**JOHN’S BAPTISM, AND THE TENANTS**

Mark 11:27-12:12 (Key Verse 11:30)

John’s baptism—was it from heaven, or of human origin? Tell me!”

In today’s passage, we’ll learn about God’s great mercy in relation to sinful hearts of men who refuse to repent. This is clearly illustrated in the interaction of Jesus and the religious leaders who questioned His authority. These religious leaders refused to repent because they lost sight of God who owned their lives, and the lives of the people who looked up to them for assistance in the salvation of their souls. John’s baptism is a reminder to all of us, and a sure warning of our responsibility to repent and live our lives as hired tenants, even so as tenants of the lives we have. Blessed are those who listen to the word of God, accept it and the Lordship of Jesus to be used in the God’s salvation work. Woe to those who refuse to repent and keep holding on to their lives. Woe to those who do not keep up with the fruits of repentance but rather continue to be lords of their lives. Yet again, blessed are those who will humble themselves, and also their lives before Jesus the cornerstone of their salvation.

Jesus and His disciples went to Jerusalem once again. This time, they were met by the chief priests, the teachers of the law and the elders. These were prominent religious people in the times. They were supposed to the guides and protectors of the people of God; serving them with love and the fear of the Lord. They were supposed to be among the first to receive Jesus as the promised Messiah.

Look at verse 27 – 28**. 27 They arrived again in Jerusalem, and while Jesus was walking in the temple courts, the chief priests, the teachers of the law and the elders came to him. 28 “By what authority are you doing these things?” they asked. “And who gave you authority to do this?”** These religious leaders asked Jesus a question, “By what authority are you doing these things, who gave you authority to do this”. They could ask Jesus this question because they were threatened by the presence of Jesus and the popularity He got. This is the same Jesus who entered triumphantly into Jerusalem, to whom people shouted **““Hosanna!” “Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!” “Blessed is the coming kingdom of our father David!” “Hosanna in the highest heaven!”** The people where cheering for this King. This is the same Jesus **who entered the temple courts and began driving out those who were buying and selling there. He overturned the tables of the money changers and the benches of those selling doves, 16 and would not allow anyone to carry merchandise through the temple courts. 17 And as he taught them, he said, “Is it not written: ‘My house will be called a house of prayer for all nations’[c]? But you have made it ‘a den of robbers.’[d]”** Instead of receiving Jesus as the Son of God, they rather rejected Him. Instead of accepting His rebuke, and repent, the chose to harden their hearts and out of pride and hypocrisy asked **28 “By what authority are you doing these things?” “And who gave you authority to do this?”** According to their stubbornness, Jesus had no right to do what He did in the temple courts, calling these religious leaders thieves. This is the danger of ignoring the word of God, and refusing to repent. A heart that is not sensitive to the word of God, and refusing to repent, is running the risk of not only becoming obstinate, but to be closed off to the Lord. I can be a bible teacher, a shepherd, an excellent bible student, a servant in the worship team, yet without repentance and accepting Jesus as Lord, all these are nothing but worthless religious deeds.

Jesus told them by what authority He is doing all these things. However, He answered them with a question. Look at verse 29, 30. **29 Jesus replied, “I will ask you one question. Answer me, and I will tell you by what authority I am doing these things. 30 John’s baptism—was it from heaven, or of human origin? Tell me!”** This was a difficult question to the religious leaders. It was difficult because it exposed their sinful hearts. Should they answer either way; that John’s Baptism was from heaven, or of human origin, they would still be exposed. I would say, what a blessing to have your sinful heart exposed so that one can repent. But they were greatly aggrieved. **31 They discussed it among themselves and said, “If we say, ‘From heaven,’ he will ask, ‘Then why didn’t you believe him?’ 32 But if we say, ‘Of human origin’ …” (They feared the people, for everyone held that John really was a prophet.). 33 So they answered Jesus, “We don’t know.” Jesus said, “Neither will I tell you by what authority I am doing these things.”**

Is it true they didn’t know? Of course not. They knew very well. But because they refused to repent, and not give Jesus the honour as the One sent by God given all the many signs, and the truth of what He preached, they chose to bow to their sinful hearts and lie; “We don’t know”. How do we treat the truth of God’s word? The Lord speaks to us each day through His life-giving word. However, if this truth is not accepted with a heart of repentance, and giving honour to Jesus, then we are dead spiritually. All the forms of worship that seem to cover the sin in our hearts are nothing disguise, and leading us deeper into the bondage of sin. It so sad to see that not only were these religious leaders knew the truth about who Jesus is, and the authority He was doing all these. They had seen the Messiah face to face and had the privilege of having Him even in their temple courts. Yet all these was for nothing for they refused to embrace the truth, rather chose to follow their own sinful hearts. Of course they knew the truth about John’s Baptism. John’s baptism was not of human origin, but was from heaven. John the Baptist was sent by God the Father, not as the Messiah but as His forerunner. When the religious leaders sent messengers to find out who he was, John the Baptist said to them. **23 John replied in the words of Isaiah the prophet, “I am the voice of one calling in the wilderness, ‘Make straight the way for the Lord.’”[John 1:23].**

Perhaps this question is also directed to us, John’s baptism—was it from heaven, or of human origin? We know the answer, but we refuse to embrace this truth because of the fear of people, including ourselves. We’d rather not honour God, but ourselves by embracing our sinful hearts. How many times did we refuse to repent because of shame, and what other people would think of us? How many times did we choose to not repent, not because God’s word is mute, but because we still want to enjoy sin? The sign of John’s baptism of repentance if for us all. May the Holy Spirit convict our hearts today, that as we hear His word, we might repent from our sins, and honour Him and His truth.

Of course Jesus did answer them. Jesus was doing all these things by the authority given by God as the promised Messiah. Jesus loved these religious leaders so much, that He wanted them to also embrace the truth and repent. He went further and told them the parable of tenants.

Look at verse 12: 1 **Jesus then began to speak to them in parables: “A man planted a vineyard. He put a wall around it, dug a pit for the winepress and built a watchtower. Then he rented the vineyard to some farmers and moved to another place**. There was certain wiseman who built a vineyard in order to produce fruit from the vineyard. With his own resources, he carefully built the vineyard. He dug a pit for the winepress. At harvest time, fruit was to be collected from the vineyard, and then eventually taken to the winepress where the juice of grapes would be pressed out and then used to produced delicious 100% fruit juice or a valuable choice wine to be sold to even the kings and officials, and even for household use. He also put a wall around so as to protect the produce. Thieves are very opportunistic. Thiers is to take that which does not belong to them. They are driven by greed to take from the rightful owners and do as they please. They steal, and in all forms of violent means, taking that which does not belong to them. So, this wise man also built a watchtower so as to spot these thieves threatening his vineyard. Because he wanted to continue on his quest to get more produce, we went to another place, and rented this vineyard to some farmers. These farmers were not owners, by mere tenants. So, they had to conduct themselves as tenants and honour the contractual agreement; to faithfully and responsibly use the vineyard, taking care of it as good stewards. Of course, they were to be compensated for their work, however, the had to pay rent to the owner.

So what happened? Did the tenant farmers honour the owner of the vineyard? What happened at harvest time? Look at verse 2 – 5. **2 At harvest time he sent a servant to the tenants to collect from them some of the fruit of the vineyard. 3 But they seized him, beat him and sent him away empty-handed. 4 Then he sent another servant to them; they struck this man on the head and treated him shamefully. 5 He sent still another, and that one they killed. He sent many others; some of them they beat, others they killed**. It was harvest time, and time to collect rent. The tenants were to give to the owner some of the fruit of the vineyard, and keep some for their work. However, they shockingly denied the owner of the vineyard his due. Instead, in their disobedience, they went further to spit on the kindness of the owner in utter contempt: They seized all the many servants the owner repeatedly sent to collect some of the harvest. They struck those servants, some were beaten and others were killed. They could act in this wicked manner for they thought to themselves as owners, instead as tenants. They forgot their place, and deceived by their sinfulness, took the owners patience and kindness with them as weakness, and reason to continue to act dishonourably against him. Some would say the owner would have pursuit the principle of an eye for an eye, yet in his great patience and hope that they would repent, the owner relented and kept sending more servants. But the same treatment was given to them.

The owner showed the rich extend of his mercy and patience, and had another plan to appeal to these wicked tenants. Look at verse 6. **6 “He had one left to send, a son, whom he loved. He sent him last of all, saying, ‘They will respect my son.’** Since the tenants had beaten and killed all the servants of the owner of the vineyard, he had no one left to send but his son whom he loved. His hope was that they will respect his son, and obey the word of the father to collect some of the harvest. But what happened? Did the tenants fear the son, and his father and honour the owner of the vineyard? No they didn’t. look at verse 7, 8. **7 “But the tenants said to one another, ‘This is the heir. Come, let’s kill him, and the inheritance will be ours.’ 8 So they took him and killed him, and threw him out of the vineyard**. The tenants had no intention to pay rent to the owner. Their hearts were so calloused that they didn’t think twice but to kill the son so that they can also steal his inheritance. They had no other intentions but to topple the rightful owner and make themselves owners of the vineyard.

**9 “What then will the owner of the vineyard do? He will come and kill those tenants and give the vineyard to others.** It is not that the owner was weak. The owner hoped that the tenants would act honourably and gave them time, in his great mercy, for them to do the right thing. But since they killed the son of the owner, the owner was left with no option but to come himself, kill those tenants and give the vineyard to others. Clearly, these farm tenants were not worthy of the owner’s honour, and deserved whatever punishment that might come their way, even if it means being killed.

This was the message of the parable of the tenants: that because the religious leaders chose not to repent from their sins, they forgot their place and treated with contempt the vineyard of salvation that God the Father had placed under their care. Because of their unrepentant hearts; not wanting to honour the truth of God, they repeatedly mistreated the servants of God, his holy prophets, including John the Baptist, and killed them. In His great love, God sent His son Jesus the promised Messiah with the hope that if they failed to listen to the holy prophets, perhaps they would listen and believe in His Son. But what did they do? As foretold by Jesus Himself, with the help of the wicked Romans, they nailed Jesus and had Him crucified on the cross.

What judgement will befall them? This was Jesus’ warning to the religious leaders should they continue in their unrepentance. God would surely judge, and severely condemn them. Look at verse 10, 11. **10 Haven’t you read this passage of Scripture: “‘The stone the builders rejected has become the cornerstone; 11 the Lord has done this, and it is marvellous in our eyes’[a]?”** The same Jesus they have rejected, and crucified is glorified as the cornerstone. They thought of Him as nothing but a religious lunatic, but He is the salvation of every mankind, including even these wretched religious leaders.

However, to anyone who repents of their sins, and come to Jesus for the salvation of their souls, making Him Lord over even their very own lives, Jesus is their salvation.

Look how the Lord has prepared everything for us to be saved? See how God has put in place all the tools for us to be saved? He has given us the word of God to, through the power of the Holy Spirit, when we receive it with open hearts and faith, convicts us of sin, giving us the grace to repent from our sins. God has given us even His Son Jesus Christ to died for our sins on the cross, that the multitude of our sins be wipe off, and we be forgiven. He has promised us that through Jesus Christ, He remembers no more our sins, and we are given a new birth where our old lives are covered by the righteousness of Jesus Himself.

Indeed, to anyone who repents, God has given them the holy privilege of participating in God’s salvation work. God is not looking for any special people to use for His work. He requires those who keep up with daily repentance, and living and giving their lives for the Lord. Such people He put them in charge of His wonderful work of salvation. I am sure most of us are hoping for a high paying jobs from our degrees, opening businesses and making so as to make an impact and leave a legacy for our names. There is no greater legacy one can leave beside being a servant of God; hearing from God Himself, knowing His heart and in turn spreading that knowledge to His people whom He loves so much.

Yesterday, I was so encouraged by our fellowship meeting. Indeed it was a blessing as many of our members voiced out the importance of fellowship and in a spiritually safe environment with common minded people whose passion is to know Jesus and to believe in Him. Testimonies were shared from the word of God; ‘A Living Hope’, where all shared how the hope of this world perishes, spoils and fade. Because of death, the hope of this world cannot be security but we can surely get living hope because Jesus rose from the dead. For this reason, yes, we have a living hope in Jesus and His kingdom. At the hearing and meditation of the word of God through testimony writing, many shared how repent from the worldly view hope, so as to honour God and attain this living hope. It is through this repentance that we get to have life in Jesus, and also to be used preciously for His will.

Last night I learned about the passing of my grandmother. This woman has been a strong support for our family at large. She has touched so many lives, not only in my family, but those who were in relations with her. My heart is rather filled with thanksgiving, despite the obvious pain of losing a loved one. My mother had me when she was fairly young. So I was under her care most of the time, and grew very close to her. When her husband, who was the provider, passed on, she stepped up to take care of a large family as this, for our grandfather had two wives. I am celebrating her not only about her care and wisdom but that she was open hearted to listen to gospel that I used to preach to her. I would describe her as one woman who was searching for God, and kept moving from one church to the other; Mapostola, to ZCC naledi and later on ZCC leeba. The Lord was kind that He kept that spiritual hunger of hers to the day where I shared the message about Jesus and the woman who had lived a life of sin; who poured an expensive jar of perfume on Jesus’ feet and worshipped Him as she wipe her tears off Jesus’ with her hair. Late at night, I was on the other room and could hear her praying, and in her prayer she was praying as the woman who had lived a life of sin. She was begging for God’s mercy to save her unworthy heart, and protect her family. I was so moved, and all I could say, was “Amen” in my heart. From there on, her life and testimony was how God was with her throughout her life. She recognised that even though she was from poverty ever since she was born, and having to work in farms under godless farm lords, the Lord was with her always.

A time came where she couldn’t walk nor work; that strong woman I knew now paralysed due to severe arthritis. Later, she also lost her hearing and it was impossible to share the word with her, but could only pray and hope that which was planted in her heart will save her. Yes, she has left us, but I believe she is with the Lord who received that prayer. Above all, I learn her attitude of coming to the Lord with a God fearing and open heart that is repentant. May her soul rest in the eternal peace of the Lord.

In conclusion. John’s baptism, is it from heaven or of human origin? That should be question we should ask ourselves. It is indeed from heaven, and for this reason, we are encouraged by the merciful and loving Father to challenge our sinful hearts, and repent from our sins as we come to Jesus His Son, to save us from our sins, and to live for Him in this world. The are many practical ways we can show a repentant life; a life that lives for God. As hired tenants of our lives, let us make a decision of faith, in obedience to Christ the Lord, to practically show, with repentance, how we are living on borrowed time. May God bless our Wits UBF ministry to raise God fearing, repentant servant for His campus ministry.