

Grace, mercy, and peace be to you from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ! Amen! Dear brothers and sisters in Christ:

***“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”*** (Malachi 3:2).

Judgement is coming and it is coming quickly. And this judgement always takes its victims by surprise.

Is Jesus *really* coming? For many of us, maybe even you, we act as if He isn’t coming. We get lost in the daily grind of life. Or we may think that God has forsaken us.

For the postexilic Jews, it’s been some 90 years since their return from Babylon to Jerusalem. The re-built Temple is now 65 years old. But Jerusalem is not a very impressive place. It looks very much God forsaken to them.

Before the Babylonian exile, Judah was great and powerful. It had mighty kings and an awesome Temple. The glory of the Lord shined. Yahweh’s reign could be seen and touched.

But on this side of the Babylonian exile, God has appeared to have slipped away. Now, Persia appears to be the ruler of their world. If the Jews want anything done, they have to ask permission from the Persian ruler. If they wanted supplies, they had to rely on the good graces of the Persians. They had to practice religion under Persian government. They were beholden to the Persians!

The mighty deeds of God were of yesteryear. The rebuilt Temple was a mere shadow of what it once was. The walls of Jerusalem were still a wreck.

The Jews were troubled. Upon their arrival back to Jerusalem, they had hoped and expected, the glorious and prosperous reign of the Davidic line of kings, but all they see is a wicked Persia prospering.

To many Jews, they began to believe that their God had abandoned them, or He refused to care about them.

Jesus says in Matthew 24: ***“For as the lightning comes from the east and shines as far as the west, so will be the coming of the Son of Man”*** (Matthew 24:27).

There is something true about lightning. It always takes us by surprise.

Jesus’ coming at the first Christmas took everyone by surprise. Mary, Joseph, Herod, the shepherds, friends and enemies were all surprised when He came. God had promised His Son’s coming from the dawn of the world. Many people had carried that thought and hope with them through all those long years, but what they hoped for, they really did not expect. It caught them by surprise. Will it catch you by surprise at His coming on the Last Day?

St. Paul writes in 1 Thessalonians 5: ***“For you yourselves are fully aware that the day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night. While people are saying, ‘There is peace and security,’ then sudden destruction will come upon them as labor pains come upon a pregnant woman, and they will not escape”*** (1 Thessalonians 5:2-3).

Where is God? Is He coming? For the Ten Virgins in Matthew 25, five of them appeared to give up on the Bridegroom coming, so they refused to refill their oil lamps through Christ’s Means of Grace and went to sleep. But then by surprise, at midnight, there was a cry: ***“Here is the Bridegroom! Come out to meet Him!”*** (Matthew 25:6). The foolish five were refused entry to the marriage feast. To them, the Bridegroom says: ***“Truly, I say to you, I do not know you.’ Watch therefore, for you know neither the day nor the hour”*** (Matthew 25:12).

We all desire the Second Coming of Christ, but that day will also surprise us, even though we hope for it and profess to long for that day.

The day of judgement is coming all right, but how often do we act like that day is far off? Do you act like Jesus is coming?

***“Just as in the days of Noah, so will it be in the days of the Son of Man,”*** Jesus says. ***“They were eating and drinking and marrying and being given in marriage, until the day when Noah entered the ark, and the flood came and destroyed them all”*** (Luke 17:26-27).

When we least expect it, Jesus will come.

***“Who can endure the day of His coming, and who can stand when He appears?”***  
(Malachi 3:2a)

If we truly examine ourselves, no one can endure; no one can stand. ***“For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God”*** (Romans 3:23). This is you and me. We are all poor, miserable sinners. We sometimes act as if sin has no consequences, but sin has eternal consequences, because God cannot partake in sin. Since none of us are as pure as the wind driven snow, what do we do? What can we do? Sadly nothing.

So, God will do everything! ***“Behold, I send my messenger, and he will prepare the way before Me”*** (Malachi 3:1).

God sends John the Baptist to prepare the way for His Son by ***“proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins”*** (Mark 1:4). We are all called to confess our sins as we recognize our inability to stand before God because of our sin. And where there is confession, there is forgiveness.

After that preparation, God sends the Messenger of the covenant in whom you delight, our Lord Jesus Christ, who brought the new covenant through His blood.

You and I cannot be 99 percent clean. We must be 100 percent clean. We must be pure. To be clean and pure, Jesus enters in.

Through His suffering and shed blood on the cross, Jesus is ***“like a refiner’s fire and like a fuller’s soap”*** (Malachi 3:2b). Upon that cross, as He suffered and died for you and your sins, Jesus is making you and I clean and pure. Jesus is not only the Purifier but also the Purifying agent. He is not only the Blacksmith but also the Fire. He is not only the Cleaner but also the Soap.

Jesus refines us through His heat. He cleans us like a launderer by rubbing, kneading, and beating to make us soft, clean, and pliable.

God the Father sent His only begotten Son Jesus Christ because He desires a pure product. On our own and by our own merits, we could never be made holy, but it is only God who has the power to make us holy. Our purity is only made possible through the blood of Jesus – the very Lamb of God, who takes away the sins of the world.

Christ scrubbed us clean through His death and resurrection. Today, He comes to keep us clean through the preaching of His Word and in His giving of forgiveness through His Sacraments.

As forgiven sinners, by grace through faith in Christ alone, we have nothing to fear, because through Christ's work, we are seen as holy and blameless before God the Father.

So, "***Who can endure the day of His coming, and who can stand when He appears?***" (Malachi 3:2a). We can! God's people can! We endure as we receive through faith the forgiveness of sins won for us at the cross and offered to us freely in the Means of Grace. God is faithful and Christ will return. But now His return is not fearful for us, since Christ has atoned for all of your sins. Amen. Come, Lord Jesus!

*The peace of God, which surpasses all understanding,  
keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus, our Lord. Amen.*

**+ SOLI DEO GLORIA +**