



See, I am sending my messenger to prepare the way before me, and the Lord whom you seek will suddenly come to his temple. The messenger of the covenant in whom you delight – indeed, he is coming, says the Lord of hosts. ²But who can endure the day of his coming, and who can stand when he appears?

For he is like a refiner's fire and like fullers' soap; ³he will sit as a refiner and purifier of silver, and he will purify the descendants of Levi and refine them like gold and silver, until they present offerings to the Lord in righteousness. ⁴Then the offering of Judah and Jerusalem will be pleasing to the Lord as in the days of old and as in former years.

Malachi 3:1-4

If you are a person of faith, there is a striking paradox in these words of the prophet Malachi. ... the Lord whom you seek will suddenly come to his temple. Isn't that the best news that we could receive? Perhaps, but then the prophet adds this question. *But who can endure the day of his coming, and who can stand when he appears?* At the heart of this paradox is this: the faithful long for God to make his presence known in part because we believe God will demand righteousness from his enemies and punish unrighteousness. Except righteousness is also demanded by God from the faithful and even the most pious of us would need to admit we fail to meet those demands day after day.

What then is God up to? God wants us to be able to worship him in the manner that he deserves, presenting *offerings to the Lord in righteousness*. The first thing I think that would be helpful to see in these verses is a picture that comes from verse three. The messenger of the Lord is coming to purify and refine the descendants of Levi. In the Old Testament the descendants of Levi are those entrusted with the priesthood and various other responsibilities associated with the wilderness tabernacle and then the Jerusalem Temple. It is important, I

think, for Christians to remember that in the New Testament we are told it is God's intention for all believers to be a holy priesthood so that we might offer *spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ* (1 Peter 2:4, 5). To me then the fulfillment of Malachi's prophesy includes us.

Let me ask again, what then is God up to? One commentator points out that when silver is refined, it is treated with carbon or charcoal, preventing the absorption of oxygen and resulting in its sheen and purity. A silversmith knows that the refining process is complete only when she observes her "own image reflected in the mirror-like surface of the metal." If this is the case, does the prophet also suggest that the image of God is restored in this process? Is humanity deemed good and righteous when once again the divine image is reflected in the human heart? That image appeals to me because I know that I am only made righteous through the grace of God doing the work within me that is necessary.

One of North America's most effective and faithful preachers is Fleming Rutledge. Her comment on our text from Malachi is most instructive. "God will save us from the judgement, but he will not save us without judgement." Yes, you and I can welcome the coming of the Lord to purify and refine this world, including us, making it possible for us to present offerings in righteousness. The poet expresses this thought in the second stanza of an Advent hymn, *On Jordan's Bank the Baptist's Cry*:

"Then cleansed be every life from sin;
make straight the way for God within,
and let us all our hearts prepare
for Christ to come and enter there."

Rev. Bill Norman

ADVENT CANDLES AT HOME

The traditional Advent wreath contains five candles, three purple, one pink and the white Christ candle, lit on Christmas Eve. Advent observed in the church struggles against the cultural push to get on with the celebration of Christmas. The decorations made their appearance in many stores on November 1. We were also told this year that "supply chain problems" might make some gifts scarce. That didn't put more pressure on you parents, did it? But Advent with its one more candle each week tells us the light is growing and we need to prepare our hearts for the coming of that light. I hope you are able to take just a little bit of time for that preparation.

PRAYER FOR THIS WEEK

Loving God, I rejoice that your plan for me is to be made righteous through the death and resurrection of my Saviour, Jesus. I know this transformation will only be complete when Jesus returns as Lord, but I ask that by your Spirit this work of transformation will be seen in my life so that each day I may be a more effective witness to your love for all whom you have created in your image.

In Jesus's name, I pray. Amen.