

Preparing to Meet the King

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 06 January 2019

Preacher: Kevin Murphy

- [0 : 0 0] Heavenly Father, this morning as we gather, we are conscious of the fact that we are coming before a holy God, a sovereign God, the majestic creator of all the universe.
- God, we agree with so many of the writers in the scriptures who ask the question, who is there like our God? And we say with a resounding answer, there is no one and none like you.
- There's no one as holy as you, God. No one is set apart as you. No one is kind and as just, as gracious and merciful as you, God.
- And so we've come to worship you. We've come to praise your name. We've come to lift our voice in worship and to declare, God, that our hope is in you, God. Lord, we've come to adore you this morning.
- We've come to align ourselves to you. Father, this morning, won't you give us faith where faith is lacking? Won't you open our eyes to see you again and to draw us back to yourself, we pray, God.
- [1 : 0 9] We've come to worship you. Father, this morning we pray for those in our midst that are struggling, those that are hurting, those that are making big decisions, those that are facing trials and difficulties.
- God, we pray, won't you draw near? Won't you love us, God? Won't you help us see your infinite wisdom and your perfect perspective? God, open our eyes to see the way things you see things, God.
- Help us, Father, not to insist in our own way, but to trust you in the midst of the storms, in the midst of the fire, Lord God. God, give us faith to trust you, though we do not always understand your ways and we do not understand the future, but help us to know that you're good and you're gracious and that you're trustworthy.
- God, we bring ourselves and we bring our brothers and our sisters before you. God, come and draw near to us, we pray. Come give us your Holy Spirit. Father, this morning we pray for our city and we pray for the gospel in our city.
- We pray for other churches gathered now all across Hong Kong, God, from English churches, Chinese churches, Filipino churches, every language. God, we lift them up before you and we ask you, God, pour out your spirit, God.
- [2 : 2 3] Pray for a renewal of the gospel in our city, God. We pray for their evangelism programs and our evangelism programs. We pray, God, that people will come to know you, God.
- God, we lift up the church in Hong Kong. Pray for Eric and Justine at the bridge, God. Pray for Steve at community church and John and Rachel at ambassador and Brett and Shannon at island, God.
- And Andrew at the vine and so many others. We lift them up before you this morning. God, this morning as they gathered, won't you minister to them? Won't you pour out your grace on those communities as we pray for ourselves?

We pray, God, for your gospel to go forward in Hong Kong. And finally, God, we pray for our city leaders. We pray for our civic leaders and our politicians. We pray, God, for great courage to make the right decisions, make even unpopular decisions, but those that are good for the city and the country.

We pray, God, for the care for the poor. We pray for the marginalized and the hurting. That, God, our leaders will take care of the poor in our city. They'll make decisions that look after them.

[3 : 29] God, we pray if there's any corruption for that to be exposed and brought to light. And we pray, God, for wisdom for complex issues facing our city. Schooling, education, housing, accommodation.

We pray, God, give our leaders wisdom. Help them to see through the complex issues and come up with solutions that will serve the citizens of the city, we pray. We pray all these things in your wonderful and holy name.

Amen. Amen. Thank you. Thank you for praying for our city and our church together. It's wonderful to pray together. Let's listen to God's word as Echo is going to come and read to us from Matthew chapter 3.

The scripture reading comes from Matthew 3. Please follow along in your bulletins and on the screen. In those days, John the Baptist came from 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 path straight.

[4 : 43] Now, John wore a garment of camel's hair and a leather belt around his waist, and his food was locusts and wild honey. Then Jerusalem and all Judea and all the region about the Jordan were going out to him, and they were baptized by him in the river Jordan, confessing their sins.

But when he saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees coming to his baptism, he said to them, You brood of vipers, who warns 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.

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.

[5 : 53] 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 uncrenchable fire.

This is the Word of God. Great. Thank you, Echo. Great. Well, as everyone else has said, Happy New Year.

If you've been away, welcome back to Hong Kong. It's great to see you. And if you're new to Hong Kong or new to Watermark, it's wonderful to have you with us this morning. Now, as a church family, in December, we started looking at the first few chapters in Matthew's Gospel in the build-up to Christmas, and we're going to continue with Matthew's Gospel for the next five months as we work through the next five chapters, chapters three until the end of the Sermon of the Mount in chapter seven.

And we're going to do that between now and the end of May. And we're doing that for two reasons. The first is because as a church, we want to be God-centered, and we want to hear what God has to say to us.

And so the best way to do that is to work expositionally through God's Word in our preaching. As a church, we are not all that interested in doing cute sermon series on three ways to find a girlfriend, or five ways to make a success of your life, or how to handle your emotions.

[7 : 12] What we want to do is we want to encounter the living God in His Word. We want to hear from what God has to say, and we want to know what God is like. And we believe that as we do that, both individually and as a church, God will change us.

He will make us more like Himself. He will teach us how to handle our emotions. He will teach us how to handle both success and failure in life in a God-centered way. And so for that reason, as a church, we are committed to working through His Word.

The second reason why we're going to be doing this is Matthew's Gospel is all about Jesus and the upside-down kingdom of God. As someone who's relatively new to Hong Kong, we've been here just over a year, one of the things that struck me when we moved here is that no matter what city in the world you live in, whether you're from lowly Cape Town, or Singapore, or Hong Kong, or Tokyo, or Toronto, or London, the basic modus operandi, the basic mode of operation of all human beings everywhere is, let my kingdom come.

My will be done. And Jesus comes to bring us a different kind of kingdom. He shows us what true life in the true kingdom is like. But Jesus' kingdom is often upside down.

It's not the way we expect it to be. It's often counterintuitive and countercultural. But it is the way that leads to life. And so for the next couple of months, we're going to be exploring this as we work through Matthew's Gospel together.

[8 : 39] Okay. Now, today's passage of Scripture, we meet this guy called John, right? Known as John the Baptist. And John is an interesting guy, to say the very least, right?

How many of you, like me, that have daughters, would like John the Baptist for a son-in-law? Anyone? Or how many of you young ladies would like to take John to that work function, that dinner, or maybe to your reunion dinner at the up-and-coming Chinese New Year?

John is an interesting guy. He's a little rough around the edges. I mean, look at his fashion sense, right? He wears this camel's leather outfit. And this isn't like Italian dyed, polished leather.

This is probably his trusty steed that got to the end of its life, and he skinned it himself. And, you know, that's his outfit. Camel skin and a leather belt.

John's not very tactful, right? Tactful means knowing how to say the right things at the right time. John says to the establishment, the leaders of society, the kind of legislative council of Israel, the first thing he says to them is, you brood of vipers.

[9 : 49] In other words, you offspring of snakes. Not very tactful, right? John's a little confrontational. He likes to get into people's faces. Imagine him sitting next to your grandma at your reunion dinner, and the first thing he says is, repent.

This is John. And, of course, don't forget his eating habits, right? Wild locusts and wild honey. And this isn't organic, caught on blue locusts from City Super.

This is the stuff he's caught just outside of his cave in the mountains. John's a little rough around the edges. He's an interesting guy. And yet for all of his kind of unrefined ways, his peculiarities, there's something special about John.

John has been sent by God. Look at what verse 3 in our passage says. It says, This is he who was spoken of by the prophet Isaiah. When Isaiah said, The voice of one crying in the wilderness, Prepare the way of the Lord.

Make straight his paths. And so what's happening here is in Isaiah's word 700 years beforehand, in ancient times when a king or a member of the royal family were to travel long distances, for the weeks and months beforehand, all the people would be working on the roads.

- [11 : 06] They'd be repairing it and fixing it and smoothing it out and fixing potholes and making sure that the highway, the road which the king was to travel on, was smooth. And so they would prepare the way for the king to go.

Now what's happening here is that Israel, God's people, are in Babylon. Or they're about to go into Babylon. And Isaiah is writing to them prophetically to say that they're in Babylon because of their sin, because of their rebellion, because of the fact that they've turned away from God, they've rejected him.

But God has not rejected them. God has not forgotten his promises. And so God is coming to rescue them. He's coming to save them. He's coming to bring them out of Babylon, out of exile, out of captivity, and to restore them to Israel.

And so a voice in Isaiah 40 cries out, and this is what it says, Comfort, comfort to all my people. Tell my people that her warfare has ended. Her sins have been pardoned.

And then Isaiah goes on. A voice cries out in the wilderness, Prepare the way of the Lord. Make straight the path or the highway of our God. And so what Isaiah is saying is this.

- [12 : 17] You Israelites, the people of God, have been in Babylon in exile because of your sin and your rebellion, but God has not forgotten you. Prepare the way because the king, God himself, is coming.

And he's coming to Babylon to deliver you, to set you free, to bring you out of exile, and to restore you. And so God's messenger, Isaiah, says, Get ready.

Prepare the way for the king. God is coming to set you free and to rescue you. And Matthew tells us that what is true of Isaiah 700 years before is just as true of John.

That John, on one sense, he's this prophet like Isaiah and Elijah that is saying, Get ready for the king. The king is coming to rescue you and restore you. But on the other hand, John is a nobody.

He's just a voice. He's just a voice in the desert. And he's calling out to those that are far from God, Prepare the way. You may have forgotten God, but he hasn't forgotten you.

- [13 : 18] He's coming to set you free. Okay? Now, how does John do this? What does John say? How does he prepare God's people to meet with the coming king?

Well, let's look at verse 2. What does it say? He says, Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand. Repent. Repentance is one of those words that we don't like to talk about too much, right?

We probably don't like it as much as John's original hearers, the audience, like to hear it themselves. But if we were to just flip over the page, we see that actually in Matthew chapter 4, Jesus says the exact same thing that John says in chapter 3.

In chapter 4, verse 17, Matthew writes and he says, Jesus now went throughout the whole region preaching, and this is what he said, Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand. And then if we flip over our Bibles a few more pages in the book of Acts, the apostles are going throughout the city of Jerusalem, throughout Judea, and the known world, and this is their message.

Repent, be baptized, every one of you, for the forgiveness of sins. Now, let's think about this for a second. What is repentance, and why does it matter?

- [14 : 32] Why is it so important? Why is it that John and Jesus and the apostles, in fact, the entire New Testament, the Old Testament, why is it that God's people keep on going on about this thing of repentance?

Well, that's actually what our passage today is all about. What is it, and why is it so important? And so let's dive into that. First thing, what is repentance? Well, in the New Testament, which was written in Greek, there are numerous Greek words to refer to repentance.

And one of the most common of them, the one that's used here in Matthew chapter 3, is the word metanoio, okay, something like that. I don't know how to pronounce it, but let's just pretend I said it right, okay?

Metanoio. And what it means is to change your mind or to turn around for a change to take place in your thinking or maybe even in your body.

But it doesn't necessarily hold a moral connotation. It's like you can change your mind from one day you like red, the next day you like blue, okay? It's not necessarily a moral connection. But that's what, in nominal sense, that's what the word meant.

[15 : 35] But when the Bible uses it, when the New Testament writers use this word repent, it often means three things. It has three key ingredients to it. It means realizing or discovering or seeing something anew in fresh light.

Discovering something that you hadn't discovered before. Seeing something in a new way. It means secondly, your heart is grieved or your heart is now anxious about what you've just discovered.

There's an anxiety in your heart about this new state of affairs or what you've just thought about. And then thirdly, it means a change that takes place.

You were facing this way, you're now gonna do this. You used to think I'll go there, you now think I'm gonna go here. So these three ingredients, a change in your mind, an anguish in your heart about the current situation or what you previously thought, and then a change that takes place from the old way to the new.

Does that make sense? Okay. Maybe an analogy will help. Think about that situation Chris helped me with this this week. Think about a movie, okay? Your favorite movie.

[16 : 41] In every movie, there's that point when something, a change takes place, right? So the main character is about to do something dreadful. They're about to leave their family, their wife and children to go move in with someone else.

They're about to make that billion dollar investment, but it's a scam. They're about to get on the airplane, but you know that there's a bomb on the airplane. They're about to do something that's going to end badly. And then, they get a text message, they see something out the corner of their eye, they overhear a conversation, something happens that gives them a new understanding of the situation, their heart realizes this is not good, and they make that radical change, right?

They run through the airport and they hug their wife again, or they cancel the business deal, or they tackle the terrorist who's about to, you know, blow up the plane, something like that. Does that make sense?

Not really. Okay. Well, sorry about that. In some ways, this is what repentance is like. It's not just acknowledgement of something.

It's not just changing your mind. It's a radical change in orientation from this way to that, a disposition. It's forsaking the old and it's turning to something new because your eyes have been opened to see things as they really are.

[17 : 56] Charles Spurgeon said it like this. He said, Repentance is a discovery, a revelation of the evil of sin, a mourning, a grieving that we've committed it and a resolution to forsake it.

It is, in fact, a change of mind that is so deep and of a practical nature that it causes a man to hate what he once loved and to now love what he once hated.

But do you see those three ingredients? It's a discovery of the evil of sin. It's a grievous mourning that we've committed. It's a resolution to change your disposition and your orientation.

You see, repentance is not just thinking differently about something. It's not just saying, hey, I used to think camel's hair and leather belts were in and fashionable but now I'm not so sure anymore.

That's not quite repentance. Repentance is not an attempt at self-approval or reforming our lives. It's not like New Year's resolutions where you say, this year, I really should get bit at not lying.

[18 : 58] I'm going to try and tell the truth more this year. Repentance is not even feeling guilty about something and trying to atone for it. Like maybe you feel guilty about the fact that you lied to your mother-in-law about Christmas plans and so you decide, okay, Chinese New Year, I'm going to tell her the truth.

I'm going to be really nice to her to make up for Christmas, right? No, no, maybe you just feel bad because we are, I'm proud or I'm self-righteous. Repentance sees the ugliness of sin such that it changes not only my mind, it changes the way I see life.

It causes an anxiety in my heart to say this is not right and it causes a change in my orientation from one way to the next. Maybe I can give you an example from my life.

Something that happened in recent, in the last few years. there was a situation where I listened to a sermon, an online sermon of another preacher from my city and truth be told, I didn't think the sermon was very, I wasn't that impressed, I didn't think it was very good and, but in my self-righteousness and in my arrogance, I told myself that's a terrible sermon and I told, I gave myself all these reasons why I thought it was so bad.

He didn't do this and didn't do this and didn't do this and he should have done this. Now, truth be told, I might have taken a different approach, that's truth, but my self-righteousness, my arrogance was very judgmental.

[20 : 32] And then what happened in the next couple of months, I happened to have two conversations with two different people where this church and the approaching came up in the conversation. And so the very humble person that I am decided to, tell this person what I thought.

And so I said, I listened to their sermon and I didn't think they were very good at all and these were the reasons, A, B, C, D. Now, if I'm honest, at the time that that was happening, I think the Holy Spirit is probably at work in my heart, saying, Kevin, this is not honoring me, this is not good.

But I quickly shut that out because I didn't want to listen to him because I wanted to feel better about myself. Until a few months later, I read a book by an English pastor from 300 years ago called Richard Baxter.

And in this book, he talks about how proud ministers can be, pastors can be. And he gives a whole lot of things and he says, in fact, pastors can be so proud that sometimes they'll even speak badly about other pastors to make themselves feel better about themselves.

And when I read that, I was absolutely devastated. I remember lying in my bed at night just weeping at the realization of who I was and what I'd done.

[21 : 47] That another pastor in the city that I could go and talk behind his back and slander him to make myself feel better about myself. And so, over the next few weeks, I had to call those two people that I had conversations with and say, I'm so sorry that I included you in my sin.

Won't you please forgive me and I need to make it right. And then I had to have a very awkward coffee with this pastor and sit across the table, tears streaming down my face and say, I'm so sorry for what I've done.

This is what I've done and this is what I've said about you. And please, will you forgive me? I don't want to be that kind of person. Now, to be honest, on the one hand, it wasn't an easy thing to do.

I wasn't looking forward to it. Part of me wanted to just confess to Jesus in my room and get on with it and just leave it there. But I knew that I couldn't hold on to my pride. I couldn't hold on to my honor and repent honestly at the same time.

And so part of me didn't want to do it. But on the other hand, if I'm honest, I couldn't wait to do it. And the reason was because my awareness of my sin was like a weight on my shoulders. It had become disgusting in my mouth.

[22 : 56] And as I saw the wonder of Jesus and the beauty of truth and the horror of my sin, what I once enjoyed putting down somebody else and I now saw as disgusting and what I once loathed or hated, the idea of me being humbled, suddenly looked beautiful and liberating liberating and freeing.

And so as I sat down with him, tears streaming down my face, telling him what I'd done, asking him to forgive me, I felt free. I felt liberated.

It was the most beautiful thing. Now friends, I tell you that not because I'm a hero that's got it right. I tell you that because I'm a sinner that gets it wrong time and time and time again.

But I tell you that because the more I grow as a Christian, the more I realize how sinful I am and the more beautiful God's grace looks and the more liberating and wonderful repentance looks. And I remember the words of John Newton who was a former slave trader.

He said this, the older I get my memory is fading but two things I remember, I am a great sinner and Christ is a great savior. Charles Spurgeon said this, we spoke about earlier, repentance is the discovery of the evil of sin.

[24 : 10] It's a grieving that we've committed it and it's a resolution to forsake it. It's a change of mind so deep and so practical that it causes you to hate what you once loved and to love what you once hate.

And we see this in our passage today. In our passage that we read we actually see an example of genuine repentance and example of fraudulent repentance. Look at verse 5 and 6 with me for an example of real repentance.

John is preaching, he's crying in the wilderness, repent for the kingdom of heaven is here. And then verse 5 says this, when Jerusalem and all Judea and all the region about the Jordan were going out to him and they were baptized by him in the river Jordan confessing their sins.

So, what does real repentance look like? Well the first thing we see involves confessing their sins. Now the passage, it seems like they weren't just confessing their sins to themselves or to Jesus, they were actually confessing it to John or maybe to one another.

They were coming to John saying, John, can I be honest? This is what's happened. This is what I've done. This is where I've gone my own way. And John says, hey, you confessed your sin. Wonderful brother. Let's put that right.

[25 : 20] And he stands with him. Friends, one of the marks of genuine repentance is that we cannot hold on to our honor, hold on to our pride, and repent honestly at the same time. Genuine repentance means such a deep and radical hatred for what once was part of our lives, what we once enjoyed, that we now are willing to lose face, even lose honor in order to forsake it.

Remember, Israel here is an honor and shame culture just as much as Hong Kong. They were very concerned about saving face, about not damaging the family name, the family reputation, but their eyes are open to seeing what they once were doing.

And they come to John, they say, John, I want to come clean. This is what's happened. It involves confession of sin. But what's more, look at what happens here. They get baptized. Now the word baptism means to immerse or to dunk or to drown something in water.

It's a public picture or demonstration of what happens when someone becomes a Christian. So here are these people, they come to John and they say, John, this is what we've done.

We want to be put right with him. And John says, let's baptize you. Let's immerse you in water as a picture that your old life, your old disposition, your old orientation is dead and buried and in the grave.

[26 : 37] And as you come up, it's a picture of your new life. You've changed direction. You were this person, you're now this person. You were this person, you're now alive and a new person again.

It's a radical picture of so completely turning away from the old life of self-righteousness and self-sufficiency, wanting to be their own God, that they make a public picture saying, that old life is dead.

I'm a new person in Christ. You see that? Friends, let me ask you this question. What do you think our church would look like?

What do you think our CGs would look like if we were a community marked by genuine repentance? I'll tell you what it won't look like. It won't look like a group of people that are always putting their best foot forward.

It won't look like a church where we all pretend that we've got it all together. Because friends, we don't have it all together. We're broken. We're sinners. But you know what I think it will look like?

[27 : 38] I think it'll look like a community of gentleness, a community of grace, a community of forgiveness. Count intuitively, it'll look like a community full of non-judgmentalism because we all know that we're broken.

There's no room for us to be judgmental and look down our nose at others. I think it'll be a community that is marked by unbelievable humility and sincerity. I think it'll be a community that's marked by tears.

Tears of sadness at the horror of sin, but tears of joy at restoration and healing and repentance. And I think it'll be marked by supernatural power, supernatural life, and supernatural freedom.

Because in Acts chapter 3, when Peter's preaching, he says, repent, repent, repent, repent, brothers and sisters, turn back, that your sins may be blotted out, that times of refreshing and times of healing may come upon you.

Friends, that's what happens when we turn to God. There's a supernatural freedom and refreshing and life that is given. May we be such a church as that.

[28 : 44] But then we see here in verse 7 to 9, look at me, look with me at this passage. We see an example of fake repentance or religious repentance. Matthew says that when many, when they saw, when John saw the Pharisees and the Sadducees coming to his baptism, he said to them, you brood of vipers, who warned you to flee from the wrath to come?

Keep fruit and bearing with repentance. And don't say to yourselves, oh, we find we've got Abraham as our father. God is able to raise up children of Abraham from these very stones. Now what's going on here is that John, this rough around the edges guy, is getting a bit of a crowd.

People are starting to hear about him and people are leaving the city to go out to the wilderness to listen to him. Now the religious leaders, they can't just stay in the city while everyone's flocking out to go and listen to what John is saying.

They better get to the picture and go and find out what's happening. And so they go out into the wilderness and they're watching what's happening and they're seeing their entire congregations are confessing their sins.

They're getting baptized. They're rejoicing and celebrating in God. And the religious leaders are thinking, gee, it's a little embarrassing if we're just standing on the side watching. We better get involved.

[30 : 01] But they don't want to get involved. And so they shuffle along and they say, just grin and bear it. Join the queue. Get baptized. It'll just take five minutes and we'll be back on our way. And so they shuffle along and they join the queue and they say, yes, we too want to get baptized, John.

But John sees through the hypocrisy. And so what does he do? He says, you guys are being deceptive. You like snakes, right? Not a very complimentary thing to say to the religious leaders. He says, who warned you to flee from the wrath that's coming?

Now, I was being sarcastic because they're not really fleeing from anything. They're not, they're just putting up a pretense, right? Friends, religious repentance, by that I mean repentance which is not born out of seeing the horror of sin and the wonder of the gospel.

religious repentance is always marked by three things. By selfishness, by self-righteousness and by defensiveness. In other words, we find a way to justify ourselves.

We tell ourselves there's a reason why we don't really need to repent or why we fine. Look at what they do. They say, oh, it's fine. We are children of Abraham. Because we are good Jews, it'll be fine.

[31 : 08] We don't need to really repent. Think about what Adam and Eve did in the garden, right? God comes to Adam and says, Adam, what happened here? And he says, Eve made me do it. Eve, what happened here? The snake made me do it.

What happens when Samuel comes to Saul in the Old Testament? Saul says, oh, well, I was going to wait for you but you took so long I just couldn't wait any longer. Self-righteousness, selfishness, defensiveness.

And that's what we see happening here. John says that if they genuinely repent, there'll be fruit of it. There'll be a humility. There'll be a brokenness. There'll be a distaste for sin and a longing for truth.

There'll be a gentleness and a sincerity, a delighting in the things of God. Except rather than forsaking their pride and their honor, here these people are holding on to their pride.

They're holding on to their honor. They are saving face. They don't want to look disrespectful before others. Rather than letting God be their God, they still want to be their own God. And the consequences are disastrous.

[32 : 07] Because look at verse 10. John says, even now the axe is laid at the root of the tree. Every tree that does not bear fruit is cut down and it's thrown into the fire. Friends, can I say this as gently as possible?

It is possible for us to deceive our bosses. It is possible for us to deceive the government officials. It's even possible for us to deceive our spouses.

But friends, we cannot dodge God. God will never be able to deceive him. God looks into the reality of things. And John gives a stern warning here.

He says, the axe is ready. It's laying weight. And every tree that doesn't bear fruit is going to be thrown ultimately in the fire. Now, why is this all so important?

Why are we making such a big deal of this? Well, up until now, everything John has been saying has been really important. Remember, this is central not only to John, this is central to Jesus and the New Testament and in fact the whole Bible.

[33 : 10] It's really important but it's not the most important thing. In other words, in some ways, repentance is so important but in other ways, it's just the doorway.

It's just the house keys. It's just the entrance hall into what is really important. In other words, it's absolutely vital that we practice what Jesus and the Bible say when they call us to repentance but this mustn't become the focus of the church as if we go around saying to our brothers and sisters, have you repented today, brother?

Have you repented today? It's so important but it's not the most important thing. How do we know? Well, two things that John tells us here. Look at what he says in verse 2. Repent.

Why? Why? For the king and his kingdom are here. Okay? Secondly, look at what he says in verse 11. He says, I baptize you with water for repentance but there is one coming after me, he who is mightier than I, who is infinitely more worthy than I am and he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and with fire.

You see why repentance is so important? Because it's the gateway, it's the entrance hall, it's the house keys to the ultimate thing which is knowing and loving and savoring and walking with the king, with King Jesus.

[34 : 31] Friends, the story of the Bible is not about how religious we should be. It's about how wonderful King Jesus is. So great and glorious is this king that he's come not to introduce a new religious system, not to introduce a religion, he's come not to even make us feel bad about ourselves, he's come to bring us into his family, he's come to welcome us into his kingdom.

Friends, every human being is born into sin. We cannot help but sin. We are children of Adam and Eve and our heart's disposition is against God and towards ourselves. We've rebelled against God, we've wanted to be our own God and we've hurt ourselves, we've hurt one another, we've dishonored God and God could have said, fine, have things your way and the consequence is eternal fire.

But God didn't do that. He came, He came to rescue us, He came to deliver us, He came to save us, He came to pardon our sin. Not only that, He came to bring us back to His family, He came to make rebels His children, He came to make sinners like me and you sons and daughters.

Christ the King came to rescue us from the gutter of sin and to bring us back into His family with God as our King and we as His beloved children. And John says, I baptize you with water for repentance but there is one coming after me and He is what it's all about and He will baptize you with fire and the Holy Spirit.

He says, this one who's coming, He's infinitely mightier than I could ever be. This one who's coming, He's infinitely more worthy than I could ever be. You might know this but in John's day, a disciple, the way a disciple treated his rabbi is the same that a way a slave treats his master.

[36 : 20] They were expected to do the same thing. What a slave does for his master, a disciple does for his rabbi except one thing. There's one thing that a disciple never had to do for their rabbi and that was carry their smelly shoes.

That was considered one level too low, too humiliating. John says this, so worthy, so glorious, so beautiful is this King that even if he were to ask me to carry his smelly shoes, I wouldn't even consider myself worthy enough to be after the task.

John is saying what he's been saying all along. I am nothing compared to this one. Who he is and what he does is infinitely more important than who I am and what I do.

I am the voice. He is the King. I am temporary. He is eternal. I must decrease. He must increase. I am man. He is God.

And friends, that's why repentance is so important. Not so that we can be super Christians who show how serious and how religious and how dedicated we are, but so that we can know the King.

[37 : 26] We can walk in relationship with the King. Friends, baptism and repentance are important, but in and of themselves, they are nothing. They are utterly meaningless unless they lead you to knowing, walking with, delighting, and enjoying, and glorifying in God the King and Christ your Savior.

Fiona read it to us earlier, but Psalm 51, David has sinned. He's committed adultery with Bathsheba. He's then gone and murdered Bathsheba's husband so that he can marry her, and he's made aware of his sin.

And he doesn't just say, oh God, I'm such a sinner. Please put things right again. The thing that David misses is the sweet communion with the living God.

What grieves his heart is that relationship with the King, with Christ, with the glorious and infinitely worthy God has been broken. And so listen to his prayer.

He says, God, let me hear joy and gladness again. Let the bones that have been broken rejoice. God, do not hide your face from me any longer.

[38 : 40] Create in me a clean heart, God. Renew what is right within me. Do not cast me away from your presence any longer. And do not take your Holy Spirit from me.

This is what John says. John says, I've come to baptize you for repentance, but there is one coming after me, and he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and with fire. But what does it mean?

Well, it means a whole bunch of things, but two things in particular. It means being immersed, being dunked, being soaked, being drowned in the life and the presence of the eternal God.

Remember, that's what baptism means. It means to drown something. John says that when Jesus baptizes you in the Holy Spirit, he will so radically pour out his Holy Spirit upon your life that no area of your life will be unaffected.

Think about if you get baptized, right? You can't get baptized in the pool outside and say, just, I don't want my right side of my body to be wet, please, just the left side of my body, right?

[39 : 39] Friends, when the Holy Spirit, when you get baptized in the Holy Spirit, God touches every area of your life, your financial life, your sexual life, your vocational life, your relational life, your emotional life.

Jesus says that when he comes, he will douse you, he will drown you in the life and the power of the living God. John Piper put it like this, baptizing with the Holy Spirit and baptizing water is the difference between a lightning bolt and a firefly.

It's the difference between a real person and a photograph, between a marriage and a wedding ring, between a real life birth and the delivery ward and a birth certificate.

And that's what Jesus is saying, that when he comes with repentance, leads us to this encounter that changes our lives forever with the living God. But then secondly, he says, I'll baptize you with fire.

It means we'll be filled with God's purifying, cleansing power. It means God actually empowering us to turn from our sin which we hate and empowering us to turn to life which we love.

[40 : 44] Turning from sin which kills us and full of darkness to life and purity and lives of holiness. Friends, Christians are not only those that are saved by the blood of Jesus for heaven.

Christians are those who are made ready for heaven by the Spirit of Christ. And when God comes on his people, that's the one that he changes us. He makes us more like Jesus.

He baptizes us with his purifying fire. John said this, I come to baptize you with water but there is one coming after me who will baptize you.

He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and with fire. And that's why he calls us to repentance. Now, let's land with this. I want to land with three very practical applications last three minutes.

Application number one. If you're here this morning and you're not a Christian, maybe you're still a spiritual seeker, maybe you're trying to make sense of the Bible and you're not yet convinced about Jesus.

[41 : 46] This is the first application for you. Can I gently and yet very clearly urge you and implore you to take seriously John's words and Jesus' words to come to him in repentance?

Friends, turning from sin and turning to the living God is the only way to salvation and it's the only way to knowing and encountering the one true living God.

your giving money to the poor won't help you a bit. Your religious observation and dedication won't help you a bit. Your moral and ethical endeavors won't help you a single bit.

The only way to come to know the one true living God is to come to him in sincerity, humility, and repentance. And the good news is he longs to give it to you.

That's why Jesus came. He loves you so much that he wants to give it to you. He loves you so much he died on the cross to give it to you. Friends, come to him this morning.

[42 : 48] Let today be the day that he turns your life around. Let today be the day that he baptizes you with power on the Holy Spirit. Friends, maybe some of us here this morning think we're Christians, but maybe we're not.

Can I ask you to observe yourself? Can I ask you to really examine whether you truly are saved? Test the genuineness of your repentance? Is it marked by selfishness and self-righteousness?

Is it marked by defensiveness and excuses? Friends, come to him. Come to Jesus. Come to the one who died on the cross for you, but come to the one who can give you true life and salvation.

That's the first application. Second application is this. For those of us that are Christians, do we think that repentance is something we did once upon a time and we've moved on from?

Or do we realize it's a daily endeavor? Martin Luther, the great reforming monk said it like this. He said, the entire life of believers should be marked by repentance. In other words, the life of a Christian is a life that's continually marked by turning from one and turning to the other.

[43 : 57] Turning from death and turning to life. Turning from me and turning towards God. Turning from self-sufficiency and turning to God dependency. Turning to align myself with the truth of who God is.

Friends, every day we should wake up and say, Christ, have your way in my life. Friends, have you repented recently? For those of us that are Christians, let us be a mark of our life. And then thirdly and finally, for those of us that are Christians, let us prepare the way like John the Baptist.

Friends, the cities of Asia are filled with literally billions of people that do not know the life-giving water of the living God. Our cities are filled with billions of people who have never encountered heaven and earth's true king.

Who have never come to know the good news of his rescue plan for salvation. Billions of people who have never encountered the life and the love of Jesus. They've never known that his upside-down kingdom is the true kingdom.

The everlasting kingdom. The kingdom that never ends. They've never met the one who is infinitely mighty and infinitely worthy. Friends, our cities are full of people that have never been baptized in his love and the Holy Spirit and with fire.

[45 : 06] Friends, Jesus says he stands ready to separate those that are his from those that are not. He sends us out with good news that the king and the kingdom are at hand and therefore, we graciously and gently and winsomely but urgently call our brothers and sisters, our fellow Hong Kongers, to come and encounter King Jesus.

John said this, I baptize you with water for the repentance of sin but there is one coming after me, the true king. He is infinitely mightier than I, he is infinitely more worthy and holy than I and he will baptize you with power, with the Holy Spirit and with fire.

Let's come to him now.