

# BUCYRUS UNITED METHODIST CHURCH December 9, 2018

## “REFINED TO STAND”

Pastor Mike Corwin

TEXT: LUKE 3:1-6

GOD’S WORD: MALACHI 3:1-4

### I – HOLIDAY PREPARATIONS:

Are you ready? Christmas is coming...are you ready? Are all of your decorations up? Are all the gifts bought and wrapped? Have you made all the arrangements for the feasts and parties that will take place at your house over the days ahead? Invitations sent, food bought, recipes laid out? And is your house cleaned and shiny? Does it all look like something out of a Hallmark story? Everything has to be PERFECT!

You can probably feel your stress level rising just because we’re talking about it! So, why do we do it? Why do we put ourselves through it year after year? The answer is easy...because we worry about what others will think of us. We worry their gifts won’t be just right, the turkey will be undercooked, the string of lights will be burned out, and the house will show the wear and tear of the other 364 days we live in it.

Put simply we worry what others think about us. To use a verse from the Bible we need to “Prepare ye the way of the relatives.”

### II – MALACHI:

Here we are, getting ready to celebrate one of the greatest milestones of our faith and we’re more worried about what the in-laws may think than we are about what God thinks. Our homes may be clean, but are our hearts? Our tree lights and tinsel may sparkle but does our soul? We’ll make time for the family festivities but will we make time for the baby born in a manger? I would suggest we may need a little adjustment in our list of Holiday priorities and our relationship to the Babe of Bethlehem.

The prophet Malachi saw the same problem with the people of his day as well. The world was covered in sin. Not only the secular world but the religious people as well. The people of Israel had a covenant with God. They had rules to help them live up to that covenant. But they had failed miserably. They had ended up being exiled because God couldn’t put

up with their disobedience and rebellion any longer. As they get their chance to move back to their lands Malachi gives them God's word.

The people had been listening to the prophecies since the beginning of their history with God. The stories that told them a Messiah would one day come and bring relief from their sinfulness. But first a messenger would come to clear the way for this Messiah. Then the Lord will come. This verse is quoted by the Gospels as referring to John the Baptist. The son of Elizabeth and Zechariah. The baby we are told leapt in the womb when Mary visited with Jesus growing in hers.

Then it appears that Malachi jumps from the first coming of Jesus to the second coming of Jesus. From the First Advent awaiting the birth to the Second Advent awaiting his return. In the first Advent we get all kinds of warm and fuzzy feelings about this little innocent baby laying in a manger cooing as shepherds visit and angels sing. We get a whole different picture of the second coming. What started in Bethlehem is still continuing today and pointing to an eternal event. And the feelings could be warm when that happens but not so fuzzy!

He's coming back to judge us. The prophet asks who can endure that day. Who can stand up in his presence? He comes to remove the impurities of the world like fire removes them from metal or soap from clothes.

Even the church needs purified. Malachi refers to how the priests of his day had become corrupt and disrespectful. They were doing things like sacrificing blemished animals instead of those pure as God demanded. About how the people had stopped tithing so the Holy Temple could be taken care of and function as God intended it to be. When Jesus returns it will be to make a clean and sanctified church.

### **III – WHO CAN STAND:**

So as I look at this and other prophecies I have to wonder...WHO CAN STAND WHEN JESUS RETURNS?

I look at the state of Christ's Church and I see things that shouldn't be going on. I see ministers caught in adultery. I see priests as pedophiles. I see churches who are openly biased and prejudiced and exclude people from their midst. I see churches who have forgotten the "least of these" that Jesus commanded us to watch over and take care of. I see churches and their leadership that are more interested in their bank accounts than they are the souls of people. I see churches that would rather keep quiet about certain

topics or the teachings of Jesus because it might offend somebody. I don't see the clean and sanctified church Jesus wants upon his return.

And then I look at the people. The drug overdose deaths in this country climbed again last year to over 70,000. The suicide rate grew. When's the last time you turned on the TV without hearing about the latest shooting in Columbus. Teen pregnancies are increasing again, as is the rate of youth who smoke or vape. We don't have enough foster care to keep up with the abandoned or endangered youth. Sex trafficking is off the charts, as is rape and abuse/violence. Theft, robbery, adultery, and all the other big 10 are broken daily. I chuckled this last week when I saw we are sending people to jail in Washington for lying...SEEMS TO ME WE'LL HAVE TO SEND THE ENTIRE GOVERNMENT!

So as I look at all this, besides crying in my spirit, I have to wonder what Jesus will find when he returns to earth. I wonder who will be able to stand in his presence.

#### IV – TEXT:

The answer to that question, and to your life, is found in this morning's text:

#### Luke 3:1-6 (CEB)

<sup>1</sup> In the fifteenth year of the rule of the emperor Tiberius—when Pontius Pilate was governor over Judea and Herod was ruler over Galilee, his brother Philip was ruler over Ituraea and Trachonitis, and Lysanias was ruler over Abilene, <sup>2</sup> during the high priesthood of Annas and Caiaphas—God's word came to John son of Zechariah in the wilderness. <sup>3</sup> John went throughout the region of the Jordan River, calling for people to be baptized to show that they were changing their hearts and lives and wanted God to forgive their sins. <sup>4</sup> This is just as it was written in the scroll of the words of Isaiah the prophet,

*A voice crying out in the wilderness:*

*“Prepare the way for the Lord;  
make his paths straight.*

<sup>5</sup> *Every valley will be filled,  
and every mountain and hill will be leveled.*

*The crooked will be made straight  
and the rough places made smooth.*

<sup>6</sup> *All humanity will see God's salvation.”*

Luke starts out by dating the event he is telling us about in the usual fashion of using the secular world to establish the time it took place. He then goes from the secular to the religious as he names the High Priest. He then goes from there to the main point of his passage. The fulfillment of the prophecy of Malachi. He names the messenger of God. The one who came to prepare the way of the Lord, the Messiah.

Luke's Gospel has a universal concern – that all would be saved. Salvation! John was the forerunner of the one who was coming to bring that Salvation. The way of the Lord must be prepared. He quotes Isaiah to let us know how important this visitor to earth will be. He will be a royal visitor and so special that even the seemingly immovable must be removed. He's not talking about dirt and stones being moved around by an excavating company...he's talking about sin. About the sorrow over that sin and the moral changes that must be made by humanity. All of humanity, not just Jews but Gentiles also.

But it's the meat of the passage I see that answers my question about who can stand. It will be those who are refined. Not by fire but by repentance and acceptance of Jesus as their Lord and Savior. John was calling the people to repent of their sins, to change their hearts and turn back to God. To live according to the ways God wanted them to and conduct their lives in accordance with his will and commandments.

The fire to refine them was coming...Jesus...but they must repent and turn towards him and have their lives refined by his teachings to be able to stand in his presence and claim their Salvation. John's baptism was just an outward sign of this change.

## **V – REFINED TO STAND:**

The Good News is that God loves you so much he sent his Son to live, die, and be resurrected to bring you forgiveness of your sins and eternal life. He walked through the fire of death so you don't have to.

Are you refined? Have you stood in the Light of the Savior and accepted his life as that sacrifice? Have you dedicated your life to being his disciple and following his teachings? Have you given up the things that take you away from God?

You need to examine your life and make the changes necessary in this life so you don't have to go through the fire in the next.

You need to kneel at the cross so you can stand in heaven!

AMEN