

PostExilicProphets 22-06-01a

Greetings, welcome to the Wednesday evening Bible study at Grace and Truth Bible Church. We're in the book of Malachi. We're going to be picking up in chapter 3, right in the middle.

Kind of like John 3.16, we're going to be in the vicinity of Malachi 3.16. We'll be looking at the context. You will notice that I am wearing my Naval Academy sweatshirt because I actually was appointed to and went to the Naval Academy, as some of you did. The president speaking at the Naval Academy to the graduating class of 22 claimed that he was appointed to the Naval Academy the same year that he graduated from the University of Delaware.

He also said, you know, greetings to those of you who came here four days ago when he meant four years ago. Just to be clear, there is a Naval Academy in Annapolis, Maryland. Some of us went there, others did not.

The current sitting president of the United States did not, just for the record. That having been said, we're going to pick up our study here. Let's ask God's blessing on our fellowship and on our investigations and we'll begin.

Father, we are so grateful for the gracious provisions, blessings, protections that you have made for us as a part of our salvation through our relationship to you in the Lord Jesus Christ. We thank you for him, his example, his words and works and his current ongoing work of intercession on our behalf as he awaits the instruction to come and collect us and receive us to himself. We thank you for this portion of your word, this section of the last book of the Old Testament that we look at together tonight and we ask your blessing on us as we try to understand it more fully and see the principles that apply in our own lives as we do our best to redeem the time, knowing that the days are evil and that the opportunities are quickly being consumed for us to learn and grow and prepare ourselves for service and function now and in the ages to come.

So we ask your blessing on us as we spend this time together and we ask all these things in Jesus' name. Amen. We're in Malachi looking at the third chapter and the last of the charges here.

Your harsh words against me beginning in 3.13 says the Lord, you say, what have we spoken against you? You have said it is useless to serve God. What profit that we have kept his ordinance that we have walked as mourners before the Lord of hosts. So now we call the proud blessed for those who do wickedness are raised up.

They even tempt God and go free. Then in verse 16, those who feared the Lord spoke to one another and the Lord listened and heard. So a book of remembrance was written before him for those who fear the Lord and who meditate on his name.

They shall be mine says the Lord of hosts on the day that I make them my jewels and I will

spare them as a man spares his own son who serves him. Then you shall again discern between the righteous and the wicked between one who serves God and one who does not serve him. Wonderfully apt searching and pertinent words for that day.

Many days since and our current time. Most certainly. Let's begin by looking at verse 13 and 14.

How have people spoken against God? What is it that they have said? They say it is useless to serve God. Useless. This is a really interesting word.

The word to save, the verb is shua. Remember Yeshua, Joshua. The shua, S-H-U-A, is the word that means to save.

This is a very similar word, but it is shau, or shav, if you like to pronounce it as the Germans. I don't think there were very many Germans in ancient Israel. They can't say W, so they have shav.

But I think it is sha or shau. And you just reverse the vowels on shua, and you have this word. And this is a word that means emptiness or vanity, nothingness, falsehood, the opposite of salvation with its fullness, with its substance, with its benefit, with its blessing.

It is the opposite of all of those things. It is emptiness. It is nothingness.

It is vain. It is a self-deception. It's a mistake to serve God.

The word servant is eved, E-B-E-D. And this is the verb form of that, avad. Useless, empty, waste of time would be a good colloquial translation.

You have said it is a waste of time to serve God. And what profit that we have kept his ordinance. What profit? The word profit here is B-E-T-S-A, betsa.

And it is usually used for unjust gain or spoil. You've gained it by violence. Gain made by violence, unjust gain.

And there are many words. They could have said what benefit is there? What blessing is there? What good is there? But you see a almost Freudian slip here, a betrayal of their hearts because the kind of profit they want is the kind where you get a lot of benefit for just a little effort. Betsa, unjust gain, is illicit benefit.

And so where is the easy money in serving God? Where is the spoil and the loot in serving God? Betsa. So they betray their own hearts here by the use of this word. Where is the easy money that we have kept his ordinance? I'm in the process, the early stages of a process, where I want to study combinations of nouns and verbs that are cognate, that come from the same root.

There's been an argument related to the pre-, mid-, or post-tribulational rapture timing based on the idea that a noun doesn't necessarily carry the same meaning as the verb that is derived from the same stem. I think they're wrong about that. My instinct and my experience tells me

that.

But in my spare time, you know how much of that there is. I'm working this problem. This is one of those cases.

This is one of those cases that we have kept. This is the Hebrew word shamar. S-H-A-M-A-R.

Shamar. To keep. This is a cal-perfect.

This means we have kept in the past. That we kept. It's not exactly a past.

I'm not going to agonize over the way Hebrew stems work. But notionally, we wasted our time in the past. We didn't get the easy money benefit.

God didn't just bless our socks off when we have kept shamar. His shamars. His shamars.

It's his mishmars. Remember, I've told you many times, you put an M in front of a Hebrew verb and you can make it into a noun. So, mishamar.

Then it's got a suffix saying that they are his. But it's from shamar. So that we have kept his things that need to be kept.

We have kept what he said to keep. We have shamard his mishamars. Make sense? Do you see that there's a very close connection here? I will be returning to this point later in another context.

But to keep that which he required us to keep. Keep what should be kept. And that we have walked, halak, as mourners.

This is an interesting and I think probably mistranslated word here. Before the Lord, before Yahweh. This is the Tetragrammaton Lord.

If you look at it here in your verse 14. Before the Lord of hosts. And you see Lord is in small caps there.

Yahweh Sabaoth. The Lord of the armies. So, you have spoken harshly, God says.

Your words have been hard against me. It seems pretty bold to speak against the Lord, your God, your creator. The God of your fathers.

The God of your scriptures. The God who established your nation. But it is an easy thing to speak harshly against an authority that you do not respect.

There is a percentage benefit in avoiding any such talk. Even if you think it is deserved. You can pick any one of our last five or six presidents.

And find people who did not respect them. And then spoke harshly against them. Past and

present.

The notion here is not whether or not it is deserved. We don't know everything. We know in part.

We see in part, Paul says. And it is easy to draw harsh conclusions through lack of knowledge. And sometimes that lack of knowledge is due to lack of interest in finding out the truth.

Or interest in pursuing knowledge. But it is safer and more solid ground to refrain from harsh talk. Knowing that we don't know everything.

And figuring that this respect in many cases should be aimed at the office. Rather than the individual who may hold the office. And the person holding the office.

However they may have gotten it. For whatever reasons they are in it. We respect the office.

Even if we don't have personal reasons for enjoying the presence of the person who is occupying that office. It is better to be respectful. If we can't respect the person, respect the office.

If we can't even respect the office because it has been hijacked and used for other purposes. We can respect the God who respects the office. Fear God.

Honor the King. God grants ruling authority. God allows even Satan rulership.

Satan is not the God of this world because he conquered it. Because he outmaneuvered God and seized it. Satan is the God of this world because God in heaven has permitted it.

God has granted him this space of time and has allowed him his authority. Even the angels do not bring railing accusations against the God of this world. So it is prudent to find what it is that we should respect and operate in respect.

Concomitant with respect is humility. The proud do not respect much. Humility looks for, finds, and then exercises respect toward that which God has established.

What God allows. What God permits. This extends even to conceptual things.

To circumstances. If God has allowed testing. If God allows what we would see as an incursion through the wall of fire into our space.

Into our security. Into our health. Into our finances.

Into our expectations. We may not have much esteem for that situation or its effects or any of the people that are involved. But we can respect the God who respects his own plan and purpose enough to permit those things.

Looking for the path of respect is a way to avoid a lot of potential judgment. These people have

not done that. The reason they speak harshly against God and ultimately speak unfairly and untruly with regard to God is they first lost their respect for God.

They lost respect, as we've seen in the preceding chapters, for his altar. For his precepts and ordinances with regard to sacrifice. His complaint in the past is, where is my honor? I am a great king.

Where is the respect that is due me? And at the heart of all of these problems in the book of Malachi is, at the very root, is no longer giving to God what is his due by way of worship. Which is founded in respect, in honor, recognition of his position vis-a-vis our own. That's the heart of the problem and that resurfaces here.

What have we spoken against you when you lose esteem, when you lose the awe, the honor, the worshipful respect that is God's due? These other things are going to follow. Even if they don't follow, you're still going to be in trouble for the hard attitude. You have said it is a waste of time.

There's no upside. There's no benefit to me to keep his things that should be kept. To keep his charge.

And that we have walked as mourners. This word has as its root, Q-D-R. Q-D-R.

Those are the, in Hebrew, you always look for the three consonants, generally. And you would expect this to be qadar, Q-A-D-A-R. This is the verb that means to be black or to be dark.

And so from this, they have gone to this form, which is thought to be an adverb, modifying walking, halak. So to walk darkly or to walk blackly, thus to walk as mourners. And I'm not going to pursue the language trail here that I went down and had a lot of fun.

But there are, in fact, adjectives and related words to qadar that do mean to be a mourner. For things to darken or be black, whether it's the skies or whatever. Metaphorically, to be circumstances.

However, to walk as mourners doesn't make great sense in this context. And occasionally, by the way, this is a hapax legomena. This particular form only occurs here.

And in trying to figure out, well, what does it mean? Well, it does have qadar in it. Dark, black, okay. They must be walking in blackness of darkness of heart.

But there is some help in cognate languages. You go to Arabic and there is a word here, a cognate word in Arabic. That means to be watchful, to it is parallel.

In other words, to keep his ordinances and to walk respectfully, to walk watchfully rather than sadly. How many times does the Old Testament say rejoice in the Lord, be of good cheer, make a joyful noise to the Lord and so on. The commands of the Lord were not designed to be burdensome and onerous.

And they didn't get credit for being sad and walking in blackness. You could say, well, it might have made them feel that way because they thought it was a burden. But I think it makes more sense here to look at the cognate in Arabic.

The Arabic root means to honor, to judge the value of a thing, to estimate or to measure. To walk in a measured fashion, to walk having estimated the value. And you can see we think there is no value.

What was the good in keeping his charge and walking, thinking that we would be blessed, making the estimate that this was the way of prosperity, the way of blessing. Blessings and curses on Mount Ebal and Mount Gerizim. We credited that, we gave that its proper estimate and that was a mistake.

So I think when you see walk as mourners, what makes more sense to me in the context is to walk obediently, to walk having estimated it to be the better path, keeping the covenant. And walking with God in obedience is throughout the Old Testament, as you can imagine. As far back as Genesis 6, 9, the description of Noah.

Noah was a just man, perfect in his generations. Noah walked, halak, with God. That's our verb here, to walk with God.

Genesis 17, 1, when Abram was 99 years old, the Lord appeared to Abram. Again, this is 17, 1 of Genesis after looking at 6, 9. 17, 1, Abram was 99 years old. The Lord appeared to Abram and said to him, I am almighty God, walk before me and be blameless, halak.

Genesis 24, 40, the Lord before whom I walk will send his angel with you and prosper your way. And you shall take a wife for my son from my family and from my father's house. Abram talking to his servant about going and finding Rebecca.

Genesis 48, 15, Jacob blesses Joseph and says, God before whom my fathers, Abraham and Isaac walked. Walking before God, walking, having estimated or accounted that this is the right way. Walking as best you can in the light of the Lord.

God before whom my fathers walked, the God who has fed me all my life long to this day. And it's a part of his blessing. 1 Kings 2, 3, keep the charge of the Lord your God to walk in his ways, to keep his statutes, his commandments, his judgments, and his testimonies.

As it is written in the law of Moses, that you may prosper in all that you do and wherever you turn. Walking before God, walking obediently to prosper. That notion is disbelieved in the day of Malachi.

Solomon in his prayer, a chapter later in 1 Kings 3, 6. Solomon said, you have shown great mercy to your servant, David, my father, because he walked before you in truth, in righteousness, and in uprightness of heart with you. You have continued this great kindness for him, and you have given him a son to sit on his throne as it is this day. Of course, Solomon's

talking about himself.

You move forward in 1 Kings to chapter 14, verse 8. God has torn the kingdom away from the house of David and given it to you. And yet you have not been as my servant, David, who kept my commandments and who followed me with all his heart to do only what was right in my eyes. To shamar the mishmar.

You can see it again in chapter 15, verse 3. You can walk as this king did in all the sins of his father, which he had done before him. His heart was not loyal to the Lord, his God, as was the heart of his father, David. So walking before God is obviously and clearly a metaphor for values, priorities, and goals.

So your words have been harsh against me. What have we spoken against you? You have said it is vain, it is empty, it is a waste of time to serve God. What profit, what benefit to me, what personal gain do I accrue having kept his ordinance and walking by taking the measure before the Lord of hosts? Lord of hosts is a specific title that emphasizes God's power, the Lord of the armies.

He's got all that power, but he hasn't exercised it on my behalf. I've reviewed for you in the past, and that's the argument made by atheists and other ne'er-do-wells that why is there so much evil in the world? If God is so powerful, if he's as powerful as the Bible claims, he would use his power to prevent all of this evil. So the presence of evil in the world indicates that God isn't Yahweh Sabaoth, or he would use his power to stop it.

And if he has the power and is not stopping it, then he's an evil and uncaring God and not worthy of worship. If he isn't really powerful enough to stop evil, then he's a weak God and not worthy of worship. This trite, syllogistic, simplistic, shallow thinking, in the very act of expressing it, people condemn themselves.

They're speaking harshly against God and saying there is no benefit, there's no profit, there's no reason. It's a waste of time to serve God, much less to honor him or believe in him and so on. So in verse 15, now we call the proud blessed.

You look back in chapter 2, verse 17. You have wearied the Lord with your words. Yet you say, in what way have we wearied him? In that you say, everyone who does evil is good in the sight of the Lord, and he delights in them.

Where is this God of justice? We say people doing evil are good. Now they're saying it's a waste of time to serve God. So 2.17 connects to this.

They're calling the arrogant blessed. The arrogant are often put for a description of the enemies of God's faithful people, God's obedient people. Throughout scripture, God resists the proud but gives grace to the humble.

Is that James 4.6? I think it is. God resists the proud but gives grace to the humble. Submit

yourself under the mighty hand of God in humility that he may exalt you in due time.

This is what the syllogistic people leave out. Well, God is either too weak or too uncaring. Either way, he's not worthy to be worshiped.

Or God is way smarter than you and has a plan that you can't comprehend because you're a small chicken and he is a very fulsome intellect. And the fact that the chicken doesn't understand why I lock it up and why I let it out. I've got a chicken out here that I have to carry to his protective house about every other night.

His will is to sleep outdoors on the back stoop. And he resists being picked up and carried and put into safety because he's too dumb to know what I know. And you could say, who is this mean individual that takes me out of my evening slumbers and literally carries me kicking and squawking to this house and shuts me in where I don't like it? How dare he? Well, one thing he can't say is that I'm not strong enough to subdue him.

There are others that can't subdue him. But you see the distance. The distance between that rooster and me is far less than the distance between us and the Lord God in heaven.

Humility recognizes this. Arrogance does not. Therefore, we call the arrogant blessed.

The Bible has much to say about the arrogant in Psalm 86 14. Oh, God, the proud have risen against me and a mob of violent men have sought my life. And they have not set you before them.

They have not set God before them. Therefore, they are now my enemies, my pursuers, my attackers. Psalm 86 14.

Oh, God, the proud have risen against me and a mob of violent men have sought my life. And they have not set you before them. That's the root of the problem.

No respect. Not giving God his due. Psalm 119 21.

You rebuke the proud, the cursed, who stray from your commandments. Pride and disobedience, pride and disregard of God go hand in hand. 119 51.

I'm going to give you about five verses out of Psalm 119. So the first one was Psalm 119 21. Psalm 119 51.

The proud have me in great derision, yet I do not turn aside from your law. Verse 69. The proud have forged a lie against me, but I will keep your precepts with my whole heart.

These people reject God and his precepts and then go and attack God's people. God's people say, even though I am under attack from the proud, I will not depart from God's precepts. You see the link there between attitude toward God and what happens between people? The faithful are not dissuaded from obedience and honoring and worshiping God and living life to

please God.

The arrogant, because they have chosen the opposite of that, are now, they can't get at God, so they're going to get at God's people. They'll take out their frustrations and their evil intent on the people who haven't chosen that disobedient path. Psalm 119 85.

The proud have dug pits for me, which is not according to your law. Remember, there's a specific requirement in the law of Moses that says you are accountable. You need to be careful not to create dangerous situations for your fellow Israelites.

Psalm 119 122. O Lord, be surety for your servant for good. Do not let the proud oppress me.

When the proud come after God's faithful and obedient people, we go to God and ask for redress, ask for protection. So, scorning God, being arrogant and haughty, they are going to try to oppress and otherwise attack God's people. The word Zadim here that is translated arrogant, this comes from a root that means to boil up, to seethe, to therefore metaphorically to act proudly, but there is a seething discontent, a seething disrespect.

It boils up. There is a pressure inside that has to find a direction to express itself. And so this is often used for rebellion.

Arrogant attitude is rebellion. And you can connect this attitude to what the psalmist says in Psalm 73 3. I was envious of the boastful when I saw the prosperity of the wicked. Why did the wicked prosper? There is no percentage in serving God and adhering to His way and measuring out a path that honors Him and His precepts.

I thought about this, honestly, when we were raising our children, raising our girls and teaching them to be respectful, to let others go ahead of them, to wait until they received instructions before they did a thing. And all of their peers, once we released them into the swamp that is public school, would elbow them out of the way. They were last in line.

They did not prosper because they weren't pushy and they didn't stick their elbows out like their peers and fight for what they wanted because they weren't out for number one. And they often didn't seem to be recognized by a teacher. The teacher said, you know, raise your hand before you ask a question.

And then the teacher himself disregarded their guidance and responded to kids who blurted out answers. Their hard work was not recognized. Their obedience was not appreciated.

It just seemed to make them come in second or third or last. And I thought, are we on the wrong path here by teaching them respect for authority and obedience and wait your turn and consider the interests of others ahead of your own and all of that? They seem to get crowded into the shadows by those who don't have that attitude. And you see this, the psalmist expresses this, I was envious of the boastful when I saw the prosperity of the wicked.

You need to go along to get along. You need to be pushy. You've got to, you know, fight for what's yours.

If the chum is in the water and you're a piranha, you better get up there and get your bite or you're going to be eaten by your fellows. But the psalmist is going to go on in 73 to enter God's sanctuary and to seek answers from God and to get perspective that God sees. And that same perspective is coming up here in verse 16 just in a moment.

The prosperity of the wicked, the arrogant, has always been a problem. Why do the wicked prosper? Remember how many wells were dug in the days of Abraham and Isaac and they had to keep moving. They'd dig a well, it would be taken away from them.

They'd move further, they'd dig a well, it was taken away from them. This is as old as Genesis. Habakkuk asks, why does Yahweh allow evil people to prosper from Abraham to Habakkuk and on to Malachi? It just doesn't pay to serve the Lord.

So then we come to verse 16. Then those who feared the Lord spoke to one another. The Septuagint doesn't translate that connecting word as then.

The word is Az, A-Z, and the Septuagint translates it as Tauta, which is this, T-A-U-T-A. Not only the Septuagint, but the Syriac and the Targums also take this connecting word to mean this, not then. So it changes the meaning of the verse a bit if it is this.

There is a similar confusion of Az and Za. Both the word this and the word then have the Z in them. Z-A-Y-I-N is the letter name.

And there's a similar confusion in Genesis 4, verse 26. As for Seth, to him also a son was born, and he named him Enosh. Then men began to call on the name of the Lord.

So this would be the translation. I think there may be some merit in this because it's hard to pinpoint a time when those who fear the Lord would suddenly start speaking. You know, then they spoke and said.

Again, just my English major spidey sense tells me that that's a bump in the road that shouldn't be there. See what you think of this take. If the word is as the early translators understood it, and it means this, and I think it does.

Since God fearing people spoke to one another this way, there were not only these who call evil good and call good evil that we saw back in chapter 2, verse 17. But this last objection is this. This is a harsh word.

It pains God to hear his faithful people begin to doubt and question whether being faithful. You think about the days of the captivity. You think about the post captivity.

You think about the pushing and shoving. As Jesus says, from earliest days until John the Baptist, the people have been trying to take the kingdom by force and forceful men have been

trying to press their way into it. And faithful people look around and say, how long? Oh, Lord, do you think about the souls under the altar in Revelation? How long? Oh, Lord, are we going to be the ones who are crushed? We are the ones who are slain.

We're the ones who are getting pushed and crowded out and away. And it really does seem as though the wicked prosper. And my father was a faithful man.

My grandfather was a faithful man. I saw him live his whole life this way. He never saw the vindication.

He never saw the blessing come. And without the concept of resurrection, without the concept of it ain't over till it's over, this word could be legitimately spoken. How long? Oh, Lord, why do the wicked prosper? I've seen faithful people come and go and never saw the blessing, never saw the fulfillment of your promises in the law.

That those who are faithful and obedient will be blessed. This is a problem. It's very interesting.

Let me just give you this right before the break here. When it says your words have been harsh against me, some work has been done on this harsh words phrase. And it seems to mean or it can mean the suggestive connotation is your words are too much for me.

It can mean not only hard and harsh, but too much. It's more than I can bear. It is harsh to the point of unbearable.

Your words are unbearable to me, says the Lord. That you're beginning to believe this perhaps is the notion. So we would expect that there would be some answer to this objection.

You know, God never credits the earlier objections that are made by these ne'er-do-wells. But this last one, this is the last one in the book. This one is different.

And God has a different response. He's going to act in the light of this. So what I want to leave you with here is this.

Those who feared the Lord spoke to one another and the Lord listened and heard. Right? So something is done. Here's the thought I want to leave you with here in our long first session.

The people who fear the Lord are speaking to one another. It doesn't say they prayed. It doesn't say they fell on their face before the Lord.

It doesn't say they went to the prophet or anything else. They were speaking to one another. But notice the Lord listened and heard.

My constant prayer before prayer every time I pray is to quote the psalmist. Let the words of my mouth and the meditations of my heart be acceptable in thy sight, O Lord, my strength and my Redeemer. Let the words of my mouth, not just the words of my prayer, the words of my mouth.

God listens and God hears to what we say to each other. Our conversations are heard in heaven. Isn't that something? The words we speak, those who fear the Lord, when we speak to one another, God is listening.

God is a party to the conversation. And He will act on what He hears. That's what we're going to see when we come back from the break.