



## ***Theme: Summer Stories with Jesus***

### ***“The House Built on the Rock”***

#### **Weekly Memory Verse:**

***<sup>24</sup> “Anyone who listens to my teaching and follows it is wise, like a person who builds a house on solid rock. <sup>25</sup> Though the rain comes in torrents and the floodwaters rise and the winds beat against that house, it won’t collapse because it is built on bedrock.” – Matthew 7:24-25***

**Monday, July 25** – Read Matthew 7:24-27. Jesus ends the Sermon on the Mount with a parable of two builders who built houses during the dry season, when the wadis of Palestine, like arroyos here in the Southwest, looked safe and harmless. When “the rain fell, the floods came, and the wind blew and beat against that house,” the house built on sand washed away. Jesus called us to be wise, building our life on the eternal, enduring values of his kingdom.




It’s a fact: it will rain in our life sooner or later. Conditions today can feel like a driving rain for many. The habits we form when life is calm are the ones that can carry us when those inevitable rough moments come. What are you doing daily to build a character that can weather life’s storms?




What people or forces shaped your life’s foundation, your assumptions, and values? Jesus, who taught “with authority” according to Matthew 7:29, made his teaching the greatest revelation of how we can know God. Some Jewish teachers told a similar parable to this one, with a major difference. In their story, the foundational rock in their parables was the Torah, or God’s law for Jewish followers. Here Jesus’ teaching holds the same role as God’s message in the traditional parable. How can you make Jesus’ teaching central to your understanding of God’s call on you?

**Prayer:** *King Jesus, I want you to rule in my heart, in my life. Reshape my values and beliefs until they truly form a firm foundation for living a life that honors you. Amen.*


**Tuesday, July 26** – Read Matthew 13:3-9 and 18-23. Matthew 13 contains a collection of parables about everyday activities you would see around the Sea of Galilee like farming and fishing, some of which we have ready earlier this summer. Matthew started the series with this story. Most of the hillsides around the Sea of Galilee were used for growing crops. Jesus might well have pointed to a farmer out broad-casting seed as he told this story.


 In verse 23, Jesus said the good soil stood for those who hear the word about the kingdom and understand, and bear fruit, and produce a generous harvest. How did you first hear the word about Jesus and his kingdom? In what ways have you deepened your appreciation of it? What kind of a crop is the word producing in your life?

 Jesus also outlined, in verses 19-22, three factors that can make human “soil” barren and keep us from responding to Jesus’ love. Which of the three issues Jesus identified has posed the biggest challenge to you in being a Christ-follower? What steps do you take to keep your heart receptive, good soil for the word about the kingdom?

**Prayer:** *Gracious God, may your word, life, teachings, and Spirit be planted deep in my heart so I can produce good fruit for you as I love you, love others, and share the Good News.*


**Wednesday, July 27** – Read Matthew 13:24-30 and 36-43. Jesus told this story of a furtive “enemy” who deliberately filled a farmer’s field with dandelion, a poisonous rye grass that looked just like wheat until the wheat heads formed. Contrary to the popular saying, it’s not “all good”! But Jesus used the story, not to say we must ruthlessly root out heretics or enemies, but to remind us that judgment is God’s job, not ours.


 An important principle in studying Jesus’ stories is that they are not exact allegory. Some details have symbolic meaning, usually to make a main point. Others are just part of the story. Read verses 37-39 again with care, noticing which details Jesus focused on, and what meaning he gave them.

 The Salem witch trials, the Spanish Inquisition—Christians’ efforts to pull weeds before the harvest have done terrible harm to individuals and the whole church. Have you ever been tempted to “pull weeds” by judging others? Does that even work? How can we treat those who differ from us in ways that make Jesus’ love the driving force in our life?

**Prayer:** *God, you know my tendency to want to “pull weeds” by seeing others as being the problem. Help me to focus on the weeds in my own life first and give me strength to treat others as your children, even when I disagree with them. Amen.*

**Thursday, July 28** – Read Matthew 13:44-46. In these compact stories, Jesus gave us two pictures of what it takes to be good soil, the crop worth keeping he described in the two previous stories in Matthew 13. He told of two people who “laid it all on the line” to have a one-of-a-kind treasure. Their actions, which seemed odd in the short term, were in fact a sign that their values were exactly right.

 What things have felt (or feel) to you like the “costs” of following Jesus? Jesus’ stories taught that this temporary, temporal world is a drop of water in the spiritual ocean of eternity. How has Jesus added inner richness, meaning and beauty to your here-and-now life? In what ways are you growing into a deep-seated trust that eternity in God’s kingdom is worth whatever it might “cost” you today to follow Jesus?

 Jesus said the man who found the treasure went “in his joy” to obtain the field. What parts of serving Jesus, and others in Jesus’ name, have brought you the most joy? In what ways is this joy deeper than the surface happiness this world tends to offer?

**Prayer:** *Dear God, I search for you today. Help me to see the great treasure you offer that will last me a lifetime and beyond, carrying me through all the challenges life may bring. Amen.*

**Friday, July 29** – Read Matthew 13:47-50. A net catches anything the right size that swims into it. Even today, we seek to lessen how often we catch things like dolphins in nets along with the fish we mean to catch. Jesus’ story was based on the same reality. As in the story about the wheat

and the weeds, though, Jesus said we just need to be “keepers.” We can trust God to sort out the good from the bad.



One reason people give for avoiding church is that some of us who say we follow Jesus don't live up to values we espouse, and as a result we don't look much like Jesus. But we all find light and dark in ourselves. Bible scholar William Barclay said Jesus' story showed “the Church ... is bound to be a mixture of all kinds of people, good and bad, useless, and useful.” How can God's grace lead you to keep growing in the “good” without hating yourself for the “bad” you aim to outgrow?



Does Jesus' picture that in verse 49, at the end of the age, “the angels will come and separate the wicked from the righteous,” trigger fear or confidence in your heart? In whom do you put your confidence as a Christ-follower?

**Prayer:** *Gracious God, I put my faith in you today. I know I am not perfect, and I will fall short.*

*AND I know that you will love me through those moments and my salvation is made complete in you, not in anything I do or don't do. Amen.*

**Saturday, July 30** – Read Matthew 9:9-13. Israelites, with some reason, saw their fellow Jews who collected Roman taxes as traitors and outcasts. Rome's system enriched tax collectors by letting them overcharge people and keep the excess. But Jesus didn't see Matthew as an outcast—he saw one of his “lost sheep” in need of his inclusive love. He called Matthew to “Follow me,” and Matthew left his predatory work and wealth behind to follow Jesus. The Pharisees were incensed, but Jesus asked them if a soul “doctor” should ignore the “sick.” The self-identified “righteous” needed him as much or more as the “sinners.”



Scholar Hans Küng wrote, “A Church that will not accept the fact that it consists of sinful [people] and exists for sinful [people] becomes hard-hearted, self-righteous, inhuman .... though it is true that the Church must always dissociate itself from sin, it can never have any excuse for keeping any sinner at a distance.” Do you ever feel left out when Jesus said, “I didn't come to call righteous people?” In what ways do you sense that you (and all of us) were included when he added, “but sinners”?

**Prayer:** *Lord Jesus Christ, have mercy on me, a sinner. As I live in the light and life of your mercy, give me a heart that has a welcoming mercy for all my fellow sinners. Amen.*