Text: Matthew 3:1-12

**Introduction**

There are a couple of modes of thinking that might feel opposed to each other. The first mode is always trying to get you to recognize what time it is. From the world of politics: the fierce urgency of now or a flight 93 election. From sports it is when you are “in the zone” or “crunch-time.” The majority of business closes in the last week of a quarter, with the last week of the 4th Quarter being the biggest. Why? Bonuses are on the line. Spend it or lose it budgets are expiring. Students get papers in at 11:59 PM of the day it is due. The second mode wants to recognize what time it is, but also be able to recognize patterns and opportunities. Sometimes throwing the ball away is the best option for a QB, even one on fire. No deal might be better than the end of quarter deal, or you might have a better alternative that isn’t currently in sight. It is almost never “the most important election of our lives.”

That second mode of thinking is the bible’s wisdom literature: Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, James. You might even consider the Sermon on the Mount in this category. Are these things always true for everyone? No. Sometimes they even contradict each other in their advice. The wisdom literature requires wisdom to understand when it applies. Are you dealing with a truth like gravity, which unless you are approaching the speed of light or a black hole, it’s pretty stable. Or are you dealing with blackjack rules or personality tests.

The first mode is the realm of the prophets. Like John the Baptist. Prophets tell you what time it is.

The comparison of the two is the problem of living between the Advents. It is the problem of the now…and the not yet. The problem of fulfillment and promise.

**Literal**

“In those days John the Baptist came preaching…” What were those days? The days of the Advent of the Messiah.

What was the expectation of those days? What was the promise? It was what Isaiah talked about. A restoration of the Davidic King. And not just a restoration of the sad line of Kings that the prophets knew, but a King that the Spirit of the LORD rested upon. And what would be the result of such a king? The entire world would be turned upside down. The wolf would lie with the lamb and the leopard the young goat. The cow and the bear will graze, the lion eat straw like the ox.

The children of men will have no fear of the snake. For the earth will be full of the knowledge of the LORD.

In those days…the days that were happening now…this was coming about.

How did John the Baptists see this unfolding? I think he saw three things.

First, “repent, for the Kingdom is at hand.” Those days would be ones in which we could get right with God. Now would be the time. Those days would be days where the mercy of God would be available, now. Jerusalem and Judea and all the region about the Jordan were going out to him, and they were baptized confessing their sins. The advent of the messiah would bring peace with God, now.

Second, that peace with God would allow sinners to be fruitful, today. “Bear fruit in keeping with repentance.”

Lastly, that not all would accept this peace, but their continued warfare would be meaningless before the might of the messiah. “You brood of vipers, who warned you to flee the wrath to come…his winnowing fork is in his hand, and he will clear His threshing floor.” Today, now, Judgement comes, the great divide. The entire earth would be the messiah’s. And if he needed to raise up children for Abraham from the stones, He would do it, now. The old covenant would not be binding on the coming King. The Son of Man would be Lord of the Sabbath, today.

These things were coming about now. Now is the time to pledge your loyalty to the coming King.

**Christology**

That’s the Baptist’s understanding. And as we will see next week, the shock of the now and not yet of Jesus, caused him some problems. Might cause us some problems. But right now, we proclaim the now.

Something as odd as the lion eating straw with he ox happened, God became incarnate in human flesh. The infinite contained in the finite. Dr. Who’s tardis stole the whole it’s bigger on the inside from Christian Theology. The Spirit of the Lord was upon him, because He was the LORD. The first Advent until now fulfilled these thing.

And more important for us, now are the days when we have no need to fear that old snake. Because the LORD has defanged him. Sin was his weapon. Sin was what Satan held against all of us. But Christ took all of that on the cross. And gave us his baptism. Now is the day that we can repent and have peace with God. Now is the day when not just people from Jerusalem, and Judea and the all the Jordan can be baptized, but all the nations that inquire. Because now, the earth is full of the knowledge of the LORD. Christ has revealed to us the love of God for the sinner. Christ has revealed the love of God for you. Now.

In these days, we can have this peace. Repent, for the Kingdom is here. Now.

**Moral**

Also today, now, you have a real choice. By that Spirit of the Lord which rests on you by His baptism, we can bear fruit. We’ve been watered. We’ve had that divine rain that makes gardens in the desert.

The first fruit is faith that we have been forgiven, faith in the word of God, proclaimed now. But it goes beyond that. We have been called to be fruitful trees that bear good fruit. Love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness…you know, those fruits of the spirit.

Now we are called to these.

**Eschatological**

But what about that ax at the root of the tree? What about the winnowing fork?

Not yet.

Now is the day of grace. Now is the call to baptism and repentance.

Not yet is the day of judgement.

Now we live between these two advents. The advent of that day of grace and the offer of divine peace and pardon, and the advent of the power and glory.

**Conclusion**

The grace coming before the power offends our wisdom. It feels like a con.

But this is what God chose. It’s backwards and upside down.

It is also why we need that prophet. The King commands, but the gospel is not a command. Its an invitation. A proclamation Now God has given you peace in Christ. Repent and believe. Amen.