

December 9, 2012
Advent 2

“Jesus Purifies Us”

MALACHI 3:1-4

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.

I direct your attention to the picture on the screen in front you. You see a pot of molten gold being poured into mold. The heat from an intensely hot fire has refined the gold and driven off the impurities.

Our heavenly Father’s plan for your life is to purify you through Jesus his Son so he can accept you in this life as his dear child and for all eternity. Our heavenly Father cannot love us and accept us unless we have a clean hands and a pure heart as we are told in Psalm 24. That is only possible through Jesus.

What is so very special about Jesus as we see him lying in a manger in Bethlehem? Although only a baby, he is Lord and God from all eternity. That little child is also the answer to our problem of sin. He is the refining fire that will purge us and make us clean. Every religion in the world tells us that we can make ourselves clean before God by trying to improve our lives. Only in the Christian faith do you have God coming into our world and purging us of our sin by giving his life on the cross.

He purges us

These words from the prophet Malachi show us how desperately all people need this purging that is like a refiners’ fire. “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.” God’s people needed to hear these words about the Lord coming to his temple from the mouth of the prophet Malachi. They were concerned that the Lord did not love them. After the Babylonian Captivity was over the city of Jerusalem and the temple of the Lord never achieved the glory they once had. The people didn’t care what kind of offerings they brought to the Lord. The priests were negligent in the daily sacrifices that were offered in the temple. They were neglecting the key elements of their worship that pointed ahead to Jesus the Lamb of God who would take away the sin of the world.

The Lord told these people who were losing hope that he was about to send his messenger to prepare the way before him. We know who this messenger as John the Baptist, the

voice calling in the desert, "Prepare the way for the Lord." John the Baptist introduced Jesus to the world with these important words, "Behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world." All the lambs and animals that were offered in God's temple, pointed forward to Jesus the Lamb of God who would take away the sin of the world.

Look at the priests offering lambs in the temple of the Lord. Think of all the lambs that were sacrificed. How often the priests sprinkled the blood of the lambs on the altar. Now the Lamb of God comes into the temple. What was pictured becomes a reality. In Psalm 40 we hear Jesus the Messiah tell us 1000 years before he is born, how he feels about coming into this world to be the sacrifice for our sin. He says to his heavenly Father with great joy and anticipation, "Here I am, I have come- it is written in the scroll. I desire to do your will, O my God, your law is within my heart."

Jesus was eager to step into the presence of the heavenly Father or the temple of God and have the sin of the world placed on him. The book of Hebrews says of Jesus, the Lamb of God who entered the temple, "But now he has appeared once for all at the end of the ages to do away with sin by the sacrifice of himself." One of my favorite Christmas cards shows the tiny footprint of the baby Jesus on the front part of the card. Then when you open the card, it shows the hand of Jesus with a nail mark in the hand.

God's people needed to hear that the Lord was ready to enter into the temple and purge the world of sin. When the people first returned from captivity they were eager to rebuild the walls of Jerusalem and the temple of the Lord. Then they lost sight of how valuable their worship to the Lord was as it pointed to Christ. The people were bringing blind and crippled animals for the Lord. They were not giving their best. They were cheating the Lord in their offerings. They took advantage of each other in business dealings. They were divorcing their husbands and wives instead of being faithful to each other. The Lord pleaded with his people, "Return to me, I will return to you."

What do you see on the faces of people who surround you as you go about your shopping once again this Christmas season? You see people whose hearts are far from being pure in God's sight. We were created by God to be holy and perfect in his sight. Adam and Eve's sin has infected us more deeply than we realize. Their first born son killed his brother. A homeless man in New York pushes another man onto the subway train tracks and the man dies. In homes across this land, there is fighting and angry words spoken by children to their parents and sometimes mom and dads towards each other. You don't have to look very far in your own life to see evil thoughts towards other people, grumbling and complaining, and lack of trust and confidence in the Lord. People still cheat the Lord in their offerings as they did at the time of Malachi. We desperately need the Lord to purge the sin out of our lives. The words of Jeremiah 17:6 are true for all of us, more than we often realize, "The heart is deceitful above all things and beyond cure. Who can understand it?"

Granted, there are shining moments that do take place in your life and mine where we actually have a genuine concern for people. A tourist in New York City used her phone to record a police officer putting warm boots on a homeless man as he sat on the street. The officer had purchased the boots with his own money. The video went viral, viewed millions of times. I want that compassion and love to be there for people in my life. There are good moments, and then the moments we struggle to love the Lord and people as we

should. We are in desperate need of refining and purging and cleansing. With Paul we confess our own struggle, "The good that I want to do, I don't do, and the evil that I don't want to do."

Malachi asks the all important question: "But who can endure the day of his coming? Who can stand when he appears?" When the Lord returns in glory he must destroy everything that does not measure up to his standards. His standards are 100% pure. Ivory soap bragged about being 99.44% pure. That is not good enough for God. I cannot hope to refine myself and make myself pure. My best efforts at being pure only add to more impurity. How blessed we are to know the Lord will purify us so we can endure the day of his coming and stand when he appears.

"For he will be like a refiner's fire or a launderer's soap. He will sit as a refiner and purifier of silver; he will purify the Levites and refine them like gold and silver." Let's take another look at the refiner working to purify the gold and silver. He fires up the coals. He places his melting pot in the fire. He works the bellows to force the air to raise the temperature. We watch as the gold that is dull with dross and impurities begins to shine brightly. The impurities burn off or sink to the bottom of the melting pot. Only pure gold is poured into the mold.

Even the best gold is not totally pure. Jesus' death on the cross for your sins is the ultimately in purity. The sin of the world was placed on Jesus. He became a curse for us. He suffered the torments of hell itself in our place, so the dross of sin can be completely removed and we can stand before God in the final judgment. When the Lord tests you on the last day and examines you, he will see someone made totally pure and clean through Jesus.

There is another picture that we have before us to emphasize the purity we have in Jesus. He will be like a launder's soap. I think of how my mother would make her own soap for washing the dirty farm clothes. She mixed animal fats and lye. She heated them and made soap that worked the best for getting out the dirt. Nothing gets out the dirt like Jesus. The Lord tells us in Isaiah 1:18, "'Come, now let us reason together', says the Lord, 'Though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they are red like crimson, they shall be like wool.'" What if the Lord returns in glory before Christmas comes? We know through Jesus we will be able to stand before him because he has refined us and made us pure.

He uses us for his glory

Because Jesus purges us and refines us we are equipped to live each day of life on this earth to his glory and honor. "Then the Lord will have men who will bring offerings in righteousness and the offerings of Judah and Jerusalem will be acceptable to the Lord, as in the days gone by, as in the former years." Because Jesus has purged you and made you clean, you are now free to live your life to him and bring offerings to him. Jesus tells us that he is the vine and we are branches. Because we are attached to him we are privileged to bear much fruit. He even tells us that because of him, we are clean through the word he speaks to us. Not a day goes by in your life without the Holy Spirit helping you produce delicious fruit that is now pleasing in God's sight. "But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy,

peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self control.”

In the Old Testament the sons of Levi and the priests had the special privilege of serving the Lord in his temple. Now because of Jesus, God’s Son, born in Bethlehem, we are the Lord’s temple. We are living stones built on Christ. We have the privilege of offering sacrifices to Lord in the form of the changed lives that we live. “But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of him who has called you out of darkness into his marvelous light.”

The Christmas cards are coming in. We see Jesus in a manger, shepherds, wise men, Mary and Joseph. I don’t think we will see the picture on a card of a refiner’s fire. What a wonderful gift we have in Jesus who purifies us and make us shine more brightly for him than the purest gold or silver. Amen.