

Jason Upchurch - Malachi 2:17-3:5 - Don't Accuse God of Injustice

This morning as we look at Malachi I want to begin by asking you a question that I think gets to the heart of the passage here: If you were accidentally irritating God, would you want someone to tell you?

Would you want someone to actually point that out? "Hey just so you know, you're kinda getting on God's nerves and he's getting a little worn out by what you're doing?" Would you want someone to let you know that? I think most of us would say yes. Or hopefully we'd say yes.

And if they did point that out, would you take steps to change it? Or would you justify what you were doing, double down, make excuses and keep doing it anyway?

I think we would all say we want someone to point it out. Unless you're just a troll - which Christians shouldn't be - you should want to live in harmony with all people and especially live in harmony with the God who saved you.

And obviously those who are believers are justified in Christ. God has pronounced that we are completely righteous and holy and blameless because the righteousness of Christ has been credited to our account. We are sons, heirs and God is for us because of our faith in Jesus. Our standing with God in terms of salvation is not changed just because we sin.

But at the same time the Bible makes it clear that in some way we can also irritate God.

Believers can grieve the Spirit according to **Eph 4:30**. How? When we're bitter and angry and slanderous.

We can rebel against the Spirit **Isa 63:10**. When we're disobedient.

We can quench the Spirit **1 Thes. 5:19** by rejecting the things he's doing.

Whatever else we might say, quenching, rebelling and grieving are not good. But they are all ways in which the true people of God, enjoying new covenant promises, can be at odds with the God who saved us. Just like you can irritate your kids or siblings or family and you're still part of the family, so you can irritate God and still be part of the family of God.

But you don't want to do that. Or you shouldn't want to do that. Mostly because God is always the one in the right, we're always the ones in the wrong and God has every right to discipline us as sons. And he will discipline us in his faithfulness because he loves us.

Now, we're going to really slow down here this morning and just look at this last verse in chapter 2 because I think this one little verse packed and worth slowing down for. If you're taking notes, the big takeaway this morning is: Don't accuse God of injustice.

That's what Israel was doing and interestingly they didn't even know it. They didn't even know they were doing that and they didn't understand how irritated God was at them for it.

We're going to break this passage down into 4 parts:

Weariness of God
Wickedness of Words
Ignorance of the People
Accusations of Injustice.

1) Weariness of God. I want to point out something that's kind of ironic in the passage. **Read 17**

They have wearied God. They have worn him out. Wait a minute. How can anyone weary God?

Isaiah 40:28 says that Yahweh is the everlasting God; He does not faint or grow weary...he is the one who gives strength to the weary and power to the faint.

God is omnipotent - all powerful - how is it that his people are causing him to be weary? Is God like Superman? He's super strong with amazing powers and yet has some kind of secret kryptonite which will make him mortal like the rest of us?

No, God is not physically wearied here. It's not like he needs to go take a nap and recharge. The idea is that he is irritated by his people.

The word for weary here is one that is often used of hard, burdensome labor. It's dreadful work that you just can't stand anymore.

Is there a chore around the home you just can't stand to do? Something that you'd pay good money if you could not to do it?

I can't stand to empty the dishwasher. I don't know why - it takes like 3 minutes. But I'd load the dishwasher 10 times before I empty it once. I'd gladly mow the lawn for months but I can't stand to unload the dishwasher. I don't know why, it's just burdensome to me.

Whatever that chore is for you, just saps your strength and happiness like a black hole - that's God toward Israel. He's weary. Putting up with Israel is now a massive chore.

What is it that's irritating God?

2) The Weariness of Words. **Read 17**

One of the easiest ways for us to weary God is with our words. That's what Israel was doing. They were wearying God with their words. We'll get to the specifics of their words in just a few minutes.

But so often in the Bible we are warned about what we say. And how what we say affects us. It affects others and it affects God.

Turn to James 3 for a minute. We really need to ensure that everything we say is pleasing to the Lord.

Part of the reason for that is because what comes out of the mouth comes from the heart. So whatever you're saying is originating in your heart. So if what you're saying is corrupted or sinful it's because there's a heart issue happening.

Here James reminds us of that we need to watch our words. Teachers here are primarily warned, but imbedded in that warning is a warning to all. **Read 1-12**

We have the common problem of saying things we shouldn't with our tongue. I think in our day and age we could add what we say in texting/group chats/social media. Maybe they aren't expressed specifically with the tongue, but through it we are expressing things.

And James reminds us that the tongue is so pervasively wicked that if we could just tame the tongue - this small little muscle in our body - we would be perfect people. That's an amazing claim - just say things that are good and you'll be set.

Why is that? Because our tongues have an outsized effect in our lives and the lives of others. Our tongues damage other people. They wound them or influence them for good or evil. They're like little matches that sets the forest on fire. Apparently, James says, that match is the flame of hell. **Read 6**

Or the rudder that turns massive ships. James says it's evil, it's like rattlesnake poison. Why?

Because on the one hand we bless God - we praise him - yet at the same time we curse other people who are made in God's image. We're killing them with our tongue.

Do you curse other people, brothers? Do you revile them and speak evil about them? It's easy to do and then justify it because we can usually come up with legitimate issues with other people. And we can defend ourselves. When we just shouldn't speak at all.

Do we defame others? Insult them directly or to others? Berate them? Gossip about them? Slander or lie about them? Curse them? Belittle them?

Cursing people is the opposite of blessing God. Blessing God means to sing his praises. To say what great things he has done. Cursing someone is to sing their failings. To proclaim what horrible things they have done.

Look at Eph. 4:29. This is an important passage about what we say. The gospel transforms what we say. Did you know that? The gospel saves us from sin and hell and death. But it also informs what things should come out of our mouths as well. **Read**

Let no corrupting talking come out of your mouths. The word for corrupting is rottenness or spoil. I remember when I was a kid I was playing fetch with my dog by the river and he found a dead fish on the side of the shore. So he did what any dog would do: he rolled in it over and over. And it was repulsive. It was spoiled.

That's what words often are: dead rotten, spoiled nastiness. God says don't let that come out of our mouths. What should come out? Only things that build people up, that are fitting for the time. **Read 29**

What's our motivation for words that fit the occasion and build up? Why would we do this? Just to be nice? Just to check a box? No. Paul gives us a motivation here: that it might give grace to those who hear.

This is amazing: our words can be the conduit of God's grace to others. Just as God showed grace to us in the Word, Jesus. So we can show the grace of Jesus to other people through our words.

Our words are powerful. They affect others. And they affect our relationship to God, which is what Malachi is getting to **back in Mal. 2:17.**

Here God is wearied by Israel's words. And notice this: Israel doesn't even seem to realize that what they're doing is an offense to God.

3) Ignorance of the People. **Read 17**

Now, remember, this is a fictional back and forth between God and a person who is representing Israel. And the idea here is that Israel is completely ignorant to the fact that they are offending God with their words. How have we wearied him?

This is really the ignorance of people who should know better. And it's a theme we see throughout this little book. **Back in 1:2** you remember that God said he loved Israel, and they respond by saying "How have you loved us?" They had no idea. They were ignorant.

Then God condemns them for polluting his altar, and they don't know it: "How have we despised your name?"

Earlier in **2:14** God says he doesn't regard their offerings anymore and they ask "Why does he not?"

Again, God isn't talking to an actual person here. The back and forth conversation is to represent the whole of Israel here. And part of the problem in Israel is that they are largely unaware of what they are to even be doing to please God.

"How have we wearied you?" "What are we doing wrong?" Whatever they're doing wrong God expects them to know. He will hold them accountable for.

Hos. 4:6: My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge; because you have rejected knowledge, I reject you from being a priest to me. And since you have forgotten the law of your God I also will forget your children.

Wow. Why is God bringing judgement? Because the people have no knowledge. They know nothing about God or his Word.

You guys, we're called to grow in the grace and knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ. We should know more about the Bible this year than we did last year. We should know more about theology this year than we did last year.

You have to have an intentional plan for growing in the Word of you will be ignorant of God's will for you. And listen, ignorance isn't going to let you off the hook.

If you get pulled over for doing 10 over and your claim to the officer is "I didn't know" they probably aren't going to let you off. You're required to know. You're required to be alert obedient to what God has said.

Heb 5:11-14: The author gets on the church because he says "It's hard for me to explain theology to you since you have become dull of hearing...For although by now you should be teachers, you need someone to teach you the basic stuff again. You need milk, not solid food."

God has an expectation that we will continue to grow in knowledge day by day and year by year. The analogy of milk is a powerful analogy. If you were over at a friends' house and they had a 8 year old walking around still sucking on a bottle you'd be pretty convinced there was a major problem.

Brothers and sisters, we need to be in the Word. Growing in the Word, thriving on the Word, soaking up the word.

Psalm 119:11: I have stored up your word in my heart that I might not sin against you.

One of the reasons we get in the Word is to avoid sin. There's a lot of times I'm reading and I'm like, well that was convicting. And it often doesn't take long to get there.

Another reason is to know Jesus. I was talking to a guy a couple weeks ago who said he had been to church a lot over the years and yet he had never read any of the gospels. He was an older guy. I told, listen, carve out a few hours and read Matthew's gospel. You should know who Jesus is.

There are many other reasons to read the Bible, but we can't be ignorant.

So we have the weariness of God. The Wickedness of words. The ignorance of the people.

4) The Accusations of Injustice. There's actually 2 accusations here. Let's look. **Read 17**

So again, the flow here is that Israel is unknowingly wearing God. How? With their words. And they're making two claims.

First, they're basically saying God actually delights in evil. "All who do evil are good and he's happy about it." That's a bold claim. And it's even more amazing to think that they're saying this and they are ignorant that it might be offensive to God.

But here's the deal, I don't think too many people would actually say "God likes evil things." They don't say that. That would be obvious.

What they say is much more subtle than that. What they do is try to make sinful things not so sinful. Or they justify the sin and say that God is actually happy about it.

“God loves everyone, even those who are drunkards or revilers or thieves. They’re fine - God loves everyone the same. God doesn’t mind if you’re gay. Hey, he made you that way. God’s mercy is so great and so wide there’s room for everyone in the Kingdom.”

Now, that sounds really gooey and righteous. But it’s a corruption of the truth.

We turn adultery and fornication into an affair. They’re not homosexuals or sodomites. They’re gay or same sex attracted - like there’s nothing they can do about it. And they appeal to God’s mercy and love and acceptance to overlook the simple fact that God says that people enslaved to their sin will never enter the Kingdom of God.

If you watch television at all you’ve probably seen the “he gets us” commercials. These are commercials that are supposed to represent how inclusive and kind Jesus is. Jesus gets gay people. He gets people who are here illegally. He gets systemic racial oppression. On and on. It’s a complete subversion of the gospel.

Because Jesus doesn’t “get us;” he calls us to repentance. He has compassion on those who rend their hearts, not their garments. Those who turn to him in faith.

I remember talking to a lady who was justifying a very foolish car purchase she had made because she was greedy. She was on a fixed income, very poor, but wanted a really nice car. So she prayed about it. And God didn’t say no - so she ended up with a ridiculously expensive car because she bought it from a dealer. And of course she had confirmation because their financing department was able to get her financed - see a sign from God! She was paying usury level interest and had to get full coverage on a car that was depreciating.

And it took her years to realize she had been fooling herself. God never wanted her to have that car. It was a terrible waste of money that she didn’t really have. But she had convinced herself it was good and God gave it to her. She had inverted greed and foolishness into God’s kindness to her.

That’s the subtlety that I think goes on.

If you look down in chapter 3 God actually names some specific sins that the people in Israel God was saying were okay. **Read 3:5**

We’ll dive deeper into these when we get here. But these seem to be the specific sins that Malachi is referencing here. People were saying it’s actually commendable to practice sorcery. “Hey we worship Yahweh but we worship Baal too. That’s fine. We can worship both.”

We’re not oppressing the hired worker. No, we’re just not paying them right now because we’re saving the money for them because they don’t know how to save it for themselves. We wouldn’t want them to waste their money. So we’ll keep it safe for them. No, God said pay them right away.

You get the idea. It’s trying to justify turning bad things to appear to be good things. And it’s also turning good things into bad things.

That’s the first accusation. They’re flipping morality on its head.

Here’s the second accusation. **Read 17**

The second thing they’re saying is sort of just the opposite: Where is the God of justice? Where is God’s judgment on bad things?

These are people in a different camp. They see good and evil rightly, but they complain that God isn’t doing anything about punishing the bad people.

We see all these corrupt politicians - where’s God?

We see people just walk into stores and steal stuff by the cartload and walk out and nothing happens. Where’s God?

We see criminals get taken to jail and they're walking out faster than the cop who brought them there. Where's God?

The drugs, terrorism, infidelity, incompetence, greed, immorality...the it's goes on. Where is God in all of that?

We have to be very careful when we see these things because our hearts can become bitter toward God. As though we know better than he does about the right time to bring judgment.

2 Pet. 3:9: The Lord is not slow in keeping his promises, as some count slowness. He's patient, not wanting us to perish but all to reach repentance.

We don't want to invert morality and say God approves of it, but we don't want to make the mistake of accusations God of injustice by not punishing it according to our timeline either.

Beloved, let's make sure every word we say honors God. Every word brings grace. Every word upholds his standards of goodness and righteousness. And every word trusts in his timing for judgment.

For his glory.

Pray