

I.N.I.

Wednesday Advent III
December 19, 2012
Matthew 3:11-12

In Christ Jesus, who has sent us out as His Ambassadors to proclaim a message of coming judgment and final deliverance, Dear Fellow Redeemed,

Our Scripture reading this evening needs an ending. King Sennacherib's ambassador, had a message for King Hezekiah and God's people—a message of judgment, impending destruction and doom. As we read King Sennacherib through his ambassador ridiculed and mocked the LORD God saying, **AS THE GODS OF THE NATIONS OF *OTHER* LANDS HAVE NOT DELIVERED THEIR PEOPLE FROM MY HAND, SO THE GOD OF HEZEKIAH WILL NOT DELIVER HIS PEOPLE FROM MY HAND.**

So bold, pompous and proud they were. "What God can save you now?" In the verses prior to our Scripture reading we hear these enemies of God declare: **DO YOU NOT KNOW WHAT I AND MY FATHERS HAVE DONE TO ALL THE PEOPLES OF *OTHER* LANDS? WERE THE GODS OF THE NATIONS OF THOSE LANDS IN ANY WAY ABLE TO DELIVER THEIR LANDS OUT OF MY HAND? WHO WAS *THERE* AMONG ALL THE GODS OF THOSE NATIONS THAT MY FATHERS UTTERLY DESTROYED THAT COULD DELIVER HIS PEOPLE FROM MY HAND, THAT YOUR GOD SHOULD BE ABLE TO DELIVER YOU FROM MY HAND? NOW THEREFORE, DO NOT LET HEZEKIAH DECEIVE YOU OR PERSUADE YOU LIKE THIS, AND DO NOT BELIEVE HIM; FOR NO GOD OF ANY NATION OR KINGDOM WAS ABLE TO DELIVER HIS PEOPLE FROM MY HAND OR THE HAND OF MY FATHERS. HOW MUCH LESS WILL YOUR GOD DELIVER YOU FROM MY HAND?**

Was there any hope? Were God's people doomed? Was Judah about to be destroyed? Was Assyria just too powerful? Was Hezekiah wrong and foolish to trust in the Lord Jehovah and encourage his people to do the same? Could God's people escape this judgment?

We read God's promise to King Hezekiah: **THEREFORE THUS SAYS THE LORD CONCERNING THE KING OF ASSYRIA: 'HE SHALL NOT COME INTO THIS CITY, NOR SHOOT AN ARROW THERE, NOR COME BEFORE IT WITH SHIELD, NOR BUILD A SIEGE MOUND AGAINST IT. BY THE WAY THAT HE CAME, BY THE SAME SHALL HE RETURN; AND HE SHALL NOT COME INTO THIS CITY,' SAYS THE LORD. FOR I WILL DEFEND THIS CITY, TO SAVE IT FOR MY OWN SAKE AND FOR MY SERVANT DAVID'S SAKE.**

An epic battle is about to take place! Who would win? Now that's a foolish question!

We read: **AND IT CAME TO PASS ON A CERTAIN NIGHT THAT THE ANGEL OF THE LORD WENT OUT, AND KILLED IN THE CAMP OF THE ASSYRIANS ONE HUNDRED AND EIGHTY-FIVE THOUSAND; (EVERY MIGHTY MAN OF VALOR, LEADER, AND CAPTAIN IN THE CAMP OF THE KING OF ASSYRIA.) AND WHEN *PEOPLE* AROSE EARLY IN THE MORNING, THERE WERE THE CORPSES -- ALL DEAD. SO SENNACHERIB KING OF ASSYRIA DEPARTED (SHAMEFACED) AND WENT AWAY, RETURNED *HOME*, AND REMAINED AT NINEVEH. NOW IT CAME TO PASS, AS HE WAS WORSHIPING IN THE TEMPLE OF NISROCH HIS GOD, THAT HIS SONS ADRAMMELECH AND SHAREZER STRUCK HIM DOWN WITH THE SWORD; AND THEY ESCAPED INTO THE LAND OF ARARAT. (THUS THE LORD SAVED HEZEKIAH AND THE INHABITANTS OF JERUSALEM FROM THE HAND OF SENNACHERIB THE KING OF ASSYRIA, AND FROM THE HAND OF ALL *OTHERS*, AND GUIDED THEM ON EVERY SIDE.)**

We now jump some 700 years to our sermon text and we hear another ambassador; God's ambassador John the Baptist, bringing a message of judgment and doom, but also of deliverance. **I**

INDEED BAPTIZE YOU WITH WATER UNTO REPENTANCE, BUT HE WHO IS COMING AFTER ME IS MIGHTIER THAN I, WHOSE SANDALS I AM NOT WORTHY TO CARRY. HE WILL BAPTIZE YOU WITH THE HOLY SPIRIT AND FIRE. HIS WINNOWING FAN IS IN HIS HAND, AND HE WILL THOROUGHLY CLEAN OUT HIS THRESHING FLOOR, AND GATHER HIS WHEAT INTO THE BARN; BUT HE WILL BURN UP THE CHAFF WITH UNQUENCHABLE FIRE.

This Advent Ambassador's message was clear: **REPENT, FOR THE KINGDOM OF HEAVEN IS AT HAND!**

To the proud self-righteous Pharisees and unbelieving Sadducees, John said: **BROOD OF VIPERS! WHO WARNED YOU TO FLEE FROM THE WRATH TO COME? THEREFORE BEAR FRUITS WORTHY OF REPENTANCE, AND DO NOT THINK TO SAY TO YOURSELVES, 'WE HAVE ABRAHAM AS OUR FATHER.' FOR I SAY TO YOU THAT GOD IS ABLE TO RAISE UP CHILDREN TO ABRAHAM FROM THESE STONES. AND EVEN NOW THE AX IS LAID TO THE ROOT OF THE TREES. THEREFORE EVERY TREE WHICH DOES NOT BEAR GOOD FRUIT IS CUT DOWN AND THROWN INTO THE FIRE.**

What a message of Judgment! They were smug in their self-confidence and in their beliefs, but since their hearts were not repentant and were not looking alone to Jesus as their Savior they were doomed. These people were under the wrath of God. And John did not mince words.

The Lord Jesus would clean house. With His winnowing fan of Judgment He will clean out the threshing floor of this world and take up the worthless chaff and burn it in unquenchable fire. With His axe of His condemning Law He will cut down the trees that do not bear good fruit and throw them into the fire. This is a picture of the Judgment awaiting all who do not repent of their sins and believe in Jesus.

But these words are also meant for us, as a warning to lead us also to see in ourselves our many sins and shortcomings. To lead us to see that we cannot put any confidence in our works—our prayers, our worship, our offerings, our kindness, our love. We too need to repent of our sins in thought, word and deed!

John's finger is also pointing at my sins and your sins! We live in a world that is sin-saturated and yet so little sin-conscious that it accepts sin as the normal and acceptable way of life. In such a sin-denying world, I need John's finger pointing at my sins and God's Law pressing hard on my heart. I need to have the Holy Spirit get out the bulldozer of repentance and level the mountain of sins in my heart and so do you. Sinners all, let us repent!

We are reminded by these words that life is not a game. It is serious and we need to seriously reflect on our actions and words. The Lord who seeks to kindle the flame of faith in our hearts will also control the fire of judgment in the end. Either we will be gathered to be with Jesus forever or we will face the unquenchable fire of damnation.

What a blessing that John says, the Lord will **GATHER HIS WHEAT INTO THE BARN.** When we are led by the Holy Spirit to repent of our sins, the fruit of repentance is faith in Jesus. We are not worthless chaff, but God's plant—His wheat.

Hezekiah and his people were spared from the coming judgment of the Assyrians by turning to the Lord God in repentance and believing His promises of deliverance. We too are spared from the coming Judgment only by being led to repent of our sins and trust in God's promises concerning His deliverance through Jesus.

Advent is the season for repentance for there is no other way to prepare for Christ's coming. Without a knowledge of our sins we miss the whole purpose of Jesus' birth, life, death and resurrection. If the Savior in the manger is going to mean anything to me, I need to know how much I need Him. With a repentant heart of godly sorrow over our sins and a trust in Jesus for forgiveness we receive Him properly. Then we can clearly see John's finger also pointing to our Savior and say to us, **"BEHOLD! THE LAMB OF GOD WHO TAKES AWAY (your sin and) THE SIN OF THE WORLD! "**

Advent also is the season for repentance because there is no other way to escape the judgment to come. Today, there are many who are reluctant to speak about judgment and condemnation. That is

not politically correct. They can only speak about love and peace. We need to remember that our sinful flesh still needs to hear the warning of the law, the warning of the coming Judgment.

As Advent ambassadors we too need to speak of God's Wrath to others. That is not easy, but it is essential. Just look at the sinful world we live in. God's wrath and condemnation are mentioned over 300 times in the Bible. Unless the Spirit leads to repentance in the heart, the Spirit cannot create saving faith.

We need to ponder what Jesus has saved us **from** and what He has saved us **for** if we are to have a true appreciation for why He was born into this world and for what He did for us on the cross. He saved us **FROM** eternal damnation in hell, an eternal separation from our God. He saved us **FOR** the eternal joys of heaven and life forever with our God.

May our Advent worship be one of continually preparing our hearts for Christ's coming with daily repentance and the hearing of the joyful assurance that all of our sins have been forgiven in Christ and then by being Advent Ambassadors proclaiming the same to our family, friends, neighbors, classmates, fellow workers and business associates.

Amen.