

**"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.**

**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. 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, and the offerings and Jerusalem will be acceptable to the LORD, as in days gone by, as in former years.**

### The Messenger's Words Hit Home

- I. Preparation is necessary
- II. Preparation is like a burning fire
- III. Preparation purifies us for service

Dear Advent Worshipers,

Jesus' coming at the first time took people by surprise. Mary, Joseph, Herod, shepherds, friends and enemies – all were surprised when He came. God had promised His son's coming from the dawn of the world. People had carried the promise and that hope with them through the subsequent generations. But what they envisioned really did not appear according to their expectation. The reality caught them by surprise because they had painted a picture of Him in keeping with what they wanted Him to be. This picture did not fit the mission they wanted their Messiah to fulfill. His message did not coincide with what they wanted to hear. This experience will repeat itself. The second coming of this "Desire of nations" will also surprise us, even though we hope for it and profess to long for it.

"How long?" the saints in heaven cry out to the Lord of Judgment. How long are you going to delay Your second coming? The messengers have proceeded on the pavement of time. Their voices have echoed down into the corners of this world. John the Baptist called out, pointing to the coming Day of Judgment – "You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the coming wrath?" Jesus, God's greatest messenger, spoke of earthquakes and famines, love growing cold, and "great distress," unequaled from the beginning of the world to now and never to be equaled again. The day of God's judgment is coming all right! Jesus the messenger of the covenant has spoken. These words of the messenger hit home, because, first of all, the announcement to prepare is necessary for each of us.

It is difficult for each of us to stop and take an account of our life in regard to our relationship with our God. The difficulty occurs for several reasons. First, we may not think that we are in need of any kind of accounting to be made. We are consistent in our day to day routine. Our spirituality remains constant. You could run the numbers for last year and see that they are very similar to the numbers for this year. A second reason might be that we could turn up something we really don't want to face. Let the sleeping dog lie, so to say. Finally inertia is difficult to overcome. As long as the house is not burning down and the roof is not letting an inordinate amount of water drip in, we are comfortable.

Perhaps, this is also an indication that some soul searching does need to take place. If we have leveled off in our spirituality, it could well mean that we are becoming stagnant. We show no sign of growth. That can only mean that we are regressing.

In the text before us the point of application is contained in these two questions. ***Who can endure the day of His coming? Who can stand when He appears?*** The message which follows really hits home. First, because the message calls for preparation for the Lord's coming. This preparation is necessary for each of us.

If we will be honest and look at our lives in the mirror of God's law, we will see any number of instances in which we have not been faithful to our Lord Jesus. Remember Jesus doesn't just check us on the basis of our outward conduct. He looks at the heart. Just think about standing here before Jesus who knows what is in your heart. Consider the desires that you have had in the week, or month. Would you be happy to have the dear Lord read some of those desires back to you right here? Has there been some unfounded anger? Has there been some thought of getting even with some one? Has there been some jealousy? Has there been some greed? Has there been some lust? Have you shirked some responsibilities? Have you connived to get your way at the expense of someone else? Have you even questioned God's love for you? Have you thought that the unbelievers are getting a better shake from God than you are? Have you thought that your faithfulness has been ignored?

You get the point, don't you! The message hits home. Preparation means we need to deal with our sins. Listen to how the text goes on. ***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.*** If you are going to use a needle to dig out a sliver from your finger, you might pass the point of that needle over a flame to purify it. The standard way to remove impurities from the rare metals of gold and silver is to cook them over a very hot fire and the dross or impurities will come to the surface and can then be skimmed off leaving the .999 per cent pure metal.

Obviously the prophet is using these examples of purification by fire to show that when the Lord comes he is looking for the real thing. He will be looking for hearts and minds and lives that have been purged of impurities. How are you going to prepare for His coming if purity is what He is looking for?

The answer to this question is to repent. This is what John the Baptist was calling for in preparation for our Lord's coming. Acknowledge all those thoughts words and actions that are disobedient to God, that they are a violation of His holiness. Confess that you are sorry for living and thinking and speaking in such ways. Ask Him in His mercy to forgive you on the basis of the life and death that Jesus endured as your substitute. Trust God's promise that even ***though your sins are as scarlet, they shall white as snow, though they are red like crimson they shall be as wool.*** Do you see the cleansing the Prophet is referring to? You are washed. You are purified by the grace of God. Your sins are removed so that you are acceptable to your God. Trust that with this forgiveness you stand pure and righteous in the sight of God.

This is why Jesus came. He came to be your substitute living in your place under the law and fulfilling its requirements for you. He came to take your place under the judgment of God and suffer hell for you so that your guilt is paid and you stand acquitted before God.

You have received this purification by faith in Jesus and this has also given you a new heart. Now you don't resist God. You want to serve your Savior with renewed zeal. You want to love as you have been loved. You are forgiving as you have been forgiven. You want to give as you have received. You see those sitting next to you or at your table at home as the people with whom you want to interact in expressing your love for Jesus and for them.

Who will be able to stand in the last Day? We will! We have been refined – purified by the blood of Jesus. We keep our eyes fixed on Jesus as He keeps coming to us in the Word, as

He is given to us in His holy Sacraments, and as He is kept in the chambers of our hearts by the on-going miraculous work of the Holy Spirit.

The devil may dig potholes in our path and he may try to trip us up by his tricks of deception but the poet has whispered these words to us from our Savior ...

When through fiery trials thy pathway shall lie,

My grace, all sufficient, shall be thy supply.

The flames shall not hurt thee, I only design

Thy dross to consume and thy gold to refine. Amen. (TLH 427:5)