

## ***“The Lord Comes – Who Can Endure?”***

“For I the Lord do not change” – and yet, man is always trying to change the Lord. In the early years the Gnostics tried to change the Lord into a God who is only favorable to those with a “secret knowledge” of the Lord. In the Middle Ages, He was depicted as a stern father, a strict Judge who only knows how to pour out His wrath.

Mystics throughout the ages have tried to turn Him into a Lord who unites with man, makes them to be divine, or works with man – apart from His Word. And more recently He’s become the most liberal of liberals – reduced simply to “God is love” – a God who condones whatever man desires to be or to do.

Whether we are talking about the days of Malachi the prophet – the days of Tiberius Caesar, Pontius Pilate – the days of Jerome, Martin Luther, C.F.W. Walther – or this very day --- the truth remains, “For I the Lord do not change.”

So, who is this Lord who does not change? Today, He reveals Himself to you – by His Word – first of all, as an Advent Lord – as the Lord who comes to you. He sends messengers to prepare the way for His coming to you – messengers like the Prophet Malachi, John the Baptist, and even a Pastor Porath.

Behold, the Lord comes to you – but the question is – “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’s soap.” What does this mean? Luther says that – “Christ is not merely the Purifier but also the Purifying Agent. He is not only the Blacksmith but also the Fire; not only the Cleaner but also the Soap.” (AE 18:410)

The Lord comes to purify sinners from their sin – like gold and silver refined in the fire to remove all impurities. Jesus, the Lord, comes to remove your sin – so that you are not consumed by God’s wrath at sin.

The Scriptures speak of the Lord as our refuge – our mighty fortress – our hiding place where we are safe from the enemy. But we sometimes misunderstand or misuse what He is saying.

He is not like a bunker that we can hunker down in – with all our sin – until His wrath passes by. He is not like the survival shelter that those who fight wildfires deploy when trapped – which rescues them until the fire passes by.

The Lord has not sent His Son as a refuge to hide out in – with your sin intact – until the danger is past. No, He comes to refine, to purify, to remove your sin – so that the fire of God's wrath has nothing to burn – so that it will not destroy you eternally.

Man's disobedience has stirred up the wrath of God – but He is not simply a strict Judge who condemns the sinner to eternal damnation – He is the Lord who comes to save His beloved children.

This is why God's own Son, Jesus Christ, comes in the flesh – to take the world's sin (including all of yours) as His own – so that HE might endure all of God's wrath at sin. God's wrath is poured out on Jesus in His suffering and death – and with His holy precious blood, and with His innocent suffering and death – "It is finished." All sin is blotted out by His blood – and all of God's wrath is turned away.

This is the Lord who does not change – who says to you today – "I will draw near to you for judgment." His judgment is swift against "the sorcerers, against the adulterers, against those who swear falsely, against those who oppress the hired worker in his wages, the widow and the fatherless, against those who thrust aside the sojourner, and do not fear me ..."

In other words, the Lord will pour out His wrath on those who hold on to their sins – who will not let Jesus be the atoning sacrifice for their sin – who stubbornly insist on taking care of their own sin – who deny the Lord and His wrath – who simply want to rebel against the Lord and go on living their disobedient lives.

Dearly beloved, either Jesus dies for your sin so that you may be purified – or you will die for your own sin. Either Jesus rescues you from God's wrath – or you will endure the full load of God's anger and punishment for your sin – and no one can endure that.

“For I the Lord do not change” – and that is why He has sent me to call you to change. Repent is His sermon to you. Do not hold on to your sin. Do not deny it. Do not excuse it. Confess it before your Father. Believe that you justly deserve His temporal and eternal punishment. Repent of your sin – trusting that the blood of Jesus purifies you from all sin.

The Lord calls you to repent this day – not put it off to a later date. “Even now the axe is laid to the root of the trees. Every tree therefore that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire.”

Don’t hold on to your sin. When you come to receive Christ’s Body and Blood – don’t withhold any sin from His forgiveness – because then the Lord’s wrath is poured out on you. Don’t come to the Lord’s Table if you plan to continue to lie, to oppress others, to continue in your adultery – for that will not go well with you.

Rather, fear His wrath and turn from your rebellious ways. Come to receive Advent Jesus and His refining forgiveness – who purifies you from all unrighteousness – who comes to have mercy on you – who saves the sinner – who announces His judgment to repentant ones today, saying, “your sin is forgiven.”

The repentant children of God are always asking the Lord – “What shall we do?” His answer is always – “bear fruits in keeping with repentance.” Bear good fruit – love your neighbor as I have instructed you in my commandments – share with those in need – don’t steal what I have given to others – don’t extort, threaten, or falsely accuse.

Like your fathers, you will continue to fall short of my will – you will sacrifice others for your own benefit – you will fear, love and trust others above me. But I do not change, says the Lord.

I call you this day to deny yourself, confess your sin – and be washed in the blood of Jesus, your Savior. For His sake, I forgive you all your sin. By faith in Him, you are not condemned. “For I the Lord do not change.” Amen.

The peace of God which passes all understanding, guards your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.