**Advent Vespers III,**

 **The Third Sunday in Advent,**

12 December 2021.

 *Concordia Lutheran Mission,*

Terrebonne, Oregon.

**“Christ Purified the Sons of Levi, i.e., Purified the Public Ministry of the Saving Gospel, by His Passion for the Salvation of Men.”**

**And he shall sit as a refiner and purifier of silver: and he shall purify the sons of Levi, and purge them as gold ans silver, that they may offering unto the LORD**

**an offering in righteousness.**

**Malachi 3:2**.

**Introduction**.

 What does purifying the sons of Levi mean? The meaning becomes readily apparent when one recalls that the Levites were in charge of the Public Ministry of the Gospel under the Law of Moses. Christ is purifying the Public Ministry of the Gospel for us and for all men.

 By the time of Christ’s First Advent false doctrine had crept into the Public Ministry of the Gospel. Jesus begins correcting those teachings and purifying the Public Ministry with His teaching in the Temple at aged 12. He also continued His Work of Purifying the Public Ministry of the Gospel in the Sermon on the Mount and in the cleansing of the Temple.[[1]](#footnote-1)1

 This Blessed Work was important because the Public Ministry of the Gospel is the delivery system for the Forgiveness of sins won by His Suffering and Death on the Cross. Christ took care not only to pay for all our debts on the Cross but He also made sure that payment for sin and deliverance from sin would be delivered to all men through the Gospel.

 Christ took care to purify the sons of Levi, i.e., the Public Ministry of the Gospel, so the Forgiveness of sins earned on the Cross would be delivered purely to all men in order to save them from sin and give life everlasting. We, therefore, know when we hear the words of eternal life from the Bible, it is true and pure because Christ took care to purify the Public Ministry of the Gospel.

**I. Jesus Purifies the Sons of Levi by His Passion.**

**A. Jesus desires pure doctrine.**

The founding fathers of the Missouri Synod were ridiculed for desiring pure doctrine from the Bible. The Rev. Dr. C. F. W. Walther writes:

From what has been said you can gather how foolish it is, yea, what an awful delusion has taken hold upon so many men’s minds who ridicule the pure doctrine and say to us: “Ah, do cease clamoring, Pure doctrine! Pure doctrine! That can only land you in dead orthodoxism. Pay more attention to pure life, and you will raise a growth of genuine Christianity.” That is exactly like saying to a farmer: “Do not worry forever about good seed; worry about good fruits.” Is not a farmer properly concerned about good fruit when he is solicitous about getting good seed? Just so a concern about pure doctrine is the proper concern about genuine Christianity and a sincere Christian life. False doctrine is a noxious seed, sown by the enemy to produce a progeny of wickedness. The pure doctrine is wheat-seed; from it spring the children of the Kingdom, who even in the present life belong in the kingdom of Jesus Christ and the life to come will be received into the Kingdom of Glory. May God even now implant in your hearts a great fear, yea, a real abhorrence, of false doctrine! May He graciously give you a holy desire for the pure, saving truth, revealed by God Himself.[[2]](#footnote-2)2

 In the first place, notice that Dr. Walther says it is irrational (“foolish”) to ridicule the idea of pure doctrine. He doesn’t note that it’s contrary to the Bible, which it is, but that it’s irrational. In other words, it’s contrary to reason. Just as a farmer is desirous of success by using pure seed and not rotten seed or weeds, so a Christian is desirous of success by using only that which produces Christians: God’s Pure Doctrine in His Word.

 Finally, despising Pure Doctrine contradicts God’s will and Sullies Christ’s Work for us and for all men. God desires the Pure Doctrine of His Word. The Prophet Malachi says that Christ desires Pure Doctrine:

But who may abide the day of his coming? [[3]](#footnote-3)1 and who shall stand when he appearth? for he is like a refiners’ fire, and like a fullers’ soap: And he shall sit *as* a refiner and purifier of silver: and he shall purify the sons of Levi, and purge them as gold and silver, that they may offer unto the LORD an offering in righteousness. Then shall the offering of Judah and Jerusalem be pleasant unto the LORD, as in the days of old, and as in former years.[[4]](#footnote-4)3

With the intensity of a refiner’s fire, a refiner of gold and silver, does Christ Work to purify the Public Ministry of the Gospel, the sons of Levi[[5]](#footnote-5)4. Just as a refiner’s fire purges all dross and impurities from gold or silver, so Christ likewise was zealous to purge false doctrine from the Public Ministry of the Gospel. Martin Chemnitz[[6]](#footnote-6)5 writes:

We are sure, after all, that He wanted to reveal in the debate of His twelfth year the initial service of His coming office about cleansing the sons of Lev, Mal. 3:3. This, then, was undoubtedly a token of the doctrine which He was going to teach later by explaining true statements and refuting corrupt ones as, for instance, about the person and office of the Messiah; the difference between Law and Gospel; the true worship of God in the New Testament; the abrogation of Levitical ceremonies; Pharisaic traditions, etc. There is no doubt but that, when the Child Jesus heard their usual rubbish decorated with this title: ‘It was said of old time,’ Mat. 5, He showed by asking discretely that such things did not agree with the words and timeless meaning of Scripture. Because He was doing this with such great proof that the doctors were unable to contradict Him, He was given the opportunity to illustrate with His responses the meaning of prophetic doctrine. At the same time, His wisdom and grace were joined together so that everyone was amazed. Moreover, we can conclude that those who were ‘doctors’ were of those groups whom we noted earlier: scribes, Pharisees, men skilled in the Law, and doctors of the Law. Therefore the Child Jesus is showing with this initial service that it would come to pass that, after He had refuted the corruptions of Pharisaic doctrine, abrogated Levitical worship and rejected the traditions of people, the sound doctrine and true worship of the New Testament was beginning with His ministry. ... Thus the Child Jesus showed the doctors in the temple rays of His divinity somewhat more clearly than before. The reputation of this Child was undoubtedly widespread at that time. However, because He published no further such token later but lived not among the doctors but at a carpenter’s house in the city of Nazareth, He vanished, as it were, from people’s memory.[[7]](#footnote-7)6

 Christ Himself is zealous for the Pure Doctrine of the Gospel as shown in His Purifying the sons of Levi, the Public Ministry of the Gospel.

 **B. Christ was zealous of the Pure Doctrine for the sake of the Cross.**

But why would Christ be zealous for the Pure Doctrine? Christ was zealous for the Pure Doctrine and corrected false doctrine for the sake of the Cross of Christ. For example, Jesus states in the Sermon on the Mount:

Ye have heard that it hath been said, Thou shalt love thy neighbour, and hate thine enemy. But I say unto you, Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you ... .[[8]](#footnote-8)7

*Jesus could not let this stand as the teaching of the Law of Moses because it contradicts Moses and this false doctrine drives a stake right through the heart of the Cross*. On the Cross Jesus died for all men, friend and fo alike. The Apostle St. Paul writes:

For I delivered unto you first of all that which I also received, how that Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures; And that he was buried, and that he rose again the third day according to the scriptures ... .[[9]](#footnote-9)8

Christ not only died for the sins of all, He even died and prayed for His Crucifiers. The Evangelist St. Luke writes:

Then said Jesus, Father forgive them; for they know not what they do.[[10]](#footnote-10)9

The Apostle St. Paul writes:

But God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us. Much more then, being now justified by his blood, we shall be saved from wrath through him. For if, when we were enemies, we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, being reconciled, we shall be saved by his life.1[[11]](#footnote-11)0

 Christ was zealous for Pure Doctrine for the sake of the Cross and the Salvation of men.

**II. Christ was Zealous of Pure Doctrine for the Sake of the Gospel.**

**Know that we have the Pure Doctrine because Jesus promised it.**

**A. Christ was zealous for Pure Doctrine because the Gospel is the delivery system for the Forgiveness of sins won by Christ for us on the Cross.**

Christ was zealous for Pure Doctrine because the Gospel is the delivery system for the forgiveness of sins won for us by Christ on the Cross. The Apostle St. Paul writes so desirous was of the Pure Doctrine of the Gospel gave *Himself to ensure His Church had the Pure Doctrine*:

... Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it; That he might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word, That he might present it to himself a glorious church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing; but that it should be holy and without blemish.1[[12]](#footnote-12)1

Luther writes:

... holy baptism was purchased for us through this same blood, which he shed for us and with which he paid for sin. This blood and its merit and power he put into baptism, in order that in baptism we might receive it. For whenever a person receives baptism in faith this is the same as if he were visibly washed and cleansed of sin with the blood of Christ. For we do not gain the forgiveness of sins through our work, but rather through the death and the shedding of the blood of the Son of God. But he takes this forgiveness of sins and tucks it into baptism.1[[13]](#footnote-13)2

The Evangelist St. Luke writes:

Then Peter said unto them, Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost. For the promise is unto you, and to your children, and to all that are afar off, even as many as the Lord our God shall call.1[[14]](#footnote-14)3

The Apostle St. Paul writes:

But what saith it? The word is night thee, *even* in thy mouth, and in thy heart: that is, the worth of faith, which we preach. That if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved.1[[15]](#footnote-15)4

The Lutheran Church confesses that the forgiveness of sins won by Christ on the Cross comes to us through the Gospel:

For neither you nor I could ever know anything of Christ, or believe on Him, and obtain Him for our Lord, unless it were offered to us and granted to our hearts by the Holy Ghost through the preaching of the gospel. The work is done and accomplished; for Christ has acquired and gained the treasure for us by His suffering, death, and resurrection, etc. But if the work remained concealed so that no one knew of it, then it would be in vain and lost. That this treasure, therefore, might not lie buried, but be appropriated and enjoyed, God has caused the Word to go forth and be proclaimed, in which He gives the Holy Ghost to bring this treasure home and appropriate it to us. Therefore sanctifying is nothing else than bringing us to Christ to receive this good, to which we could not attain of ourselves.1[[16]](#footnote-16)5

 Christ was zealous for the Pure Doctrine because it is the delivery system for the Forgiveness of sins won by Christ for the Salvation of souls.

**B. Jesus. the Messenger of the Covenant, gives life everlasting through the Gospel.**

Because Jesus was zealous for the Pure Doctrine according to prophesy, then, we know that we have His Pure Word and life everlasting. The Apostle St. John states:

Then Simon Peter answered him, Lord, to whom shall we go? thou hast the words of eternal life.1[[17]](#footnote-17)6

 We are certain that we have Christ’s Pure and Saving Gospel in the Bible because He Himself Purified the sons of Levi, namely, the Public Ministry of the Gospel, so we could gain what He won for us on the Cross, namely the Forgiveness of sins and life everlasting.

**Conclusion**.

 Because Christ Purified the sons of Levi, i.e., the Public Ministry of the Gospel, at His First Advent, we know we have the Pure and Saving Gospel in the Bible.

 Because we have the Pure and Saving Gospel by His Passion, we have His words of salvation and life everlasting.

 ***Amen.***

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1. 1“**6. WHY DID THE SELLERS YIELD TO THE CLEANSING BY CHRIST?** ANSWER: That the merchants in the temple, without any resistance yielded to the command of Jesus, was not because they wanted to avoid the scourge. The majority of the person of Christ, His holy earnestness, which shown from His face, moved them, and rove them out.” The Rev. Dr. George Stoeckhardt, *Wisdom for Today*, Vols. II & III, tr. the Rev. Arthur E. Beck, Ft. Wayne: Concordia Theological Seminary, no date, p. 35. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. 2The Rev. Dr. C. F. W. Walther, *The Proper Distinction Between Law and Gospel*, tr. W. H. T. Dau, St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1929, pp. 20, 21.

 “With the utmost rigor we demand that all the articles of Christian doctrine, both large and small—although we do not regard any of them as small—be kept pure and certain. This is supremely necessary. For this doctrine is our only light, which illumines and directs us and shows the way to heaven; if it is overthrown in one point, it must be overthrown completely. And when that happens, our love will not be of any use to us. We can be saved without love and concord with the Sacramentarians, but not without pure doctrine and faith.” Martin Luther, *Luther’s Works*, Vol. 27, p. 41. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. 1“**6. WHY DID THE SELLERS YIELD TO THE CLEANSING BY CHRIST?** ANSWER: That the merchants in the temple, without any resistance yielded to the command of Jesus, was not because they wanted to avoid the scourge. The majority of the person of Christ, His holy earnestness, which shown from His face, moved them, and rove them out.” The Rev. Dr. George Stoeckhardt, *Wisdom for Today*, Vols. II & III, tr. the Rev. Arthur E. Beck, Ft. Wayne: Concordia Theological Seminary, no date, p. 35. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. 3**Malachi 3:2-4**. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. 4“The sacrifices of the Old Testament could, in themselves, not atone for sin, but being shadows of Christ’s sacrifice, they offered in advance, as it wee, to the people that forgiveness of sins which Christ would procure on the cross. Like a check, properly signed and secured by sufficient funds in the bank, is worth all it says, so the Old Testament sacrifices were checks which God himself issued to the people, and which were secured by the treasure Christ earned by His life and death. In appearance they were sacrifices, but in reality they were Sacraments, through which grace and forgiveness was offered to the people.” The Rev. Edward W. A. Koehler, *A Short Explanation of Dr. Martin Luther’s Small Catechism, Edited by the Evangelical Lutheran Synod of Missouri, Ohio, and other States, with Additional Notes for Students, Teachers, and Pastors* *by Edward W. A. Koehler*, Ft. Wayne: Concordia Theological Seminary Press, 1981, p. 148. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. 5“Chemnitz, Martin, Lutheran theologian. B. 1522 ... He took the leading part in getting out the Formula of Concord, and the Catalog of Testimonies, which is appended to the Symbolical Books, is essentially his work.... Together with Selnecker and Kirchner, Chemnitz, in 1582, published an Apology of the Book of Concord. ... The most learned theologian of his time was mourned by the whole Lutheran Church; his importance is seen in the Catholic saying that if Chemnitz had not come, Luther had not stood.” *Concordia Cyclopedia*, pp. 127, 128, **s.v. Chemnitz, Martin**. “‘If the Second Martin had not come, the first would not have prevailed. – 17th Century Adage.’” *The Second Martin: The Life and Theology of Martin Chemnitz*, The Rev. Dr. J. A. O. Preus, St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, back cover. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. 6Martin Chemnitz, *The Harmony of the Four Evangelists*, Vol. I, Book I, tr. Richard J. dinda, Malone, TX: The Center for the Study of Lutheran Orthodoxy, 2009, pp. 250, 251. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. 7**St. Matthew 5:43**, **44**. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. 8**I Corinthians 15:3**, **4**. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. 9**St. Luke 23:34**. ... Christ prayed for His crucifers: **Father, forgive them,** He says, **for they know not what they do,** the first word which Christ spoke on the cross. In the Old Testament, as the sacrifice was being offered, the high priest at the same time had to instruct the people about its true benefit. Christ, the High Priest of the New Testament, also does this; and He teaches that this His sacrifice is intended for the forgiveness of sins. Also, since Christ suffered not for himself but for us ... He, as it were, forgets His agony and concerns Himself with us human beings and prays that God would forgive us for what we were doing to Him. He thus here portrays Himself as our true Advocate, 1 John 2, who pleads on our behalf before the heavenly Father with the power of His sacrifice. He holds before Him, as it were, His wounds and petitions that God would allow His wrath to abate. Just as in those times Christ’s petition was so powerful that many of those who helped crucify Him were converted and the remainder were given forty more whole years in which to repent, ... so now Christ’s intercession retains its power to this very day. For we should not think that Christ was praying [only] for the Jews and soldiers who at that timed [sic] crucified Him. Rather, }ul this prayer applies to us all. He was crucified for the sake of all our sins, Isa. 53; and with our sins we caused Him pain and effort, Isa. 43. And if we still at times go forth with confidence (brashness) and don’t realize what we are doing – that is, we don’t realize the consequence of lying in sin, nor do we consider what a serious matter the wrath of God is – behold, with His intercession Christ presents the very best and obtains so much that God grants time for repentance and does not so quickly destroy with His wrath. Ponder here also the incomprehensible patience of Christ, how He in His distress also prayed for His worst enemies who dealt with Him so pitiably and horribly. They had affixed Him with nails so hat He could do not other good for them. Only His tongue remained which even so, because of torture, stuck to the roof of His mouth, Psa. 22. Yet, He used it still to pray for His crucifers. Indeed, how distant are those from this example of Christ who do not pray for their enemies. Even more distant are those who return evil with evil. Farthest away of all are those who deliberately offend their neighbors. From this, God graciously preserve us. Amen. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. 10**Romans 5:8-10**. [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. 11**Ephesians 5:25**, **26-27**. “.. holy baptism was purchased for us through this same blood, which he shed for us and with which he paid for sin. This blood and its merit and power he put into baptism, in order that in baptism we might receive it. For whenever a person receives baptism in faith this is the same as if he were visibly washed and cleansed of sin with the blood of Christ. For we do not gain the forgiveness of sins through our work, but rather through the death and the shedding of the blood of the Son of God. But he takes this forgiveness of sins and tucks it into baptism.” Martin Luther, *Luther’s Works*, Vol. 51, p. 325.

 “This Baptism is also founded upon the name of Christ ... because it was purchased by Christ’s vicarious satisfaction, as Eph. 5:26 expressly teaches, ‘Christ also loved the Church and gave Himself for it ..., that He might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word.’” The Rev. Dr. Francis Pieper, *Christian Dogmatics*, Vol. III, p. 259. [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. 12Martin Luther, *Luther’s Works*, Vol. 51, p. 325.“This Baptism is also founded upon the name of Christ ... because it was purchased by Christ’s vicarious satisfaction, as Eph. 5:26 expressly teaches, ‘Christ also loved the Church and gave Himself for it ..., that He might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word.’” The Rev. Dr. Francis Pieper, *Christian Dogmatics*, Vol. III, p. 259. [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. 13**Acts 2:38-39**. [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
15. 14“For there is no need to say, he means, that one must go up to heaven, or cross a great sea, and then receive the commandments, but things so great and grand hath God made of easy access to us. And what meaneth the phrase, ‘The Word is nigh thee?’ That is, It is easy. For in thy mind and in thy tongue is salvation. There is no long journey to go, no seas to sail over, no mountains to pass, to get saved. But if you be not minded to cross so much as the threshold, you may even while you sit at home be saved. For ‘in thy mouth and in thy heart’ is the source of salvation. And then on another score also he makes the word of faith easy, and says, that ‘God raised Him from the dead.’ For just reflect upon the worthiness of the Worker, and you will no longer see any difficulty in the thing. That He is Lord then, is plain from the resurrection. And this he said at the beginning even of the Epistle. ‘Which was declared to be the Son of God with power ... by the resurrection from the dead.’ (Rom. i. 4.) But that the resurrection is easy too, has been shown even to those who are very unbelieving, from the might of the Worker of it. Since then the righteousness is greater, and light and easy to receive, is it not a sign of the utmost contentiousness to leave what is light and easy, and set about impossibilities? For they could not say that it was a thing they declined as burdensome. See then how he deprives them of all excuse. For what do they deserve to have said in their defence, who choose what is burdensome and impracticable, and pass by what is light, and able to save them, and to give them those things which the Law could not give? All this can come only from a contentious spirit, which is in a state of rebellion against God. For the Law is galling ... , but grace is easy. The Law, though they dispute never so much, does not save; Grace yieldeth the righteousness resulting from itself, and that from the Law likewise. What plea then is to rescue them, since they are disposed to be contentious against this, but cling to that to no purpose whatever? Then, since he had made a strong assertion, he again confirms it from the Scripture.” St. John Chrysostom, *A Select Library of the Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church*, *Volume XI, Saint Chrysostom: Homilies on the Acts of the Apostles and the Epistle to the Romans*, ed. Philip Schaff, Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., reprinted, September 1980, p. 474, underscore added. [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
16. 15*The Large Catechism*, **Part Second, Of The Creed, Article III**.38-39, *Triglotta*, 689. [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
17. 16**St. John 6:68**. [↑](#footnote-ref-17)