

X Marks The Spot

³*Beloved, although I was very eager to write to you about our common salvation, I found it necessary to write appealing to you to contend for the faith that was once for all delivered to the saints.*
(Jude 1:3. ESV)

¹⁷*I appeal to you, brothers, to watch out for those who cause divisions and create obstacles contrary to the doctrine that you have been taught; avoid them.* (Romans 16:17. ESV)

¹*But as for you, teach what accords with sound doctrine.* (Titus 2:1. ESV)

Now And Not Yet
February 24th, 2013
Matthew 12:28
Matthew 25:31, 34
Rev. Paul Carter

Introduction:

Good morning! We are at week 8 of a 14 week series called “X-Marks The Spot” in which we are exploring some of the real and seeming tensions we discovered in our Walk Through The Bible journey in 2012. This morning I want to talk to you about the tension between the “now” and the “not yet” that we meet in Holy Scripture. If you are a serious reader of the Bible then you know exactly what I’m talking about; there are passages in the Bible that make it sound as though the Kingdom of God is here NOW. Jesus said in Matthew 12:28:

²⁸But if it is by the Spirit of God that I cast out demons, then **the kingdom of God has come** upon you. (Matthew 12:28. ESV)

And there are passages in the Bible which seem to clearly teach that the Kingdom of God in its fullness is something future:

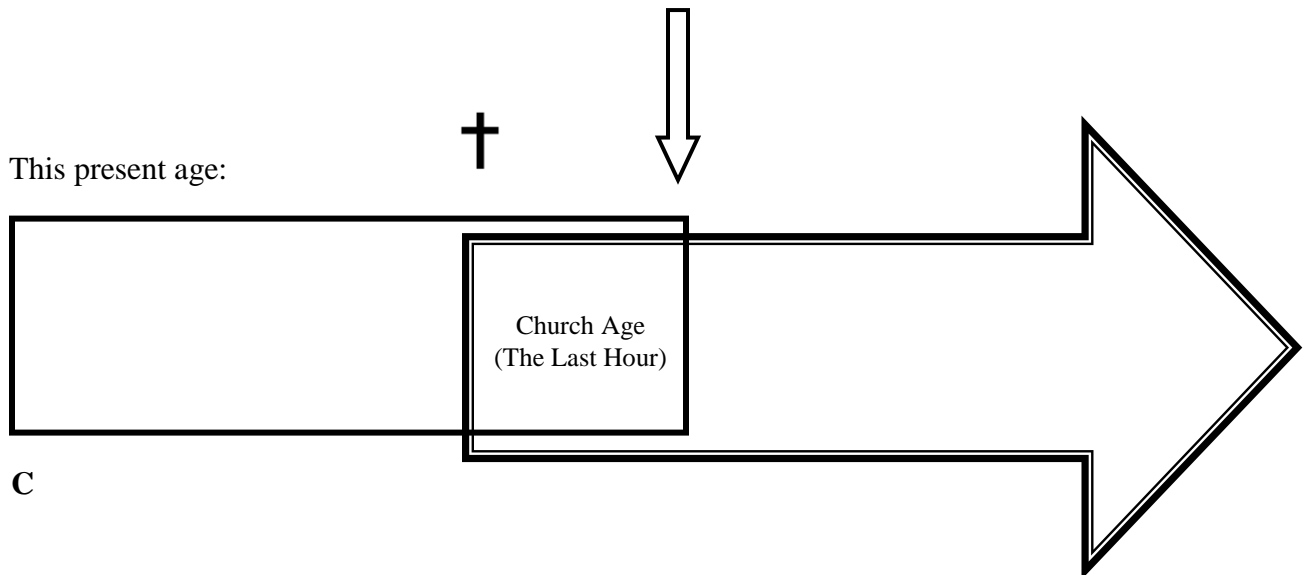
³¹“**When the Son of Man comes in his glory**, and all the angels with him, then he will sit on his glorious throne. ³²Before him will be gathered all the nations, and he will separate people one from another³⁴Then the King will say to those on his right, ‘Come, you who are blessed by my Father, **inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world.**’ (Matthew 25:31, 34. ESV)

Theologians refer to this tension by means of the term: “Inaugurated Eschatology”.

“Inaugurated” means that it is truly here, it has begun, it began with the life, teaching, ministry, death and resurrection of Jesus. If you are in Christ then you are in the kingdom right now!

Your kingdom life has begun. Eschatology means “concerning the end” which reminds us that while it has begun, the fullness of it doesn’t come UNTIL THE END. At the end it will be CONSUMMATED KINGDOM LIFE – consummated means fully here in every respect.

We live therefore in a unique time; we live between the ministry of Christ that achieved the kingdom victory and the time when Christ returns to actually REIGN in person and in fullness over the universe. Many of Jesus’ parables reflect this unique reality. Do you remember the parable of the talents for example? It was a story about a king who went away for a long time and entrusted his servants with some money and some responsibility and then after a long time he returned and held them to account and some servants were rewarded generously and others were punished quite severely, and of course we understand Jesus to be saying that He is the king who in one sense already reigns, and in another sense has gone away for a time and who will come back in final judgment. This is the season therefore of the now and not yet reign of Jesus Christ. Let me help you visualize this with a well known chart that I did not invent but rather have stolen from people wiser and smarter than I:



We live in the overlap. The everlasting kingdom of God began with the life and ministry of Jesus Christ. If we are in Christ by faith there is an immediate change of citizenship. You are no

longer citizens of the City of Destruction, this fallen world, destined for ruin, now you are a citizen of the Celestial City, the heavenly Jerusalem, the eternal kingdom, even while you walk through this passing world. The church is not identical to the kingdom of God, the church is the agent of the Kingdom of God – we hold the keys of the kingdom and we serve as ambassadors – the church is really a working embassy of the kingdom of God. And we live in the last hour. The Bible says that the entire period from the ascension of Christ until his return is in fact the last hour. It is a pause in the activity of God that reflects his mercy and patience desiring none to perish but all to come to repentance. So you and I live in the end times – these are the end times – we live in the final transition period between the kingdom of death and the kingdom of life. We live in the now/not yet world.

And while we live in the now/not yet world it is very important that we understand those things which are our possession NOW and those things which constitute our Christian HOPE – they belong to the **coming** city whose architect and builder is the Lord God. They are ours certainly but not presently. It is very important that we know what is ours in Christ right now and what it is that we wait for in his appearing. If we don't know we can get ourselves into all kinds of trouble and difficulty. Let's talk first about what is ours NOW:

What Is Ours Now?

1. Adoption unto life

1 John 3 says:

¹See what kind of love the Father has given to us, that we should be called children of God; and so we are. The reason why the world does not know us is that it did not know him. ²**Beloved, we are God's children now**, and what we will be has not yet appeared; but we know that when he appears we shall be like him, because we shall see him as he is. ³And everyone who thus hopes in him purifies himself as he is pure. (1 John 3:1-3. ESV)

Even in those three verses you can hear both sides of this tension can't you? Beloved we are God's children NOW! What we will be lies ahead, but we are God's children NOW and as God's children we need to begin living accordingly.

Now I would love to preach a whole sermon on adoption as a lens for understanding our salvation. In fact when we finish this series we are having a 4 week break with Easter and a small series on marriage and family and then we are launching into an extended walk through Paul's Letter to the Ephesians which he starts off by giving thanks to God for the things which really matter and right at the top of the list he mentions adoption. To be a child of God, a child of the King, is an unspeakable privilege. We are that now. Right now if you are in Christ Jesus by faith you have a heavenly father who loves you, who protects you, who has put his seal on you, who is preparing you to work alongside of him in the things that he does and who will one day shower you with an inheritance beyond your wildest dreams. That's who you are right now. Daughter of God. Son of God. You were chosen by the Father from before the foundation of the world. You are not an accident. He planned your birth, he planned the trials and tribulations that made you the person you are today and he planned your salvation. When Jesus was dying on the cross he was thinking of you. Not the possibility of you. Not you and three other people all of whom or none of whom might come to put their trust in him – NO! He was thinking of you. Your face was in his mind as they nailed him to that cross. He died for you. Not “the world”, not “people in general” – he died for the sons and daughters of God BY NAME. That's who you are right now. You don't have to wait for that dignity, it is yours right now in Jesus Christ.

2. The indwelling Holy Spirit

Every child of God has the Holy Spirit dwelling inside of them. Every one. The Apostle Paul said:

⁹You, however, are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if in fact the Spirit of God dwells in you. **Anyone who does not have the Spirit of Christ does not belong to him.** ¹⁰But if Christ is in you, although the body is dead because of sin, the Spirit is life because of righteousness. ¹¹If the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, he who raised Christ Jesus from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through his Spirit who dwells in you. (Romans 8:9-11. ESV)

If you belong to God, if you have been adopted into his family then you have the Spirit of God within you – PERIOD. One of the cruellest and meanest lies out there is that there are some Christians who have not been baptized in the Holy Spirit. That is hurtful in addition to being thoroughly unbiblical. The Bible says that to be in Christ is to have the Holy Spirit. Now can your enjoyment of the Holy Spirit increase and decrease? Of course. Can you receive new gifts or greater empowerment as your journey in Christ progresses? Of course. As a baptized in the

Holy Spirit believer, do you need constant filling and fresh anointing? Of course – we leak. But if we are in Christ we have the Spirit. That is definitional to being a Christian and don't you ever let anyone try and take that from you. You have the Spirit if you have Christ. You have gifts that differ according to the grace to us but you have gifts and you have life and you have leadership and you have prayer in the Spirit if you are in Christ. This is yours now. Enjoy it.

Thirdly and we need to begin moving much quicker, if you are in Christ as a citizen of the Kingdom of God you have:

3. Victory over sin

Romans 6 says:

¹⁴For sin will have no dominion over you, since you are not under law but under grace. (Romans 6:14. ESV)

If we are in Christ we have been freed from the penalty of sin because God is just and he cannot therefore punish the same sins twice. If we are in Christ than God has already meted out justice for our sins in the body of Christ on the cross. There is therefore NO CONDEMNATION for those who are in Christ. You are free from the penalty of sin. But you are also free now and increasingly from the POWER of sin. Remember last week on Sunday night I said that the law of Moses functioned like an electric fence that was supposed to keep us inside the will of God but it failed. There was nothing wrong with the law but there was something wrong with us. Our sin was stronger than the penalty of the law. We were like rabid dogs biting our way through the electric fence so that we could keep on sinning. But now, with our hearts made new and full of the Holy Spirit we are kept in the will of God not by fear of the fence but by love of the centre. We are under grace now. The gift of God is the love of the centre. That love is ours now and increasingly in Christ. If we are in Christ, Paul is saying, the effect of original sin is defeated in our lives. The broken compass which led us astray, the insatiable desire for self and sin has been defeated and destroyed. We've been given a new heart that is capable of being content at the centre. Now do we still sin? Yes. We all sin. But we no longer love it and we no longer need it. We love the centre now and the memory and the pull of sin fades. We can live in and love fully the centre of God's perfect will. That is a gift of God's grace and we have it now; now and increasingly. Where the Spirit of the Lord is there is freedom.

Fourthly and lastly, if we are citizens of the kingdom of God NOW in Jesus Christ then we have:

4. First fruits and anticipations

In the Bible healings and miracles of every sort are commonly referred to as “signs”. In Mark’s version of the Great Commission he includes a promise from Jesus that as his disciples go out into the world they will be accompanied by signs, promising for example that:

they will lay their hands on the sick, and they will recover.” (Mark 16:18. ESV)

The church is promised to be a place blessed with signs. To call something a “sign” indicates that it points to something beyond itself. The signs of the church are meant to point backwards to the victory of Christ upon the cross and forwards to the coming kingdom. In that sense they can also be thought of as first fruits and anticipations. They are meant to provide a glimpse of the fullness that is to come. Like pamphlets at a travel agency full of pictures of the desired destination, they themselves are not the point, they are intended primarily to stir up interest in the ultimate destination. That’s how signs are supposed to function but unfortunately, signs are very dangerous. In Jesus’ own ministry he was extremely cautious about signs. Every time he did a sign it seemed to cause trouble because immediately people became hungry for the sign instead of the thing signified. He frequently got angry at people for their interest in signs; in Matthew 12 some folks asked for a sign from Jesus and he replied:

“An evil and adulterous generation seeks for a sign, but no sign will be given to it except the sign of the prophet Jonah. (Matthew 12:39. ESV)

Human beings have an awful tendency to become fixated on the lesser at the expense of the greater. We fixate over a person being healed from sciatica but forget that unless that person comes to put faith in the sign of Jonah – the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ! – they will die and go to hell, taking their healed sciatica nerve with them! The lust after signs constantly threatened the ministry of Jesus and if HE was careful with them, how much more should we be? God does grant us signs and first fruits and deposits and anticipations of the age to come – he does. I’ve seen it. People will be healed, miracles will be prayed for and received. Not every day, not every time. 100% of the Christians in this church will die, unless the Lord returns. You

may be healed of your cancer only to die of heart disease. You may be healed of heart disease only to die of liver failure. We all die. Sign or no sign. The sign is meant to encourage and to witness. They are a blessing if received as such and a curse if they are received in immaturity. Let us pray for the maturity to receive them unto the purpose God intends, yet despite all the associated hazards, let us give thanks that we DO in fact have these signs among us. When we lay hands on the sick and pray – NOT INFREQUENTLY PEOPLE ARE IN FACT MADE WELL. Praise the Lord. These signs do accompany those who believe but far better things lie yet in the future; and it is to those things we turn now. What is it that we look forward to in Christ?

What Does The Future Hold?

First and foremost we look forward to his return.

1. The Return of Christ

I love how the KJV renders 2 Timothy 4:8:

⁸Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me at that day: and not to me only, but unto all them also that love his appearing.

There are good things coming for those who long for and who LOVE the Lord's appearing.

2. The resurrection of our bodies

In 1 Corinthians 15 the Apostle Paul speaks at length about the glory of the coming resurrection and he ends by saying:

⁵¹Behold! I tell you a mystery. We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, ⁵²in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable, and we shall be changed. ⁵³For this perishable body must put on the imperishable, and this mortal body must put on immortality. ⁵⁴When the perishable puts on the imperishable, and the mortal puts on immortality, then shall come to pass the saying that is written:

⁵⁴“Death is swallowed up in victory.”

⁵⁵ “O death, where is your victory?”

O death, where is your sting?"

⁵⁶The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law. ⁵⁷But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ. (1 Corinthians 15:51-56. ESV)

We shall not all sleep – some of us will walk alive into the eternal kingdom being alive on the earth at the time of his return – but we shall all be changed! The perishable will put on the imperishable, the mortal will be clothed in immortality at the appearing of our Lord Jesus when the last trumpet shall sound. Lord haste the day!

3. Full, total, eternal healing

In this life presently we have first fruit healings; and yet we die as we succumb to subsequent diseases. All men and all women DIE. In the end, regardless of whether you are charismatic, cessationist or something in between – you will get sick, grow frail and die. Merry Christmas. But, here is the good news, if you are in Christ then full, total and eternal healing is in your future.

²And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. ³And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with them, and they will be his people, and God himself will be with them as their God. ⁴He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning nor crying nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away." (Revelation 21:2-4. ESV)

Maybe when you were a child your mother told you that God answers all the prayers of his true people. Sometimes the answer is yes, sometimes no and sometimes wait. My brothers and sisters; are you in pain today? Are you sick? Is your strength failing? Then pray for God to heal you and I promise you that he will answer that prayer. Maybe he will answer it right now, I can't promise that for all of you and in fact the wise among you would not want it so – the wise among you know that sickness and weakness can be very good for faith and the very wise among you know that while health is wonderful, death is ultimately better, for to be absent from the body is to be present with the Lord. But maybe he will give you a straight yes. He will give us a sign to encourage us and to lighten our steps. For the rest of you he will say: "Wait". Wait. Wait is just yes with a time table, so WAIT and watch for your healing comes in the morning. Christ will arise; he will COME and he will bring healing in his wings. Full, total and eternal healing for every one of you that knows him. No more crying, no more pain, no more death. For the former

things have passed away. Cry to him for healing and I promise you, the one thing he will not say if you are truly his is no! You will ALL be healed because Christ has defeated death in his death upon the cross. Watch for it, wait for it, for it will surely come.

Fourthly and quickly we also wait for our reward:

4. Reward and Recompense

Just as you will all be healed if you are in Christ, so shall you also be rich. The Bible again and again promises us reward from God for our labours in Christ:

²³Whatever you do, work heartily, as for the Lord and not for men, ²⁴knowing that **from the Lord you will receive the inheritance as your reward**. You are serving the Lord Christ. ²⁵For the wrongdoer will be paid back for the wrong he has done, and there is no partiality. (Colossians 3:23-25. ESV)

The Apostle Paul reminds us that not all people will receive the same reward so we need to work hard and work wisely:

¹³each one's work will become manifest, for the Day will disclose it, because it will be revealed by fire, and the fire will test what sort of work each one has done. ¹⁴If the work that anyone has built on the foundation survives, he will receive a reward. ¹⁵If anyone's work is burned up, he will suffer loss, though he himself will be saved, but only as through fire. (1 Corinthians 3:13-15. ESV)

Jesus made the same point in the parable of the talents. Rewards await all those who are in Christ. We are joint heirs with Jesus and will enjoy the fullness of his inheritance and to that will be added individual rewards based on the work which Christ approves. The Bible says: "Great is your reward in heaven". (Matthew 5:12). We look forward to that in faith.

5. The full enjoyment of His Glory

Lastly, and most importantly, we look forward to the full enjoyment of God's glory. The Bible ends with an absolutely breathtaking promise. Speaking of those who are in Christ and who are living in the fully consummated Kingdom of God, John says:

⁴**They will see his face**, and his name will be on their foreheads. ⁵And night will be no more. They will need no light of lamp or sun, for the Lord God will be their light, and they will reign forever and ever. (Revelation 22:4-5. ESV)

If you read the Bible a verse here and a verse there without any sequence or context then perhaps that promise will not make much of an impression on you. If however you read that promise at the end of your journey reading through the entire Bible from start to finish then you are quite likely to half fall off your chair in shock. SEE GOD'S FACE? Moses in all his intimacy with God NEVER beheld God's face. He asked once if he could see it and God said that it would kill him if he did. Instead he was granted the most intimate view of God any human since Adam had ever had. He got to see "the hem of God's garment." The thread on the underside of God's Robe as he passed by – an obvious metaphor but a metaphor that obviously means to communicate that it was an extremely shielded and limited disclosure of God's glory. And yet it changed Moses forever. His face shone and was so transformed he had to hide himself from the people of Israel because they were terrified. Nobody sees the face of God in the Bible! Not even angels see the face of God. Do you remember in Isaiah's vision of heaven he saw the holy angels that ministered round the throne?

Each had six wings: **with two he covered his face**, and with two he covered his feet, and with two he flew. (Isaiah 6:2. ESV)

They covered their faces because not even ANGELS can look upon the full, unshielded glory of God and live! And yet you and I, in our glorified, resurrected bodies, will SEE HIS FACE – WE WILL LOOK UPON THE UNSHIELDED GLORY OF GOD AND LIVE ETERNALLY IN HIS LIGHT. That is the end of the story my friends and it is glorious; what else could it have been? What is the chief end of man? To glorify God and enjoy him forever. And so shall it be, world without end.

Conclusion:

Now, I'd love to end right there – its always nice to end on a high note. But the ministry of the Word of God must do more than inspire it must also warn and correct. This has never been an easy tension to maintain. As with most Biblical truths there is a ditch on either side that we need to know about and watch out for. The first ditch is often called by theologians and Bible teachers the ditch of "Over-Realized Eschatology". "Over realized" simply means when you think you have more in your present possession than in fact you do. It is when you start taking things from the "Not Yet" column and pretending that they are already in your possession now. The devil is

very happy to help out with this and so often provides lying signs and wonders to make people feel like they are further along than they really are. Over realized eschatology today shows up in two types of people, the miracle people and the prosperity people. The miracle people think that they can name it and claim it. They are the modern day descendents of the people who followed Jesus around begging for signs and wonders and who perished for eternity having neglected the Gospel of eternal life. They are the people who have their own TV shows and healing ministries and at best they are deceived and deluded into putting the EMPHA-SIS on the wrong SYL-A-BLE but at worst they are false prophets leading many astray. Be on guard. We are not in heaven yet. Everybody gets sick and everybody dies. Anybody who tells you different is a liar who is selling lies. Don't sell the farm for a bag of fool's gold.

The prosperity people read all of those verses about reward and they claim that we can have that now. We can be rich and happy and have our best life NOW. But the Bible says that in this world we will have tribulation and that we get our best life AFTER Jesus returns to judge the living and the dead. We need to watch out for these people; they are deceived and deceiving and if you drink too deep from that well then you will be ill-prepared to suffer when the season of suffering returns to the Evangelical church. You will become ensnared in riches and you will forfeit reward in the life to come. Do not listen to them. We're not there yet.

The ditch on the other side might be called "Outlawed Eschatology". This is when you get so fed up with all the silliness from people who have coloured charts and painted vans and shiny billboards announcing the time of the Lord's Return that you OUTLAW all discussion of eschatology and final things. Do not do that. The devil tries to make us embarrassed to discuss the things related to the end by making it the favourite pastime and obsession of all the crazy people on his payroll. Do not fall for that old trick. We can't afford NOT to talk about what is to come. You need a vision of glory to see you through the trials that will surely come. You need to have in your mind that promise of God's face if you are to survive and thrive in the years that lie ahead. Hope matters. Hope powers joy in suffering, boldness in witness and perseverance in under trial. You cannot survive without it. Good things really do lie ahead. Encourage each other with these words and follow the example of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, who:

for the sake of the joy that was set before him endured the cross, disregarding its shame, and has taken his seat at the right hand of the throne of God. (Hebrews 12:2. NRSV)

So let it be said of us, church, on that last and glorious day. This is the Word of the Lord, thanks be to God.