

As you do your Christmas shopping, looking for that perfect gift, there are many things to consider. Here are two: How well do you know the person you’re shopping for? And how do you present the gift? It’s fairly easy to find the right gift if you know a person’s interests and hobbies. And the way you present your present matters a lot too; If you leave the price tag on or you say, “Here’s something I made, but I didn’t quite get it finished,” that’s probably not going to have the desired effect.

There’s a lot of preparing going on this time of year in order to present things in just the right way. The question for you this morning is, are you preparing to present your heart to God? Is that even on your list?

In this morning’s Old Testament Lesson, we meet Malachi, a prophet whose name actually means “my messenger.” And Malachi’s message is that the Lord is going to send a Messenger to prepare the way for the Messiah. Did you get that? This is a prophetic reference to John the Baptist, whose ministry was all about preparation. But John the Baptist did not show up to say, “Prepare the Christmas Goose” or “Prepare to shop ‘til you drop.” John showed up to say “Prepare your heart for the Lord to come in. Make a straight path for Him to come into your life and renovate.” What do you think of that message? Is there a straight path for Jesus to get into your heart? Or is it more like an obstacle course? What could you maybe shove to the side to make way?

Malachi continues: “Then suddenly the Lord you are seeking will come to his temple; the messenger of the covenant, whom you desire, will come.” I want you to realize that about 450 years after Malachi spoke these words, they came true; and they came true in an unexpected way. The Lord came to his Temple as an eight-day-old baby, brought by Mary and Joseph. The Lord came to his temple as 12-year-old boy and taught the teachers about God’s Word. And throughout his thirty-three years the Lord Jesus would return to His temple to participate and teach and finally to warn and to cleanse.

Make no mistake, this is good news. The Lord you are seeking will come. Excellent! But, there is also an element of “be careful what you ask for” at work here. When the Lord shows up, things have to change. That’s where Malachi goes when he says “Who can endure the day of his coming? Who can stand when he appears?” When Jesus appears in your life, one thing that cannot endure is the idea that your good performance merits anything with him. The Lord is holy. You’re not, nor am I. Something’s got to give.

Furthermore, Malachi says, “He will be like a refiner’s fire and a launderer’s soap.” The Lord comes to get rid of our impurities. He comes to clean us up. Going from impure to pure and dirty to clean is not an easy process. That’s why the Lord comes to do it to us. We could never do it ourselves. Well, this got deep. From Christmas shopping to this. But this is what it takes. It’s very easy for our Christmas preparation to slip into ritual and routine. What Malachi’s talking about is very different. It’s almost like the prophet is saying that the day is coming, faster

than you can imagine, when it won't matter that you found the right Lego set; it won't matter that you left the pie in the oven too long. The only thing that will matter is: are you ready to meet the Lord Jesus? How do you prepare for that moment?

What you present to God says a lot about how prepared you are to see Him. Again, the prophet Malachi says, "[The Lord] will purify the Levites and refine them like gold and silver. Then the Lord will have men who bring offerings in righteousness." A life of faith is built on this foundation: we trust that Jesus purified and refined us with his blood at Calvary. This is God's gift to you. He does not have to give it. But He gives it because he is love. God's present to you is a new life. What's your present to him?

Might I suggest something He'd like? How about a change of mind? A change in attitude? A changed life? As much as the word "repentance" might seem unusual to us, that's what it means: a change for the better. A new emphasis on going God's way. A new openness to let him come in and take over. The Refiner will be happy to come in and purify you; Jesus will come in with the strange soap of His blood and thoroughly clean your soul. All of God's spokesmen, all the prophets, including Malachi and right up to John the Baptist (and Jesus himself) have said the very same thing: Repent and believe the good news! Change direction! Return to the Lord and receive the blessing he gives to those who confess their need for it.

This Christmas, Jesus wants to give you the riches of heaven; the wealth of knowing you are loved and treasured by the God who made you. His present to you. A word of advice? Let Him.