

REPENT – THE KINGDOM IS AT HAND

John the Baptist burst onto the scene in the strangest of places (in the wilderness) and with a startling message!

Matthew 3:2 (NKJV)

2 and saying, “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand!”

The first recorded word of John’s message is “Repent”. That was the core emphasis of his message!

The call to repentance is important and must not be neglected. It is entirely accurate to say that it is the first word of the gospel.

- Repent was the first word of John the Baptist’s gospel (Matthew 3:1-2).
- Repent was the first word of Jesus’ gospel (Matthew 4:17 and Mark 1:14-15).
- Repent was the first word in the preaching ministry of the twelve disciples (Mark 6:12).
- Repent was the first word in the preaching instructions Jesus gave to His disciples after His resurrection (Luke 24:46-47).
- Repent was the first word of exhortation in the first Christian sermon (Acts 2:38).
- Repent was the first word in the mouth of the Apostle Paul through his ministry (Acts 26:19-20).” – **David Guzik**

The word “**Repent**” (Gk. *metanoeo*) literally means “**to change your mind**”. Repentance is a change of mind that results in a change of direction in the life. Note Matt. 3:8, where John tells the religious leaders to “bear fruit **worthy of repentance**”. True repentance is seen in the fruits of a changed life.

John called on the people to repent saying, “**for the kingdom of heaven is at hand!**” Matthew consistently uses the terminology “**kingdom of heaven**” (32 times) instead of the parallel “**kingdom of God**” used in the other gospels (cf. Mt. 19:23-24; Mk. 10:23-25 – Lk. 18:24; Mt. 4:17; Mk. 1:14-15).

So “**kingdom of heaven**” and “**kingdom of God**” are essentially interchangeable. We believe that Matthew used the phraseology “**kingdom of heaven**” because of the Jews sensitivity in using the name God for fear they would use it in vain. So, it was an accommodation to Jewish scruples.

The kingdom is the BIG IDEA in the Scriptures. Dr. Michael Vlach says, ***“The kingdom of God is the great and grand theme of Scripture.”*** The whole of redemptive history is moving towards the KINGDOM! The kingdom in view is the literal Messianic kingdom prophesied about in the OT Scriptures.

“This title [kingdom of heaven], peculiar to Matthew in the NT, is based on Dan. 2:44; 7:13, 14, 27. It refers to the Messianic kingdom promised in the OT, of which Jesus was about to be presented as king.” – ***Wycliffe Bible Commentary***

This is the kingdom reign of the Messiah on the earth. With the King of the Jews now on the scene, the kingdom was being presented to Israel on the condition of “repentance” (cf. 2:2). Being at hand means it was imminent, with the sense that it was now being offered.

The OT Scriptures are very clear that before the kingdom can come, there must first be repentance in Israel. Thus, John was calling Israel to repent so that the kingdom could be ushered in. Peter emphasized this very condition to the Jews in Acts 3.

Acts 3:19–21 (NKJV)

19 Repent therefore and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out, so **that times of refreshing may come** from the presence of the Lord, **20** and that He **may send Jesus Christ**, who was preached to you before, **21** whom heaven must receive until the times of restoration of all things, which **God has spoken by the mouth of all His holy prophets** since the world began.

Before the kingdom can come, before the Messiah can come and set up His kingdom, there must first be repentance in Israel. Until Israel comes to repentance the kingdom will not come.

Footnote on God’s KINGDOM program.

Overview of God’s Kingdom Program

Gen. 1:26-28 – Kingdom mandate – (First Adam).

FAIL – Satan usurper (cf. Lk. 4:6).

Psalms 8:6 – Kingdom mandate destiny continues.

2 Sam. 7:12-13 – Kingdom mandate promised through the Davidic line.

1 Cor. 15:25-28, 45/Heb. 2:5-9 – Kingdom mandate to be fulfilled in Christ (the Last Adam).

Jesus Christ comes to fulfill the kingdom mandate given in Genesis to Adam, and to fulfill the Davidic Covenant given to David. Ruling the earth for God is still mankind's destiny, and it will be fulfilled through Christ. God's plan is for humanity to rule the earth for His glory, and this will yet be fulfilled in the Person of Christ and His followers.

"The millennial kingdom will highlight the successful reign of the Last Adam (1 Cor 15:45) in the reign where the first Adam was tasked but failed. When Jesus comes again He will share this reign with those who identify with Him (see Rev. 2:26-27; 3:21; 20:4)." – **Dr. Michael Vlach**

The kingdom that the Messiah will bring is the Davidic Kingdom, which is why Matthew traces Christ's genealogical record back to David and places such an emphasis on it.

Acts 1:6 (NKJV)

6 Therefore, when they had come together, they asked Him, saying, "Lord, will You at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?"

The kingdom the Messiah brings is a RESTORED kingdom, meaning it is a kingdom they once had. What is this kingdom? It is the Davidic kingdom. God promised the throne and the kingdom to David's line forever in the Davidic Covenant (cf. 2 Sam. 7:12-17).

Ever since the fall of Jerusalem in 586 BC, at the time of the Babylonian Captivity, there has never been a rightful Davidic king sitting on David's throne in Jerusalem. Finally, the Messianic King came – finally the One to whom the throne rightfully belongs CAME! And what did Israel do? Did they repent? Did they receive the King? No, they rejected Jesus Christ. And so the kingdom has been put on hold.

However, it was legitimately being offered to Israel at the time of John the Baptist on the condition of repentance. This is what John meant when he said, "**Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand!**"

But note: After the death of Christ and the inauguration of the Church, the apostles no longer spoke the gospel of the kingdom. That has been put on hold. Instead, today what we are holding forth is "**the gospel of the grace of Christ**" (Acts 20:24) or, as it is simply called, "**the gospel of Christ**" (1 Cor. 9:17-18). However, Christ in the Olivet Discourse in Matthew 24 spoke

of a future time in the Tribulation Period where the gospel of the kingdom will once again be proclaimed.

Matthew 24:14 (NKJV)

14 And this **gospel of the kingdom** will be preached in all the world as a witness to all the nations, and then the end will come.

The gospel of the kingdom was presented to Israel at Christ's first coming on the condition of repentance. They did not repent, and so God is now building His Church through the gospel of Christ. When the Church is complete, the gospel of the kingdom will then once again go forth, and it will be preached throughout the world, and the END will come!

Suddenly, after 400 years of prophetic silence, this prophet John the Baptist burst onto the scene, crying out, "***Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand!***" To which the question may well have been asked, "***Who is this guy anyway?***" Well, Matthew proceeds to answer that question as we go on in the chapter.