

The Preparation: Repentance and Readiness | Malachi 3:1-4 and Luke 1:17

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[0 : 00] Welcome to Ontario Community Church, where we're dedicated to encouraging, equipping, and engaging lives for Christ. Located in Ontario, Oregon, Pastor Patrick Daly preaches insightful sermons from the Word of God, offering practical applications for modern living.

We're delighted to share this sermon with you. All right. Well, good morning, everyone. It's good to see all of you. It's good to be with you this morning.

Today, as we're heading back to our seats, we are continuing our sermon series on Journey to the Major, Prophets, Promises, and the Prince of Peace.

This is going to be our second sermon as we are preparing the way for the season of Advent. It's just coming up only in a couple more weeks here. You know, Thanksgiving is happening so quickly.

This next week. It's a great way for us to have a sense of gratitude. It's a time for us to be thankful for the life that God has given to us.

[1 : 09] It's a time for us to have good food together. How many of you guys like cranberry sauce? Or how many of you guys like a good stuffing? Mashed potatoes and gravy or a good turkey?

I mean, there's all sorts of green beans, casserole, all sorts of things that we get to have together at this Thanksgiving. And it's also a way for us to not only enjoy this food together, but to enjoy time with family and with friends, to take time to appreciate what God has given to us.

It's a way for us to get ready for that season of Advent. And I always get excited for this time of year as it's going to be a real winter for my children, for the family and I.

I got to tell you, for being in Hawaii for the past two years, we left in the summer and then there was two years in Hawaii. So that's two and a half years of being on summer vacation, kind of forgetting what winter is like.

And you know, I got to admit to you, when I came here, I didn't have a jacket. So what did I do? I went to the thrift store and I found a real nice jacket, you know, a good 20 bucks here, something really nice, to keep me warm, because I'm sorry, a thin sweater that you wear in the Hawaiian beaches when it's cold, it's just not going to cut it.

[2 : 33] So I had to find something more suitable for this area here. And you know what though? I kind of miss winter, I miss fall, I miss the cold temperatures. And Erin, my son, has been one of the only kids who's really experienced a cold winter before.

So it'll be very interesting seeing the twin boys and the twin girls, how they experience that cold weather. I'm excited when they experience snow. I'm just waiting for that moment, when they're going to see it for the first time, and it's just going to be really great.

But it's definitely been a season where now we're getting onto a more regulated four season schedule as it were. And so anyways, with the title for this Sunday sermon, where it's going to be titled, The Preparation, Repentance and Readiness.

And for our two main passages in scripture, we're going to be going over what the prophet Malachi has to say. We're also going to be going over the Gospel of Luke.

So let's make sure we all have our notes. Do we all have a copy of our notes, right? We have something to write with, and I know there's only two lines for notes, but make sure you have your notes ready and your Bible's ready as we are going to prepare our minds and our hearts to open the Word of God, to read what scripture has to say and what does that mean to us today?

[3 : 59] It's important for us to open the Word of God together as a church. And we ask that God is with us, that God moves in our life as we prepare for the coming of Jesus Christ.

And I want us to think about this question. How can we prepare our hearts for Christ's love and presence in our lives?

Before we go any further, what I'd like to do, I'd like for us to open in a word of prayer. Will you pray with me? Let's bow our heads and pray together. And Father, as we are beginning our time here this Sunday for the message, we ask that you're with us.

We ask that you help prepare our minds and our hearts to hear from your Word, to read from the Word, to learn from the Word, to apply the Word of God. We ask that you are with us, that our minds and hearts are being prepared for your Son, Jesus, the Christ, not just in the spirit of Christmas, but to prepare us to receive the gift of salvation and to grow in faith.

Prepare our hearts and our minds to believe in you, to grow in faith. May we appreciate the life that you have given to us. May we have that sense of gratitude.

[5 : 16] We pray that as together as a community, that we can come closer to living and loving like you have. For Father, you have shown us this unconditional love, love that is beyond our understanding.

We know God that we are imperfect. Oh, we are imperfect and we are a needy people. And we are lost without you. But with you, as we are going to learn today, you refine us.

You cleanse us. You make us whole in you. We pray for healing. We pray for understanding. We pray for transformation in our lives, in our family's lives, and in the community as well.

We pray that it is you that leads and guide us this morning. It is in Jesus' holy name that we pray together. And we all say, amen. It is in this time, in this season, you know, we think of the word preparation.

The word preparation may come to your mind. Many of us are going to prepare a meal together for Thanksgiving, right? We're going to prepare for a feast as it were.

[6 : 23] The Thanksgiving meal. It's not something that you can do quickly, though. Is it something you can just, you know, I'm going to put the entire Thanksgiving feast into the microwave. Oh, no, not really. I know you can do that for leftovers.

I know that's a little bit different. But when you're preparing the Thanksgiving meal, it's something that takes time. It takes effort. It takes energy. It takes a lot of preparation in order to have this meal.

You have so many different types of foods. You have different preparation and things that have to happen in order for the Thanksgiving meal to take place and for it to take place smoothly.

As a child, I remember many Thanksgiving where I had lots of family come over and they were all in the kitchen. And they were all just, it seemed like, what is going on? They're going back and forth. They're going through the drawers.

They're looking for different cooking items. And you're like, what are you doing? But as a child, you don't really know at first, but you'll learn. Oh, you know, Auntie is preparing this.

[7 : 26] My mom is preparing this. My uncle or my cousins are preparing ambrosia or whatever it is. So many different pieces that are coming together to make this meal possible.

And it's a great time for family to come together, for friends to come together, and just enjoy a meal together. And of course, it also makes me think that there are many of us who don't have a family.

Maybe we don't have family or maybe we are alone. It's still an opportunity for us to have that sense of gratitude for what God has given to us. And I reminded about how Scripture says that every good gift comes from the Lord.

To exhibit gratitude. How can we exhibit gratitude for the life that God has given to us? How can we prepare for the coming of Jesus Christ? It is in gratitude, it is one way that we can prepare our minds and our hearts for Christ.

And I love this season. I love how the community comes together and offers food for those who are in need. What a wonderful way for a community to help those who are hungry in a time of thanksgiving.

[8 : 43] You know, sometimes you see turkeys or food that's being delivered to those who are in need. So they can partake in a thanksgiving meal.

It's just a wonderful thing that happens. And I think of how we are exhibiting that same kind of love that Christ has for us. As we are in this fall season, there is so much preparation that has to happen also for winter.

I know we're in fall, it don't seem like it's fall, but it is fall. And winter is coming and this is also a time for preparation for winter. And much like how we have to prepare for the Thanksgiving meal, it's a good opportunity for us to take moments and be thankful for every moment, for every gift, for every breath that comes from the Lord.

And ask yourself that question. How can we be thankful for what God has given to us? And I bring up this idea of preparing for the Thanksgiving meal as we're going to read in Malachi and Luke.

It's this idea of preparation, preparation of the coming of Jesus Christ. And what I want us to do, I want us to open our Bibles. We're going to turn to our first reading and I'm going to put that on the screen here, page 954.

[10 : 02] It's going to be Malachi chapter 3, verses 1 through 4. And as a quick reminder, it's right before Matthew.

Last book of the Old Testament, that's a great way to remember it. So Malachi chapter 3, verses 1 through 4.

As we turn our Bibles to this, I want you to think of this idea of refinement and cleansing. And think of what areas in your life need refinement or cleansing from the Lord.

Because we're going to read what Scripture has to say. Let's read together.

A refiner's fire. And then what does it say after that? Like fuller's soap. He will sit as a refiner and a purifier of silver.

[11 : 45] And he will purify the sons of Levi and refine them like gold and silver. And they will bring offerings in righteousness to the Lord. Then the offering of Judah and Jerusalem will be pleasing to the Lord as in the days of old and in former years.

So we start off with that first verse. Behold, I send my messenger. He will prepare the way before me. And the Lord who you seek will suddenly come to his temple, the messenger of the covenant in whom you delight.

He is coming, says the Lord of hosts. This verse is in reference to John the Baptist. When John the Baptist is saying, prepare the way of the Lord.

It's the first verse that's talking about that. For many of us, we remember that there are other verses that mention not just the coming of Jesus Christ, but we also think of John the Baptist.

It's interesting when we turn in Scripture and we find references to the coming of John the Baptist. That's very interesting that John the Baptist is going to come and prepare the way for Jesus Christ to come into the world.

[13 : 04] We remember that in last week, we were talking about Jesus to be born in Bethlehem, and that Christ is to be out of the stump, right? The chute, the stump of Jesse.

There is mentioning of the coming of John the Baptist, like I said. Malachi 3.1 is a great example, and of course, there's the famous verse in Isaiah, chapter 40, verses 3 through 5.

We're not going to go over that, but that can be found in your notes. We then go to verse 2. 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 fuller soap. This leads us to the coming of Jesus Christ. I want to put this image on the screen.

It's actually a very pretty good visual representation of the refiner's fire and the fuller soap. These are two words that are describing the coming of Jesus Christ.

[14 : 06] When we think of the idea of the refiner's fire, we can think of how in biblical times, making sure that metal was pure. You wanted to make sure that there were no impurities in the metal.

So you had to turn up the heat and make sure that any imperfection was gone, so that you could make whatever metal work that you were using. Back then, and even in some cases now, you had to separate things, the impurities as it were, with that which is pure.

The language that is used to describe the coming of Jesus Christ is the fulfillment of prophecy, the Messiah. It helps us to understand that Christ purifies us, doesn't He?

Especially when we think of our salvation, when we place our trust in Jesus Christ, when we believe in Him, we are refined in and through Him.

And there's that refining process that happens in our lives. And I want to put this image kind of as, you know, it's just art, right?

[15 : 12] I love technology now, how you can give it a prompt and it'll make something. Sometimes they're not very good and sometimes they're really good. And I think this is kind of a good representation of the heat, right?

How often do we have the heat turned on in our lives to purify us? And then I want us to go to the next image here and this is this idea of Fuller's soap.

When we think of Fuller's soap, this process had to do with having strong alkali. It was used to remove oil, dirt and other imperfections.

This had to do with cleaning wool or other types of linen in order to make it white so that you could use color to dye the linen.

This process was done to make it ready, make the linen, make the material ready. So this image here, you see someone who's really working.

[16 : 13] I mean, I tried to find some images of it and it's very difficult, but finding software that can make something like it is very good. If you can imagine the scrubbing as it were, the process to separate the oil and the dirt and the other imperfections to make the linen suitable is much like how Christ works in our life.

It reminds me of Isaiah chapter 1 verse 18 and you'll find that in your note under the Malachi 3-2. You'll see in your notes Christ, refiner's fire and Fuller's soap.

Isaiah chapter 1 verse 18 goes on to say, Come now, let us reason together, says the Lord. Though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be white as snow.

Though they are red like crimson, they shall become like wool. And this is a great kind of parallel, a connection as it were when we're thinking of our sins.

Because when we come to the Lord and we believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, when we say yes to receive the gift of salvation, our sins are washed away as though in this image to be washed away like Fuller's soap.

[17 : 32] It's such a great representation if you can imagine that big bowl, right? And getting the linen ready. And these two verses, well, it helps with our understanding that it is Christ who takes away the sins of the world and that our sin will be white as snow.

What a great image, what a great representation of the forgiveness of the grace that God has for us. What beautiful language we're seeing here that's found in Malachi.

And I want you to think of a time in your life or maybe someone you know that has experienced this cleansing. Maybe they've experienced this purification process.

Do you know someone that you have seen, you have heard, or maybe you yourself have experienced transformation? Because God is the God of transformation.

I think of my own life and I think of how I became, how I came to the Lord. If you knew the man I was before I knew the Lord compared to the man that I am now, you would think they're two different people.

[18 : 42] But I'm just one of many examples. My story is just another testimony to how God works in our lives. And think of your own testimony.

Think of people that you may know could be a friend or a family member. How has God worked in your life? Or how has God worked in someone else that you know?

It all goes to show that God works in and through our lives. Yes, he cleanses us of our sin, but he continues to purify us on going.

It's just a wonderful testimony and it's amazing and it's remarkable to know that our sins are washed away. It's remarkable to see that once you are saved, once you believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, God will continue to work in your life.

Just imagine the people who you interact with. Sometimes when we're in a hurry, sometimes when we don't even realize it, we meet someone.

[19 : 50] We interact with them. They might see the love of Christ through you. Do you realize how many people you interact with on a weekly basis? It's quite a lot.

Even if you just go to the store, right? How you interact with people, exhibiting the love of Christ. God can work through you even when you're in the everyday interactions.

So I want you to think about that. Let's move to verse three. He will sit as a refiner and a purifier of silver. He will purify the sons of Levi and refine them like gold and silver.

And they will bring offerings in righteousness to the Lord. And this is where we're going into verse three and verse four of Malachi. Verse three is making mention of how Jesus is Lord.

That he is sitting in a position of authority. That Jesus Christ is king and he sits as the refiner and the purifier. Some scholars have suggested that this is where the verse is saying that Christ is the judge.

[20 : 59] And is the providing the way of salvation, which would make sense. The purifier, right? The one that washes away our sin. It's very, it's remarkable.

Jesus is in that position of authority and much how metal gets purified. He purifies the sons of Levi. Well, this reference has to do with the Levites that they needed to be refined according to this verse.

They needed this to happen so that they could properly serve God and his people. And this is much like how the Lord will purify us in our lives. That the word of God will work in and through us, that God will work in and through us so that we can grow in maturity.

Are you the same person that you were when you first came to the Lord? Or have you seen transformation in your life? What better way for transformation to happen than by the word of God?

And in certain moments even, God will work through you. The final part makes mention of bringing offerings in righteousness to the Lord.

[22 : 09] That God will work in their lives to have moral and spiritual purity. Much like how Scripture says, create in me a clean heart, oh God, and renew a right spirit within me.

We need to have a clean heart, a renewed mind and a renewed spirit as it were. Transformation of the law, of the mind. We should pray for God to transform us and to work in and through us as we go about our every day.

But first and foremost, we must come to believe in Jesus Christ. And we, when we believe in Jesus Christ, we're on this spiritual journey, this walk with the Lord and the footsteps of Christ.

And how God will work in us to make us more like Him. It's just like that famous song, trust and obey. How easy is it for us to trust in God? It's very easy.

What about the obey part though? I know even for me, it can be difficult, right? God, you really want me to talk to that person? You want me to say this? Happens to us all the time, right? But trust and obey.

[23 : 19] And this leads us to verse four. It's, then the offering of Judah and Jerusalem will be pleasing to the Lord as in the days of old and in your former years. And this comes to our last verse where the offering is made, it's made pleasing to the Lord.

And it's a reminder. And it's a reminder back then as it is now, that we should worship God with a pure heart. We should worship God with all of our heart.

And in having a relationship with Christ, it means that we must focus on that relationship, heart knowledge, rather than head knowledge. When you think of any relationship that we have, we certainly need to focus on matters of the heart, right?

Not necessarily the head knowledge. And I know a lot of us like to use our minds for logic and reason, but in matters of relationship, how we love in any relationship.

It's the difference between knowing of someone and actually knowing someone. Many of us, we may know of Jesus, but do we know Jesus?

[24 : 31] It's just like I can say, hey, I know of Tom Cruise, many of us know of Tom Cruise, or a famous actor, right? We read the paper about famous politicians or CEOs or actors and actresses, but do you actually know them though?

See how you think about that? It's very similar to the difference between, I know of this Jesus guy, he seems like a cool guy, he seems like a great teacher or whatever, but to know the Lord and to have a relationship with him is more focused on matters of the heart rather than the things having that head knowledge of him.

It's a much deeper and much more intimate relationship with him. And of course, with Jesus Christ coming into the world, Jesus would change the way things were done from the Levitical priesthood system, or the old covenant to the new covenant, where Christ died for our sins once and for all.

Do you realize that with Christ dying, being buried and rising on the third day, that was a change from the Levitical system where you had to atone for your sins every year.

It was once, one and done, just like how Christ said, it is finished. No longer following the Levitical system, the old way of doing things, but providing a new way, a better way, God's way.

[26 : 01] And I don't know about you, I would much rather trust in God's way than some old way of doing things. So that's just a great reminder for us and all we need to do in order to be saved is to believe in Jesus Christ.

And as we have read these passages in Malachi, there is preparation not just for John the Baptist, but also for Jesus Christ, right? In verse one, the coming of John the Baptist, but verse two, verse two through four, the coming of Jesus Christ as the refiner's fire and fuller's soap.

And this leads us to our final scripture for today, which is found in the Gospel of Luke. Let's turn together. It's going to be Luke chapter one, verse 17. And in this verse, we see that, look, there's prophecy about John the Baptist who's going to be preparing the way.

It's fulfilled in the Gospel of Luke. John the Baptist is not the refiner. He's not the cleanser, but he is the one who is in the wilderness. Prepare the way of the Lord. Isaiah chapter 40, verse three.

So we're turning to Luke chapter one, verse 17. That's going to be found in page 1016.

[27 : 31] Verse 17. And he will go before him in the spirit and power of Elijah to turn the hearts of the fathers to their children and the disobedient to the wisdom of the just, to make what?

To make ready for the Lord a people what? Prepared, right? Prepare the way of the Lord. And as we read this, we can see that John the Baptist will go before Jesus Christ, right?

He's making preparations as it were for the coming of the Messiah. It's in the same spirit and the same power as the same power of Elijah.

And it means that the same authority that Elijah had, John the Baptist will have that authority. John the Baptist is a critical person in scripture, and I'm sure you can imagine the revival that was happening in that time.

And some of us know that the prophet Elijah was very important, a well-known prophet. His commitment was to God and calling Israel to have authentic worship.

[28 : 45] So this reference, it speaks of revival and it also speaks of preparation for the coming of Jesus Christ. To turn the hearts of the fathers to the children, it speaks of restoration within the family unit.

And that can be even extended to the community. And this is wonderful inspiration. This is a wonderful call for us to pray for restoration in the family unit, restoration within the community as well.

We should always pray for those who have fallen away or those who do not know the Lord. For those of you who have been to the Bible study, we talked about the fool and the simple one.

Well, it's our prayer that those who have rejected God, that their hearts will be softened to come to know the Lord. And the simple ones, the naive ones who don't know the Lord, we pray that they come to have saving knowledge of the Lord.

We pray for those to make their life right with God. And I speak of repentance. I speak of reconciliation coming to know the Lord. When we think of our community, when we think of the city of Ontario and the surrounding communities, we should pray for revival.

[30 : 04] We should pray that our community and our leaders can seek God and have wisdom from God. John was preparing for the arrival of Jesus. His ministry was one of preparing people to acknowledge and to receive Jesus Christ.

We can think of John's ministry much like today, that we should prepare and receive Jesus Christ in our lives by believing in him. Let us think as we're going to have Thanksgiving coming up so soon.

The things that we are grateful for and ask yourself the question, how will you prepare for Jesus Christ? How will you be grateful for the life that you have been given? How can you exhibit thankfulness and gratitude?

Let us think of how we can prepare not just for the meal, but for the season. Prepare to be ready for Jesus Christ in our lives. And maybe this is a call for you to believe in Jesus Christ. Maybe this is a call for you to seek healing and restoration.

Maybe your heart needs to turn to your spouse or your children as we were reading. Maybe this is a call for you to seek wisdom from God and to turn to God and allow for God to cleanse, to work, to refine your life.

[31 : 31] It all begins by believing in him. And maybe this is a call for you to have that sense of readiness. Call for you to repent even. Focus first on believing in Christ and then allow for God to work in and through you.

We do this by asking the Lord into our lives and to continue to work in our lives. We can also allow for God to work in our lives by praying, opening the word, and exhibiting love to others.

And as we close our sermon for today, I want you to ask yourself this question. How can we prepare our hearts for Christ's love and presence in our life? That was the opening question.

And that is also the closing question. And I want you to think about that today. I want you to think of preparation. How can we prepare for Jesus Christ coming in our life?

Let's pray together. Will you pray with me? And Father, we thank you for bringing us here today. We learned about preparation, about how you love us so much and that you sent your son as the atoning sacrifice, the sacrificial lamb, the one who forgives us for our sins.

[32 : 59] We pray for those who do not know you, that they may come to have a relationship with you. We pray for those who need cleansing and refining. We ask that you are with them as they are growing in their faith.

You are always there with us, Lord. You never leave us. You never abandon us. We pray for this season of thanksgiving right before the season of Advent.

As we approach thanksgiving, may we be grateful and prepare our lives as we are focusing on your son, Jesus the Christ.

We ask that you are with us as we go from this place to love you and to live our lives like you. It is in Jesus' holy name that we pray. We all say together, Amen.

Thank you for tuning in to the Ontario Community Church sermon podcast. For more about our church and how you can get involved or support our mission, please visit ontariocommunitychurch.org.

[34 : 09] May God's blessings be with you.