

## *“Parable of the Sower, part 2”*

*Isaiah 55:10-13; Luke 13:6-9*

September 6, 2020

Y’all ever heard the business phrase, “going granular?” It might not be as popular an expression now as it was 5 years ago or so but I think people are still using it. About 5 years ago, you couldn’t hardly go into a meeting without someone tossing out that phrase. “We’re going to go granular” means we’re going to closely examine all of the small details and get to the bottom of the story.

“Going granular” is helpful sometimes, a good tool to get to the bottom of certain mysteries, not all, but a lot. Other times though, going granular, focusing on the little details, leaves you missing the bigger picture.

I’ve been known to do this very thing. Missing the forest through the trees and all that. Way back when, when I was in seminary, I had to take Biblical Hebrew. Now, I found Hebrew to be very, very tough and in order to do well, I got into a bad habit. I would cram Hebrew relentlessly right before a test. I’d study those little lines and dots until I knew just what every one of them meant.

Except I couldn’t read hardly a word of it. I knew the words but focused so much time on that, I lost the bigger picture – that I was being taught to read the language, not be a technical expert on the pointing of vowels.

Last week I began a two-week sermon series on the Parable of the Sower. As I mentioned previously, this is a significant parable, showing up in Matthew, Mark and Luke’s gospels, one of only 7 of 33 parables to do so. Further, it is one of the few parables that Jesus explicitly explains. Whereas with other parables, the meaning bubbles up through the story. In the Parable of the Sower, Jesus takes it one step further, making sure that his disciples don’t miss the point.

Last week, we examined this parable looking at the different types of soil as conditions of the human heart. Some are rocky, hard, pride-filled or concerned about the world. Now, don’t get me wrong, this is clearly a topic in view in the parable. We can’t read these words and overlook an examination of our hearts. Are they rocky with pride? Are they shallow with only artificial concern for others? Are our hearts being choked out by the cares of this world?

We should ask those questions.

But we should also, I believe, take a step back from the soil. Get out of our granular-mode and see the bigger picture artfully obscured by our fascination with soil-typing. And here’s what we see – This is one CRAZY sower.

Now what do I mean by that?

Let’s listen again to our parable from the Gospel of Matthew, chapter 13, verses 1-9 and 18-23:

“That same day Jesus went out of the house and sat beside the sea. And great crowds gathered about him, so that he got into a boat and sat down. And the whole crowd stood on the beach. And he told them many things in parables, saying: “A sower went out to sow. And as he sowed, some seeds fell along the path, and the birds came and devoured them. Other seeds fell on rocky ground, where they did not have much soil, and immediately they sprang up, since they had no depth of soil, but when the sun rose, they were scorched. And since they had no root, they withered away. Other seeds fell among thorns, and the thorns grew up and choked them. Other seeds fell on good soil and produced grain, some a hundredfold, some sixty, some thirty. He who has ears let him hear.”

“Hear then the parable of the sower: When anyone hears the word of the kingdom and does not understand it, the evil one comes and snatches away what has been sown in his heart. This is what was sown along the path. As for what was sown on rocky ground, this is the one who hears the word and immediately receives it with joy, yet he has no root in himself, but endures for a while, and when tribulation or persecution arises on account of the word, immediately he falls away.

As for what was sown among thorns, this is the one who hears the word, but the cares of the world and the deceitfulness of riches choke the word, and it proves unfruitful. As for what was sown on good soil, this is the one who hears the word and understands it. He indeed bears fruit and yields, in one case a hundredfold, in another sixty, and in another thirty.”

So, the question before us this morning isn't one of interpreting soils, it is instead for us to ask some questions about the Sower here in our passage. The first of which being, is he nuts?

Now, we can reject the idea that the Sower's rather indiscriminate use of seed arose from his farming ignorance. The ancient near east was an agrarian society, one in which the average citizen knew more about farming than today. And, certainly, the hearers would've known that seed sown on hard ground or rocky ground or so on wouldn't grow.

So why would the Sower go about sewing the seed in such a haphazard manner?

The only reasonable explanation is that the "seed" if you will, is inexhaustible. That there's a never-ending supply.

And that makes sense, especially as we hear Jesus explain what the "seed" is. According to Jesus, the seed being discussed here is "the word of the Kingdom."

It's actually an interesting use of words here in the Greek text. "The Word of the Kingdom" is translated a little oddly. It's phrased in such a way to give the expression "An explanation of the kingdom." Put another way, if biology is the study of life, the word being used here would be similar – like Kingdom ology, if you will.

So, the Sower goes out to scatter the seed of "kingdom ology," which is THE GOSPEL.

The Gospel is the message of God's Good News for sinners. **John 3:16-17** – "For God so loved the world,<sup>[a]</sup> that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him."

**Romans 5:8** – "But God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us."

The Gospel is Kingdom ology.

The declaration that, in a world broken by sin, God triumphs.

In a society curved inward by self-absorption, God wins

In bodies wrecked by sin, God prevails.

You see, Kingdom ology never comes very far from the same exact message Jesus Christ shared, **Matthew 4:17** – "From that time Jesus began to preach, saying, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand."

Jesus primary message was the Gospel He lived out for us. God drawing near, taking costly action, restoring humanity into full fellowship with God through the atoning sacrifice of Jesus Christ.

This is the message that we as individuals are called to carry out into the world with reckless abandon. We do so know that the Word is never empty, null or void. **Isaiah 55:11** – "...so shall my word be that goes out from my mouth; it shall not return to me empty, but it shall accomplish that which I purpose, and shall succeed in the thing for which I sent it."

Jesus dramatic emphasis on Kingdom ology, the Gospel, should NOT be overlooked by us. Jesus Christ came into a world that was premodern – human understanding of body and medicine was sorely, sorely lacking. Minor, everyday problems that we handle with a quick trip to the CVS could be life-threatening. And, while Jesus did heal people, he certainly didn't spend all his time doctoring.

So too was the world at the time one that wasn't populated with Harris-Teeters and Food Lions. Starvation was a real concern and famines could and did kill thousands. And while Jesus did feed people, he wasn't a chef nor a McDonald's.

The emphasis Jesus had within his earthly life was Kingdom ology. The Gospel. Announcing the Kingdom was Jesus primary concern. And, as Jesus leaves this earth, He declares Kingdom ology to be the primary concern of His Church – **Matthew 28:19-20** – "Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you."

The reason the Church of Jesus Christ exists is to spread the Gospel, if we're not doing that, we are failing. Notice I didn't say if we don't fill stadiums, we're failing. No, God alone determines the outcome of our success. But sharing the Gospel is our focus.

Unfortunately, that's not been the case within the mainline American Protestant churches in a great many years.

In fact, a few years back, a pastor at the church I served before coming here started to bristle against this evangelical silence. Looking within the doors of the church he was serving, Matt decided that the emphasis of the church wasn't on the spreading of the Gospel. And so, he did something he probably shouldn't have done, he split the church. Taking a healthy number of their members, Matt founded Relevant Church.

I know. It's a preposterous name if you think about it. As the church is, by definition, the body of Christ on Earth, the church is thusly, by definition, relevant. But that's just mincing words.

Relevant for Matt meant the Gospel. Good news for sinners. Getting away from the patois of liberal Protestantism, Matt focuses on sin and redemption as opposed to social justice.

It worked.

It seems to me as though we've grown squeamish at discussions of morality and ethics, sin and redemption. Instead, we've spent far greater time trying to work our way out of this important work.

I don't mean to sound bitter because I am certainly not, but I have wasted my time in meetings with sincere, earnest church members who wanted to evangelize. I've sat with them as they've debated children's art-programs, adding screens to worship services, electric signs to the front lawn. I've talked about hosting Christian money lessons, doing grief groups, feeding people, you name it, all with ONE aim – get more people in the doors of the church.

And, I confess, I've done the same thing. Gone all-in. on some of these strategies. But now, at nearly 15 years in, I am beginning to see the obvious. The forest through the trees, if you will.

We're not spreading the Word. Not like the Sower, we're not.

It's been my experience within modern Protestantism that it is our evangelism that has failed and, with it's failure, so fails the church. On the one hand, I look around and have seen far more empty pews than full ones in my day and I realize that this deemphasis has had deleterious consequences.

On another level, I look around and see a culture drunk with immorality, with greed, with lust, with pride, with gluttony, you name it, all are being idolized as opposed to anathemized and I can't help but believe our failures in evangelism come with far more harmful effects than just dust gathering on pews.

No, there are BIG problems the world is facing right now. And, dear friends, the solution isn't just a vaccine for COVID or an antidote for political division. No, the only thing BIG enough to cure what we've got? The Gospel.

Now look, the Bible can and does have the potential to upset your applecart on occasion. I know, this passage has made me foundationally reconsider something, especially in regards to evangelism.

Undoubtedly, I want people to come to the Lord. But, I confess, my methodology has been the exact opposite of what the Scripture suggests here.

I've been all about making connections with other people, showing them as best I'm able the love of Jesus but without mentioning His name necessarily. I've drunk deeply from the wells of "nobody cares what you know unless you know that they care" which appears in like NO verse of Scripture, I might add. In a way, I want to choose the soil, the season and only plant the seed if the conditions seem to warrant it.

Ah, do you see it?

That a'int my job. First, it's not my job because the Gospel itself is hella-powerful.

**Romans 1:16** - For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek

**1 Thessalonians 1:5** – "...Because our gospel came to you not only in word, but also in power and in the Holy Spirit and with full conviction. You know what kind of men we proved to be among you for your sake.

**1 Peter 1:23** – "... "since you have been born again, not of perishable seed but of imperishable, through the living and abiding word of God."

Now look, we don't want to be jerks about doing this. 1 Peter 3:15 suggests articulating our hope with gentleness and respect. If we begin our discussions calling people names, then we're not doing it right.

But we do have to do it.

What three things do I need to do this.

1. A deeper relationship with Jesus Christ
  - a. Prayer, Scripture study, devotion
2. The Humility of a Sinner

- a. Ryan Story
    - i. When he thought it would help, he told other people.
  - b. We know that our stuff stinks and we're not afraid to share that. Honest, genuine, humble
3. The **Confidence of a Winner**
- a. John Kaydos story.
    - i. Numbers game. God determines the outcomes. Our job is to just go out and do it.
  - b. Conclusion of parable - As for what was sown on good soil, this is the one who hears the word and understands it. He indeed bears fruit and yields, in one case a hundredfold, in another sixty, and in another thirty.”
  - c. **John 16:33 - 33** I have said these things to you, that in me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation. But take heart; I have overcome the world.”

### Scripture

**Matthew 13:1-9, 18-23** – “That same day Jesus went out of the house and sat beside the sea. And great crowds gathered about him, so that he got into a boat and sat down. And the whole crowd stood on the beach. And he told them many things in parables, saying: “A sower went out to sow. And as he sowed, some seeds fell along the path, and the birds came and devoured them. Other seeds fell on rocky ground, where they did not have much soil, and immediately they sprang up, since they had no depth of soil, but when the sun rose they were scorched. And since they had no root, they withered away. Other seeds fell among thorns, and the thorns grew up and choked them. Other seeds fell on good soil and produced grain, some a hundredfold, some sixty, some thirty. He who has ears let him hear.”

“Hear then the parable of the sower: When anyone hears the word of the kingdom and does not understand it, the evil one comes and snatches away what has been sown in his heart. This is what was sown along the path. As for what was sown on rocky ground, this is the one who hears the word and immediately receives it with joy, yet he has no root in himself, but endures for a while, and when tribulation or persecution arises on account of the word, immediately he falls away.

As for what was sown among thorns, this is the one who hears the word, but the cares of the world and the deceitfulness of riches choke the word, and it proves unfruitful. As for what was sown on good soil, this is the one who hears the word and understands it. He indeed bears fruit and yields, in one case a hundredfold, in another sixty, and in another thirty.”

**John 3:16-17** – “For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him.”

**Romans 5:8** – “But God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.”

**Matthew 4:17** – “From that time Jesus began to preach, saying, “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.”

**Isaiah 55:11** – “...so shall my word be that goes out from my mouth; it shall not return to me empty, but it shall accomplish that which I purpose, and shall succeed in the thing for which I sent it.”

**Matthew 28:19-20** – “Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you.”

**Romans 1:16** - For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek

**1 Thessalonians 1:5** – “...Because our gospel came to you not only in word, but also in power and in the Holy Spirit and with full conviction. You know what kind of men we proved to be among you for your sake.

**1 Peter 1:23** – ... “since you have been born again, not of perishable seed but of imperishable, through the living and abiding word of God.”