

INTRO:

Alright friends, come on back... So we're continuing a series we introduced last week, entitled **"Upside Down"** THROUGH Jesus' Kingdom Parables - these category-exploding invitations He gave describing what God's like, even IF what He's like is **upside down** from what we normally think... TODAY we come to Jesus's first parable - a famous one that's gonna show you that, contrary to popular belief, God/relationship with God is the opposite of boring, mundane or irrelevant. No! As you'll see, God is utterly surprising, lavish, indiscriminate... even scandalous! SO let's pray and then we'll hear Jesus' "Parable of the Sower" or as I'm calling it, **"Parable of the SCANDALOUS Sower."** *Let's Pray... Amen!*... If you have a Bible or Bible App and I hope you do, follow along as we hear the reading of God's word... **Jude** reads...

TEXT:

Hey, can we thank BOTH **Jude** AND God for the reading of His Word?... So since I'm guessing very few of us might be familiar with farming and certainly farming from a 1st century perspective, let me set the scene for ya here. For the previous 12 chapters in Matthew, Jesus has essentially done two things: **One**, in clear detail *declare* what being a follower and a part of His kingdom entails. And **Two**, *display* it through various miracles and such. So by the time you get to **chapter 13** here, things are startin' to crystalize as those listening-to and watching Jesus are either repenting, believing-in and following Him OR continuing keeping Him at arm's length.

Now, since Jesus is obviously a guy who knows things, He knows that something akin to like a giant game of spiritual kickball is going on with people picking and choosing teams. And so what He does, as **v.3** shows, is start speaking in parables TO essentially crystalize who's on which team. Cuz you understand, Jesus doesn't care about having you as a fan/isn't interested in you liking Him. He wants you as a follower/wants you to love Him!... And so Jesus starts speaking in parables, with THIS one, about farming, being His first!

Now, traditionally the way this parable has been interpreted is by focusing/almost exclusively on the soils you see Jesus mention in **vv.4-9** and then explain in **vv.18-23**. And in part, that's ok cuz of course Jesus DOES describe 4 soils here and DOES equate em to, as **v.19** shows, four types of people or "heart"-level responses we tend to have toward Jesus. For example, you see He equates the "hard-path soil" to those who don't receive Him or the Gospel. In Jesus' time, this was very clearly/(and ironically) the Pharisees/the supposedly "good soil" but who were actually hardened AGAINST Jesus... Similarly, you see He equates the "rocky soil" to those who INITIALLY receive Him, but only until pain or problem comes along. In Jesus's time this was the crowds/the nominally religious, who by-and-large were more interested in getting FROM Him than actually getting Him... Additionally, you see He equates the "thorny soil" to those who receive Him, BUT end up living choked by fear, worry, anxiety. In some respects, this was Jesus' family/the Disciples/you and me for example, who can become more preoccupied with our circumstances than trusting Jesus IN our circumstances!... So, no doubt, Jesus is placing some emphasis on the "soils" here. The issue is: making the soils the main emphasis does an injustice

to what He's actually saying.¹ Cuz notice, HE introduces the parable saying NOT, *"Listen, there are multiple types of soils, and here they are..."* No! **What does He say?** *"A farmer went out to sow some SEED."* HIS focus is NOT on the soils, but the seed! Which begs the question, *"what's the 'seed?'"* Well, if you look down in **v.19** and even more if you were to look in **Mark 4:14** and **Luke 8:11** where Jesus ALSO explains this parable, you'd see, very specifically, the "seed" is *"the word of the kingdom"* or *"the WORD of God."* Now be careful, cuz a lot of people stop there and say, *"Oh ok, so the Gospel. Jesus is saying, 'As the Gospel gets sowed and goes out, people necessarily respond differently right?'"* And unfortunately, in stopping there we then extrapolate that this story is essentially about us: *"Ya know, Christians/the church entrusted with evangelizing or 'sowing the Gospel'. And don't be surprised when only a small number of people receive it. It cuz they're hard, rocky or thorny soil. So we just move-on and look for fertile soil. And in the meantime, you better make sure YOU'RE of that fertile soil" ...Ever heard this parable taught that way? ...*And that's not to say evangelization is wrong. It's ABSOLUTELY right and not only commanded by Jesus Himself, who tells us to dedicate our lives to *"making disciples,"* BUT as Charles Spurgeon said; it's the natural response for anyone who's come to truly know Jesus.² It's not wrong. It's just that, it's not what THIS parable is about. THIS is not a story about you and me and what we're like...but about God and what He's like....And here's why I say that: **John chapter 1.** In **John 1** the same language used BY Jesus here is used to DESCRIBE Jesus there; namely, *"the Word"* being not merely the Gospel, but Jesus Himself! *"In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God" ...So ya see,* what Jesus is saying is, THIS is a story about Him...AS the "seed"...which God the Father as *"the true farmer"*....has "sown" into all the "soils" of the world. In other words and again, this isn't about you and me and what we're like, but about what GOD, in Christ, is like!

And specifically, you see **3 Things** about Him here/write these down: **First, He's Surprising!** *Surprising! Let me ask;* If you were God and were, let's say, lookin' to bring some change to the world/"sow and harvest" as it were; what would ya "sow?" I think if we're honest, most of us would sow things like force, strength, talent, charisma right? What's been called "right-handed" things/things that get after winning and progress and impact, with efficiency. What we prolly WOULDN'T sow is "seed"! Cuz there's nothing powerful or efficient about seeds right? You can crush em, lose em, neglect em. AND they take a long time to produce results...And YET that's EXACTLY what God "sowed" into the world/sowed the "seed" of His Son. As Tim Keller says, *"Didn't sow a hammer, or a fire, or a sword. Didn't come to judge, but to be judged. Didn't even appear strong/actually appeared weak and ultimately died."* ...Seed-like! That's Jesus. And of course, He did teach with authority and did do miracles/though as scholars have pointed out, Jesus's miracles weren't overt displays of power/like, ya know, shooting lighting from His hands. Rather, they foreshadowed restored life in His kingdom - blind people made to see, lepers healed, the lame made to walk...BUT while Jesus did teach and act with a modicum of power, by-and-large He was content to hang out with and preach good news to the poor, oppressed, and discarded RATHER than bring some kind a swift cleansing to the world...Very "seed-like"!

¹ Insight: <https://podcasts.apple.com/us/podcast/larkcast/id1339351918?i=1000517387367> + <https://podcasts.apple.com/us/podcast/larkcast/id1339351918?i=1000517511451>

² "Every Christian is either a missionary or an impostor." - C. H. Spurgeon, *The Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit Sermons*, vol. 54 (London: Passmore & Alabaster, 1908), 476-77.

You say, “*Why?*” Well two reasons: **One**, it weeded out those simply interested in getting FROM Him rather than getting Him. Cuz think about it: If one of your main drivers in life is “winning” or just being successful, advancing...getting ahead, Jesus is not your guy. Cuz by all accounts He not only lost, He called His followers to lose with Him: daily pick up your cross to follow Him, die to yourself, forgive rather than payback, and serve rather than be served...By coming as a “seed,” you understand, Jesus weeds out those of us simply interested in getting FROM Him rather than getting Him...But **Two**, by coming as a “seed,” we see God’s heart for the world. And by world, I mean US/sinners/losers, who in the process of doing a number on God’s creation still think we’re winners and God’s gift TO creation. It shows us: God isn’t out to get the best and most beautiful on His team. Cuz if He was/if He’d come as a hammer rather than a seed, you understand, NONE of us, no matter how good or beautiful you are, NONE of us would be on His team. We’d all be dead-meat!...But God’s desire, you understand, wasn’t to destroy you/though that woulda been deserved, but rather to preserve relationship WITH you. It wasn’t to make the world straighten up and fly right by instantly wiping out sin, which woulda meant wiping out you and me with it; it was to Himself BECOME our sin/BE wiped out FOR us on the Cross. HIS desire was to be like a “seed,” which only when it falls into the “soil” and dies, is it able to bring about new life. Or as the Apostle Peter says, “*Christ suffered once for sins, the righteous for the unrighteous, THAT he might bring us to God.*” He’s utterly **surprising!**

Second, He’s **Lavish!** *Lavish!* No other word for it. Cuz remember the context here: Jesus is speaking about farming in the first century right? Which MEANS over 1800 years BEFORE the advent of bulk farming.³ I think we read this text and we go, “*ok, so a farmer’s throwing seed around and naturally some’s falling on good soil and some on bad. Sounds normal.*” But if you’re reading it that way, it’s cuz you’re importing modern farming practices onto it. In Jesus’ day, you understand, there was no such thing as bulk grain to sow. You couldn’t just go to Home Depot and buy a bag of seed. Whatever seed you had, you’d harvested. Seed was treasure/certainly not something you just toss about. No, farmers would strategically place every seed into soil THEY thought had the best chance of being good. To chuck seed about like THIS farmer’s doing, is stupid if not scandalous!...And YET, that’s EXACTLY what God’s doing: not just scattering HIS treasure/His Son Jesus about, but doing so SO liberally/so **lavishly** as if to be scandalous/as if to show you that He won’t withhold ANY good thing from you. I love the way **Romans 8:32** says it: “*(If God) did not spare (even) his own Son, but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things?*”...**And Friend, you understand how fundamental this is?** NOT believing this is THE source of your problems. Goes all the way back to Adam and Eve. When you fail to believe that God has your best interest in mind or ya think He’s holding out on ya in some way, it necessarily leads you to transgress His word rather than take Him AT His word - something the Bible calls “sin” and which ONLY ever results in brokenness...But what if you actually had as **v.9** says, “*ears to hear*” that, not only, is God NOT withholding from you; He’s actually ready to lavish every blessing ON you, starting with His Son!...Like honestly, what would change in your life if you truly believed that God was out for your good, to the point that He was willing to give up EVERYTHING in Christ for you? How

³ Insight adapted from: <https://podcasts.apple.com/us/podcast/larkcast/id1339351918?i=1000517387367>

would that impact what you're pursuing/what you're worried about/frustrated over? How would it change the way you interact with those around you?... We're talking about a God who *lavishes!*

Third and Finally, you see that God is **Indiscriminate!** One of the most shocking/and again scandalous things about this parable is that Jesus is saying, God is like a farmer, who almost appears cavalier as He "sows" His most treasured "seed," into the places WE often write off as being too "hard," "rocky," or "thorny." And YET, it's the exact opposite! It's not God sowing Jesus everywhere, cuz He doesn't care who receives Him. It's God sowing Jesus everywhere because ANYONE CAN receive Him! Think about that!... I've often told you that THIS is the thing that makes Christianity/the Gospel so unique. Every other religion/just every other way of living says some form of the following, "*If you obey, THEN you'll be accepted.*" In other words/and follow me on this: Your advancement/blessing/your ultimate acceptance is in large-part a function of what you do or don't do/REALLY, whether or not YOU are able make yourself "good soil."... But of course, that's not what this says. THIS/JESUS says, regardless of what kind of soil you are, God's ALREADY scattered His blessing, forgiveness, redemption, justification, salvation... His Son. All YOU have to do is decide whether or not you're gonna let that seed take root in the soil of your heart. Cuz look in **v.23**: that's REALLY the only thing that distinguishes the good soil from the "bad" right? It's just that the good simply "*hears and understands*" or receives, takes-in and appropriates the seed; while the "bad" pushes it away! **Ya see?** CHRISTIANITY/the Gospel is NOT "*If you obey, THEN you'll be accepted.*" But "*You ARE accepted*" - the radical grace, forgiveness and salvation of Jesus having already been sown into the world - "*therefore obey!*" - receive it, appropriate it UNTIL it produces, as Jesus says, "*an over-abundant thirty, sixty, hundred-fold crop*"... See how **indiscriminate** God is?

CONCLUSION:

So friends let me close with this: As a Pastor/teacher... As one who struggles/perhaps like you, when people tell me what I need to do, should do, or oughta do... As one who just understands the exhausting nature of our "get-it-together/do-better/be-better" culture and just wants to be sensitive to not "should'ing" all over you, can I tell you: I LOVE the fact that in telling this parable, Jesus doesn't spell out the application for it. He simply gives it, explains what it means and says at the end in **v.23**, "*the one who hears and understands all this; that's that one who'll indeed bears fruit.*" I LOVE that, cuz it's Jesus saying, in such a graceful/refreshing way, "*the applications are infinite. But at the end of the day it's not really about who you are and what you need to do, but who I am, what I've done and YOU deciding if you'll trust and follow me or not?*" In other words, you could say, Jesus's application is to simply behold Him/see and savor Him, because as you do/and even if it takes along time as "seed growth" is akin to do, it WILL produce in you a crop of "*30, 60, maybe even 100 fold,*" which is to say a supernatural over-abundant harvest... So Friends, if I might: Pick up your eyes... up off yourself, your circumstances, your concerns, worries, plans, up off both your successes AND your failures... and simply behold Jesus! Behold His **surprising** heart NOT to punish you, but to have relationship with you! Behold the **lavish** way in which He holds NOTHING good back from you! And behold how He **indiscriminately** welcomes any and all to receive Him! Behold, Receive, and Trust Him today!... **Let's Pray... Amen!**