**The Parable of the Tenants**

**(Divine Interference)**

September 29, 2013

Mark 11:27-12:12

Key Verse 11:28 “‘By what authority are you doing these things?’ they asked. ‘And who gave you authority to do this?’”

Do you remember the last time God interfered in your life? We are creatures who gravitate toward comfort zones, where everything is nice and predictable, where we think we have a pretty good handle on life. You don’t expect to live trouble free, but you like to think you can maintain a certain amount of control over your circumstances. Even if life cannot be perfect, you like to think that you have a pretty good grip on things. Then God starts to meddle with things. He pricks your conscience about some sinful habit that you want to ignore. He reminds you that you need to be reconciled to someone that you did wrong. He keeps bringing up some promises you made to him that you haven’t kept. He starts teaching you some lessons you don’t really want to learn. Right when things get comfortable, God starts to upset us. And sometimes, if you are really honest, you don’t appreciate it. You wish God would just leave you alone, sometimes. Jesus had a habit of interfering with other people’s comfort zones. You can ignore him, but the consequence will be that you will be cut off from God. In today’s passage, when Jesus’ interference really annoyed the religious leaders so much, they confront him and try to stop his meddling in their lives. His answer to them is an answer to all of us about Jesus’ right to interfere in your life.

I. What right does Jesus have to interfere? (27-29)

On Sunday Jesus entered into Jerusalem on a colt as the suffering King. On Monday he went on a rampage in the temple, driving out those who were selling and buying, and overturning the tables of the moneychangers. Now he came back Tuesday morning, strolling through the temple, daring anybody else to start back up their businesses. He acts like he owns the place! Jesus’ cleansing the temple had exposed the religious leaders’ profane treatment of God’s holy dwelling.

This was too much for a group of men who thought they owned the place. The chief priests, scribes, and the elders began to fight back. They came to Jesus and ask him a two-pronged question: “Who do you think you are? What gives you the right to interfere with these people in this temple? Who gave you the authority to do this?” You can hear the accusation in their voice. They were outraged that Jesus would dare to meddle in things that are not his concern.

We do the same thing to Jesus today. We don’t mind if Jesus stays at church, safe from our everyday life, where he won’t interfere. It’s great that we can pray, and talk to him into helping us out of trouble, but we don’t want Jesus making us look weird in front of our friends. Reading about Jesus in the Bible is OK, but we don’t really want to bring him up too much in conversation- it might make the person we are speaking to a little uncomfortable. We say, “You know I love you, Lord, but I don’t really have much time to pray at home, or read my Bible. I have a pretty tight schedule, and I just cannot have time for Bible study. Lord, I really don’t feel like I can help out in that area where you want me to serve. Can you get somebody else, please? And Lord, you know I love you, but don’t interfere with how much money I give, or how I spend my money. Jesus, I’ll serve you and love you, but please don’t interfere with my friends, or my job, or my school, or my time, or my plans.” Whenever you have this kind of attitude, you are asking the same question these men were asking: Jesus, what right do you have to interfere in my life?

The present position of Christ may be likened to Queen Elizabeth in a limited constitutional monarchy. She is just a pleasant symbol of unity and loyalty much like a flag or a national anthem. She does not have any authority. Nominally she is head over all, but in every crisis someone else makes the decisions. On formal occasions she appears in her royal attire to deliver the tame, colorless speech. That is the way people like these men want God to be: king in name only, never interfering with their lives. But Jesus will have none of this kind of thinking. Jesus answers this question with a stunning brilliance. What gives him the right to interfere with your life?

II. Because of who he is (29-33; 12:1-7)

The men who asked Jesus this question were known as experts in religion who intimidated common people. They probably thought they could intimidate Jesus. They were wrong. Jesus immediately took control of the conversation, and basically threw the question back to them: “If you want to know what right I have to interfere, then you have to answer my question first. Tell me: was John the Baptist a prophet of God, or just another religious fanatic? Go ahead--tell me!”

Why did Jesus bring John into this? He has been dead for a while now. What has he got to do with this? In John chapter one, these guys from Jerusalem had sent a delegation to John, asking him who he was, and what he came to do. Remember what he told them? John 1:23,29,34 say, “I am the voice of one calling in the desert, ‘Make straight the way of the Lord.’ The next day John saw Jesus coming toward him, and said, ‘Look, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world.’ I have seen and testified that this is the Son of God.” John very clearly told everybody who would listen who Jesus was: the Son of God. Now Jesus looked these hypocrites straight in the eye and said, “Either John was lying, or else he was a prophet of God. Which is it?”

These men are not dummies. They see what Jesus is asking them, and they want to avoid taking either side. Notice they are not really interested in saying what they really think. They didn’t believe John’s message. But they are too afraid of the crowd, because they recognized John as God’s prophet. If they admitted John was sent by God, then Jesus could say, “Well, why don’t you believe what he said about me?” So these self-important, self-righteous bunch of cowards try to wriggle out of their own trap. “We give up. We don’t know whether John was sent by God or not.” Jesus said, “If you weren’t willing to listen to God speak through John, you won’t listen to what I say. I won’t waste my breath telling you what you have already decided not to believe. But I’ll tell you a story to help you understand.”

Once upon a time there was a man who owned a vineyard. He took good care of his vineyard: put a fence around it to keep out the animals, built a storage tower for the wine, and built a tower to oversee it. He rents out his vineyard to some tenant farmers who agree to live on the land for free as long as they tend the vineyard and sent a portion of the crop to the owner. They agreed to do this, and so later, when the grape harvest was over, the owner sends one of his servants to collect his share of the harvest. But instead of giving him what was due, they beat the servant, and sent him back empty handed. The owner sends other servants, some of whom were beaten, others killed. Finally, the owner sent his only son to collect the fruit of the vineyard. “Surely” he said, “they will respect my son.” But these wicked farmers assumed the landowner must be dead, so they kill the son, hoping to take over the vineyard for themselves. “What will the landowner do now?” Jesus asks, and then answers, “He will come and destroy these murderers, and give his vineyard to others.” Then he quotes Psalm 118:22-23, “The One they rejected has become the most important Person--This is God’s marvelous plan!”

Let me explain some of the symbolism here. When Jesus spoke of a vineyard, any Jew would immediately thought of the Old Testament passages such as Isaiah 5:1-7, where Israel is portrayed as God’s vineyard. The owner is God, the vineyard is Israel, and the farmers are Israel’s leaders. The servants are the Old Testament prophets--including John--who brought a message from the owner. The beloved only son is Jesus, who now not only uncovers this plot to kill him, but declares himself to be the Son of God.

If Jesus is the Son of God, and God is pleased with him, then he had every right to “interfere” with anything going on in the temple. In fact, as the Son of God, he is the authority when it comes to worshipping God. He has a right to interfere because he is the Son of God. That’s why he has the right to “interfere” in your life, too. He is not just a good man, or even a good prophet. He is God’s one and only Son. He is God in the flesh. He is the Lord of all. And he has the right to rule every aspect of your life. He has the authority to demand your obedience and your worship. He has the right to tell you what is right and wrong. He has the authority to tell you how you should think, how you should feel, how you should live. He is God, and he has the absolute authority over everything and everyone--including you. But don’t forget another reason he has the right to interfere in your life--because he died for you on the cross. He saved us from our sins by his own blood, and made us heirs with God and co-heirs with Christ. He not only made you, but he made a way for you to be forgiven and accepted by God as his own child. His love gives him the right to do what is best in your life--even when you don’t understand why or how he does it. Because he is Savior and Lord, he has the right to interfere in your life for his glory, and for your good.

I deserved to be cut off from God and condemned in hell, but God interfered through my friend. In 1989, I was thinking of going back to Korea for my military service, but God interfered in my life and I got married even though my wife and I were very immature. We both struggled in our marriage. Furthermore, my father had to pay $20,000 fine because I did not go back to Korea. But without God’s interference, I could not receive God’s blessings such as two obedient children. Aren’t you glad Jesus interfered in your life? Shouldn’t you let him continue to “interfere” in your life? Well, let me make it clear--you don’t have to.

III. You can reject his interference (12:8-12)

These chief priests, scribes, and elders realized that Jesus’ story was meant to indict them. They know that they are the wicked tenant farmers, and they would have arrested Jesus then and there and had him executed if it were not for his popularity among the people. So they angrily left off, planning another chance at destroying him. They have rejected him despite all the evidence that Jesus is the Son of God. They will get their chance to kill him, and fulfill the prophecies Jesus makes in their presence.

God has given us a very precious gift: the gift of free will. You can reject God’s interference.
You can decide to ignore his word; you can turn a deaf ear to his voice speaking to your heart. You can harden your heart, and go your own way, in spite of his discipline and his warnings. You can keep running away from God until his voice is a distant echo that barely registers in your soul. The Almighty God has given you the power to tell him hand off of your life! We say, “I’ll live like I want to, without your interference.” Then we fall into an illusion, “This is my life. Nobody can tell me what to do.” If you think that is how you want to live, let me remind you that there is only one place where you will never be bothered by God’s meddling in your affairs. There is one place where he will not convict your heart--one place where you will not have to deal with his constant presence. One place where you can eternally be free from God’s interference: it’s a place the Bible calls hell. Jesus does not want you to end up in hell. He does not want you to go through life without his love. That is why he interferes in your life. He wants to deliver you and me from destruction. He wants to save us from ourselves, but you must allow him to interfere with your life. You must choose to surrender to his will, his love, his plans.

Are you willing to allow the Son of God, who gave his life for you, and who demands your absolute surrender--will you allow him to interfere in your life today? Or will you choose to reject his authority in your life? Will you submit to his will for you, or will you stubbornly hold on to your own life? It is time to choose who will rule and reign in your heart and life. Most of all, let’s learn the heart of God, his love and patience so that we may be rejected and persecuted for inviting God’s flock to Jesus.