on his name and he will just be happy to be a part of our lives. Dear friends, repent! Let God's church be purified of such false ideas, let our teachings be regularly refined in order that such falsehood is avoided among us. Let our lives be purified so that we do not promote such falsehood in the way that we speak and act. Instead, let us be prepared, dear friends for the one who will actually come. ***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. <sup>2</sup> 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.*** Yes our God is good, yes our God is gracious and loving and in his great love he reaches out and blesses us in so many different ways. He is there to encourage and inspire us. He is there to save us. But we are not to overlook, we cannot overlook, his call to repentance. He is pure and we are impure. He is the master of this temple, and we track the mud of sin into his house and into his presence. He comes to us and we are to receive him in humility, for he is pure and we are impure.

Your forefathers built this house and we maintain it so that we may meet with the LORD here, but perhaps we are to be a bit more careful for what we wish for; especially if we insist on coming to him on your own terms. If you or I confidently stride into this place with chest out and head held high, as if you were announcing for all to see, "I am here to receive my just reward from God." If there is even a speck of that arrogance or pride in our hearts just remember that your God can see all that you have done? He can see beneath our Sunday best and he sees clearly the daily sin we get ourselves into or more consciously wallow in. Who could stand in his appearing? We must realize that sin is not only something that we handle and leaves a stain our hands that we must occasionally wash off with gentle hand soap but sin is deeply imbedded in us. It is a part of us by nature. It becomes a part of us by nature. The launderer's soap will sting, the refiner's fire will be difficult to bear, but it is for our eternal good.

It is not easy for the gossip to resist gossiping for that sin has become a part of him or her. It is downright painful for the alcoholic to give up drinking because that sin has become a part of him or her. To ask the excessive gambler to give up gambling is a difficult chore. And so on, from lust to greed to theft and fraud, lying and cheating,

dishonesty, hatred, and anger it is imbedded in us. As sinners it is a part of who we were, but God is there to purify, to make us new. Like a precious metal that is filled with impurities the only way to separate is with fire. And so each one of us goes through the painful process regularly. God shows us where we have fallen short and we confess our sins. There should, consequently, be a sting as the LORD leads us through that process, but too often it easily becomes mindless habit that is lacking of any discomfort or real sincerity. We run through a thrown together list at the end of the day, we rattle off the familiar script on Sunday. *Yes, yes, I am by nature sinful, I have done this, I have done that. And that is that.* NO! Repent! Confess! Come before him in humility! Genuinely come before our LORD and recall the things that you have done, the way that you acted, the things that you have said or thought. When this is done, each time it is painful for confession is not easy, to admit your flaws and mistakes is something that we would rather not do, it is a harsh reality that we would rather not confront. But God is there for us in this. He is the one who keeps his eye on us as he refines for himself a new creation. The result is precious to our God. He changes us and makes us new. He compares it to the refining of precious gold or silver. We are purified by Christ. His Word tells us, ***the blood of Christ purifies us from all our sins – 1 John 1:7.*** His Word tells us ***“If we confess our sins he is faithful and just and will purify us from all unrighteousness” – 1 John 1:9.*** We are refined and made new created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness, to display the shine of his glory now in part and fully when he brings us to the glorious realms of eternal life.

We are prepared, for this final reveal, by God’s call to repentance. God prepares his people by opening our eyes to see the reality of our sin. He does not come into our lives to approve of whatever we do, or simply reward us for being such good people, or to give us all that glitters and shines because we are connected to him in some superficial way. But he comes to us through his Word and often he leads us through a process - that though painful - is for our eternal good. He leads us to repentance. His Word stings and burns as it shows us our sins. But this is to purify us, to make us shine with the brilliance of his glory in this life, and to shine with him forever in heaven.

Take a moment to appreciate the process that happens before that final reveal. God in his mercy reaches down into this imperfect world and he takes hold of those who are by nature impure. He uses his powerful tools of Word and Sacrament to carefully refine and purify us. He daily leads us to repentance, turns us away from sin, and helps us live God-pleasing and productive lives that shine with his glory. And then he comes again for that final breathtaking reveal. One day he will present us as holy and blameless and pure for all eternity. We are that precious display held proudly in his hand. He has saved us, changes us, and makes us new. With deep humility may we praise our God with lives that shine with his brilliant glory both now and into eternity! Amen.