

Sermon Outline
Burton Memorial United Methodist Church
“The Kingdom of God – Life as God Intends”
(Part I of “The Kingdom of God and UM Social Principles”)
April 12, 2026

Scripture

Isaiah 11:1-9
Matthew 6:33
Luke 17:20-21

Core Idea and purpose

Core theological ideas from earlier sermons in the series:

- None – This is the first sermon in the series

Core theological idea: The Kingdom of God is not just a future culmination or the place we go when we die. It is a present reality for us to live and pursue – encouraging the world more to be more in line with life as God intends.

Challenge/purpose: To encourage people to live and pursue the Kingdom of God.

The Sermon

I enjoy learning about history. I like ancient history, U.S. Civil War history, reconstruction and just about any other historical period. One of my favorite historical periods is the modern Civil Rights movement, starting from the 1950s to the present day. This is why I enjoyed watching the PBS documentary series called “Eyes on the Prize”. It’s about the Civil Rights movement from 1954 to 2015. It’s a very well-done series and I have its companion book. If you ever want to learn about the Civil Rights movement, watching this series or reading the companion book is probably the best way to start.

I love the title– “Eyes on the Prize”. For the Civil Rights movement to succeed, many people had to face ridicule, financial ruin, beatings, jail time, and even death. To endure these hardships the Civil Rights activists had to keep their eyes on the prize. For them the prize was dignity, equal rights, and freedom. Keeping their eyes on the prize kept them on the course of non-violent struggle despite the heart-breaking suffering.

Our Savior and Lord, Jesus Christ, tells us to keep our eyes on the prize. The trials and tribulations of life are inevitable. Some of us will suffer more than others, but we all experience it sometime during our lives. If we keep our eyes on the prize, we’ll make it through the suffering and come out victorious. Jesus was telling us to keep our eyes on the prize when he said, “...seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.” In other words, the prize is the Kingdom of God (Also known as the Kingdom of

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Heaven). We keep our eyes on the prize...we keep our eyes on the Kingdom of God!

To follow this command, we must understand something about the Kingdom of God. Yes, the Kingdom of God is a future event. When Jesus returns, he will make everything right and the Kingdom of God will become fully manifested on earth. But it is not just a future event. Yes, the Kingdom of God is also a place to go when our bodies of flesh cease to function. When we die, we will experience the resurrection and continue with eternal life. But it is not just a place to go when we die. Along with being a future event and a place to go when we die, the Kingdom of God is also a present reality for us to live and pursue.

Let me say this again: The Kingdom of God is a present reality for us to live and pursue. We can experience the peace, joy, and love that comes with being a citizen of the Kingdom of God right here and right now. We do not have to wait until we die or Christ returns. This is what Jesus meant when he said, “The coming of the kingdom of God is not something that can be observed, nor will people say, ‘Here it is,’ or ‘There it is,’ because the kingdom of God is in your midst.” (Luke 17:20-21) Other Bible translations say, “...the Kingdom of God is within you.” Either way, it points to the Kingdom of God as being a present reality that we live and pursue.

We can now posit a simple yet accurate definition of the Kingdom of God. The Kingdom of God is life as God intends – life as God intends in heaven, life as God intends inside our hearts, and life as God intends here on earth. The visions of heaven described in Isaiah 6, Ezekiel 1, Daniel 7, and Revelation 4 & 7 tell us about life as God intends in heaven. Romans 14:17 and Galatians 6:16-26 describe life as God intends inside our hearts. In this sermon, however, we focus on life as God intends here on earth. As followers of Christ, God calls us to encourage the world to be more in line with life as God intends. This is how we live and pursue the Kingdom of God on earth – encouraging the world to be more in line with life as God intends.

To help in this endeavor, the General Conference of the United Methodist Church provides Social Principles. I have here the social principles of the UMC. (You can order it online at cokebury.com or find it in the UM Book of Discipline.) As stated in its preamble, “The Social Principles are not church law. Instead, they represent the prayerful and earnest efforts of the General Conference to speak to issues in the contemporary world from a sound Biblical and theological foundation that is in keeping with the best of our United Methodist traditions.”¹ The General Conference meets every 4 years and consists of delegates from every Annual

¹ Paragraph 510 of the 2024 United Methodist Book of Discipline

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Conference. It is the only body that can speak officially for the UMC and update the Social Principles.

To be a United Methodist, you do not have to agree with everything written in the Social Principles. But it is a good place to start if you are trying to discern what your opinion ought to be on a social issue. Read what it has to say on the issue and then determine if it lines up with what God reveals in the Bible.

The Social Principles touch upon a large variety of issues but they are all based on three general convictions.

The first conviction is that Jesus commands us to unconditionally love everyone. After all, God is love and we are to strive to be perfect as our Father in heaven is perfect. (1 John 4:8 & 16 and Matthew 5:48) Our Lord Jesus summarized God’s law with love when he said, “Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.’ This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’ All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments.” We should also note that Jesus said, “love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you” (Matthew 22:37-40 & Matthew 5:43)

The second conviction is that God calls us to be good stewards of the earth. God is a God of life. Therefore, as stewards of God’s earth, we must ensure the flourishing of biodiversity on earth. In Genesis 1:28 God tells humanity to fill and subdue the earth. In other words, God calls us to govern the earth. This, however, must be understood while considering Genesis 2:15, which says, “The Lord God took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden **to work it and take care of it.**” This means that God has commissioned us to govern the earth as farmers, not tyrants. Farmers create the conditions for life to thrive while tyrants seek to maintain their own power at the expense of life. This will be the topic of next Sunday’s sermon.

The third conviction is that God is a God of justice for poor, oppressed and marginalized people. There are hundreds of verses throughout the Bible that talk about how God wants justice for the poor, widows, orphans, and strangers (migrants). Look at this slide. It has 40 passages showing that God is a God of justice for poor, oppressed, and marginalized people. I encourage you to take a picture of it and read through all these verses. This will be the topic of the sermon in two weeks.

God calls us to keep our eyes on the prize, which is the Kingdom of God. To live and pursue the Kingdom of God on earth, we encourage the world to be more in

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line with life as God intends. This means loving everyone, taking care of our earth, and seeking justice for poor, oppressed, and marginalized people.

Let's pray.

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Sermon Outline

- I. I enjoy learning about history.
 - A. I like ancient history, U.S. Civil War history, reconstruction and just about any other historical period.
 - B. One of my favorite historical periods is the modern Civil Rights movement, starting from the 1950s to the present day.
 - C. This is why I enjoyed watching the PBS documentary series called “Eyes on the Prize”.
 - It’s about the Civil Rights movement from 1954 to 2015.
 - It’s a very well-done series and I have the companion book right here.
 - If you ever want to learn about the Civil Rights movement, watching this series or reading the companion book is probably the best way to start.
 - D. I love the title– “Eyes on the Prize”.
 - For the Civil Rights movement to succeed, many people had to face ridicule, financial ruin, beatings, jail time, and even death.
 - To endure these hardships the Civil Rights activists had to keep their eyes on the prize.
 - For them the prize was dignity, equal rights, and freedom.
 - Keeping their eyes on the prize kept them on the course of non-violent struggle despite the heart-breaking suffering.
- II. Our Savior and Lord, Jesus Christ, tells us to keep our eyes on the prize.
 - A. The trials and tribulations of life are inevitable.
 - Some of us will suffer more than others, but we all experience it sometime during our lives.
 - If we keep our eyes on the prize, we’ll make it through the suffering and come out victorious.

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- B. Jesus was telling us to keep our eyes on the prize when he said, “...seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.”
- In other words, the prize is the Kingdom of God (Also known as the Kingdom of Heaven).
 - We keep our eyes on the prize...we keep our eyes on the Kingdom of God!
- III. To follow this command, we must understand something about the Kingdom of God.
- A. Yes, the Kingdom of God is a future culmination.
- When Jesus returns, he will make everything right and the Kingdom of God will become fully manifested on earth.
 - But it is not just a future culmination.
- B. Yes, the Kingdom of God is also a place to go when our bodies of flesh cease to function.
- When we die, we will experience the resurrection and continue with eternal life.
 - But it is not just a place to go when we die.
- C. Along with being a future culmination and a place to go when we die, the Kingdom of God is also a present reality for us to live and pursue.
- Let me say this again: The Kingdom of God is a present reality for us to live and pursue.
 - We can experience the peace, joy, and love that comes with being a citizen of the Kingdom of God right here and right now.
 - We do not have to wait until we die or Christ returns.
 - This is what Jesus meant when he said, “The coming of the kingdom of God is not something that can be observed, nor will people say, ‘Here it is,’ or ‘There it is,’ because the kingdom of God is in your midst.” (Luke 17:20-21)

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- Other Bible translations say, “...the Kingdom of God is within you.”
- Either way, it points to the Kingdom of God as being a present reality that we live and pursue.

IV. We can now posit a simple yet accurate definition of the Kingdom of God.

A. The Kingdom of God is life as God intends – life as God intends in heaven, life as God intends inside our hearts, and life as God intends here on earth.

- The visions of heaven described in Isaiah 6, Ezekiel 1, Daniel 7, and Revelation 4 & 7 tell us about life as God intends in heaven.
- Romans 14:17 and Galatians 6:16-26 describe life as God intends inside our hearts.
- In this sermon, however, we focus on life as God intends here on earth.

B. As followers of Christ, God calls us to encourage the world to be more in line with life as God intends.

- This is how we live and pursue the Kingdom of God on earth.

V. To help in this endeavor, the General Conference of the United Methodist Church provides Social Principles.

A. I have here the social principles of the UMC. (You can order this online.)

B. As stated in its preamble, “The Social Principles are not church law. Instead, they represent the prayerful and earnest efforts of the General Conference to speak to issues in the contemporary world from a sound Biblical and theological foundation that is keeping with the best of our United Methodist traditions.”²

C. To be a United Methodist, you do not have to agree with everything written in the Social Principles.

² Paragraph 510 of the 2024 United Methodist Book of Discipline

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- But it is a good place to start if you are trying to discern what your opinion ought to be on a social issue.
- Read what it has to say on the issue and then determine if it lines up with what God reveals in the Bible.

VI. The Social Issues touch upon a large variety of issues but they are all based on three general convictions.

A. The first conviction is that Jesus commands us to unconditionally love everyone.

- Our Lord summarized God’s law with love when he said, “Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.’ This is the first and greatest commandment. ³⁹ And the second is like it: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’ All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments.” (Matthew 22:37-40)
- We should also note that Jesus said, “love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you” (Matthew 5:43)

B. The second conviction is that God calls us to be good stewards of the earth.

- God is a God of life.
- Therefore, as stewards of God’s earth, we must ensure the flourishing of biodiversity on earth.
- In Genesis 1:28 God tells humanity to fill and subdue the earth. In other words, God calls us to govern the earth.
 - This, however, must be understood while considering Genesis 2:15, which says, “The Lord God took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden **to work it and take care of it.**”
 - This means that God has commissioned us to govern the earth as farmers, not tyrants.

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- Farmers create the conditions for life to thrive while tyrants seek to maintain their own power at the expense of life.
 - This will be the topic of next Sunday’s sermon.
- C. The third conviction is that God is a God of justice for poor, oppressed and marginalized people.
- There are hundreds of verses throughout the Bible that talk about how God wants justice for the poor, widows, orphans, and strangers (migrants).
 - Look at this slide.
 - It has 40 passages showing that God is a God of justice for poor, oppressed, and marginalized people.
 - I encourage you to take a picture of it and read through all these verse.
 - This will be the topic of the sermon in two weeks.
- VII. God calls us to keep our eyes on the prize, which is the Kingdom of God.
- A. To live and pursue the Kingdom of God on earth, we encourage the world to be more in line with life as God intends.
 - B. This means loving everyone, taking care of our earth, and seeking justice for poor, oppressed, and marginalized people.

Let’s pray.