

Advent 2 / December 7, 2025

Matthew 3:2

*"In those days John the Baptist came preaching in the wilderness of Judea,
'Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.'"*

Repent for the Kingdom of Heaven is at Hand

John the Baptist, or more properly the baptizer, began his ministry in the wilderness of Judea a short time before Jesus began His ministry. John preceded Jesus in birth by approximately six months. He preceded Jesus in his ministry because the purpose of his ministry was to prepare the way for the Lord, to prepare the people of Israel to meet their Lord. They met their Lord when Jesus was revealed as the Christ, the Son of God at His baptism. John prepared the people of Israel to meet their Lord by calling them to repent. Repent is an important word in John's ministry as in Jesus' ministry which would follow. The first words of Jesus recorded in the gospel of Mark are: *"The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel."* In common usage repent means to feel bad about something, to feel guilt and sorrow for our sins. Repent means to stop doing our sins and instead do what God considers righteousness.

When John and Jesus call us to repent, they mean all those things, but they also mean something more. At heart the word repent means to turn to God for healing, cleansing, forgiving and empowerment. Repent means to turn to God, but it also means to be turned or transformed by God, first in relationship with Him and secondly in terms of our actions. Only God can bring us to repentance. Only God can turn our hearts towards Him, so that we want to stop doing our sins and instead do what He considers righteous. God brings us to repentance by first opening our eyes to our sins and their harmful effects through His law. Paul writes in Romans, *"through law we become conscious of sin."* Paul writes in Ephesians, *"For by grace you are saved through faith. And this is not your own doing. It is the gift of God."* God brings us to repentance by opening our hearts to His forgiveness through the gospel of forgiveness in Jesus' Name. God empowers us to seek after Him, to hunger and thirst for His righteous, by softening our hearts to respond to His love through the Holy Spirit whom He gives to dwell within us. Repent means to live with God in faith and faithfulness for the sake of Jesus our Saviour.

When John calls us to repent he calls us to turn to Christ our Saviour. When John calls us to repent he calls us to see our need for the salvation only Christ can give.

The salvation which He accomplished, first through His sinless life and ultimately through His sacrificial death, by which He atoned for the sin of the world. John prepared the people of his day for the coming of Jesus so they would believe in Him as the Christ and receive Him as their Saviour. John prepares us for the coming of Jesus in a different way. Obviously, we don't anticipate Jesus' coming the same way as people in the first century. We are aware of His birth, His life, His death and His resurrection. John prepared the people of Israel for Jesus' first appearance. John prepares us for Jesus second appearance as the judge whose winnowing fork is in His hand for a rebellious world, but as a gentle Saviour for those who believe. John calls us to repentance by reminding us that even as Jesus first came in humble form, He will return in divine glory as the Judge of a rebellious world and as the Saviour of all who believe. John calls us to repent by treasuring in our hearts as first importance Jesus, our God and Saviour.

John and Jesus called people to repent not just in general, because it's a good thing to do. They called people to repent specifically, because the kingdom of heaven was at hand. The kingdom of heaven was at hand for first century Jews, because Jesus was soon to be revealed as the Messiah, the Son of God, heir to the throne of David and the promise of an eternal kingdom. The kingdom of heaven is at hand for twenty-first century believers, because Jesus will next be revealed as the Judge of an unrighteous, rebellious world and the Saviour of those who we believe. Today John calls a sinful world to turn from its idols to serve the true God through faith in Jesus as its Saviour. John calls believers in Christ as their God and Saviour to take our faith to heart and to apply ourselves diligently first to the grace of God in Christ Jesus and secondly to the callings He has entrusted to us. Repent for an unbelieving world is to turn to Christ as its Saviour. Repent for believers is to cling to Christ as our God and to treasure Him as our Saviour.

John called the people of first century Israel to prepare themselves for the kingdom of heaven, which was at hand and would immediately be revealed when Jesus' was anointed its king at His baptism. We think of a kingdom as a geographical location. However, the kingdom proclaimed by John and inaugurated with the baptism of Jesus is not a location, but rather the righteous reign of God in the world, beginning in the human heart. Jesus told His disciples, "*The kingdom of heaven is within you.*" The kingdom of heaven breaks into our hearts when God through His law shows us our sins and convicts us of our sinfulness. The righteous reign of God begins in our hearts when the Holy Spirit convinces us of our sins and convicts us of our sinfulness. The kingdom heaven is God's righteous reign in our hearts that

begins when we believe in Jesus as our Saviour and receive Him in our hearts as our Lord. The kingdom of heaven will come in the fulness of divine glory when Christ returns and takes full possession of the kingdoms of the earth. The kingdom of heaven is now in all the earth through the church, the people whom God has brought to repentance and faith in Christ Jesus.

John prepared ancient Israel for the revealing of Jesus as the Christ by calling them to repent, to take seriously their relationship with God, to value it above all else, to nurture it through the hearing of the word and to express the fruits of faith in their lives. John prepares believers in the 21st century to receive Jesus when He is revealed at His second coming as King and Lord of all. We prepare ourselves for Christ's revealing by living repentant lives, living intentionally in relationship with Him. We live intentionally in relationship with Him by confessing our sins and sinfulness and receiving His absolution through the washing of our baptism. We live intentionally in relationship with Him by gathering for worship and receiving His grace in the bread and wine of holy communion. We live intentionally in relationship with Him by hearing His words, reading His words, studying His words, meditating on His words and praying His words. Jesus said to His disciples, *"The words that I have spoken to you are spirit and life."* He has the words of eternal life.

Jesus revealed Himself to the people John prepared through the power of His word. When Jesus spoke the Sermon on the Mount the people were amazed at the power and authority of His words. When Jesus spoke storms stopped, the sea was quieted, the blind received sight, the dead were raised. Jesus' words opened the hearts of His disciples to believe and opened their mouths to confess Him as their Saviour and God. He has the words of eternal life. He is the eternal word of life. Jesus continues to reveal Himself to His prepared people through His word; spoken, written, imparted under the forms of water, bread and wine, embodied in each believer, embodied in the gathering of believers. God's word is the power by which the Holy Spirit brings us to repentance and begins the righteous reign of God in our hearts. God's word is the power by which He will bring His reign in our hearts to fulfillment in the resurrection of Jesus Christ. We repent by turning daily to His word for spiritual nourishment and encouragement in faith.

We repent by bowing our heads and quieting our hearts in prayer. We repent by gathering for worship, study and fellowship as believers. Jesus said where even as few as two or three are gathered in His Name that He is with them there. We should never despise, discount or look down upon even the smallest gathering of believers. It is the body of Christ and Christ is there with them. We repent by

speaking words of forgiveness and encouragement to each other, reminding one another of the forgiveness of the cross promised in our baptism, encouraging one another in our shared faith. We repent by coming to the Lord's table to receive the gift of His body and blood, shed for the forgiveness of our sin, given as a sign of our promised share in His resurrection and as a foretaste of the feast come. To repent is to live with God intentionally in faith and faithfulness. To repent is to treasure in our hearts above all else Jesus and the righteous reign of God that comes now through faith in Him and will come fully and forever when He returns as King of Kings. The kingdom of God is at hand. Let us rejoice in it! In Jesus' Name. Amen