

Calling for Repentance

Matthew 3:1-12 - NCBC, March 24, 2019

Main Point: **Jesus' reign is outwardly demonstrated by a life of repentance from sin.**

- Repentance prepares you for the rule of Jesus as king (1-6)
 - The call: Repent from your sins
 - The conviction: Reject your self-reliance
 - The confession: Agree that you need God's rescue
- Repentance protects you from the judgment of Jesus as king (7-12)
 - The condemnation: Your own efforts can never satisfy God's wrath
 - The crop: Whatever you produce apart from God's Spirit will burn
 - The consolation: Your union with God's Spirit secures your future with God

Application: **You must repent of your sins.**

Opening Announcements:

- Prayerfully plan ahead to invite people to Easter Worship services!!

<<Come Thou Fount>>



What a joy-giving thought that we will soon be home with Jesus – all by His strong and amazing grace.

Please continue your worship now by opening your Bible to **Matthew chapter 3**. **Matthew 3** introduces us to the last Old Testament prophet named John the Baptizer who calls us to repentance.



If you don't have a Bible, simply raise your hand as people are coming now with Bibles for you to use in our worship together, and even take home as our gift to you.

This is such an exciting time in the history of New Castle Bible Church! God continues to shower us with such undeserved mercy and favor.



Last week Shaun Lewis and his family were here candidating to serve as our Associate Pastor of Care & Discipleship. Shaun preached from **Philippians 2**, then he and his wife Cristi shared a Question and Answer time with us during the Sunday School hour. Our elders are very excited about having the Lewis family join our church family, and begin benefiting from Shaun's leadership over our discipleship and care ministries.

But right now our elders are in this 2-week window of listening to our church family before we proceed to invite Shaun back to preach again and then vote to officially call him to this pastoral ministry here.

So if you have any concerns or questions for our elders in regards to Shaun Lewis serving as our Associate Pastor of Care and Discipleship, please share those in writing to our elders before next Sunday, March 31st.

Back on March 14th, each of you should have received an email containing Shaun's resume, doctrinal statement, and philosophy of ministry, along with a copy of the job description for this important pastoral position. (If you didn't receive this please contact the church office this week and give them your email address.) Please carefully review everything that has been shared with you, pray with us for God's will to be accomplished, and communicate with your elder shepherds this week.



Now this morning we continue our sermon series on the Gospel of Jesus Christ by turning our attention to **Matthew chapter 3, verses 1-12**. The first three chapters of **Matthew** aim to connect Jesus to the Old Testament. Matthew wants his Jewish audience to behold Jesus as King! Jesus is the long-awaited, promised Messiah!

Please stand in honor of the public reading of God's Word as I read **Matthew 3** from the **ESV** translation:

In those days John the Baptist came preaching in the wilderness of Judea, 2 “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.” 3 For this is he who was spoken of by the prophet Isaiah when he said, “The voice of one crying in the wilderness: ‘Prepare the way of the Lord; make his paths straight.’” 4 Now John wore a garment of camel’s hair and a leather belt around his waist, and his food was locusts and wild honey. 5 Then Jerusalem and all Judea and all the region about the Jordan were going out to him, 6 and they were baptized by him in the river Jordan, confessing their sins. 7 But when he saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees coming to his baptism, he said to them, “You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the wrath to come? 8 Bear fruit in keeping with repentance. 9 And do not presume to say to yourselves, ‘We have Abraham as our father,’ for I tell you, God is able from these stones to raise up children for Abraham. 10 Even now the axe is laid to the root of the trees. Every tree therefore that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. 11 “I baptize you with water for repentance, but he who is coming after me is mightier than I, whose sandals I am not worthy to carry. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire. 12 His winnowing fork is in his hand, and he will clear his threshing floor and gather his wheat into the barn, but the chaff he will burn with unquenchable fire.”

Thus reads God’s Word. You may be seated.

Let’s Pray.

Two weeks ago Pastor Scott walked us through 3 different Old Testament prophecies at the end of **Matthew 2**. Each of these prophecies were fulfilled in the first couple of years of Jesus’ life on earth. After he had

returned from fleeing to Egypt, we left Jesus the child safely living with Joseph and Mary in Nazareth as a socially-ostracized Nazarene.¹

Then between **chapter 2** and **chapter 3** approximately 28 years quietly pass.

There was all this hub-bub surrounding the birth of God’s Anointed deliverer – angels visiting, shepherds worshiping, prophets prophesying, Gentile wise men worshipping, the killing of all the baby boys in Bethlehem, and then the stage of history goes quiet.

Scripture tells us very little about Jesus’ life between **Matthew 2** and **Matthew 3**. **Luke 2** describes one event when Jesus attempted to start his public ministry in Jerusalem at 12 years of age.² But when his parents demanded that he return home, Jesus was submissive to them and he returned to Nazareth to grow in favor with God and man.

We know from **Matthew 13** and **Mark 6** that Jesus worked with Joseph as a builder,³ which in the Galilean context probably meant he worked with stone and iron as much as with wood.⁴

¹ Matthew 2:23

² Luke 2:41-52, especially verse 49

³ Matthew 13:55; Mark 6:3

⁴ The Greek word for carpenter in Scripture is “tekton” which generally means builder or craftsman and can include working with stone, wood, or other metals, etc. Since most of the construction in Jesus’ day was done with stone, and since wood was in such limited supply around Galilee, it seems probable that Jesus worked more with stone than with wood. The early church tradition held that Jesus and Joseph made yokes and plows (Justin’s dialogue with Trypho, A.D. 155), but that tradition cannot be

But apart from those meager details, approximately 28 years of Jesus' earthly life pass quietly.

Perhaps some of us can relate to a similar reality in our lives? When we first believed in Christ and were born again, it seemed like God gave us so many amazing experiences! We were baptized. People rallied around us with encouragement. Some unbelieving friends and family were upset, and we experienced some persecution for our love for Christ. But then just a few years into our new relationship with Christ, things settled down a bit. No major miraculous events ... just quietly learning each day what it means to grow in favor with God and man.

Whenever you read history like the Bible, you must beware of the distortion caused by the necessary compression of time in historical accounts. Sometimes when you read Scripture, it can seem like God is doing miraculous signs and wonders with His people every day. But don't let history's compression of time distort your expectations for how God normally works. **Matthew 2:52** lasts for approximately 28 years.⁵ *Jesus increased in wisdom and in stature and in favor with God and man.*

So here's a question: how does God want us to grow in the normal mundane seasons of life? How do we grow in favor with God and man? What does it look like for us to

proved.

⁵ Luke 3:1 specifically dates the beginning of John the Baptist's ministry to A.D. 26, likely in the spring. Interestingly A.D. 26 was a Sabbatical year for the years, giving those who more strictly observed the Mosaic law more than ordinary leisure time, thus enabling the crowds to travel into the wilderness to hear the preaching of this new prophet, the baptizer!

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quietly build a life that's lived in joyful submission to King Jesus?

All of us need to keep changing and growing in wisdom and godliness, right? None of us are perfect, so Christ-followers can never coast. But how do we keep growing as a Christian through the normalcy of daily life?

Today our Bibles are open to **Matthew 3** where John the Baptist teaches that,



Jesus' reign is outwardly demonstrated by a life of repentance from sin.

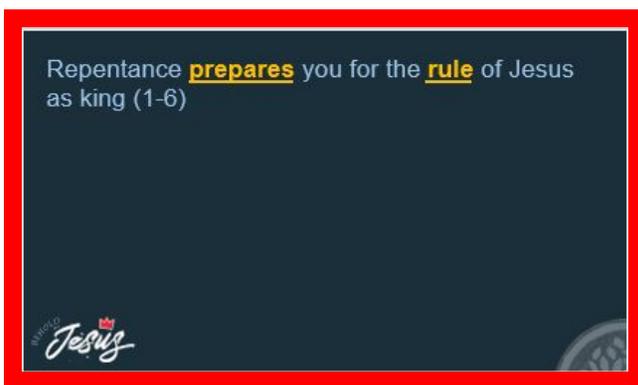
We grow in Christlikeness through repentance. And not just a one-time repentance, but a lifestyle of repenting from sin and growing our faith in God. All who profess that Jesus is their Lord and King will outwardly demonstrate that reality by practicing repentance. A repentance that turns from sin and grows in love for Jesus!

Repentance seems to have fallen out of favor with today's church. Perhaps that's because we've lost sense

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of how sinful our sin really is? We prefer to talk about God's love and God's grace. But what makes God's love and God's grace so magnificent and glorious is a proper understanding and repentance from our sin! Without repentance from sin, we cannot work out what God's Spirit is working into our hearts by His saving grace.⁶

So the first six verses of **Matthew 3** teach that,



Repentance prepares you for the rule of Jesus as king.
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Now in ancient times roads weren't paved with asphalt. So before a king would arrive to reign and rule in a city, his servants would go on ahead to clean up all litter alongside the roads, perform infrastructural improvements, fill in pot-holes and generally make the road ready for the king's safe and smooth travel. The roads required preparation before they were fit to be traveled by the king!

⁶ Philippians 2:12-13; Titus 2:11ff
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So when the Old Testament prophet Isaiah gets to **chapter 40** in his prophecy and turns his attention to the future comfort and restoration that will come to Israel when the Messiah arrives, he begins by describing how the Messiah's arrival will be preceded by a herald – a voice crying in the wilderness, *Prepare the way of the Lord; make straight in the desert a highway for our God!*⁷

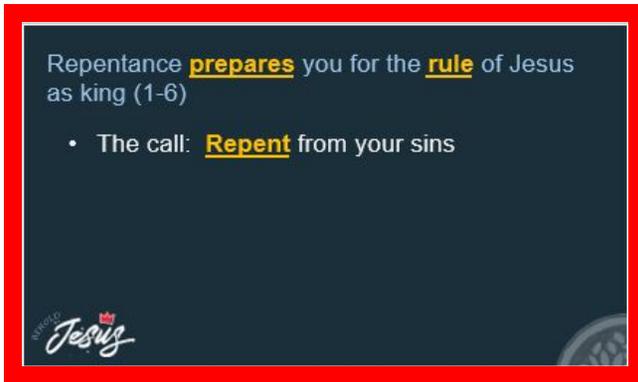
Every well-trained Jew was familiar with Isaiah **chapter 40**. God had promised a forerunner who would come and announce the arrival of the Messiah so His people could be sure to be ready to receive Him! Such a message would mean that the glory of the Lord was about to be revealed in the salvation and restoration of God's chosen people!

And so Matthew writes for his Jewish audience in **chapter 3**,

In those days John the Baptist came preaching in the wilderness of Judea, Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand. For this is he who was spoken of by the prophet Isaiah when he said, "The voice of one crying in the wilderness: 'Prepare the way of the Lord; make his paths straight.'"

Behold Jesus King is coming! And John doesn't go into the city of Jerusalem for them to prepare highways and infrastructures to receive him, but John begins preaching and crying in the wilderness – prepare your hearts!

⁷ Isaiah 40:3-5



The call is to Repent from your sins!

Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand!

The kingdom of heaven was a Jewish way of saying the kingdom of God. Matthew is the only Gospel writer that uses this phrase, and that makes sense due to His Jewish audience that was hesitant to even mention God's name.⁸ So we should understand that the "kingdom of God" and the "kingdom of heaven" are synonyms.⁹

To proclaim that the kingdom of heaven is near, or at hand, is to say that the King is coming! Because the kingdom of God is wherever God Himself rules. The kingdom emphasizes not a specific place, but a specific reign. The rule of God – the reign of heaven itself – is coming – prepare your hearts to receive your King!!

Now remember, **Daniel 2** had foretold a time when the God of heaven would set up an everlasting kingdom that

⁸ Even Matthew uses the phrase "Kingdom of God" in Matthew 12:28; 19:24; 21:31, 43

⁹ Matthew 19:23-24

would never be destroyed.¹⁰ Babylon was the 1st worldwide kingdom,¹¹ the Medes and Persia was the 2nd kingdom,¹² the Greeks were the 3rd kingdom,¹³ Rome was the 4th kingdom,¹⁴ and the Kingdom of God is the fifth and everlasting kingdom in God's history.

So don't miss the good news of John's call here for the Jewish people – *the kingdom of heaven is here!* That means Rome is about to fall! **Daniel 2:44** is here! **Isaiah 40-60** has come! Prepare your hearts for God's reign is about to be established forever among His people!

Therefore, *Repent!*

To repent means to turn or change your mind in such a way that your entire life is transformed. Turn from idols to serve the true and living God.¹⁵ Change your mind from sin to holiness. Be converted on the inside in a way that shows on the outside.

You see, God's people had begun to live very much like the Gentiles around them. So John preaches to bring,

¹⁰ Daniel 2:44-45; c.f. Daniel 4:3, 7:13-14; Ezekiel 37:25; Isaiah 9:6-7

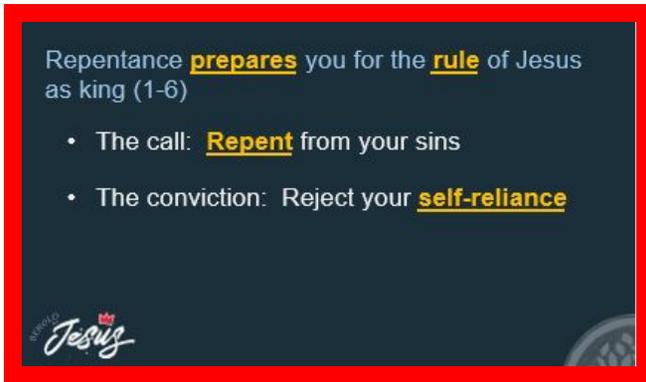
¹¹ Daniel 2:36-37

¹² Daniel 2:39a

¹³ Daniel 2:39b

¹⁴ Daniel 2:40

¹⁵ 1 Thessalonians 1:9



The conviction to Reject your self-reliance.

The root of all sin is pride. It is the kingdom of self that ultimately opposes the kingdom of God. So turn away from living for yourself, and repent.

Verse 4 describes the simple dress and diet of John the Baptist. John didn't dress or live or talk like the other Jewish religious leaders of his day. The Scribes and the Pharisees all had fine robes, and loved the respect of the people in the marketplaces, and the best foods of every feast.¹⁶

Instead John dressed and ate simply and practically, much like the prophet Elijah.¹⁷ In fact his very dress and diet were a rebuke to the self-indulgent and self-serving attitudes of God's people in that day. Come out from the hypocrisy of the religious institutions in Jerusalem – come away to the wilderness and have the Lord deal with the ruling loyalties of your heart!

¹⁶ Matthew 23:5-7

¹⁷ 2 Kings 1:8; c.f. Zechariah 13:4

You must reject your reliance on self before you will receive Jesus as your king.



You must confess, or Agree that you need God's rescue

You must admit that you are a sinner before a holy God. You must acknowledge that you are unable to save yourself. You must confess that you need God to rescue you from His coming judgment that you deserve.

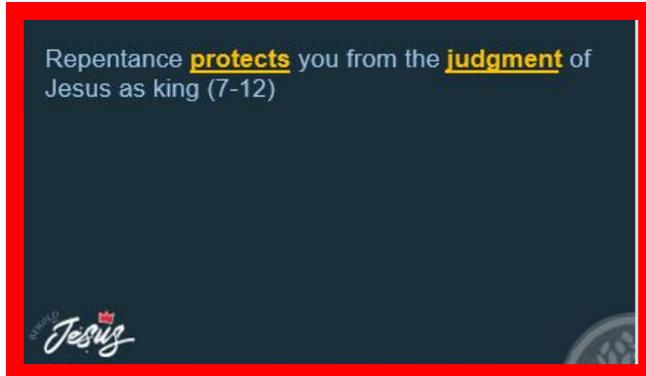
Now for all the Jews that God's Spirit was bringing out to John in the wilderness – to embrace John's preaching and submit to his baptism was absolutely radical! Because to be baptized by John publicly acknowledged that your Jewish upbringing was not sufficient to grant you access into God's kingdom. John's baptism was a baptism of repentance... public identifying you as a sinner – one who was deserving of God's judgment. The confession of John's baptism was that they were sinners in need of God's saving grace.

So what about you? Are you living a life of repentance? None of us are perfect; every one of us still sins in many ways. So the question is, how do you respond when you are confronted with your own sin? When's the last time

you've confessed your sin to another person?¹⁸ To repent of your sin means you own it, you admit it, you confess it, and you turn from it.

Godly repentance doesn't hide sin, or just manage sin's consequences. Godly repentance outwardly takes action to turn from all self-rule ... so that Jesus might truly rule as king in your heart.

But **verses 7-12** go on to teach us that,



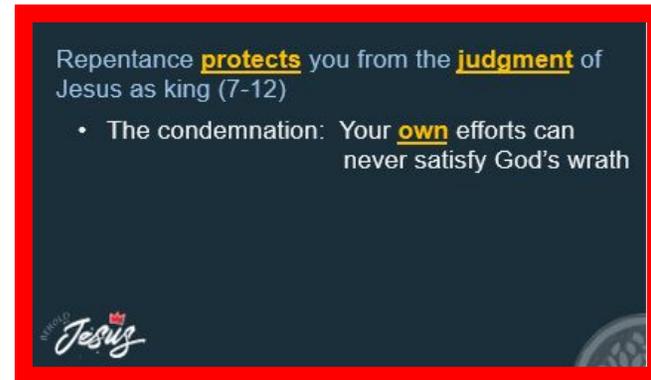
Repentance also protects you from the judgment of Jesus as king (7-12)

Because here's the reality, right? When the king shows up to rule, his people receive blessings but his enemies receive judgment, right? The king's arrival brings both blessing and cursing – depending on your own personal relationship with the king.

So John preaches, *Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand* since repentance protects you from the judgment that is coming as God sets up His everlasting kingdom. That's why, in **verse 7**, when John the Baptizer sees many of the Pharisees and Sadducees in the crowd watching him prepare the people for the Messiah's arrival, he gives them a strong warning and rebuke:

You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the wrath to come? Bear fruit in keeping with repentance. And do not presume to say to yourselves, 'We have Abraham as our father,' for I tell you, God is able from these stones to raise up children for Abraham. Even now the axe is laid to the root of the trees. Every tree therefore that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire.

Listen carefully to John's condemnation.



Your own efforts can never satisfy God's wrath

God's wrath against sin is coming! But it doesn't matter if you are a ritualistic legalist or a rationalistic liberal. Your

¹⁸ 1 John 1:7-10; James 5:16

own religious efforts cannot save you from God's holy posture against your self-rule.

You see the Pharisees were the traditional Jewish legalists. They flaunted their holy separation before others to be praised by men.

The Sadducees were the ultraliberal wealthy compromisers who controlled all the business aspects of temple worship. They rejected the notion of angels, the resurrection, and most things supernatural.

Together the Pharisees and the Sadducees made up the Sanhedrin, the ruling religious council of John's day. But contrary to their expectations, this well-respected prophet¹⁹ didn't thank these leaders for making an appearance at the riverside. Instead, John calls them the offspring of serpents!! While they appear to be harmless, they are full of the deadly poison of hypocrisy and pride. John openly calls them spiritual deceivers, and mocks their attendance as if they are exempt from God's coming wrath.

Bear fruit in keeping with repentance! You must die to yourself! You must turn from your sin, and forsake its lies in such a way that your outward living demonstrates the reality of your inward change!

True repentance will always produce a changed life. John is rebuking religious hypocrisy here by saying, stop trusting your profession of faith! Your words are worthless if they aren't demonstrated by the works of

your life! *Faith without works is dead!*²⁰ All genuine faith will be accompanied by works of love.²¹

So don't act like you've repented from your sin if you still love and practice your sin. Repentance truly changes the heart, and when the inward root has been transformed by God's grace, the outward fruit will necessarily be transformed as well!

You see **verse 9** reminds us that the Jewish people – especially the Jewish leaders – thought they would automatically be included in God's kingdom just by virtue of the fact that they were Jews.

But John the Baptist prepares the way for Jesus' arrival by teaching that the kingdom is only for those who submit to the rule of the King.²²

Sometimes I wonder if we have the same presumption in the church today. If you say, of course I'm a Christian. I grew up with Christian parents. Perhaps my parents even had me baptized as a baby! I don't have any strong disagreements with any Christian doctrine. I'm a well-respected member of my church. I've been baptized, and I even give financially to the Lord. Of course I'm a Christian.

Dear friend – hear the Baptizer's message this morning, and *bear fruit in keeping with repentance!* Jesus' reign is outwardly demonstrated by a life of repentance from sin! Only those whose faith progressively produces

¹⁹ Matthew 14:5
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²⁰ James 2:20-26

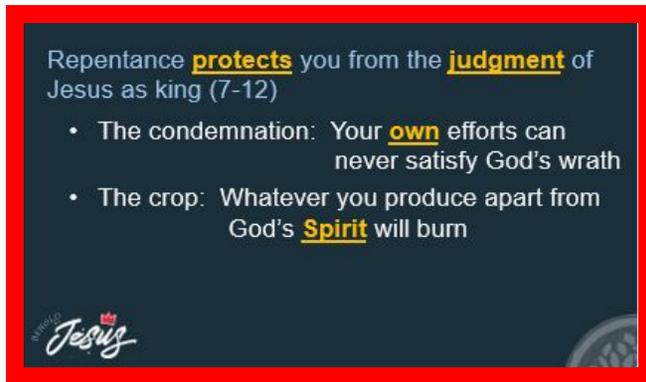
²¹ Galatians 5:6

²² Matthew 12:47-50

obedience²³ truly have saving faith. Only those who have been born again – truly converted and transformed on the inside by the Spirit of the living God²⁴ - are truly protected from the eternal judgment of unquenchable fire that is referenced in **verse 12**.

That's John's point when he points to the stones alongside the River Jordan and says, *God is able from these stones to raise up children for Abraham.*

God's Spirit is able to make for Himself a people out of the most unpromising and lifeless material. Salvation is God's work. God alone has the power to turn hearts of stone into hearts of flesh.²⁵ Repentance like faith, is God's gift to give,²⁶ but it is our responsibility to practice.



For whatever you produce apart from God's Spirit will burn.

²³ Romans 1:5; 16:26

²⁴ 1 Peter 1:3ff; John 3:3ff

²⁵ Ezekiel 36:26-27

²⁶ Jeremiah 31:18; John 15:5; Acts 5:31, 11:18; Romans 2:4; 2 Timothy 2:24-26; c.f. John 6:29; Ephesians 2:8-9; Philippians 1:29; Hebrews 12:2; 2 Peter 1:1

In **verse 10** John says, *even now the axe is laid to the root of the trees.* The time is short. The axe of judgment is lying at the very root of Israel – ready to cut them off in their disobedience. *And every tree therefore that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire.*

Fire is mentioned in **verse 10**, **verse 11**, and **verse 12**. And in all three cases it refers to God's judgment for unbelief. God's eternal punishment of unbelief in hell.

Dear professing Christian – please honestly examine the fruit – the produce – the results of your life. John wants to make sure no one misunderstands his message.

He says in **verse 11**, *I baptize you with water for repentance, but he who is coming after me is mightier than I, whose sandals I'm not worthy to carry.*

What makes the King Jesus so mighty and exalted?

He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire! The judgment of fire for all his enemies, but the baptism of the Holy Spirit for all of His own!

And this is the greatest,

Repentance **protects** you from the **judgment** of Jesus as king (7-12)

- The condemnation: Your **own** efforts can never satisfy God's wrath
- The crop: Whatever you produce apart from God's **Spirit** will burn
- The consolation: Your union with God's Spirit secures your **future** with God



consolation: Your union with God's Spirit secures your **future with God**

The king's arrival will separate the sheep from the goats. The wheat from the chaff. And the wheat – those who are united with God's Spirit through faith in Jesus Christ – will be gathered into His eternal dwelling place, while the empty and self-ruling chaff will forever burn with unquenchable fire.

You see, you can't trust the name of your church, or the faith of your fathers, or your reputation with others for your spiritual relationship with King Jesus. The only means of biblical assurance is the obedience that is produced by faith in Christ.

Main Point

Jesus' reign is **outwardly demonstrated** by a **life of repentance** from sin.



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Remember – repentance is not penance. We're not talking about paying off our sins. Repentance is an internal change of mind which the Spirit of God produces within our hearts that cause us to see sin as foolish as it truly is, and causes us to see Christ as good as He truly is – all so that we bear fruit – we outwardly change our behaviors and our speech and our relationships with others because of the inward transformation God has worked in our minds. Have you repented from sin? Are you even today living a lifestyle of repentance from sin?



You must repent of your sins, if you claim to know Jesus as your Savior and Lord. Your repentance and faith is only as real as your words and works confess.

So today is a day of repentance church. King Jesus has come, and died on the cross to pay the penalty for your sins. King Jesus rose from the dead to eternally conquer the power of sin – so that you and I can now live free from sin and know Christ forever as Savior and Lord!

If you truly believe in Jesus' death and resurrection for your spiritual standing with God, then He has baptized you with His Holy Spirit – and you have the spirit of the living Christ within you! O dear Christian – repent of your sins. Turn from them particularly and specifically. Change doesn't happen in fuzzy-land. Confess your sins to one another – walk in the light with other believers – and the blood of Jesus Christ will cleanse you from all sin, and purify you from all unrighteousness!²⁷ The King has come bringing salvation...and He's coming back soon to bring eternal judgment. Repentance prepares you to be ruled by Jesus, and protects you from

²⁷ 1 John 1:7-10
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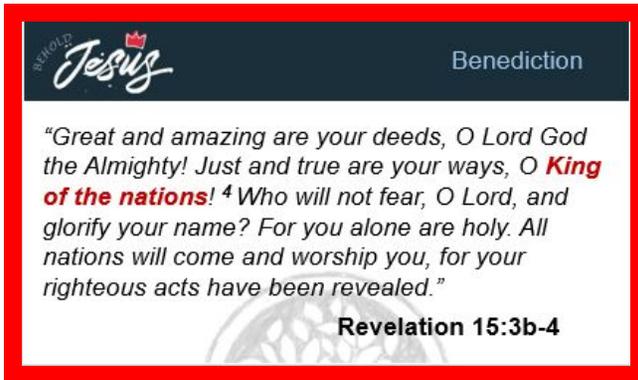
His coming judgment. Repent of your sins today and know the joyful life that comes through the power of God's Spirit to all who truly are submitted to Him as King.



Let's pray.

<<Give us clean hands>>

Let's pray our benediction together as we dismiss.



REKOLD Jesus

Benediction

*"Great and amazing are your deeds, O Lord God the Almighty! Just and true are your ways, O **King of the nations!** ⁴ Who will not fear, O Lord, and glorify your name? For you alone are holy. All nations will come and worship you, for your righteous acts have been revealed."*

Revelation 15:3b-4

Great and amazing are your deeds, O Lord God the Almighty! Just and true are your ways, O King of the nations! ⁴ Who will not fear, O Lord, and glorify your name? For you alone are holy. All nations will come and worship you, for your righteous acts have been revealed."

Revelation 15:3b-4



Many Hands Make Light Work.

Thank You New Castle!

Please share a few minutes to stack chairs & ready the Family Center for weekly activities.

Recommended Resources on Repentance:

- 2 Kings 1:8
- Isaiah 1:16-17; 40:3
- Ezekiel 33:18-19
- Malachi 4:5-6
- Matthew 4:17; 11:7-15
- Mark 1:15
- John 3:30
- Acts 5:31; 11:18; 13:24; 19:1-7; 20:21; 26:20
- 2 Corinthians 7:10-11ff
- 1 Thessalonians 1:8-9
- 2 Timothy 2:24-26
- Hebrew 12:12-17

- <https://www.ccwtoday.org/1994/04/the-unrepenting-repenter/>
- <https://bradbigney.wordpress.com/guilt-and-repentance/>
- <https://bradbigney.files.wordpress.com/2013/03/guilt-repentance-outline-blanks-filled-in.docx>

- *Gospel Treason*, Brad Bigney
- *The Gospel Primer*, Milton Vincent
- *Comforts from the Cross*, Elise Fitzpatrick

Growing Deeper: Life Group Questions

1. Read 2 Corinthians 7:10-11. What is the difference between godly grief and worldly grief over sin?
2. Review Matthew 3:7-10. Discuss some common ways people today can trust in their upbringing or their family for their relationship with God.
3. Compare Matthew 3:8 with Luke 3:10-14. What are the fruits (or evidences) of God-given repentance? Refer to page 1977 in The MacArthur Study Bible for a helpful Bible study on genuine marks of saving faith/repentance.
4. Read Matthew 3:2. Why was it so important that John preach repentance in preparation of Christ's earthly ministry? Compare 3:2 with 4:17. Why is the lifestyle of repentance necessary for all Christ-followers? How would you counsel someone who professes to be a Christian but shows no evidence of repentance?
5. Since Christ in you provides abundant hope for your change (Philippians 2:13; Galatians 2:20), how do you desire to change and grow in Christlikeness this week? This year?