**Malachi 3:1-3 Look! I am sending my messenger! He will prepare the way before me. Then suddenly the Lord, whom you are seeking, will come to his temple! The Messenger of the Covenant, in whom you delight, will surely come, says the Lord of Armies. 2But who can endure the day when he comes? Who will remain standing when he appears? For he will be like a refiner’s fire, like launderers bleach! 3He will be seated like a refiner and a purifier of silver. He will purify the sons of Levi and refine them like gold and like silver. They will belong to the Lord and bring him an offering in righteousness. 4Judah and Jerusalem’s offerings will be pleasing to the Lord as they were in the days of old, in years long ago.**

Do you have a go to cleaner? I mean when something is really dirty and you know it’s going to take a lot to get that out. You want it to be completely clean. It’s dirty now but now you know this with make it clean. Would you ever consider using hot water and bleach? How about using fire? Those are both really good cleaners. If you want all the undesirable filth to be gone, both will do the job.

The prophet Malachi lived about 400 years before Christ was born and was amongst the last of the Old Testament prophets. It had now been a century since the exiled Jewish people had come back to their place in Judah and Jerusalem. In a sense God was starting over with his chosen people. No longer would they be called the nation of Israel. That nation was gone. It had been drastic but God had purged or purified from them those who refused to worship him and was now going to use this new group to fulfill his promise of a Savior. He had refined them.

Things started out well as they returned. They quickly rebuilt the city of Jerusalem and the Lord’s temple. Unfortunately this dedication didn’t last long as they decided it was more important to build beautiful homes for themselves than to finish building and participating in worship. They ignored God’s warnings to carefully select who you would marry and to not even consider marrying a heathen because they don’t share your faith. They discontinued their worship and soiled marriage. They cheated, lied, and embezzled. Even their priests were guilty of many of these things—openly.

With all of that you would expect God to say, “Enough!” This story of the Jews is often our story, isn’t it? We too know our God is all-powerful and in control. We know he is concerned about our well-being. We know he has cleansed us. Yet when we think about living life, we bend and break his rules thinking we have a better way of life. When we see something going not the way we plan, and sometimes even when it does, we abandon God. We forget about those times when we did go out on our own only to mess things up. We also seem to conveniently forget that it was God who bailed us out of the mess we have gotten into.

Point to consider as an individual or with a small group:

* 1. Recall a mess that you got into during your life. 2. Trace the steps it took for you to get there. 3. Identify the places you chose to turn away from God rather than live according to his design.

How do you think God should deal with people who continue to second-guess him? Who say that he is their God but their lives are full of filthy sins against him? They know what they are doing goes against God. They still do it anyway. They get more open and bold about their sins. After hearing about all of the sins the Jews were committing you would expect God to tell Malachi that he was going to start over again. Another punishment for their disobedience was coming. Instead, God says he was going to send a messenger to refine and purify them.

It was time to break out God’s chosen cleaner. Jesus came to purify. How did he do it? He pulled out his best cleaner—his pure blood. Blood that doesn’t contain any of its own sin and therefore absorbs all of our sinfulness like a big sponge. We can be confident that because of Jesus our sins are covered and removed. We can trust God won’t punish us for them because they are gone.

But in spite of the wonderful work Jesus has done many people are not planning on standing behind Christ’s blood when they appear before God’s judgment throne. They either think that their life has been good enough or they simply don’t know about Christ’s work and therefore plan on standing before God on the basis of what they have and have not done. But that’s foolish. It’s just like the little boy who doesn’t think he needs to wear a shocking cap while he’s playing outside in the -20 C weather. Without that hat it won’t take very long for the boys’ ears to become frostbitten, will it? In the same way if we try to stand before God on our own merits we won’t last very long before God throws us out of his loving presence for daring to reject his Son’s work of salvation. Praise God for purifying our hearts through Jesus. Honor him by putting your trust in him for the forgiveness of sins.

While Jesus’ work of purifying our hearts from sin is completed, he continues to refine our faith. He does this at times with trials. He sends tough times because he wants to teach us through experience that we can count on him for everything. He burns out what doesn’t work. Don’t be surprised if God takes away something you hold dear. When that happens look forward to seeing how God will continue to care for us just as he has in the past. It’s like we are gold or silver being refined by God.

In refining our hearts from sin, Jesus restored our usefulness as God’s servants. Think of this way. You wouldn’t melt down jewelry if you didn’t plan for it to be used to make something else that serves your purposes. In the same way, Jesus doesn’t refine us so that heaven, can be ours. He already gave that to us. He’s refining us so that we can serve God.

How exactly does God want us to serve him? Well, God doesn’t ask anything extraordinary from his people. He simply wants them to serve faithfully in the work that he has already given to them. For the priests this meant that they should take their duties seriously and look at it as a privilege, not a burden. For you it means to live as the person God has made you to be. If you are single, that means to live your life as if you are single. Not because you couldn’t get away with it but because through being single you know that God is refining you as one who solely trusts in him. If God has made you a student, apply yourself diligently to your studies. Don’t put homework off, or do it to get done as quickly as you can, instead do it to the best of your ability and when God blesses your work give him credit for your success.

Point to consider as an individual or with a small group:

* Pick one of the callings you have in life and list three ways God has needed to refine you to be able to complete that calling OR list three ways God refines you through that calling.

We need the filth of our sin to be removed. Sin didn’t just go away because God declared you not guilty as he has worked faith in you. We need God’s cleansing from our dirty defiance. The gracious work of our Lord Jesus Christ accomplishes that cleaning and refining. His sacrificial offering makes us as righteous sons of Levi, serving God with proper worship. He purifies us for doing good toward others. As a people prepared, our response is to **belong to the Lord and bring him an offering in righteousness.** God has redeemed us. Our acts have been cleaned up.

Next time you receive one of those cute Christmas cards that pictures Jesus as a little baby wrapped in swaddling clothes, remind yourself that we can picture our Lord that way because he came to clean up and refine our lives. If Jesus had not come to purify us from sin, we would remain filthy dirty. But Jesus has purified us and in doings so has made us useful again as God’s servants.

Point to consider as an individual or with a small group:

* Contrast Jesus’ actions of purifying to his actions of refining.