

Sermon outline and notes prepared by:
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Malachi 1:12-13; 2:17; 3:13-15 “Christian Complainers!”

Intro. Are you a complainer? Well, the people of Malachi’s day certainly were complainers! They had returned to the land of Israel after the Babylonian captivity, and things were not going so well. And as Malachi preached to the people, they responded in negative ways repeatedly. They denied the charges that the prophet brought against them. They often complained about various things. Well, their ancestors were the same way. Do you remember what happened after they were delivered from Egyptian bondage, and when they got into the desert? In the books of Exodus, Numbers, & Deuteronomy, there are 20 references to the complaints of the children of Israel! For example, in Exodus 15:24 the people complained against Moses, saying, "What shall we drink?" In Exodus 17:3 they complained about the same thing, in spite of a previous miraculous provision from God. In Exodus 16 they complained about not having meat to eat. Then in vv. 7-8 Moses pointed out that they were actually complaining against the Lord. In v. 9 Moses said that the Lord had heard the complaints of the people. Did you know that the Lord hears your complaints? In fact, in v. 12 God says, "I have heard the complaints of the children of Israel." And I can tell you, the Lord was not pleased with what He was hearing! In fact, in Numbers 11:1 the Bible says, “Now when the people complained, it displeased the LORD; for the LORD heard it, and His anger was aroused.” God judged many of the complainers! In 1 Cor. 10:10 Paul makes a reference to this and applied this to Christian believers, saying that we should not “complain, as some of them also complained, and were destroyed by the destroyer.” Likewise, James 5:9 says, “Do not grumble against one another, brethren, lest you be condemned.” We can be sure that the Lord is displeased with many of the criticizing, complaining saints today. They are everlastingly finding fault and nothing seems to please them. By the way, the Hebrew word translated “to complain” or “to murmur” is based on the Hebrew word that means “to dwell, to lodge, to pass the night.” Do you see how the word came to mean “to complain”? It is because complainers *dwell* on their complaint. They will give the same complaint over and over to anyone who will listen! In fact, Proverbs 19:13 says, “... the contentions of a wife are a continual dripping.” That is why Solomon also wrote in Proverbs 21:9, “Better to dwell in a corner of a housetop, Than in a house shared with a contentious woman.”

In New Testament times they hadn’t improved much. There are 3 references to the Jewish leaders complaining about the fact that Jesus ate with sinners (Luke 5:30; 15:2; 19:7). In John 7:12 it says there was much complaining among the people concerning Jesus. In Mark 14:5 we see that some of the disciples were critical & complaining about the so-called waste in pouring expensive, fragrant oil of the head & body of Jesus while He reclined at the table. Have you ever heard someone complain, “Oh, they’re just wasting money down there at that church.” In Acts 6:1 we read of the fact that there was complaining in the early church about the way the Greek-speaking widows seemed to be neglected, and were not getting their fair share of support.

Complaining is a common problem. Someone said, “The Lord created the world in six days and rested on the seventh. On the eighth day, He started to answer complaints.” Actually, it wasn’t until after Adam & Eve sinned that He started answering complaints. We are born with a complaining, disagreeable spirit. In the book of Jude we see that complaining will be a common

characteristic of people in the last days. In Jude 1:16 he says of people in the last days, “These are grumblers, complainers,....”

Now what should our attitude and response be about this common human problem? Php. 2:14 says, “Do all things without complaining and disputing.”

Now let’s look at some of the specific complaints of the people in Malachi’s day. I believe we will find that many of the same complaints are being voiced by Christians today. I want to ask you 3 questions:

I. DO YOU COMPLAIN ABOUT THE OFFERING OF THE LORD?

In 1:12-13 notice what the people were saying, “The table of the LORD is defiled; And its fruit, its food, is contemptible.” They were also saying, “Oh, what a weariness!” They were even sneering at it! Now the context is talking about the requirement of offering animal sacrifices and other offerings to the Lord at the temple. Bringing the sacrifices, and offering them up on an altar was declared to be a weariness, a hardship, a tiresome thing. My friend, when the heart is not in the thing, it becomes weariness.

Now we do not bring animal sacrifices to church, but when it comes time to give tithes and offerings in church, I wonder how many sneer at it, and complain about the way the church is always asking for money. If you give at all, it is given reluctantly, not generously, and with complaint. Well notice what the last of v. 13 says, “And you bring the stolen, the lame, and the sick; thus you bring an offering! Should I accept this from your hand?” The Lord did not accept such offerings from the Jews, and He will not accept such offerings from Christians. 2 Cor. 9:7 says, “So let each one give as he purposes in his heart, not grudgingly or of necessity; for God loves a cheerful giver.”

When people complain that ministry costs money, listen to what President Pearson of Miami Christian College said. He noted that people complained that he was always asking for money for the school. In response, he told a personal story. He had a little boy, his firstborn. He was a delight to his heart, but he was always costing him and his wife something. He needed clothing, shoes, food, and had special needs that were gladly provided, for he was his son. Then one day he died. He does not cost even a dollar now. Every need is an unfailing sign of life and growth. Body, mind, and soul have their needs and they must be met continually. A ministry that is constantly in need of funds is alive and growing and going somewhere. A dead ministry has no need, and will not bother you.¹

II. DO YOU COMPLAIN ABOUT THE WAYS OF THE LORD?

In 2:17 the prophet said, “You have wearied the LORD with your words.” Once again, they denied knowing what the prophet was talking about. They said, “In what way have we wearied Him?” Then Malachi quoted their own words back to them. They were saying, “Everyone who does evil is good in the sight of the LORD, and He delights in them,” Or, “Where is the God of justice?” There were complaining that God was not being fair.

Now look down to 3:15, “So now we call the proud blessed, for those who do wickedness are raised up; they even tempt God and go free.” This was their complaint: the pagan peoples around them who didn’t know the Lord were in better shape than the people of Judah! The wicked were prospering while the godly were suffering. Their attitude was wrong. They thought that

¹ #C-738, March, ’83, sent by David Olson of Excelsior, Minnesota.

because they were not blessed immediately with material favors from the Lord, they were prone to call the arrogant sinners a happy lot; for they appeared to prosper and to get great enjoyment from life. The murmurers further charged that the proud who worked wickedness were built up by the Lord and that, though they tempted the Lord, they escaped from judgment.

Note God's answer to these complainers. He basically says, "Just wait. In due time the righteous will be rewarded and the wicked judged." In fact, notice how He concludes in v. 18, "Then you shall again discern between the righteous and the wicked, between one who serves God And one who does not serve Him." Even so, we shouldn't complain against God or question what He's doing. I believe this is what Hab. 2:20 is referring to when he says, "But the Lord is in His holy temple; let all the earth keep silence before Him." He's on the throne. He is in charge of the universe. Stop your complaining and keep silent before Him."

There is another answer to these complainers. They didn't want to admit it, but many of the problems they were complaining about they were bringing on themselves. The problem wasn't with God - the problem was with them. Instead of doing something about their sin, they just complained about the troubles and trials they were facing, and how unfair it seemed that those who were ungodly pagans seemed to fair better. It reminds me of a story I read. A pastor stopped to visit an elderly member of his congregation who was sitting on the front porch of his old house. As they talked, they were constantly disturbed by the man's dog on the porch near them. The dog continually moaned and growled. Finally, the pastor asked, "What is the trouble with your dog?" "Well," the man replied, "the poor old dog is trying to sleep, but he's lying on a nail. He hurts enough that he can't sleep, but he doesn't hurt enough to make him get up and move." How like his dog we are. We moan and groan about our marriage, our diet, our job, etc., but we don't seem to hurt enough to do something constructive to improve our situation. We go through life wasting our energy complaining rather than changing.

III. DO YOU COMPLAIN ABOUT THE SERVICE OF THE LORD?

In 3:13 God says, "Your words have been harsh against Me." The adjective "harsh" means "hard, harsh, violent." In their conversations one with another they had said strong things against the Lord. Then in the last of v.13 they said, "What have we spoken against You?" They were saying, "We don't recall that we have said anything against You!" So the Lord tells that what they have been saying against Him. In v.14 it says, "You have said, 'It is useless to serve God; what profit is it that we have kept His ordinance, And that we have walked as mourners Before the LORD of hosts?'" It is as if they were serving the Lord for hire and He hadn't paid up.

I wonder how many among us have the same complaining attitude. You give up your Sunday morning, get dressed, come to church. You go through the motions of worship, singing songs, listening to prayers, and listening to a sermon. You go home just the way you came. And when something bad happens, you complain, and wonder if going to church has been just a waste of time.

One form of Christian service we should perform is hospitality. 1 Peter 4:9 says, "Be hospitable to one another without grumbling." Indeed, we ought to serve the Lord and others without grumbling and complaining. By the way, the same Greek word is used in Hebrews 13:17, where it says, "Obey those who rule over you, and be submissive, for they watch out for your souls, as those who must give account. Let them do so with joy and not with *grief*, for that would be unprofitable for you." In contrast, we're commanded to "serve the Lord with gladness" (Ps. 100:2). Do you serve in the nursery with gladness, or with complaining? Do you come to choir rehearsals

with gladness, or with complaining? [Etc.]. God wants you to be a joyful Christian. Can you be joyful and complain at the same time? No.

Conclusion: So what's the answer to this problem of complaining? Well, to solve a problem, you first have to identify the root cause of a problem. So what is the root cause of complaining? It comes from an unthankful, ungrateful heart. Wayne Nix said, "Critical words that come from the mouth originate in an unthankful heart." So I want to conclude by giving you 3 steps to minimize complaining in your own life:

1. Cultivate an Attitude of Gratitude - Focus on what you can be thankful for. Zachary Fisher said, "Gratitude is riches. Complaining is poverty. Instead of complaining about what's wrong, be grateful for what's right." The children of Israel complained about so much in the wilderness, when they should have focused their energy on being thankful! God had delivered them from Egyptian bondage. He was leading them to the promised land. He had given them good laws to live by. He had provided for their every need, at just the right time.

Listen to how one person was transformed from a complainer to one who is thankful. I will share their thoughts in the first person: "My car broke down and it cost \$400 to get it fixed . . . \$400 that I did not have. Why me, Lord? After all, I've been as good as most people. In fact, I've been better than most. Why are you treating me this way? Why are you punishing me this way? Then the TV went on the blink, and so did the dishwasher, and the clothes dryer, and the lawn mower, and even the iron! Why me, Lord?"

When I find myself starting to think like this, it sometimes helps for me to ask the same questions about other aspects of my life. Lord, what have I done that's so grand that you should have blessed me with a car, a TV set, a clothes dryer, a lawn mower, and an iron? Why did you give me all these things anyway? Why me, Lord? Lord, why did you permit me to be born in America with all its plenty? I could have been born in poverty-stricken Bangladesh. Why me, Lord? Lord, why did you give me the opportunity to have a job when so many, who are as deserving as I, are without work? Why me, Lord? Lord, why did you give me good health? Others died at my age of heart attacks or are crippled by accidents or disease. Why should I escape ill health when other religious people do not? Why me, Lord? Lord, why have you spared me from the sorrows that strike so many other families? Others, wonderful people, have lost close relatives, but I haven't. Why me, Lord? When I think of all the ways the Lord has blessed me, though I don't deserve it, I wonder how I could possibly complain about the relatively insignificant things that go wrong in my life from time to time. If I could only learn to count my blessings!² Indeed, Ken S. Keyes, Jr. said, "To be upset over what you don't have is to waste what you do have." You can become joyful by becoming thankful.

2. Cultivate a Spirit of Contentment – Paul wrote in Philippians 4:11, "Not that I speak in regard to need, for I have learned in whatever state I am, to be content." Likewise, he wrote in 1 Timothy 6:6, "Now godliness with contentment is great gain." Then Hebrews 13:5 says, "Let your conduct be without covetousness; be content with such things as you have. For He Himself has said, 'I will never leave you nor forsake you.'" Contentment is the opposite of complaining. When you have a spirit of contentment, you trust God's provision, and you are thankful for what He does provide.

3. Cultivate a Spirit of Forgiveness - You say, "But what if I have a just complaint?" I believe there is a time, a place, and a proper way to deal with problems. But listen to what Paul said in Colossians 3:13. He said we should be "bearing with one another, and forgiving one another, if

² Pulpit Helps Illustration Collection II in *Stories for Preachers & Teachers V1.0*, 1999.

anyone has a complaint against another; even as Christ forgave you, so you also must do.” Even if you have a just complain, you must ever be willing to forgive the person who have a complaint against.

Now let’s resolve to implement these 3 steps in our own lives, and learn the joy of a life that is thankful, content, and forgiving!