

# JOHN THE BAPTIST COMES TO TOWN

## 4. Turn or Burn!

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(1904-1969)

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We bring you today the fourth and last in the series of messages on the general subject, "John the Baptist Comes to Town" – "Repentance, God's requirement, the chief duty of all men everywhere and the gift of God to believing sinners." We have been trying in these last three messages to press the demand of a Sovereign God as it came through the lips of John the Baptist. That demand was: REPENT! You know, my friends, God Almighty has nothing else to say to an eternity-bound soul. You need not bring your problems or your alibis or your theology, or anything else, to try to have a Bible conference with a Holy God. He's got just one thing to say to a sinner: "Stack arms, sinner! Throw down that shotgun! Yield yourself to My claims." Plant, by the grace of God, the flag of King Jesus in your life, then the Lord God will put up the white flag of peace, and you will know the peace that this old world didn't give, and therefore cannot take away. Romans 5:1, "Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ."

And now with your Bibles open, I want to speak to you on the subject, Turn or Burn. John the Baptist says, "Repent or else." It is repent or hell. There are no if's and and's about it. That is the only command that God has for the sinner. If you ignore that, He won't do business with you on any other ground. That is the only place that God will deal with a sinner, the place of repentance. You have no time to argue about being a special creation of Adam's mined and lost race; He just looks every human being in the face now and says, "You are all cut out of the same cloth, and you've got to repent." John the Baptist evidently knew by heart Psalm 7:11-12, where the Psalmist speaking of God says, "God judgeth the righteous, and God is angry with the wicked every day. If he [the wicked] turn not, He will whet His sword: He hath bent His bow, and made it ready." Turn or burn!

Richard Baxter went up and down England years ago saying, "Sinner, turn or burn." The gifted and sainted and lamented Spurgeon had a sermon, "Turn or Burn." And that is just what it is. Our text here, from which I think John the Baptist drank deeply, simply puts it on the line – if you don't turn, God will whet His sword! He has got it ready. He has prepared the instruments of death, and you have made a pit and you have dug it; then you have fallen into the ditch you made. It is turn or burn. God has a sword, and God will punish sin. The old-time preachers believed this. They went up and down the land and copied or republished God's demands, saying, "Turn, sinner, turn!" There is no time to argue. There is not time to delay. There is no time for a conference. Turn! Throw down your arms. It is turn or burn!

The heart of the Gospel is that God in His marvelous grace (of course, nobody can make Him do it) said, "Sinner, the way has been prepared so that, as you throw down your arms, peace and pardon may be yours." And that way is through the Lord Jesus in His precious life and His death

and His present reign, and because of Who He is and what He does now, God Almighty is able and willing (Praise God!) to promise (imagine God promising an old sinner anything, but He does – isn't that grace?) – to promise that the vilest sinner out of hell, if he repents toward God and believes in Christ, that pardon will be his! He will be set free. Thank God! Isn't that grace? Isn't that great!

You know, my friends, universally almost all preachers used to preach against sin. Now it is unpopular to even mention any kind of sin. We hear a lot now about "God is love," but also according to the Bible He is Judge. In the Bible, line upon line, precept upon precept, and plain text upon text says, "The wicked shall [S-H-A-L-L] be turned into hell, and all the nations that forget God" (Psalm 9:17). I wonder how many preachers I am preaching to now who are afraid to speak out here. I warn you, my friends, that you are preaching to a generation that is wicked, and because they are wicked, they have had a conference and abolished hell, and they think that deciding they don't like hell has done away with it! And because this is a hypocritical generation, it will have the same punishment.

Now we invent all sorts of doctrines and movements and isms to get out of facing the plain facts that it is repent or it is hell. You are living in a day, my friends, when men have endeavored to prove that God will clear the guilty. He says in the Bible that He won't. You are living in a day when men and women are endeavoring to prove that He will by some kind of means refrain from punishing sin, when He says He won't. Two hundred years ago the predominant strain of the pulpits all over England and America was one of terror and of justice, and that kind of preaching produced a breed of God-fearing men and women who made our nation possible. Now we lap up a soft gospel of easy-believism, and we have a soft generation of so-called Christians. God help us to come back to the plain preaching of the Word of God!

You know, my friends, people sneered at Noah when he preached righteousness. No wonder the people didn't pay much attention to him! Imagine old Noah coming back to America and walking down the streets and seeing the parade of naked flesh and all the out-right flagrant disobedience of God's plain teaching – men and women doubling their fists at God, snubbing their noses at Him, and blowing the smoke of their absolute impenitent attitude in the holy nostrils of God! Imagine Noah coming and preaching righteousness. No wonder they didn't get in the ark! No wonder they didn't pay any attention to his preaching! Perhaps they made fun of Noah. But the day came when the flood was there and they came to appreciate the old man after it was too late.

I tell you over this radio station, someday you will know I am telling you the truth. I am not here to flatter you – I am here to warn you, and I tell you that God Almighty says, "If the sinner turns not, he will burn in hell." God will whet His sword. You know, John the Baptist was sent to tell men just that. He said, "It is repenting time now." He said, "No time to argue now." God help us! I think I have had hundreds come to me, and if you would listen to their talk, they are cut out of a little different cloth from anybody else, and I tell them that it is high time that they just came on down and join the human race! We are all in the same boat, sinner. He just says, "Sinner, throw down your arms. Repent – right now. Right now!" That is the only message that He has for a sinner. He won't talk to you. You say, "Well, Brother Barnard, you don't understand my case." God does and He says, "I have just one thing to say to you, you have pointed your shotgun at Me as long as you need to, and I haven't cut off your neck yet, and I have been patient and

longsuffering, and you have been shooting at every claim of a Holy God, and I have been patient – but I have just one thing to say to you, sinner, and that is: You come on down here and take your place and repent. Repent! Repent!"

You can't make a Bible conferee out of a Holy God. You can't make out like you are different from everybody else. God commands all men everywhere to repent. He won't even talk to you. He won't do business with you at all on any other plane. He won't just let you pour out your sob stories and then say, "Well, I understand now, you are a different person from most folks, and I will have to get a brand new scheme of dealing with you." He is not going to do it, sinner. He will just look you in the face and say, "Repent, or else!" It's repent or else. Luke 13:5: "Except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish."

You are just bringing all your alibis but all the time you are talking about you're this and you're that, and about this and that and the other. You have the shotgun of your hatred of God's holiness and your unwillingness to bow to God's rule pointed right straight at the heart of God. And you are just like your great, great granddaddy, old Adam – you are trying to reach up and with your filthy hands snatch God off the throne and sit there yourself. God says, "Sinner, I will just tell you right now, I have got nothing else to say to you. You just turn or you are going to burn." That's pretty plain, isn't it, but that is the God's truth!

It is time we quit this nice little dealing, trying to slip up on the blind side of God and making out like we are just not double-barrelled, hell-deserving sinners. Why, that is what we are! Why, if we had our way, we would have pushed God off the throne a long time ago. If we had been there in person, we would have driven the nails in the hands and feet of the Lord Jesus Christ, and our voices would have drowned out everybody else's when they cried, "Away with Him. Away with Him! Crucify Him and release unto us Barabbas." That is the kind of folks we are. Those people did exactly what you would have done if you had been there in person, and old Adam did exactly what you would have done if you had been there in person. I am telling you, if what I am saying to you is so, God Almighty couldn't be holy and deal with us and talk over conditions and try to work out something that would be mutually satisfactory to both of us. God Almighty, if He is God at all has just one thing to say to rebellious sinners, "Sinner, repent! Repent!"

What kind of turning is God talking about? What kind of turning is necessary? Well, bless your dear heart, it is an ACTUAL turning. A lot of people are always talking to me about they want to turn. Well, you are going to go to hell wanting to turn. Repentance is an actual turning. It is not simply wanting to – it is not simply trying to find out how to. It is an actual turning from sin. It is to see your face in the mirror of God's Holy Law, and get a glimpse of yourself and see yourself as God sees you. I tell you, any form of repentance is worse than nothing if it attempts to deceive God and lie about your condition. I tell you, your darling sins must be turned from. One leak in the ship is enough to sink that ship. And I tell you, God Almighty declares it necessary that you have repentance after the order of giving up all of your sins. That is what He is talking about. If you don't, it is no Christ. The gates of heaven are barred against any human being who thinks that you can enter that strait gate with all of your idols hugged to your own bosom and all of your rebellion still carried in your arms.

Oh, my friends, God Almighty demands an ACTUAL turning. John says, "Do it! Do it!" They came to him and said, "What must we do? We've been listening to you preach; evidently it's our move now." And John says, "You are dead right, bud. You quit doing that, and you do this, that and the other." Somebody says, "That is legal." I warn you, my friends, that no sinner ever has come to real repentance, which is a reliance on Jesus Christ, without facing the way it is done and who he is. And legally, or any other way you want to, that is the way of real repentance. A man has got to actually turn on himself, take sides with God against himself!

Now, bud, that is hard to do, because your mama don't want you to do that. Your mama swears that you are a sweet little boy, and your wife will say, "Brother Barnard, I want you to pray for my husband; he is such a good man." But God says that his old heart is as vile as the pit of hell itself. But Mother says, "My boy is a good boy," and the wife says, "My husband is a good husband, he has just one bad habit." But you listen to me now. Listen to me now! It has got to be an actual turning. You've got to take sides with God against yourself. That is hard to do, isn't it? Now it is easy to quit a few little things you do, but, oh, my soul, to take sides with God and say, "God, that is right." That is what confession is, "You're right, God. I agree with You, God. You are telling me the truth, and I will hide it and disguise it no longer." That is what confession is; it's this actual taking sides against yourself, your old nature, that is who you are, that part of you that makes you do what you do, that thing that makes you tick. Repentance is taking sides against and abhorring yourself and the way you do, this actually has to take place.

And then the repentance that God Almighty demands is ENTIRE, no reservation. You can't hug something. You can't fool God. You can't keep any rebellion. I know that this matter of laying down your arms will have to be done all over again and again and again and again. There is nothing in the Bible about a repentance that you did thirty years ago, and that wound it up. No! No! No! No! No man can have any evidence that he is born from above except there is some fruit, and the fruit of the new birth is repentance and faith. It is an every day position, but it has got to start sometime. A man has got to bring everything that he knows anything about, every rebellion of which he is conscious, and lay those things and that rebellion down, and take sides against himself – and no reservations, please! No holding one hand behind your back, please! No, sir! The rich young ruler couldn't get in except he did that. I tell you what is a fact, my friends, a pig will always be a pig, I don't care how you clean him up, and a sinner will always be an old wicked sinner unless he comes to the place of repentance where God Almighty will do business with him.

Now that is hard to do, isn't it? That is hard to do. And, bud, you are not going to do it if you can help it. You would rather go to hell, some of you, than have this operation. Oh, my soul, to come laying every ambition and every desire and every well devised plan of your whole life and say, "Lord, it is all dross in my sight; I turn it over to You" – that's hard to do. As a matter of fact, no man can do that just by deciding that he will do it. No man will ever do that apart from the goodness and grace and mercy of God. That is the reason those of you who listen to my voice now who have the slightest evidence that you have been able to repent, you thank God that He has enabled you to come to the place, instead of congratulating yourself and alibiing yourself, that you took sides with God against yourself and repented!

What kind of turning is demanded by a Holy God? Well, bless your heart, it is IMMEDIATE. The longer I preach the more this thing makes the hair stand up on my head. God commands all men to repent – when? Well, every time that word occurs in the New Testament it says it is in the imperative mood, "RIGHT NOW!" Right now! I have known some people throughout my ministry, and up and down the land, who talk to me about how they want to go to heaven when they die, and they don't want to go to hell, and yet they sleep well and they eat well. They make a good living, and they are nice sociable people, they are good citizens; they listen to you preach and never bat an eyelash, and are perfectly unaware of the fact that every time they draw breath that was given to them by a Holy Sovereign God, against Whose reign and Whose will they are absolutely sinning every day of their lives!

Here is this old wicked world, and just like a revolution yonder in Cuba or somewhere else, the rebels are out in the hills and the mountains and every time they see a soldier they take a shot at him because they are aiming to overthrow the dictator or the king or whoever it may be. This old world is seeing where two people claim to be sovereign – Satan and the Lord. Some people say, "Well, I am not such a bad fellow, brother preacher. I do this and I do that." I know, but you are a member of the rebel army; you are a shotgun carrier for the enemies of King Jesus, and if your side wins, God will be put out of business.

God Almighty has sent forth the proclamation and said, "Rebel, lay down your arms; do it right now, and I promise pardon." But you say, "Well, I will do it when I get ready." Men walk the streets and breathe God's air; eat God's food and drink God's water, and enjoy God's blessings and continue with the shotgun of their wills pointed at the very heart of God. God Almighty demands immediate repentance – not tomorrow, not next day, but NOW! God doesn't say, "It is all right; you just keep on. You just keep on being on the enemy's side. You just keep on." Every dime he makes, God gave him power to make that dime. Every ounce of food he consumes, God Almighty produced that food. Try to make a crop yourself without God's help. Every bit of the water that refreshes your old tired body came from a well that God Almighty provided. That is right. Every breath of air you take is God's air, and you breathe God's air and shoot at God at the same time. You eat God's food and use it to give strength to your resistance to the demands of the Sovereign Christ. I tell you, my friends, God couldn't be God – God wouldn't be God – God would be a disgrace if He allowed sinners to take their time about what they are going to do about ceasing their resistance against His rule. That is the reason that in the Bible, God says, "Repent right now!"

God doesn't like it, brother. God doesn't think it is nice for you to be shooting at Him. God doesn't like that at all. "God is angry with the wicked every day!" The Word of God says that the sinner is under the wrath of God right now, and that wrath abides on him continually. That is the reason that God Almighty demands immediate repentance. Immediate repentance!

Hear me, my friends, it is turn or burn! It was so in John the Baptist's day – it is so now. It will always be so. The only hope for a sinner is to turn from his rebellion, out of which nest grows all of his lawlessness, and turn himself over to the Lord Jesus Christ.

Psalm 37:8-9: "Cease from anger, and forsake wrath: fret not thyself in any wise to do evil. For evildoers shall be cut off; but those that wait upon the Lord, they shall inherit the earth." Verse

38: "But the transgressors shall be destroyed together; the end of the wicked shall be cut off."  
John 3:36: "He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life: and he that believeth not the Son shall not see life; but the wrath of God abideth on him."