

In today's Gospel, as soon as John was thrown into prison, Jesus immediately gets to work. He continues what John and the other Old Testament prophets did before Him.

In today's gospel, Jesus preaches to you and to all people everywhere, **"Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand."**

When lightening ignites a forest fire in a California mountain range, or when a hurricane begins to gather its fury off the coast of Florida, you will inevitably find people living in the path of death and destruction who don't want to listen to the warning.

Government and Law Enforcement officials warn these people to evacuate because they could be in imminent danger.

Everything may seem fine while the danger is still distant, but before long the fire begins to melt the siding on the house, or the hurricane picks up a boat and throws it into your front yard.

NOW you want to escape, but you are unable. You don't have the power, you don't have the escape route, and you don't have the time.

What happens? The very same officials who earlier warned you that this was going to happen now come in and save the day. Without them you would be destroyed; with them you escape death and you get the gift of life.

God Sent His Son Jesus to Save You from Disaster! Somewhat like a government official who is warning us of impending disaster.

Jesus tells in today's Gospel, **"Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand."** Now ask yourself honestly: How is it even possible for you to repent?

What exactly does repentance look like and what does it mean, and how can any of us be certain that we have done repentance well enough to gain entry into the kingdom of heaven?

You don't have any more willpower for repentance than I do. Even if you did have the desire to repent, what precisely are you going to do? What steps do you plan to take? How do you intend to do it?

Fire and storm are right here; Jesus is right here—who will never leave you or forsake you **“Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.”**

Like a homeowner who stays too long while the disaster looms overhead. Neither you nor I have the power to repent, we have no escape route to follow for repentance.

So, what happens? The very same Jesus who calls for your repentance now comes in and saves you. Jesus is like the official who warns you to escape the storm and the fire, but then He comes and gives you the very escape that you now realize you need.

First the official, or law enforcement officer gives you the command, and then—even while the forest fire is consuming your property—the officer does for you what you would not and now could not do.

In the same way, Jesus likewise says to you, **“Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.”**

Just as the officer saves you from the deadly jaws of the looming storm, so likewise does Jesus give you your repentance, that is, your deliverance and escape from death, and Jesus gives you your certainty of forgiveness and life.

Jesus’ Built His Sermon Upon the Sermons of the Old Testament Prophets Who Came Before Him, Preparing His Way.

When Jesus preaches, **“Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand,”** He's not merely echoing the preaching of John the Baptist. Rather, Jesus’ sermon about repentance in today’s Gospel goes deeply into the Old Testament.

God spells out for you how it is that He works His miracle of repentance for you. Jesus is applying personally to you what God had said through His prophets:

Hosea 6:1, “Come, let us return to the LORD; for He has torn us, that He may heal us; He has struck us down, and He will bind us up.”

With these Words, God wants you to know that repentance is something HE begins in you through the wrath and condemnation of His Law. Through the Law and the Ten Commandments, God’s Word tears at you, so to speak.

Psalm 51:3-10 “For I know my transgressions, and my sin is ever before me.

⁴Against you, you only, have I sinned and done what is evil in your sight, so that you may be justified in your words and blameless in your judgment. ⁵Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity, and in sin did my mother conceive me. ⁶Behold, you delight in truth in the inward being, and you teach me wisdom in the secret heart. ⁷Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean; wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow. ⁸Let me hear joy and gladness; let the bones that you have broken rejoice. ⁹Hide your face from my sins, and blot out all my iniquities. ¹⁰Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me.

Jeremiah 23:29 “Is not my word like fire, declares the LORD, and like a hammer that breaks the rock in pieces?”

God’s Law performs its work on you when it crushes you and breaks your bones, as it were—so that God Himself may heal you and bind you up with the promises of forgiveness that are yours in Christ Jesus.

How, then, do you repent? You repent by listening wholeheartedly to God’s Ten Commandments and by not resisting the way they tear you down and accuse you and condemn you.

Isaiah 44:21-22 “O Israel, you will not be forgotten by me. ²²I have blotted out your transgressions like a cloud and your sins like mist; return to me, for I have redeemed you.”

Just as an official is only looking out for your health and well-being when he urges you to escape the coming fire or hurricane.

God is looking out for more than your health; He is looking out for your salvation.

God has blotted out your transgressions with the blood of Jesus His Son. All your sins have disappeared like the mist in the rising Sun of morning.

Psalm 103:12 “As far as the east is from the west, so far does he remove our transgressions from us.”

Matthew 3:1-2, “In those days John the Baptist came preaching in the wilderness of Judea, ‘Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.’”

Repentance isn't something that happens for you only once in a lifetime. Repentance is a miracle God produces in you repeatedly and continually through the power of His Word.

This is where the analogy of rescue from a forest fire or a hurricane breaks down. Certainly, no one would choose to be caught in a natural disaster.

Repentance is something God continually works in you and something God desires never to stop working in you. John the Baptist didn't preach, "Repent," as though it were a single action. John the Baptist preached: "Be repenting" which means "Continually repent."

So long as you remain in this life, the Law of God will condemn you, and the fire of judgment will not be far from your door. "Be repenting and continually repenting."

So long as you remain in this life, the Lord Jesus will never fail to remain your faithful and courageous rescuer and Savior, delivering you again through his unending grace and mercy.

We cling to the one who says, I am the light of the world, the light no darkness can overcome; when it seems like the darkness is gaining the upper hand, we have a Savior that is the True Light, which we can take refuge in.

A Savior that went to the Cross and conquered darkness and death once and for all.

1 Corinthians 1:18 "For the word of the cross is folly to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God."

Jesus took your place on the Cross and became a sacrifice in your place; on the Cross he overcame death and became the light of forgiveness and salvation.

Christ loves you unconditionally and gives you the greatest gift of his light, free of charge, which is paid in full on the Cross with His suffering, death and resurrection from the dead. Amen.