

1. Sermon on the Mount – part one

Aim: To apply the teaching of Christ's Sermon on the Mount to our lives.

Introduction: On Sunday mornings we have been considering Christ's Sermon on the Mount in Matthew 5-7. This short home group series will be a recap on what we have considered thus far, as well as a means of encouraging us to discuss further Christ's teaching, and how to practically live out His words.

Read Matthew 5:1-12

How would you summarise Christ's teaching in His Sermon on the Mount?

It is where the King of God's Kingdom (Jesus) gives us the keys to living in His Kingdom. We are not saved by living out these words, but if we are saved, then these words describe the holy way we are to live.

Consider the Beatitudes in Matt 5:3-9. How should we view them? Do you grasp what each one is?

They are the Christ-like characteristics that are to mark the heart of every true follower of Jesus.

Note: "Poor in spirit" is considered to be humility; those who "mourn" as those who sorrow over sin.

As we live out these characteristics with the help of the Spirit, what encouragement do we have?

We will be blessed of God, and we will receive an appropriate blessing for each characteristic.

What encouragement do you receive from vv.10-12? [discuss]

No matter what we must bear in regard to persecution, we have a great reward in heaven.

Read Matthew 5:13-20

As we live out the Beatitudes, what does Jesus want us to become? What does this mean?

He wants us to be the salt of the earth; preserving life from sin's decay, and enhancing life by living out the abundant life of Jesus (John 10:10). We are also to be the light of the world, shining Christ's light to all. Consider the moon. It's just dirt, but it reflects the sun's glory. We are dirt. Do we reflect Jesus' glory?

As we live as the salt of the earth and the light of the world, what will this result in?

It will result in our "good works" glorifying our Father in heaven. We were made for "good works" (cf. Eph 2:10), and the main goal of our life is to glorify God (1 Cor 10:31). Does the way we live our life show to others that our main goal is this? What would those around us think our main goal for life is?

How are we to take vv.17-20 in the light of God's grace?

We are saved by grace (Eph 2:8-9), but as a follower of Jesus we are to keep God's law out of love for Him (John 14:15). If we don't, we should question whether we have been born of God (cf. 1 John 2:3-6).

In the light of v19, are we "least" or "greatest" in the kingdom of heaven? [discuss]

We are "least" when we are lawless, and we are great when we do and teach Christ's law (cf. Matt 28:20)

The Pharisees were well known for their righteous life. Is our life more righteous than theirs, for unless it is, we will not enter the Kingdom of Heaven? How can we be more righteous than them? (v20)

We have been made righteous by faith in Christ (Rom 3:21-22). Even so, through the re-birth there ought to be a practical righteousness in our life. The Pharisees practiced their righteousness to be noticed by men. One thing we can do to be more righteous than them is to be righteous for God's glory.

Read Matthew 5:21-26

In Matt 5:21-7:12 Jesus gives us His law in regard to how we are to live in His kingdom. He takes the "damaged" law that the Jewish people lived under, and gives us the "perfect" law. The first one is on anger.

How should we view anger and contempt toward another in the light of this passage?

We should equate anger and contempt with murder. These sins are as serious as murder in God's eyes.

Jesus was angry at the temple (Mat 21:12-13). Is there a place for anger? [discuss]

There is a thing called righteous anger (being angry over sin which mars the glory of God). However, most of our anger is not righteous (cf. James 1:19-20). It is selfish, coming from fear, frustration or hurt.

In what way could we show contempt toward others? [discuss]

What are we to do if we are not right with someone? (vv23-24)

We are to go and put things right. The emphasis is on us going, and not waiting for the other person to come to us. We are even to put it above important religious duties. How should we view the importance of being reconciled to a brother, compared to neglecting this and going to church, or having communion, etc?

In vv 25-26, what is Jesus saying we should do in judicial matters?

The thing that matters the most is making friends, rather than becoming angry and contemptuous. How would we go if we were being taken to court unjustly? What did Jesus do? (cf. Luke 23:34).

Summary: Christians are to be distinguished from all others by the way we live. Are we different?

2. Sermon on the Mount – part two

Aim: To apply the teaching of Christ's Sermon on the Mount to our lives.

Revision: *What are all followers of Jesus to be in this world? (5:13-16)* We are to be the salt of the earth and the light of the world by living out the Beatitudes (Christ's characteristics) in 5:3-12.

How does God's law apply to us now? We are not saved by keeping God's law, but as a follower of Jesus, living in His kingdom, we are required to come under Christ and obey His law (cf. 5:19-20).

What does the Lord Jesus equate with murder? (5:21-22) He equates anger and contempt with it.

Read Matthew 5:27-30

Adultery is a serious sin, punishable in the OT by death. What does Jesus say to us in vv.27-28?

Lusting (desiring) after someone who isn't your spouse is also equal to adultery.

We often associate sin with a wrong action or word. What else should we see as sin?

Evil thoughts and desires are also sin. God sees everything; not just what we do outwardly (1 Chron 28:9).

Consider the society we live in. How common do you think adultery of the heart is? How do we go keeping our heart pure in a society that abounds in sensuality? [discuss]

How should we understand Jesus' words in 5:29-30?

Hell is so terrible that we should do all we can to keep ourselves from going there by cutting ourselves off from sin (repenting). Repentance is essential for salvation (Acts 2:38), together with faith in Christ.

Read Matthew 5:31-32

According to our King, what is possibly the only grounds for divorce?

The only possible grounds for divorce for those who follow Jesus is when a spouse commits sexual immorality. Note: Others believe from these verses that there is no grounds for divorce.

What is your reaction to Jesus' teaching? Consider the disciples' response in Matt 19:8-10.

If our marriage is failing, through neglect or abuse, what options do we have? (1 Cor 7:10-11)

We are either to be reconciled or to remain single and unmarried. We do not have the option to re-marry. Is this the common practice in Christ's church? If not, why not? [discuss]

Read Matthew 5:33-37

What is the thrust of Jesus' teaching in 5:33-37?

As a follower of Jesus we are to be honest, always speaking the truth, and fulfilling our word. How well do we go in accomplishing this as a spouse? A parent? A child? A worker? A boss [discuss]

Should we ever make an oath? What about swearing on the Bible in a court of law? [discuss]

Read Matthew 5:38-42

In the light of 5:38-42, what are we called to give up? How do you feel about that?

We are to give up our right for personal justice. This cuts right across what our human nature desires.

What characteristic are we to show instead to those who seek to hurt us or use us?

Instead of retaliating, we are to be gracious. Grace is to mark our life; not justice and pay-back.

Do we have a right to defend ourselves? Are we just to be a "door-mat"? [discuss]

God has put in place courts to rule over us. However, as a follower of Jesus, we are not to take things into our own hands in order to seek justice for ourselves. Instead, we are to be like Jesus (cf. 1 Peter 2:21-23).

Read Matthew 5:43-48

As a believer, in what way are we to be different to others according to 5:43-47?

We are not just to love those who love us, but we are to love all people; even our enemies. Indeed, we are to pray for the well-being of those who even persecute us.

In the light of this section of Scripture, what is Jesus calling us to display?

We are to be gracious and kind, just as our Father in heaven is. Again, grace is to distinguish us.

How are we to understand 5:48? In what way are we to be perfect?

In the context of 5:43-48, "perfect" is associated with the way we are to love. We are to be perfect in loving all people; believers and unbelievers, the nice and the ugly, friends and persecutors. Do we?

We're to live graciously (5:38-42) and love graciously (5:43-48). Does grace characterise our life? What does characterise the life of an average Christian in the western world? [discuss]

Sadly, many in our world view Christians as being hypocrites (not truthful) and judgmental (not gracious).

Summary: Living under Christ will result in us being like Christ – full of grace and truth (Jn 1:14).

3. Sermon on the Mount – part three

Aim: To apply the teaching of Christ's Sermon on the Mount to our lives.

Revision: *According to Jesus' teaching in Matt 5:38-42, what is to characterise a Christian?*

We are to live graciously, and not be like those who retaliate and fight for their rights.

According to Matt 5:43-48, how should we treat our enemies and those who persecute us?

We are to love them graciously. We are to even pray and do good to them, like our Father in heaven.

What will such gracious behaviour lead to? It will lead to us being very different from those in the world; the salt of the earth and the light of the world, glorifying our Father in heaven (Matt 5:13-16).

Read Matthew 6:1-4

What does the Lord Jesus expect His followers to do? (v2)

We are to be those who give to the poor. We are even expected to be generous in giving (cf. 2 Cor 9:6-7).

What is the main point Jesus makes when we give to others?

We are not to be hypocrites (actors) in our giving, performing before a crowd, but we are to give secretly, so that we may not receive man's praise, but reward from our Father. How can we do this? [discuss]

Jesus' teaching extends to all "good works" we do. What should our attitude be? (1 Cor 10:31)

We are to do all things for God's glory, and not ours; whether it be changing a nappy or sharing the Gospel.

Read Matthew 6:5-13

How are we not to pray, according to v5?

We are not to pray to be noticed by people. This includes praying with eloquence in order to sound good before others. Consider Luke 18:11-12. Who was the Pharisee actually praying to?

What does Jesus instruct us to do instead of praying to be noticed by people? (v6)

We are to pray in a quiet place, free from distractions and disturbances (in "your closet"). Do you have a place to pray secretly to your Father? Have you noticed how often we're interrupted when we pray. Why?

What else should we not do when we pray? Why is this? (vv7-8)

We should not use meaningless repetition, or any other method to try and "twist the arm of God". This is because our Father already knows our needs (cf. 6:32). He just simply wants us to ask Him. (cf 7:7-8).

In the example prayer that Jesus gives us, who should we direct our prayers to? (v9)

We should be praying to the Father (cf. also John 16:23-27). It is not wrong to pray to Jesus (cf. Acts 7:59-60), but He encourages us to address the Father; the One we've been reconciled to through Christ's atoning death. In your prayers, how do you address God? As Father? Do you cherish the name Father?

What should be the first three requests that come from our lips when we pray? (vv9-10)

We should pray for the honouring and glorifying of God's name, for God's kingdom to grow and eventually come in all its power and glory at the return of Jesus, and for God's good, pleasing and perfect will to be done (Rom 12:2). In other words, our primary concern should be for God and His kingdom. Is it?

What three personal requests should come next when we pray? (vv11-13) Why?

We should pray for our daily needs, in order to be dependent on the Lord for everything; we should pray for forgiveness for sin, for we do sin and need cleansing so that we can be right with God; we should pray for deliverance from sin for we are weak with a sinful nature and need God's help to overcome sin.

Read Matthew 6:14-15

Jesus expands on one of the requests in vv11-13 - forgiveness. What is He saying?

If we ask God to forgive us of our sins, He will not forgive us, if we do not forgive others. This is a very serious matter. Consider Matt 18:23-35 – vv34-35 suggest that a person who does not forgive others was never saved. [discuss]

In the light of Christ's teaching, have you forgiven all others of the sins they've done against you?

We must ask ourselves whether we would prefer to go to hell clutching onto some grievance against another, all because we would not forgive.

Forgiving others can be very difficult for some of us. Do you battle with it? Why is this? What can we do to help us forgive others?

Some battle with forgiveness because they have a strong sense of justice, and will not forgive, because they want justice served. We must learn to let God serve justice. We need to also comprehend how much we have been forgiven in Christ – this will then help us to forgive others (Eph 4:32).

Summary: Seek our Father's reward; not the praises of men. Forgive others so that you'll be forgiven.

4. Sermon on the Mount – part four

Aim: To apply the teaching of Christ's Sermon on the Mount to our lives.

Revision: *Whether we give or pray, or whatever we do, what does Jesus teach us in Matt 6:1-8?*

Don't do things for show, but for God's glory. Do things for His reward; not for the praise of men.

Do our prayers resemble the model prayer Jesus gave us in Matt 6:9-13? What components are often lacking? [discuss] We often don't adore God in prayer, and pray for His kingdom.

Do we forgive others of their sins against us? If not, what warning does Jesus give us?

Our Father will not forgive us, if we do not forgive others. This is a very serious matter. Why? [discuss]

Read Matthew 6:16-18

Fasting is something rarely spoken about these days. What is fasting?

In the Old Testament, fasting was equated with prayer (Judges 20:26-27) or with mourning (2 Samuel 1:12). In regard to prayer, it meant going without food in order to dedicate oneself to seeking the Lord and praying to Him.

Is fasting still to be practiced?

In Mark 2:18-20, Jesus taught His disciples that we would fast after He returned to heaven. Therefore, it is to be practiced, just as we see in the New Testament church (cf. Acts 13:1-3; 14:23)

In what situations should we be praying with fasting? (cf. again Acts 13:1-3; 14:23)

According to the Bible, there ought to be times when we have extended periods of prayer, whether it be for a national disaster, a terrible sin, or seeking God's will. In such cases of more lengthy prayer, we should fast. This includes for personal times of prayer as well. Can you think of any situations?

According to Matt 6:16, when we fast personally, how should we do it?

We are to fast without drawing attention to our self. We are to fast and pray for God's reward; not man's.

Read Matthew 6:19-24

What command does Jesus give us in regard to worldly possessions? Why?

We are not to accumulate worldly possessions. The reason is because they will not last, and more importantly, they will draw our heart away to the things of the world, and we will end up living for them.

What are we to store up instead? How do we do that?

We are to store up heavenly treasure. We do that by living for God's glory and seeking His reward.

Surrounded with affluence, are we guilty of storing up earthly treasure? Where's our heart? [discuss]

According to Matt 6:22-23, what must we be particularly careful of?

We must be careful in regard to how we see. If we walk by faith, then we will see well. We will not desire the things of the world, but the things of Christ, and we will have Christ's light (John 8:12). If we walk by sight, then we will covet and desire worldly things, and will be filled with spiritual darkness.

How do you understand Jesus' words in Matt 6:24?

If we store up worldly possessions and have an "eye" for them, then that has become our master. When this occurs, it is impossible for us to also serve God. It's either one or the other; not both (cf. 1 John 2:15-17).

Read Matthew 6:25-34

What does Jesus command us not to do? Why not?

We are not to worry or be anxious. This is because we have a wonderful Father in heaven who knows our needs (v32), who cares for us (v30), and considers us to be of great worth (v26).

The Lord Jesus uses some examples from nature. What point was He making?

Our Father feeds worthless sparrows and clothes the temporary grass of the field with splendour, so how much more will He care for us. NB: We ought to look at nature and see God's goodness and care. Do we?

What is the real reason why we worry? What is anxiety a sign of?

We worry because we do not trust God. It's a sign that we are lacking faith (v30). Often we panic rather than pray; often we try to sort out things our self, rather than depend on our Father (cf. 1 Peter 5:6-7).

Instead of worrying, what should we be doing (v33)? What does this mean?

We should be seeking God's kingdom and His righteousness. This means seeking to glorify our Father, by submitting to the King of God's kingdom (Jesus) and living under Him. As we do, our Father, who knows our needs, will meet them (cf. Phil 4:19). In other words, live for Christ, and our needs will be met.

Summary: Live for Christ and His kingdom and not for the things of this world.

5. Sermon on the Mount – part five

Aim: To apply the teaching of Christ's Sermon on the Mount to our lives.

Introduction: After looking at the Christianity Explored course, we now return to Christ's Sermon on the Mount. We previously considered Matt 5 & 6, and for the next three lessons we will look at Matthew 7.

Revision: *What is the Sermon on the Mount all about?* It is Christ teaching His followers how they are to live under His Kingship in order to be the salt of the earth and the light of the world, and thereby bring glory to God. We are not saved by living out these words, but if we are saved, we will live them out.

What's some of the main teaching in Matt 5&6? Our character is to be that of the Beatitudes; in conduct we are not to lust, lie, or be angry; we are to live and love graciously; we are to do things for God's glory and not for show; we are to pray as Jesus taught; we are not to worry, but seek His kingdom.

Read Matthew 7:1-5

What common human practice does Jesus command us not to do? What does this mean?

We are not to judge – that is, we are not to condemn others, or to go about finding fault in others. We are, however, encouraged to be discerning (1 Cor 2:15; Phil 1:9-11; Heb 5:14). *[discuss]*

Why are we not to judge (condemn) others? (cf. also James 4:11-12)

We are not to judge because God will judge us in the way we judge others; so if we are harsh and critical, then God will be to us. Also, when we find fault with others, we can be blind about our own faults. Besides, when we judge, we place ourselves in the seat of God, for only God has the right to judge.

Instead of judging (condemning) others, what attitude should we have?

We should be merciful, like our Father in heaven (James 5:11).

When we see a brother sin, should we refrain from judging, and say nothing? (cf. Jam 5:19-20)

We are encouraged to point out sin in a fellow believer's life, but we are to do it gently (Gal 6:1), and humbly, conscious of our own sins and flaws (Matt 7:3-5).

Read Matthew 7:6

What does this "intriguing" verse mean?

In the context of judging and Christ's teaching, when it comes to sharing Christ's teaching with others, we are to be discerning. Christ's teaching in Matt 5&6 is not for a non-Christian. Indeed, they may react to it. *[discuss]* Jesus' teaching is for those who follow Him, and who have the Holy Spirit to help them.

What should be proclaimed to all people everywhere, without restriction?

The Gospel is to be declared to all – we have been commanded to do so (Matt 28:18-20).

Read Matthew 7:7-11

Jesus has already taught us about prayer in Matt 6:5-13. What does He emphasise in this section?

He encourages us to persevere in prayer, because our Father will listen and answer us. NB: In the Greek, the verbs in v.7 are to keep on asking, keep on seeking, and keep on knocking; ie, never give up praying.

How do we distinguish between Matt 6:7 & Matt 7:7?

We are not to babble or do things to manipulate God in prayer (as the pagans do), but we are to keep on asking about things, remembering we come to One who knows our needs already (Matt 6:8).

It would appear from Matt 7:7-8 that the Lord will grant us whatever we ask. Is this true?

No! The Lord will only grant our request according to His will (1 John 5:14-15). So, we should seek to know God's will, and request Him about such things, for He will grant them. Also, we ought to pray a lot more by faith, believing the Lord will grant our request, rather than doubting (cf. James 1:5-8).

What characterises your prayers? Is it more wishful praying, or praying in faith? [discuss]

What encouragement do you get from Jesus' words in Matt 7:9-11?

Our Father is far better than any earthly father. If earthly parents know how to give good gifts to their children, how much more does our heavenly Father know how to give good gifts to us.

Read Matthew 7:12

How does Jesus summarise His moral teaching in the Sermon on the Mount?

We are to treat people the way we want them to treat us. This implies thinking of others, and treating them in a loving way. Isn't it interesting how this fulfils the Law and the Prophets *[discuss]*

Summary: Don't judge; be merciful. Keep on praying. Treat others how you want to be treated.

6. Sermon on the Mount – part six

Aim: To apply the teaching of Christ's Sermon on the Mount to our lives.

Revision: *What does Jesus mean when He says "don't judge" in Matt 7:1-5?* We are not to condemn, criticise, or be fault-finders; but we are expected to judge in the sense of being discerning.

How should we understand Matt 7:6? It is inappropriate (even dangerous) to push Christ's teaching on holiness onto those who aren't Christians. But we are to never hesitate sharing the Gospel.

In Matt 7:7-11 we have some great prayer promises. What is assumed in regard to the Lord granting our requests? That we are following Jesus, seeking His kingdom (Matt 6:33), and that our prayers are in accordance with the model given to us by Jesus in Matt 6:9-13; ie, God's glory is paramount.

Read Matthew 7:13-14

How does Jesus describe life in Matt 7:13-14?

Jesus declares that there are only two paths in life; the narrow path that leads to life, and the broad path that leads to destruction. NB: Jesus clearly taught that there are not many paths to heaven, as most think.

What does Jesus mean when He says that the broad path leads to "destruction"?

The Greek word translated as "destruction" does not infer annihilation, but utter ruin or complete loss. People on the broad path will experience utter ruin in hell. Cf. Matt 13:41-42, 49-50 – hell is a furnace of fire, where people experience weeping and gnashing of teeth (ie, torment); Matt 25:41 – hell is an eternal fire, where people suffer eternally in the presence of the devil. It's a place to be avoided at all costs.

Who is on the broad path?

Those on the broad path are all those who have not entered through the narrow gate. The narrow gate is Christ (John 10:9). Unless we turn away from living our own life, and embrace Jesus as our Saviour from sin and the Lord of our life, we remain on the broad path that leads to hell.

What is the narrow path?

The narrow path is following Jesus. All those who have turned to Jesus (ie, entered through the narrow gate) will follow Him (John 10:27-28). They have (and will have) eternal life and will never perish.

What is so disturbing about Jesus' words here? (cf. the end of v.13 and the end of v.14)

Many are on the broad path that leads to destruction, and only a few are on the narrow path that leads to life (ie, heaven). This is against the popular notion where many think that most will make it to heaven.

How should Jesus' words in Matt 7:13-14 affect us? [discuss]

It should awaken us to the serious reality that most people, including family members, friends, neighbours, etc, who are not following Jesus are heading for eternal ruin. Do we care? Does it show?

Read Matthew 7:15-20

Who does Jesus warn us about in Matthew 7:15-20? What are they up to?

He warns genuine believers about false prophets (false teachers) who seek to turn us away from the narrow path that leads to life; ie, from listening to and following Christ. Watch out for them!

How are false prophets described? What is so disturbing about them?

They are wolves in sheep's clothing; that is, they outwardly appear to be a genuine follower of Jesus (a sheep), but in actual fact they are like a wolf - out to destroy. They are deceptive (cf. 2 Cor 11:13-14).

False prophets and teachers can deceive us with their charisma and charm, and even with miraculous signs (cf. Matt 24:24). What are we to do to make sure we are not deceived?

Firstly, we are to be watchful (v.15); not naïve. Secondly, we are to examine their life (v.16), and see if they are a genuine follower of Jesus, bearing the fruit that comes from listening to and obeying Jesus.

Has Christ's church listened to their Lord? [discuss]

As a whole, the Lord's church has failed to heed His warning. From early church days, false prophets have come in and drawn many away from the narrow path. This problem still continues today.

What key thing should we be doing to prevent ourselves from being deceived? [discuss]

We should be listening to the Lord by reading His Word and living it out. Do you? Daily?

Looking at Matt 7:15-20 from another angle, there are only two kinds of trees. Which one are you?

It is dependent on the fruit we bear – we're either bearing good fruit or bad fruit (cf. Gal 5:16-23).

Summary: There are only two paths in life; which one are you on? There are only two kinds of

trees; which one are you? It is all dependent on whether we are listening to Jesus and following Him.

7. Sermon on the Mount – part seven

Aim: To apply the teaching of Christ's Sermon on the Mount to our lives.

Revision: *People think that there are many paths to heaven. What did Jesus teach (Matt 7:13-14)?*

There's only two paths: the narrow path that leads to life (heaven), the wide path that leads to destruction.

What disturbing thing does Jesus teach us about the two paths? Only a few are on the narrow path of Christ that leads to eternal life, but many are on the wide path that leads to hell.

People can be likened to two kinds of trees. What are they and what distinguishes them (Matt 7:15-20)? We are either a good tree or a bad tree; and it's the fruit we bear that determines this. We prove ourselves to be a good tree when we bear the good fruit that comes from following Jesus.

Read Matthew 7:21-23

These are some of the most challenging/disturbing verses in the Bible. Why is this?

There will be those who think they are Christians, by the way they call Jesus "Lord", and do great things in His name, who will be turned away from heaven; ie, they will not be saved.

How many will fall into this category? What does this infer in regard to the day of judgment?

In v.22 Jesus tells us that there will be "many" who will be turned away from heaven, though they thought they were Christians. This implies that there will be many shocks on the day of judgment.

Why will these people, who think they are "Christians", be turned away?

Jesus states it plainly: they did not do the will of the Father - which is to trust in Jesus and follow Him. Also, in v.23, Jesus calls them lawless; ie, they did not submit to Jesus, but did their own thing. The problem is that they never repented of their sins and submitted themselves to Christ's Lordship.

What sort of people are in this category? [discuss]

Judas - a disciple of Jesus, who preached and did miraculous signs, and yet he did not submit to Christ

Religious leaders – who know the Bible and yet do not do what Jesus says in His Word

Church attenders – who enjoy church and the company of God's people, but do not obey Jesus.

It is Jesus who will say "depart from Me". What's inferred here in terms of the day of judgment?

Jesus is the one who will be judging and turning people away from heaven's gates. God has appointed His Son to do this. This is plainly taught in Matt 25:31-46, John 5:22-29 and Acts 17:30-31.

According to v.23, what must we ensure so that we are not excluded from heaven? [discuss]

We must make sure that we know Jesus personally, and that we are not lawless (ie, instead we seek to live under Christ). Note: We come to know Jesus personally, as well as God the Father, when we accept Jesus as our Saviour, and submit to His Lordship (obey Him) – cf. John 14:21-23.

Read Matthew 7:24-27

Jesus concludes the Sermon on the Mount with a powerful parable. What's the gist of it?

Where we spend eternity is dependent on what we do with Jesus' words. If we hear and act upon them (do them), then we will be saved. If we do not hear and act on them, then we will perish. Note: Jesus is highlighting again how essential it is that we submit to His Lordship - which means doing what He says.

According to Jesus' parable, what is the rock? What does it mean to build our life on the rock?

The rock is Christ and His Word. To build our life on the rock is to believe in Christ and to do His Word.

What does the sand stand for?

The sand stands for other religions, human philosophies, worldly ways, etc. It also includes believing in a mystical Christ (the Christ you want), and not doing what the real Christ says.

There are many trials and testings in life. What do they reveal?

They reveal what our life is built on – whether the rock or on the sand. If we have built our life on the rock, then we will be able to endure the trials of life, and one day stand before God. We will not fall.

In the context of Matthew 7, what does Jesus mean when He speaks about the great fall in v.27?

Those who do not hear and act upon Christ's Word will stumble and fall in life, but in particular, they will experience a great crash on the day of judgment. They will not be saved, but face utter ruin.

Jesus' teaching may seem to suggest that we are saved by works. [discuss]

We are saved by grace through faith in Christ (Eph 2:8-9). However, the evidence that we have truly been saved, and therefore born of God's Spirit (John 3:3-5) is that we will follow Jesus – do what He says.

Summary: Only those who build their life on Christ (hear and act on His Word) will stand on

the day of judgment and enjoy eternal life; the rest will experience a devastating fall.