

Reading: Malachi 3:13-18

Theme: Prosecuted by the Lord!

The apostle James writes a number of verses dealing with the problem of the tongue and the way it is incorrectly used in Chapter 3 of his letter. The book of Proverbs says much concerning the tongue and its use - warning of lying, boasting, foolish talking and commends the right use of the tongue in good, wholesome and encouraging speech e.g. **Proverbs 25:11** *“Like the coolness of snow at harvest time is a trustworthy messenger to those who send him; he refreshes the spirit of his masters.”* [For the wrong use of the tongue see Proverbs 10:31; 12:18-19; 15:2, 4; 17:4, 20; 18:21; 21:6, 23; 26:28; 28:23]

We can fail to realise that our words affect others - family, friends, others in the church and even ourselves. God spoke and created all things. He saw everything was good. When we speak, we also create things - the ‘world’ and atmosphere in which we live, exist, move and have our being. We can create a world of encouragement and relaxation with our words or an atmosphere of tension, resentment and even despair.

In the verses we read, we can see of the things the people spoke and said. We are also given God’s reaction to their words. Sadly, we forget or are ignorant of the fact the Lord not only sees what we do, but He knows and records all we think and desire, He also hears and records what we say. We will be called to account for all such things. That is an awesome thought!

In 3v13-15 Malachi is going to present the charge of God against these people for their harsh and hard words against Him. Just as in the earlier part of the book, the people now will be addressed as if they have no knowledge of the charge and the situation is opened

up to them. Malachi uses “the disputation method” - charge, question the charge, then give details to prove the charge.

Let us all go to ancient Jerusalem, in a cool shady square in downtown Jerusalem; there is a trial going on. Called to the dock to face the charges are the returned people of Israel. Prosecution lawyer is Malachi, the defence lawyer is, say Adam Israel. We are the jury! Note the 5 main areas of the trial:

1. The Prosecution’s Charge.

The charge is that they had spoken harsh things (NIV & NKJV), hard things (ESV), arrogant words (NASB), stout words (AV & RSV) against the Lord. In 2:17 the Lord had said He had been wearied by their words. Now here He again goes back to their words and they are accused of hard, harsh, arrogant words against Him. They seem to have persisted in such words and it amounted to a verbal assault, verbal GBH on the character and heart of God.

Here then is the prosecution’s charge - the people were accusing God of not rewarding their nice and religious lives. God was said to be cruel and they were wasting their time serving Him. They spoke hard, harsh, arrogant words against God; ‘stout’ (AV) means, in this context, strong and stubborn words.

The accusation was made against the people of Israel, who had had the Lord do so much for them in their history, even their recent history. As a nation they had known God’s care, covenant and love. They were not some foreign nation who were ignorant of God – they had a glorious history with God.

We are disgusted when we read or hear about a person brought to trial for assaulting a child or an old person and we are even more disgusted if they assaulted and hurt a person closely related to

them. Here these charges are made against the nation who had received so much good from God and so were serious charges indeed!

2. The Defence Statement.

The defence statement is rooted and grounded on ignorance. They question “*What have we said against you?*” Here they were, accused of such a crime and they basically ask “*What are you on about? We do not know what you’re saying!*” Just because we are unaware of a law or regulation, it does not exempt us from keeping it. That we may break it in ignorance does not make us innocent of breaking that law. The old saying “***Ignorance is no defence in the eyes of the law***” is still as true today as it was when it was first used.

I feel here it was a bit more than just pleading ignorance. They question “What” - almost in the sense of “*What wrong have we said against you? We can justify our words; we can argue our case!*” Many times, I have heard people question God and what He’s allowed in a situation - something like ill-health in loved one, or when a disaster occurs and they verbally rail, argue against God; question His care, goodness, even if He exists as He let such happen. Some are even so bold to say, to boast that they will argue with God - when they meet Him one day, then they will argue their case and make God see that they were right and justified in doing as they did and God was wrong to expect anything different!

What of us? How do we defend our life without God and the Lord Jesus? What arguments would we give to God to justify why we have never bothered to believe on the Saviour He has provided? It could be that you have actually and deliberately chosen to reject the Saviour! What arguments would we who are believers put to say as to why we’ve not really been wholeheartedly committed in

our life, love and service of the one we claim to love so much? The defence statement was made, but see:

3. The Evidence Presented.

The accusation has been made against the people of Israel. Now specific evidence is brought to show that this charge was not a one-off, but it was a persistent and an aggravated offence the people were guilty of. God keeps accounts of what men and women; boys and girls say and that is true for us! The people here had said “*It is futile to serve God...*” The Lord knew the hard things they said about Him. Basically, they accuse God of lying and failing to keep His word. Remember that they were going through the motions of serving God and in doing so, they were expecting to be well paid for doing that - health, wealth, prosperity, happiness, success etc. They were serving God out of duty and not out of love. They did so because they expected, wanted, even demanded an easy and successful life.

When they found they did not get an easy time, they complained, murmured, resented the service and charged God with being unjust. They claimed to have carried out His requirements, kept His ordinances, but they were playacting at this - giving scabby offerings, partial tithes, fobbing God off with 2nd best and yet still expected God to bless and prosper them with the best things.

They went through the rituals and actions of sincere and serious worship – **by dressing in black and going about as mourners before the Lord**. They must have appeared very holy and godly people - as they looked so miserable! Yet they were doing this to curry favour and merit reward. They had wrong words, motives and reactions!

When things didn't go as expected, their fingers were pointed, their tongues wagged and God was lashed with the things they said as they attacked His character and being (v15). Their words were faithless, also self-righteous as they pointed at others being the evildoers and it was a real discouragement to others to trust and serve God.

It is a dangerously easy thing to **start talking against God**. It can occur to us all. We want to do this or that, so we pray and expect to be so, but then it does not happen. Yes, we say *“God is in control; all things work together for good...”* But even that can be a faithless going through the motions and we may feel, even whisper in our homes to our loved ones, and sometimes openly say *“What is the point of serving God? Why bother putting myself out? Why deny myself this or that? It is a waste of time!”* Sadly, others may pick up on such things, especially if they feel the same and soon there is a chorus of complaining and wailing - which may be audible or subtle and quiet. Yet it soon affects the family, the church. The pastor, church officers can soon come in for some flak - even when they do not deserve it. People question the Bible version, the preaching, the praise or lack of it, it's the old songs or it's the new songs; it's the music, it's other people - they are blessed, but do not deserve it! Basically, we can be saying that it is **everyone else's fault, but not ours** - for we deserve recognition, blessing etc.

Do we realise we are saying hard and harsh words against God in private, in our homes, with our partners, with our families and yet the Lord knows what we say! The Lord will accuse you and me with such if we are guilty of it! We may not show or say such words openly, but our body language, lack of commitment shows it. The coronavirus of harsh and discouraging sentiments can

spread in a life and soon spread throughout the people of God in a church.

In Malachi's day, such words and attitudes were found in God's own people and the evidence was put to them. Regrettably, such words are still found in God's people today - resentment at not having a Sunday lie in, or to have to waste time in church service rather than... Maybe we have been infected with a materialistic worldview, even a Christianised materialistic one - God will always bless us if we are a Christian! Yet we can end up seeing believers, even ourselves, hurting, struggling, suffering and we are in a Psalm 73 situation of almost having slipping feet as we have envy at the wicked ones' prosperity and we feel it is futile to serve God.

Sometimes we look back and feel "*If only...*" We think things would then be so different - "*I have lived for God, but if only I had done this then, well things would have been different now*" - as if serving God and the way God has led us is a waste of time! Someone has compared living life like that to driving a car with your eyes fixed firmly on the rear-view mirror! That's the way to head for a crash, a life of ineffective service, of harsh words, of a sense of a wasted life, an introverted selfish sense of low esteem.

What evidence could be presented about our lives, their harsh and hard words against God? Yet, before the trial reaches an end, there needs to be:

4. The Summing Up.

How could God's people say such things, then or now? It occurs because we only focus on the here and now and do not have in view the future and what is ahead. People live for here and now, it is so hard to get people to plan for retirement, or plan for their

funerals - service order or its costs Paul writes in 1 Corinthians 15:19 *“If only for this life we have hope in Christ, we are to be pitied more than all men.”* Paul was a great man of God; he knew wonders of revelation and experiences of God that no one nowadays can get near. If ever a man should have known health, wealth and prosperity it was Paul. Surprisingly, as we read of his life, we see he knew sufferings, persecutions, losses, crosses, beatings and church history tells us he was beheaded by Nero. If Paul hadn't a view of the glorious future, he could so easily have been a bitter man and accuse God of much, but Paul gloried in his sufferings, for they were nothing compared to the glory to be revealed in him or us!

This life is not the be all and end all. The day of judgement is coming and we need to question where we would be on that day. Our sin, our pleasures, our unbelief will be seen for what it is and we will lose our soul. Yet if we are Christians, having trusted Christ as our Saviour, our losses, our service for, our love and devotion for Him - as weak as they seem now - will be revealed on that day to be worth it - even if they were ten thousand times more.

The summing up process of our lives and the lives of these ones that Malachi confronted has to include the awesomeness of judgement and therefore the danger of a partial obedience or a profit orientated obedience, or showtime, show off obedience. The Jews outwardly went through the actions, but their hearts' motives would be known and exposed on that day - as they were resenting the time, effort, cost etc. they put in for God. In fact, partial obedience was why God was not blessing them and He challenged them to test Him with wholehearted and whole-tithe-giving lives (v10).

Half-hearted obedience means we put God after self and self-interests, so when self-interest is not blessed, we can then accuse God of many things and can so easily slip into bitterness and resentment against Him which may even be verbalised. The Jews did this and finally we see:

5. The Verdict.

Remember that I said that we are the jury, well then, what is our verdict on the ones accused here? Do we find these Jews guilty or not guilty as charged? Surely, there can only be one verdict - guilty! We may not want to give that verdict, because the trouble is, the trial also included you and me! In finding them guilty, how would we pronounce the verdict on our own life?

This is where the rubber hits the road, as we have to examine and try our own lives by the truths and principles of God's word. We are not just to be ready to point the finger at others! I pray God would deal with each one of us in the secret places of our own hearts and that we will not be those who resent God, but we would be willing for God to deal with us in our lives.

I pray we would also take heart - as we will go on next time to see encouragements from God to those who had heart desires to speak and live for Him. There is hope for us, but it is not found within us, but in the God of grace and mercy, who loves His people and wants them to be in and enjoy a close, loving relationship with Him.