

Title: Your Words Matter to God

Text: Malachi 3:13–18

Words matter.

My Dad, Fr. Dell, and a funny comment...

A careless sentence can destroy a marriage.

A bitter conversation can divide a church.

A sarcastic comment can reveal years of hidden resentment.

And a reverent, gracious word spoken at the right moment can strengthen a weary soul.

Jesus said in [Matthew 12:34](#)

Matthew 12:34 ESV

You brood of vipers! How can you speak good, when you are evil? For out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks.

In other words, our words reveal.

They are windows into the soul.

What comes out of our mouths exposes what is living inside our hearts.

Matthew 12:36 (ESV)

³⁶ I tell you, on the day of judgment people will give account for every careless word they speak,

You can often discover the spiritual condition of a person simply by listening to the way they talk:

“How could God let this happen?”

“What’s the point of obeying Him?”

“It doesn’t really matter how you live.”

“Serving God doesn’t accomplish anything.”

Those kinds of words are not merely emotional reactions. They reveal something deeper. They reveal a heart moving away from the fear of God.

The people in Malachi’s day had become spiritually cold.

They still attended worship.

They still offered sacrifices.

They still maintained outward religion.

But their hearts were far from God.

Throughout the letter, God confronts them through a series of disputations:

“I have loved you.”

“How have You loved us?”

“You despise My name.”

“How have we despised Your name?”

“Return to Me.”

“How shall we return?”

Now we come to another revealing confrontation.

The people had begun speaking against God Himself.

Malachi ministered after the Babylonian exile, likely around 450–430 BC.

The temple had been rebuilt.

The walls of Jerusalem had been restored under Nehemiah.

Externally, many of God’s promises appeared to be moving forward.

But spiritually, the nation was struggling with disappointment.

The glorious kingdom promises had not yet arrived.

Foreign powers still ruled over them.

Life was difficult.

Wicked people seemed to prosper.

And instead of humbly trusting God, many became cynical and bitter.

Their disappointment turned into complaining.

Their complaining revealed unbelief.

And their unbelief began pouring out through their words.

And this is the thing about our words...

Main Idea: Our Words About God Reveal Whether We Truly Fear Him.

What do our conversations reveal about the condition of our hearts before God?

In this passage, God exposes two completely different kinds of speech.

One reveals spiritual cynicism. The other reveals genuine reverence.

1. Faithless Words Reveal a Cynical Heart — vv. 13–15

Complaining about God reveals a heart that no longer treasures or trusts Him rightly.

Look at verse 13:

Malachi 3:13 ESV

“Your words have been hard against me, says the LORD...”

The phrase *“hard against Me”* means harsh, strong, severe, or offensive.

The people were speaking in a way that dishonored God.

Notice something important here.

God hears our conversations.

These were not merely public speeches. These were the private conversations happening among the people. The cynical comments. The sarcastic observations. The grumbling spirit.

Nothing escapes the ears of God.

Ecclesiastes 10:20 ESV

*Even in your thoughts, do not curse the king,
nor in your bedroom curse the rich,
for a bird of the air will carry your voice,
or some winged creature tell the matter.*

Luke 12:2–3 ESV

Nothing is covered up that will not be revealed, or hidden that will not be known. Therefore whatever you have said in the dark shall be heard in the light, and what you have whispered in private rooms shall be proclaimed on the housetops.

I have learned the hard way over the years to be more and more cautious about what I say and when I say it.

Not because what I say could get me in trouble, but because I want to be pleasing to Jesus with what I say.

Then the people respond exactly like they have throughout the book:

Malachi 3:13 ESV

“Your words have been hard against me, says the LORD. But you say, ‘How have we spoken against you?’

This response yet again reveals the hearts of the people! They were apathetic towards God!

Spiritual apathy always minimizes sin.

The spiritually cold person rarely recognizes the seriousness of his own heart condition.

These people had become so accustomed to cynical speech that they no longer even recognized it as sinful.

Verse 14 reveals what they had been saying:

Malachi 3:14 ESV

You have said, ‘It is vain to serve God. What is the profit of our keeping his charge or of walking as in mourning before the LORD of hosts?’

The word *“vain”* means empty, useless, worthless, futile.

Their conclusion was simple:

“Serving God does not pay off.”

This is shocking because these are covenant people talking this way.

These are not pagans mocking Yahweh.

These are worshipers in Israel.

They had reached the point where obedience felt pointless.

Then they continue:

“What is the profit of our keeping his charge or of walking as in mourning before the LORD of hosts?”

In other words:

“What do we gain from obedience?”

“What benefit comes from repentance?”

“What advantage is there in taking God seriously?”

They had reduced obedience to a transaction.

They viewed worship like a transactional business deal:

“If God blesses me materially, then I will serve Him.”

But when suffering came, disappointment exposed the true condition of their hearts.

And they didn't keep their disappointment in their hearts, it poured out of their mouths.

This attitude appears repeatedly throughout Scripture.

In [Job 21](#), the wicked say:

Job 21:15 ESV

¹⁵ What is the Almighty, that we should serve him? And what profit do we get if we pray to him?'

Psalms 73:13 ESV

¹³ All in vain have I kept my heart clean...

Even faithful believers can wrestle with these temptations.

This is why the New Testament speaks so often about how we use our mouths

Ephesians 4:29 ESV

Let no corrupting talk come out of your mouths, but only such as is good for building up, as fits the occasion, that it may give grace to those who hear.

Ephesians 4:15 ESV

Rather, speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ,

1 Thessalonians 5:11 ESV

Therefore encourage one another and build one another up, just as you are doing.

Colossians 4:6 ESV

Let your speech always be gracious, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how you ought to answer each person.

Colossians 3:8 ESV

But now you must put them all away: anger, wrath, malice, slander, and obscene talk from your mouth.

Here in Malachi, the people of God were settling into cynicism.

Verse 15 exposes the depth of their distorted thinking:

Malachi 3:15 ESV

And now we call the arrogant blessed. Evildoers not only prosper but they put God to the test and they escape.'

Their theology had become inverted.

They looked at the world and concluded:

“The wicked are winning.”

“The proud are succeeding.”

“God does not seem to care.”

This is what happens when people interpret life through circumstances rather than through the character of God.

Instead of measuring reality by God’s covenant faithfulness, they measured God by their temporary frustrations.

Faithless words reveal a cynical heart

Years ago, early in my pastoral ministry there was a very godly woman in our church who was saturated in the word of God.

She was so kind and she was a sought-after Bible teacher for the women’s ministries of our church.

Unfortunately, she contracted cancer and after a long battle, she died.

After she passed, I attempted to offer my condolences to her husband.

I didn’t realize how angry he was at God! I said to him, “I am so very sorry for your loss. I know how much you loved your wife. At least we know that she is in Heaven with Jesus.”

In a shockingly fast and angry response he got in my face and said, “Oh yeah? If it’s so great, do you want to be next?”

Now this was not some unbeliever off the street, this was a prominent member of our church.

I was shocked at his faithless words and his cynical heart which was on full display!

This is how many people treat God during difficult seasons.

Because life becomes painful, they begin questioning His goodness, His justice, and His faithfulness.

As we learned last week...

God has not moved.

His character has not changed.

And His truth is still shining forth.

Spiritually apathetic churchgoers often reveal themselves more by their conversations than by their faithfulness in their church attendance.

You can sit in church every Sunday and still have a cynical heart.

Listen to the kinds of conversations that expose spiritual apathy:

“What’s the point of serving?”

“No one appreciates what I do.”

“Why should I sacrifice?”

“Everyone else compromises and seems happier.”

“Obedience only makes life harder.”

Usually there is some sort of hurtful experiences behind these kinds of statements.

Christian, don’t live in hurt.

Don’t live in fear.

Live in the sweet faithfulness of our Savior!

Hear me carefully: disappointment can become the breeding ground for unbelief if it is not surrendered to God.

Some people begin the Christian life with joy, but over time disappointment hardens them.

Prayers go unanswered.

Relationships fail.

Health declines.

Ministry becomes difficult.

People disappoint them.

And slowly their conversations become filled with negativity, sarcasm, criticism, bitterness, and cynicism.

The problem is not ultimately your circumstances. The problem is that your view of God has become small.

A cynical mouth often reveals a worship problem.

We live in a culture of complaining.

People complain about government.
They complain about weather.
They complain about work.
They complain about church.
They complain about their family.
They complain online.
They complain in private.
Complaining has become normalized.

Israel grumbled in the wilderness and dishonored God.

But Scripture consistently treats grumbling seriously.

Philippians 2:14 NIV84

Do everything without complaining or arguing,

Why?

Because complaining often accuses God indirectly.

Complaining says:

“God is not good to me.”

“God is withholding from me.”

“God is failing me.”

That is why our words matter to God.

When you are complaining to your friend about your spouse you are actually accusing God of doing you wrong by giving you the wrong partner in life!

This can be applied to any relationship or situation.

God is either in charge of everything or He is in charge of nothing.

And if He is in charge of everything, you can trust Him!

Faithless words reveal a cynical heart.

Our Words About God Reveal Whether We Truly Fear Him.

But thank God this passage does not end with cynical speech.

In the middle of widespread spiritual apathy, there was still a faithful remnant.

2. Faithful Words Reflect a Reverent Heart — v. 16

People who truly fear God speak differently because their hearts are anchored in Him.

Verse 16 begins with beautiful contrast:

Malachi 3:16 ESV

Then those who feared the LORD spoke with one another...

While many in Israel were complaining about God, another group was speaking reverently about Him.

Notice the defining characteristic:

“They feared the LORD.”

The fear of the Lord is not terror that drives us from God.

It is reverent awe that draws us toward Him.

It is a heart posture that says:

“God is holy.”

“God is worthy.”

“God is trustworthy.”

“God deserves my obedience.”

These people who feared God were not spiritually perfect.

They were living in the same difficult circumstances as everyone else.

But they interpreted life differently because they viewed God differently.

Notice also that they *“spoke with one another.”*

Their conversations strengthened faith instead of spreading cynicism.

This matters tremendously.

Words are contagious.

Complaining spreads.

Bitterness spreads.

Cynicism spreads.

But so does faith.

Encouragement spreads.

Worship spreads.

Hope spreads.

Healthy believers help each other remember who God is.

Hebrews 3:13 ESV

But exhort one another every day, as long as it is called "today," that none of you may be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin.

Hebrews 10:24–25 ESV

And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near.

Ephesians 4:29 ESV

Let no corrupting talk come out of your mouths, but only such as is good for building up, as fits the occasion, that it may give grace to those who hear.

The speech of reverent believers strengthens others spiritually.

Then notice the incredible statement in verse 16:

Malachi 3:16 ESV

Then those who feared the LORD spoke with one another. The LORD paid attention and heard them...

What a phrase.

God listened.

The sovereign Lord of heaven bends His ear toward reverent conversations among His people.

Sometimes faithful believers feel unnoticed.

The world ignores them.

Culture mocks them.

Even other professing believers may overlook them.

But God hears every word of those who faithfully follow Him!

Then verse 16 continues:

Malachi 3:16 ESV

Then those who feared the LORD spoke with one another. The LORD paid attention and heard them, and a book of remembrance was written before him of those who feared the LORD and esteemed his name.

This does not mean God forgets things and needs literal reminders.

This is covenant language expressing God's personal remembrance and faithful care for His people.

In the ancient world, kings kept records honoring loyal servants (think of Esther). God uses that imagery here.

The Lord takes notice of those who fear Him.

He remembers their faithfulness.

Pastoring is an interesting business.

I love it so much and I love you all so much!

What a privilege to serve Christ's church.

But there are times when it is a challenge.

Dealing with hundreds of people, hundreds of opinions, hundreds of hurting hearts can become overwhelming if I am not careful.

Pastor Larry is a gift from God to our church but also to me.

When I am feeling low, I can share my heart and frustrations with him and he listens.

He speaks to me about God's faithfulness.

He reminds me of Scripture.

He encourages me to persevere.

He prays with and for me.

And, he reminds me that Christ is worthy of all the challenge.

Heaven pays attention to life giving conversations like this.

God delights in this kind of uplifting and reverent speech.

So many times we are surrounded by complainers.

Find a "Larry" for your life. Someone who will speak life into you.

What kind of conversations characterize your life?

When people leave a conversation with you, are they strengthened spiritually or poisoned by negativity?

Do your words produce:
Faith or cynicism?
Hope or despair?
Worship or complaining?

Spiritually mature believers help others think rightly about God.

One of the great ministries in the church is faithful and encouraging speech.

A simple conversation can become ministry:

“Let me remind you God is faithful.”

“Let me encourage you from Scripture.”

“Let’s pray together.”

“Christ is still worthy.”

“God has not forgotten you.”

Some churchgoers have become deeply shaped by the language of the world.

Social media outrage.

Political bitterness.

Constant criticism.

Sarcasm.

Mockery.

Eventually that spirit seeps into their theology.

Instead of sounding like Christians who consistently trust God, they sound like unbelievers despairing in darkness.

It is shocking to me how often so many seemingly mature followers of Christ who profess a complete trust in the sovereign, providential hand but by their negative speech reveal they are functional atheists.

Check your speech, friends. It reveals your level of trust in the only One who is trustworthy.

You must develop a healthy fear or reverence for the Lord Jesus.

The fear of God changes the way we speak because it changes the way we see reality.

What is that reality? God is in charge and we can trust Him!

Faithful words reflect a reverent heart.

Our Words About God Reveal Whether We Truly Fear Him.

Now God gives a glorious promise to those who fear Him.

3. God Honors Those Who Honor Him — vv. 17-18

God lovingly remembers, treasures, and rewards those who genuinely fear Him.

After exposing the cynical words of the wicked and highlighting the reverent speech of the faithful, God now gives a promise to those who fear Him.

Look at verse 17:

Malachi 3:17 ESV

“They shall be mine, says the LORD of hosts, in the day when I make up my treasured possession...”

What a comforting statement.

The faithful remnant may have felt overlooked by the world.

They may have appeared weak, insignificant, or forgotten.

The arrogant seemed to prosper while the godly struggled.

But God says:

“They shall be Mine.”

This is covenant language filled with affection and ownership.

The phrase *“treasured possession”* reaches back to [Exodus 19:5](#) where God described Israel as His special treasure among the nations.

In the ancient world, kings possessed vast wealth, but there were certain treasures they especially prized and protected.

Exodus 19:5 ESV

Now therefore, if you will indeed obey my voice and keep my covenant, you shall be my treasured possession among all peoples, for all the earth is mine;

God says that those who **fear** Him are **His** treasured possession.

Think about that.

The God who owns the universe sets His affection upon His faithful people.

Then He says:

Malachi 3:17 ESV

“They shall be mine, says the LORD of hosts, in the day when I make up my treasured possession, and I will spare them as a man spares his son who serves him.

This speaks of compassion, mercy, tenderness, and love.

The faithful are not spared because they are sinless. They are spared because they belong to God.

Ultimately, this points us directly to the Gospel.

Every one of us deserves judgment for our sinful hearts, complaining spirits, and careless words.

Yet Jesus Christ came to bear the wrath we deserve so that those who trust Him might be forgiven, adopted, and eternally treasured by God.

Do you have a relationship with Christ. Do you have this treasured son or daughter status? You can only become a son or daughter of God by faith in Christ and His finished work on the cross!

Why don't you follow Him today?!

Then verse 18 says:

Malachi 3:18 ESV

Then once more you shall see the distinction between the righteous and the wicked, between one who serves God and one who does not serve him.

At that moment in history, it looked as though serving God accomplished nothing.

The wicked prospered.

The proud appeared blessed.

The faithful often struggled.

But God says a day is coming when the difference will become unmistakably clear.

The people in verse 14 asked:

“What is the profit of serving God?”

Verses 17–18 are God's answer.

There is eternal value in serving and fearing the Lord.

God sees His people.

God remembers His people.

God treasures His people.
And one day God will publicly honor His people.

This theme runs throughout Scripture.

1 Samuel 2:30 ESV

...the LORD declares: 'Far be it from me, for those who honor me I will honor, and those who despise me shall be lightly esteemed.'

Psalm 84:11 ESV

*For the LORD God is a sun and shield;
the LORD bestows favor and honor.
No good thing does he withhold
from those who walk uprightly.*

Matthew 25:21 ESV

His master said to him, 'Well done, good and faithful servant. You have been faithful over a little; I will set you over much. Enter into the joy of your master.'

Hebrews 6:10 ESV

For God is not unjust so as to overlook your work and the love that you have shown for his name in serving the saints, as you still do.

The world may overlook quiet faithfulness, but God never does.

If my understanding of the end times is correct, there will come a time in the future at the Bema Seat Judgement where God will actually reward us for how we lived our Christian life. Can you imagine?

The God who sought after me

The God who concocted a divine rescue plan by sending Jesus to the cross.

The God who not only redeemed me by grace but also indwelt and empowered me to live the Christian life.

The God who did all of this will be the same God who will crown me with a crown if I have walked in faithfulness as a believer?

This makes no sense - but this is the God who honors his children.

Not because they deserve it, but because He is kind.

2 Corinthians 5:9-10 ESV

So whether we are at home or away, we make it our aim to please him. For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each one may receive what is due for what he has done in the body, whether good or evil.

This passage is deeply encouraging for faithful believers who sometimes wonder if their obedience matters.

Maybe you serve quietly and nobody notices.

Maybe you battle discouragement privately but you press on!

Maybe you feel surrounded by a culture that mocks holiness and rewards compromise.

Hear the Word of the Lord:

Your faithfulness matters to God.

Every prayer.

Every act of obedience.

Every unseen sacrifice.

Every gracious and encouraging conversation.

Every moment of resisting cynicism.

God sees it all.

And this passage is also a warning to spiritually apathetic churchgoers.

You can attend church regularly while inwardly moving away from the fear of God.

You can sing worship songs while privately believing obedience is pointless.

You can maintain outward religion while your conversations reveal a cynical and unbelieving heart.

But God knows the difference between external religion and genuine reverence.

One day that distinction will become fully visible.

God honors those who honor Him.

Our Words About God Reveal Whether We Truly Fear Him.

So, the question before us is not merely:

“What do we say about God?”

The deeper question is:

“What do our words reveal about our hearts about God?”

Conclusion

The way we speak about God reveals whether our hearts truly treasure Him.

A cynical tongue may expose a spiritually drifting heart, but reverent speech reveals genuine fear of the Lord.

This week, intentionally examine your conversations and ask yourself:

“Do my words help people trust God more deeply, or do they spread cynicism and unbelief?”

Then choose one practical step:

Encourage someone spiritually.

Pray with someone.

Speak truth instead of complaint.

Replace grumbling with gratitude.

Imagine standing before Christ one day.

On that day, the opinions of culture will not matter.

Material success will not matter.

Religious appearances will not matter.

What will matter is whether you truly feared the Lord.

And one of the clearest evidences of that fear will have been your words.

Because the mouth has always revealed the heart.

The good news is that Jesus Christ died for sinful complainers like us.

Every one of us has spoken wrongly about God.

Every one of us has doubted His goodness.

Every one of us has grumbled against His providence.

But Christ came and lived with perfect reverence toward the Father.

And at the cross, He bore the judgment our sinful words deserve.

Through faith and repentance, God can transform not only your speech, but your heart.

Because when the heart is changed by grace, the mouth begins to speak differently.

What does your language reveal about your God?