

“Are We There Yet?”

April 4-May 16, 2021 (6 weeks)

Brainstorming: Monday, March 22, 2021 in Fellowship Hall

12:30 pm Pork BBQ lunch

1:00 pm Brainstorming

2021 theme: Still Blessed

2021 theme connection/synopsis: Easter is a season when we celebrate resurrection and the call to live as people who claim new life and have hope in Christ. Spending time focusing on the Sermon on the Mount where Jesus starts with words of blessing challenges us to understand blessing more fully – not simply as a gift or reward, but as a way of living the Kingdom of God. Are we there yet?

Social Justice issue (April): Creation Care

Social Justice issue (May): Inequities in Health Care

Key words: Reflect/Reflection, Redeem/Redemption (Easter)

Series theme: Jesus taught us to pray (and work) for God’s “kingdom on earth as it is in heaven.” Are we there yet? In the 2,000 years since he came, many things have changed for the better, but we still have a long way to go. Civility, integrity, truth-telling, grace and forgiveness have fallen out of favor. Being right has replaced being kind. Face-to-face conversations that might lead to understanding and cooperation have been replaced by often divisive social media encounters. The 24/7 media cycle feeds the ugliness. Wow! In this series, **we’ll look at Jesus’ teaching from The Sermon on the Mount in Matthew 5-7** so we can heed his call to be a part of building God’s Kingdom.

Notes for series: Use the image of a road trip (journey) to underscore the theme. It’s a constant question when we’re trying to get to our destination: **Are we there yet? How much longer?** Thinking in terms of Kingdom living, we describe it as “already, but not yet.” Seeking God’s Kingdom first and working for God’s Kingdom has been the work of the church since its beginning. The scenery has changed along the way, but the journey toward the Kingdom in full view is still our focus.

From www.umc.org – *Our Christian Beliefs: God’s Reign*

Christian faith is, in part, a matter of hoping. We believe in and trust the Lord of the future, and we lean into the future that God has promised. God goes before us, beckoning us into the new world that is already being created, calling us to join in the challenging work of fashioning it.

However, when we're confronted with personal disasters or with the daily horror stories of society's ills, we may falter. Hope may seem to be unrealistic, naive optimism.

Yet our hope is not in trends. Our hope is in the Lord of all creation and all history—a God who is still in charge and is actively at work transforming the world. How do we know this?

The coming *shalom*: The Bible is a book of God's promises. It may seem to be about the past, but its outlook is toward the future. From promises in the Book of Genesis to Abraham and Sarah for a new land, a son, and countless descendants (chapter 17), to promises in the Book of Revelation of a "new heaven and a new earth" (21:1), God was helping biblical people live into the vision of creation's ultimate goal.

The Old Testament (Hebrew Bible) uses the word *shalom* to describe God's future. We often translate this word as "peace," but it means more than that. *Shalom* means a world of plenty, of personal and interpersonal harmony and righteousness, of liberation, of just economic practices, and of ordered political relations.

The coming kingdom: For Jesus, the *shalom* of God was the kingdom of God, the coming reign of God in human hearts and in all human affairs. In fact he proclaimed that this reign already "has come near" (Mark 1:15) and that the decision about one's part in it was an urgent necessity: "Strive first for the kingdom of God and his righteousness" (Matthew 6:33).

In the resurrection of our Lord, his amazed followers recognized that God's reign was breaking into their lives: "So if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation: everything old has passed away; see, everything has become new!" (2 Corinthians 5:17). The old regime of hostility, greed, injustice, and violence was obsolete and dying. The new order was coming in: "See, I am making all things new" (Revelation 21:5). For those who see with the eyes of faith, it is apparent that our common human future on earth is indeed the promised reign of God.

The church as a sign of the future: There are signs of the coming Kingdom all about us—from random acts of kindness by individuals to the worldwide family's growth in tolerance and cooperation. In particular we see the church as a sign of the Kingdom. Imperfect as it is, the community of believers nevertheless provides the best clue we have to God's vision. Day after day, we see deeds of Christian courage, of compassion and reconciliation, of integrity in the face of temptation, and of witness for truth and justice.

Our part: And what is our role? To sit back and simply wait for God's kingdom to arrive? By no means! We are to pray earnestly for the Kingdom to come on earth (Matthew 6:10). We are to watch faithfully for any signs of its coming (Matthew 25:13). We are to put away our old selves and clothe ourselves "with the new self, created according to the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness" (Ephesians 4:24). As renewed people, we're to do "the work of ministry" (Ephesians 4:12). As Easter people witness and serve, we take part in the Kingdom's dawning. Thy Kingdom come!

Additional resources:

- <https://www.ministrymatters.com/all/entry/3460/heaven-on-earth-sermon-series>
- <https://www.ministrymatters.com/all/entry/2518/sermon-series-the-sermon-on-the-mount>
- <https://www.ministrymatters.com/all/entry/4108/sermon-series-missions-with-the-lords-prayer-in-mind>
- <https://www.ministrymatters.com/all/entry/3534/sermon-series-the-radical-sayings-of-jesus>

- <https://www.ministrymatters.com/all/entry/1147/the-model-prayer-matthew-69-15>
- “Kingdom justice is not up for partisan political debate. All who become part of Jesus’ movement will be working together in community to change oppressive systems that fail to honor the least and the lost.”
https://www.ministrymatters.com/all/entry/10524/being-the-church-in-divisive-political-times?utm_source=newsletter&utm_medium=email&utm_content=Being%20the%20church%20in%20divisive%20political%20times%20&utm_campaign=MM%20Newsletter%2009-30-20
- <https://www.umcdiscipleship.org/worship-planning/after-epiphany-worship-series-overview/blessed-planning-notes/blessed-preaching-notes>
- <https://www.ministrymatters.com/all/entry/10424/whatever-became-of-the-sermon-on-the-mount>
- <https://www.ministrymatters.com/all/entry/9646/the-jesus-lens>

Ideas for the series: How could the road trip theme tie in each week?

Series introduction:

- “Journey.” Length: 1:10. Cost: \$19.99. Life is a journey. Each of us has a road to walk and decisions to make. Are we looking forward or looking back? Are we watching our steps or looking to Jesus? The road of life was not meant to be waled alone. It was meant to be waled with Jesus. <https://www.sermonspice.com/sermon-illustrations/59111/journey>
- “It Starts with Me.” Length: 1:00. Cost: \$19.99. There are lots of distractions and wrong turn that can land you “lost” in life. You are ultimately responsible for your journey, your health, and your faith... no one else. Spiritual health begins with reflection on your route, where you are and where you’re headed. <https://www.sermonspice.com/sermon-illustrations/59040/it-starts-with-me>
- “Road Maps.” Length: 0:36. Cost: \$15.00. Have you ever felt lost? Maybe you’ve taken unexpected detours, or maybe you’ve found yourself at a few dead ends. This sermon intro will help you get your congregation to take a look at how they can make the most of the journey as you step out onto the highway of life together.

From Pastor Mary: Seeking to be counter-cultural is different than cancel culture. Being counter-cultural seeks to transform the world; buying into cancel culture seeks to ignore and undo without a care for others. What’s the difference between making boundaries to be faithful to Jesus (not playing into negativity, choosing not to engage in certain things or watch/listen to certain people) and cancel culture?

Music: Build Your Kingdom Come, Seek Ye First (UMH 405)

April 11, 2021: “Upside-Down Blessings”

Easter

Rev. Diane Gordon preaching

Scripture: Matthew 5: 1-12 (TMSG)

“You’re Blessed”

Lectionary: 2/2/20

5 ¹⁻² When Jesus saw his ministry drawing huge crowds, he climbed a hillside. Those who were apprenticed to him, the committed, climbed with him. Arriving at a quiet place, he sat down and taught his climbing companions. This is what he said:

³ “You’re blessed when you’re at the end of your rope. With less of you there is more of God and his rule.

⁴ “You’re blessed when you feel you’ve lost what is most dear to you. Only then can you be embraced by the One most dear to you.

⁵ “You’re blessed when you’re content with just who you are—no more, no less. That’s the moment you find yourselves proud owners of everything that can’t be bought.

⁶ “You’re blessed when you’ve worked up a good appetite for God. He’s food and drink in the best meal you’ll ever eat.

⁷ “You’re blessed when you care. At the moment of being ‘care-full,’ you find yourselves cared for.

⁸ “You’re blessed when you get your inside world—your mind and heart—put right. Then you can see God in the outside world.

⁹ “You’re blessed when you can show people how to cooperate instead of compete or fight. That’s when you discover who you really are, and your place in God’s family.

¹⁰ “You’re blessed when your commitment to God provokes persecution. The persecution drives you even deeper into God’s kingdom.

¹¹⁻¹² “Not only that—count yourselves blessed every time people put you down or throw you out or speak lies about you to discredit me. What it means is that the truth is too close for comfort and they are uncomfortable. You can be glad when that happens—give a cheer, even!—for though they don’t like it, / do! And all heaven applauds. And know that you are in good company. My prophets and witnesses have always gotten into this kind of trouble.

Synopsis: We live in a world inundated with messages about what “the good life” is, which can leave us with mixed messages when it comes to living faithfully. The Beatitudes serve as a way of getting our bearings as to how God operates, what God values, and where the “good life” is truly found.

From Pastor Diane: I’ve been reflecting on the blessings that came out of the time of pandemic for me. Those are certainly upside-down but became an opportunity to learn about myself, our culture and how to proceed into a future where God’s kingdom living comes to life in real time.

Felt need: To understand what “blessed” means when Jesus says it

Visuals: packing the vehicle, mode of transportation

Hands-on item:

Activity:

Media possibilities: We also own, “Matthew 5: The Bible in Rhyme,” which is no longer available to purchase or preview.

- “Blessed” by Centerline New Media. Length: 1:45. Cost: \$19.98. The world tells us one thing about being blessed, yet the Word tells us something very different.
<https://www.sermonspice.com/sermon-illustrations/39852/blessed>
- “The Beatitudes” by Rype.tv. Length: 1:00. Visual liturgy.
<https://www.sermonspice.com/sermon-illustrations/98111/the-beatitudes>

- “The Beatitudes” by Clements Media. Length: 2:23. Cost: \$19.99. The (be)Atitudes seeks to present the portion of the sermon on the mount found in Matthew 5:1-12 in a beautiful compelling way.
- “The Beatitudes” by Fervent.” Length: 1:36. Cost: \$15.00. The Beatitudes are a timeless reminder of God’s blessings for all people. This video highlights the Beatitudes in a contemporary interpretation using audio from one of the greatest evangelists of all time - Dwight L. Moody. <https://www.sermonspice.com/sermon-illustrations/18180/the-beatitudes>

Music: Blest Are They (FWS 2155), Be Thou My Vision (UMH 451), Open the Eyes of My Heart, Trading My Sorrows

Children’s Time: Kate Robbins and/or Sandy Colella, Paraphrase of Beatitudes (Forbid Them Not, Year A)

Worship Leaders: Rose Emmons & Jim Post

Discussion points:

April 18, 2021: “You Make a Difference!”

Easter 3

Scripture: Matthew 5: 13-20 (TMSG) “Salt and Light” Lectionary: 2/9/20

¹³ “Let me tell you why you are here. You’re here to be salt-seasoning that brings out the God-flavors of this earth. If you lose your saltiness, how will people taste godliness? You’ve lost your usefulness and will end up in the garbage.

¹⁴⁻¹⁶ “Here’s another way to put it: You’re here to be light, bringing out the God-colors in the world. God is not a secret to be kept. We’re going public with this, as public as a city on a hill. If I make you light-bearers, you don’t think I’m going to hide you under a bucket, do you? I’m putting you on a light stand. Now that I’ve put you there on a hilltop, on a light stand—shine! Keep open house; be generous with your lives. By opening up to others, you’ll prompt people to open up with God, this generous Father in heaven.

“Completing God’s Law”

¹⁷⁻¹⁸ “Don’t suppose for a minute that I have come to demolish the Scriptures—either God’s Law or the Prophets. I’m not here to demolish but to complete. I am going to put it all together, pull it all together in a vast panorama. God’s Law is more real and lasting than the stars in the sky and the ground at your feet. Long after stars burn out and earth wears out, God’s Law will be alive and working.

¹⁹⁻²⁰ “Trivialize even the smallest item in God’s Law and you will only have trivialized yourself. But take it seriously, show the way for others, and you will find honor in the kingdom. Unless you do far better than the Pharisees in the matters of right living, you won’t know the first thing about entering the kingdom.

Synopsis: We’re called to be difference-makers – just like salt and light make a difference.

How do we reflect the nature of God our King and his Kingdom?

Felt need: To understand that discipleship is vital to fulfilling Jesus’ mission

Visuals: fuel gauge

Hands-on item: salt packet, lightbulb

Activity: Holy Baptism – Ellie Louise Aamodt

Media possibilities:

- “This Little Light.” Length: 2:14. Cost: \$14.98. Jesus calls us the light of the world. But are you just covering your light up? Or are you going out into the world and using it for the glory of our God? <https://www.sermonspice.com/sermon-illustrations/58922/this-little-light>
- “Your Light.” Length: 1:28. Cost: \$20.00. We all shine a light and that light symbolizes God’s love. We all possess the power in helping others shine their light for the good of mankind. <https://www.sermonspice.com/sermon-illustrations/22469/your-light>
- “Lights.” Length: 2:07. Cost: \$17.00. We live in a dark world. But there are lights everywhere. The bible says... “Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven.” The brighter we shine... the more people can see what God has done in us. Will you let your light shine?
<https://www.sermonspice.com/sermon-illustrations/59056/lights>
- “Light of the World.” Length: 0:56. Cost: We own it. Last used 2011. A stylized interpretation of Matthew 5: 13-16. <https://www.sermonspice.com/sermon-illustrations/13248/light-of-the-world>
- “Lights.” Length: 0:48. Cost: We own it. Last used 2011. What type of light are you?
<https://www.sermonspice.com/sermon-illustrations/20884/lights>

Music: I Want to Walk as a Child of the Light (UMH 206), This Little Light of Mine (UMH 585), We Are Marching (FWS 2235)

Children’s Time:

Worship Leader: Jimmy Epplert

Discussion points:

April 25, 2021: “Hard Words from Jesus”

Easter 4

Scripture: Matthew 5: 21-48 (TMSG) “Murder” Lectionary: 2/16/20 (v. 21-37)

²¹⁻²² “You’re familiar with the command to the ancients, ‘Do not murder.’ I’m telling you that anyone who is so much as angry with a brother or sister is guilty of murder. Carelessly call a brother ‘idiot!’ and you just might find yourself hauled into court. Thoughtlessly yell ‘stupid!’ at a sister and you are on the brink of hellfire. The simple moral fact is that words kill.

²³⁻²⁴ “This is how I want you to conduct yourself in these matters. If you enter your place of worship and, about to make an offering, you suddenly remember a grudge a friend has against you, abandon your offering, leave immediately, go to this friend and make things right. Then and only then, come back and work things out with God.

²⁵⁻²⁶ “Or say you’re out on the street and an old enemy accosts you. Don’t lose a minute. Make the first move; make things right with him. After all, if you leave the first move to him, knowing his track record, you’re likely to end up in court, maybe even jail. If that happens, you won’t get out without a stiff fine.

“Adultery and Divorce”

²⁷⁻²⁸ “You know the next commandment pretty well, too: ‘Don’t go to bed with another’s spouse.’ But don’t think you’ve preserved your virtue simply by staying out of bed. Your *heart* can be corrupted by lust even quicker than your *body*. Those ogling looks you think nobody notices—they also corrupt.

²⁹⁻³⁰ “Let’s not pretend this is easier than it really is. If you want to live a morally pure life, here’s what you have to do: You have to blind your right eye the moment you catch it in a lustful leer. You have to choose to live one-eyed or else be dumped on a moral trash pile. And you have to chop off your right hand the moment you notice it raised threateningly. Better a bloody stump than your entire being discarded for good in the dump.

³¹⁻³² “Remember the Scripture that says, ‘Whoever divorces his wife, let him do it legally, giving her divorce papers and her legal rights’? Too many of you are using that as a cover for selfishness and whim, pretending to be righteous just because you are ‘legal.’ Please, no more pretending. If you divorce your wife, you’re responsible for making her an adulteress (unless she has already made herself that by sexual promiscuity). And if you marry such a divorced adulteress, you’re automatically an adulterer yourself. You can’t use legal cover to mask a moral failure.

“Empty Promises”

³³⁻³⁷ “And don’t say anything you don’t mean. This counsel is embedded deep in our traditions. You only make things worse when you lay down a smoke screen of pious talk, saying, ‘I’ll pray for you,’ and never doing it, or saying, ‘God be with you,’ and not meaning it. You don’t make your words true by embellishing them with religious lace. In making your speech sound more religious, it becomes less true. Just say ‘yes’ and ‘no.’ When you manipulate words to get your own way, you go wrong.

“Love Your Enemies”

³⁸⁻⁴² “Here’s another old saying that deserves a second look: ‘Eye for eye, tooth for tooth.’ Is that going to get us anywhere? Here’s what I propose: ‘Don’t hit back at all.’ If someone strikes you, stand there and take it. If someone drags you into court and sues for the shirt off your back, giftwrap your best coat and make a present of it. And if someone takes unfair advantage of you, use the occasion to practice the servant life. No more tit-for-tat stuff. Live generously.

⁴³⁻⁴⁷ “You’re familiar with the old written law, ‘Love your friend,’ and its unwritten companion, ‘Hate your enemy.’ I’m challenging that. I’m telling you to love your enemies. Let them bring out the best in you, not the worst. When someone gives you a hard time, respond with the supple moves of prayer, for then you are working out of your true selves, your God-created selves. This is what God does. He gives his best—the sun to warm and the rain to nourish—to everyone, regardless: the good and bad, the nice and nasty. If all you do is love the lovable, do you expect a bonus? Anybody can do that. If you simply say hello to those who greet you, do you expect a medal? Any run-of-the-mill sinner does that.

⁴⁸ “In a word, what I’m saying is, *Grow up*. You’re kingdom subjects. Now live like it. Live out your God-created identity. Live generously and graciously toward others, the way God lives toward you.”

Synopsis: Jesus invites us to envision and enter into a way of living that is different from the world around us. The Ten Commandments are the foundation for this new life, but we also have to reorder our desires. And to do that, we have to rely on the power of God.

Felt need: To admit that we can’t follow God trusting in our own strength

Visuals: Project Ten Commandments (Exodus 20), tune up

Hands-on item:

Activity:

Media possibilities:

- “The Heart of the Matter.” Length: 1:53. Cost: \$20.00. This video exemplifies what Christ warns His people about during his sermon on the mountain found in Matthew 5. We must always protect our heart first because that is where the root of sin takes hold. <https://www.sermonspice.com/sermon-illustrations/38075/the-heart-of-the-matter>
- “Love – No Exceptions.” Length: 2:36. Cost: \$18.00. Jesus said that one commandment was greater than all others: To love. Love God, love your neighbor, even love your enemies. It was a commandment with no exceptions. <https://skitguys.com/videos/love-no-exceptions>

Music: Freely, Freely (UMH 389), Make Me a Channel of Your Peace (FWS 2171)

Children’s Time:

Worship Leader: Dave Lorenz (creation care)

Discussion points:

May 2, 2021: “How We Pray”

Easter 5

Scripture: Matthew 6: 7-15 (TMSG) “Pray with Simplicity”

⁷⁻¹³ “The world is full of so-called prayer warriors who are prayer-ignorant. They’re full of formulas and programs and advice, peddling techniques for getting what you want from God. Don’t fall for that nonsense. This is your Father you are dealing with, and he knows better than you what you need. With a God like this loving you, you can pray very simply. Like this:

Our Father in heaven,
 Reveal who you are.
 Set the world right;
 Do what’s best—
 as above, so below.
 Keep us alive with three square meals.
 Keep us forgiven with you and forgiving others.
 Keep us safe from ourselves and the Devil.
 You’re in charge!
 You can do anything you want!
 You’re ablaze in beauty!
 Yes. Yes. Yes.

¹⁴⁻¹⁵ “In prayer there is a connection between what God does and what you do. You can’t get forgiveness from God, for instance, without also forgiving others. If you refuse to do your part, you cut yourself off from God’s part.

Synopsis: The Lord’s Prayer is a source of great comfort for many people, but when Jesus first taught it to his followers, it was shocking! How does this model prayer continue to strengthen us to witness faithfully?

Felt need: To understand the challenge of the Lord’s Prayer and hear the call to action

Visuals: car maintenance

Hands-on item:

Activity: Holy Communion

Media possibilities:

- “The Lord’s Prayer” by Centerline New Media. Length: 1:26. Cost: \$19.98. In Matthew 6, Jesus taught us to pray in this way. The download includes two versions – one with the modern translation and one with the traditional one.
<https://www.sermonspice.com/sermon-illustrations/46795/the-lords-prayer->
- “Our Prayer (Matthew 6).” Length: 1:18. Cost: \$19.99. This visually stunning video is a moving retelling of The Lord’s Prayer in Matthew 6. <https://skitguys.com/videos/our-prayer-matthew-6>

Music: Sung version(s) of The Lord’s Prayer

Children’s Time:

Worship Leaders:

Discussion points:

May 9, 2021: “Trust or Worry?”

Easter 6, Mother’s Day

Scripture: Matthew 6: 24-34 (TMSG) “A Life of God-Worship” **Lectionary:** 11/22/18

²⁴ “You can’t worship two gods at once. Loving one god, you’ll end up hating the other.

Adoration of one feeds contempt for the other. You can’t worship God and Money both.

²⁵⁻²⁶ “If you decide for God, living a life of God-worship, it follows that you don’t fuss about what’s on the table at mealtimes or whether the clothes in your closet are in fashion. There is far more to your life than the food you put in your stomach, more to your outer appearance than the clothes you hang on your body. Look at the birds, free and unfettered, not tied down to a job description, careless in the care of God. And you count far more to him than birds.

²⁷⁻²⁹ “Has anyone by fussing in front of the mirror ever gotten taller by so much as an inch? All this time and money wasted on fashion—do you think it makes that much difference? Instead of looking at the fashions, walk out into the fields and look at the wildflowers. They never primp or shop, but have you ever seen color and design quite like it? The ten best-dressed men and women in the country look shabby alongside them.

³⁰⁻³³ “If God gives such attention to the appearance of wildflowers—most of which are never even seen—don’t you think he’ll attend to you, take pride in you, do his best for you? What I’m trying to do here is to get you to relax, to not be so preoccupied with *getting*, so you can respond to God’s *giving*. People who don’t know God and the way he works fuss over these things, but you know both God and how he works. Steep your life in God-reality, God-initiative, God-provisions. Don’t worry about missing out. You’ll find all your everyday human concerns will be met.

³⁴ “Give your entire attention to what God is doing right now, and don’t get worked up about what may or may not happen tomorrow. God will help you deal with whatever hard things come up when the time comes.

Synopsis: Trust in God is a cornerstone of a faithful life that helps other areas fall in line. Do we spend our time and energy on worrying (depending on ourselves and others) or on trusting God (depending on God) and going forward in faith?

Felt need: To choose trust in God rather than worry and find the balance between trust and precaution and preparation

Visuals: GPS, map

Hands-on item: Chocolate for all women in congregation

Activity: Special prayers honoring all experiences of mothering

Media possibilities:

- “Stressed Out.” Length: 1:38. Cost: \$20.00. Several people in stressful situations completely “lose it” as opera music plays. This video is a humorous way to identify with the things that stress us out and a great lead in to sermons about worry, peace, or anger. <https://www.sermonspice.com/sermon-illustrations/22499/stressed-out>
- “Do Not Worry.” Length: 1: 48. Cost: \$19.98. Worry... In times like these, it seems so easy to be consumed by it. But what did Jesus say about worrying? <https://www.sermonspice.com/sermon-illustrations/13284/do-not-worry>
- “May Today Be Enough.” Length: 2:12. Cost: Free with our subscription. Life on earth is full of twists and turns that often leave us feeling like we’re riding an emotional and spiritual roller-coaster. Whether we’re feeling up, down, or even lost somewhere in between, it’s important to remember today is enough. <https://www.playbackmedia.com/mini-movies/88182/-may-today-be-enough>

Music: This Is My Father’s World (UMH 144), God Will Take Care of You (UMH 130), All Things Bright and Beautiful (UMH 147), ‘Tis So Sweet to Trust in Jesus (UMH 462); “Oceans” by Hillsong United

Children’s Time:

Worship Leader:

Discussion points:

May 16, 2021: “Location, Location, Location!”

Easter 7

Ascension Sunday, Children’s Sunday

Scripture: Matthew 7: 21-29 (TMSG) “Being and Doing”

²¹⁻²³ “Knowing the correct password—saying ‘Master, Master,’ for instance— isn’t going to get you anywhere with me. What is required is serious obedience—*doing* what my Father wills. I can see it now—at the Final Judgment thousands strutting up to me and saying, ‘Master, we preached the Message, we bashed the demons, our super-spiritual projects had everyone talking.’ And do you know what I am going to say? ‘You missed the boat. All you did was use me to make yourselves important. You don’t impress me one bit. You’re out of here.’”

²⁴⁻²⁵ “These words I speak to you are not incidental additions to your life, homeowner improvements to your standard of living. They are foundational words, words to build a life on. If you work these words into your life, you are like a smart carpenter who built his house on solid rock. Rain poured down, the river flooded, a tornado hit—but nothing moved that house. It was fixed to the rock.

²⁶⁻²⁷ “But if you just use my words in Bible studies and don’t work them into your life, you are like a stupid carpenter who built his house on the sandy beach. When a storm rolled in and the waves came up, it collapsed like a house of cards.”

²⁸⁻²⁹ When Jesus concluded his address, the crowd burst into applause. They had never heard teaching like this. It was apparent that he was living everything he was saying—quite a contrast to their religion teachers! This was the best teaching they had ever heard.

Synopsis: Foundations matter because they hold up the rest of the structure. Our grounding in God must be authentic. Jesus warns that it is not enough to claim his name—we must live as his followers.

Felt need: To understand that salvation isn't an ending point, but a journey of becoming more like Jesus every day with humility

Visuals: new views along the journey, new sites to see

Hands-on item:

Activity:

Media possibilities:

Music: How Firm a Foundation (UMH 529), Great Is Thy Faithfulness (UMH 140)

Children's Time:

Worship Leader: Youth & Kids

Discussion points: 1) To use John Wesley's terms, we are passively justified by the saving acts of Jesus Christ, but we are sanctified by how we respond to the saving acts of Christ. We grow in grace and service by practicing our faith; it is not only "talking the talk" but also "walking the walk."

"Don't look for shortcuts to God," Jesus says (v. 13-14 MSG) "The way to life—to God!—is vigorous and requires total attention."

Matthew 7: 21-23