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Parable of the Leaven. Matthew 13:31-33

Matthew 13:31-33, *Another parable He put forth to them, saying: "The kingdom of heaven is like a mustard seed, which a man took and sowed in his field, ³²which indeed is the least of all the seeds; but when it is grown it is greater than the herbs and becomes a tree, so that the birds of the air come and nest in its branches." ³³Another parable He spoke to them: "The kingdom of heaven is like leaven, which a woman took and hid in three measures of meal till it was all leavened."*

Both parables speak to the same theme of influence. They speak about small beginnings with great conclusions.

You throw a stone in a lake and its influence touches every shore.

Our Lord is saying, something starts very small but ends very large.

So, it will be with the kingdom.

It will start small. But ultimately, its influence will be global.

In the Old Testament, the prophets predicted that the kingdom of God would ultimately come to the earth. In coming to the earth would ultimately touch the globe at every point, would be far reaching. Jesus Christ would be God's representative, the greater Son of David, the anointed, the Messiah, the King who would sit on the throne in the city of Jerusalem and rule the world.

- There would be worldwide peace,
- There would be the end of war, crime, poverty, and the suffering.
- There would be salvation among the nations, as well as the Jews.
- Jesus Christ would be revered and honoured as King.
- All rebels would be destroyed.
- All blasphemers would be condemned when the kingdom came.

They had reason to believe that.

Prophet Micah is seeing the kingdom in the last days, exalted, lifted up. Christ is reigning on the throne and the nations are flowing into worship, to adore, to give homage, to come under His rule.

Micah 4:1-3, *Now it shall come to pass in the latter days That the mountain of the Lord's house Shall be established on the top of the mountains, And shall be exalted above the hills; And peoples shall flow to it. ²Many nations shall come and say, "Come, and let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, To the house of the God of Jacob; He will teach us His ways, And we shall walk in His paths." For out of Zion the law shall go forth, And the word of the Lord from Jerusalem. ³He shall judge between many peoples, And rebuke strong nations afar off; They shall beat their swords into ploughshares, And their spears into pruning hooks; Nation shall not lift up sword against nation, Neither shall they learn war anymore.*

The ruling will come out of Jerusalem and the nations will respond and flow back in.

Messiah will control the world. The ones that resist, He will rebuke even though they are afar off.

The end of all war across the earth, scrap all their weapons.

Micah 4:4-5, *But everyone shall sit under his vine and under his fig tree, And no one shall make them afraid; For the mouth of the Lord of hosts has spoken. ⁵For all people walk each in the name of his god, But we will walk in the name of the Lord our God Forever and ever.*

The world will come to the feet of the Messiah and wherever the rebels are they will be rebuked. The other prophets have said that God will rule through His Son with a rod of iron and justice will be swift and immediate.

Even the Prophet Zechariah saw this after their captivity.

- The fasts will be turned into feasts.
- The fasts were times of mourning, sorrow, and remembering tragic events.
- The Jews remembered the captivity.
- They remembered the times when they were devastated and destroyed and carried away captive.
- They memorialized that memory by identifying certain fasts.
- They would go without food in order to remember those sorrowful times.

Zechariah 8:18-23, *Then the word of the Lord of hosts came to me, saying,*¹⁹ *“Thus says the Lord of hosts: ‘The fast of the fourth month, The fast of the fifth, The fast of the seventh, And the fast of the tenth, Shall be joy and gladness and cheerful feasts For the house of Judah. Therefore love truth and peace.’*²⁰ *“Thus says the Lord of hosts: ‘Peoples shall yet come, Inhabitants of many cities; ²¹The inhabitants of one city shall go to another, saying, “Let us continue to go and pray before the Lord, And seek the Lord of hosts. I myself will go also.” ²²Yes, many peoples and strong nations Shall come to*

seek the Lord of hosts in Jerusalem, And to pray before the Lord.’²³ “Thus says the Lord of hosts: ‘In those days ten men from every language of the nations shall grasp the sleeve of a Jewish man, saying, “Let us go with you, for we have heard that God is with you.” ’ ”

- They fasted **4th month** because they remembered the flight of the royal seed and the taking of Jerusalem.
- They fasted on the **5th month** because of the destruction of the temple.
- They fasted on the **7th month** because of the murder of **Governor Gedaliah**.
- They fasted on the **10th month** because of the seize of Jerusalem.

Some Jews in the world today are still observing those fasts.

But the prophet says the fasts shall be turned to cheerful feasts.

- No more fasting.
- No need to remember the sorrow.
- Everything is going to change.

It shall come to pass that there shall come peoples and the inhabitants of many cities. The world is going to come to Messiah.

The Jew will be the agent to bring the world to the feet of Christ.

The Jews lived in anticipation of this. They expected it all to happen and here came Jesus and He was the King. But none of this happened.

John 18:33-37, *Then Pilate entered the Praetorium again, called Jesus, and said to Him, "Are You the King of the Jews?"³⁴ Jesus answered him, "Are you speaking for yourself about this, or did others tell you this concerning Me?"³⁵ Pilate answered, "Am I a Jew? Your own nation and the chief priests have delivered You to me. What have You done?"³⁶ Jesus answered, "My kingdom is not of this world. If My kingdom were of this world, My servants would fight, so that I should not be delivered to the Jews; but now My kingdom is not from here."³⁷ Pilate therefore said to Him, "Are You a king then?" Jesus answered, "You say rightly that I am a king. For this cause I was born, and for this cause I have come into the world, that I should bear witness to the truth. Everyone who is of the truth hears My voice."*

There is no question in my mind at all that Jesus is a King. That's why He was born and came into the world.

But it is not perceived as a kingdom as men understand kingdoms. It is first and foremost a kingdom from within the heart.

Romans 14:17, *for the kingdom of God is not eating and drinking, but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit.*

It is internal.

Luke 17:20-21, *Now when He was asked by the Pharisees when the kingdom of God would come, He answered them and said, "The kingdom of God does not come with observation; ²¹nor will they say, 'See here!' or 'See there!' For indeed, the kingdom of God is within you."*

The first 2 Parables describe the nature of the kingdom.

The parable of the soils, the parable of the wheat and the tares, talks about the nature of the kingdom and the good and evil will co-exist.

There will be soil that rejects.

There will be the true soil.

The next 2 Parables about the Power of the kingdom.

In spite of good and evil coexisting still the power of the kingdom is so great it's going to grow.

- From a small beginning like a mustard seed, it will become a massive tree.

- From the littlest seed it becomes the biggest bush.

A little tiny piece of leaven, hidden in a massive pile of dough, it permeates everything, and influences everything.

The key to understanding the parable is two-fold.

1st, it's context.

The parable comes right after the mustard seed. That parable is a story of something small producing enormous outward growth. The parable of the leaven is something small that produces enormous inward growth.

Both are pictures of the Gospel of Grace going out into the world. The gospel has an inward affect in that it changes a sinner's eternal destiny, and temporal worldview.

The gospel has an outward affect in that sinners who have been changed by grace come together in a body called the Church which has an outward affect in that it changes the community.

2nd, the properties of leaven help us understand the meaning of the parable. It's what leaven does that is the focus of the parable, not what leaven is.

Small beginning.

Had you been in the multitude gathered along the shoreline that day to hear Jesus teach?

Your heart may have been a bit disturbed as well as discouraged after hearing the first two parables.

In the **Parable of the Sower**, Jesus indicates that only a small number of people will ever be receptive to the gospel.

- Not all who hear the Gospel will receive it.
- Most human hearts will be like unreceptive soil – rocky and hard.

In the **Parable of the Wheat and Tare**, Jesus tells us that the Devil will be doing all he can to undermine God's Kingdom work in this world.

- Satan will use false brethren, and false prophets preaching false gospels and even false Messiahs to counterfeit the true gospel.

These are not encouraging descriptions of Kingdom growth!

After hearing these Parables, the disciples might be wondering,

How big will this kingdom be?

What kind of kingdom is this going to be where most people don't want to be a part of it?

But in the **Parable of the Mustard Seed** Jesus teaches that the seed of the gospel message like the mustard seed will produce phenomenal growth.

After telling the Parable of the Mustard Seed, Jesus tells the Parable of the Leaven

All the Jewish mothers in the crowd were nodding and thinking, What a good boy. His mother taught him how to cook.

Jesus tells this parable was a common experience in every Hebrew household!

a) Small leaven leavens the whole lump.

Jesus would use leaven as an illustration of spiritual realities.

In the New Testament, leaven is often symbolic of corrupting influence.

Jesus warned of the leaven of the Pharisees and the Sadducees, which included their teaching and hypocrisy.

Matthew 16:5-12.

Luke 12:1, *In the meantime, when an innumerable multitude of people had gathered together, so that they trampled one*

another, He began to say to His disciples first of all, "Beware of the leaven of the Pharisees, which is hypocrisy.

Paul wrote of the danger of how a little leaven leavens the whole lump, as he addressed the need to withdraw fellowship from the unrepentant brother.

1 Corinthians 5:6, *Your glorying is not good. Do you not know that a little leaven leavens the whole lump?*

Galatians 5:9, *A little leaven leavens the whole lump.*

This has led some to conclude that leaven in the parable represents something evil.

Leaven and hypocrisy are both inherently evil but that they both are inherently pervasive and powerful in their influence.

The same is true of Paul's use of leaven.

It is not that leaven is to be associated with immorality, but that both are inherently pervasive, and powerful in their influence.

Leaven, in and of itself, is neither good nor bad.

Yeast is nothing more than a microscopic one-celled fungus that multiplies rapidly under the right conditions.

It produces enzymes which converts starch to sugar, and sugar to alcohol and carbon dioxide.

The earliest foods made with yeast were beer, wine, and bread.

In South India we make rice flour to make Idly and Dosa similar way.

Leave a bottle of grape juice around long enough and if the right sort of yeast lands in its wine.

The simple way to cultivate your own yeast for bread is the same way they did it in Jesus' day.

Mix flour and water to form a batter, then let it stand in a warm spot until yeast starts growing. That mix is then called a starter.

The baker takes some of the starter and folds it into a batter of flour, water, and sugar and waits for the starter to affect the rest.

Within a very short period of time, you would see this glutenous mass of batter getting larger and larger.

Leaven is a catalyst — it causes change in the things it is mixed in to!

In the case of bread, as the yeast multiplies and ferments it gives off carbon dioxide which causes the bread to rise and expand.

3 measures of meal are a lot, for something like 100 people.

When the Lord and two angels in Genesis 18 visited Sarah and Abraham, Sarah made bread.

Genesis 18:6, *So Abraham hurried into the tent to Sarah and said, "Quickly, make ready three measures of fine meal; knead it and make cakes."*

Gideon prepared using three measures of meal, or one ephah.

Judges 6:18-19, *Do not depart from here, I pray, until I come to You and bring out my offering and set it before You." And He said, "I will wait until you come back."¹⁹ So Gideon went in and prepared a young goat, and unleavened bread from an ephah of flour. The meat he put in a basket, and he put the broth in a pot; and he brought them out to Him under the terebinth tree and presented them.*

Hannah offered three measures of meal to the Lord.

1 Samuel 1:24, *Now when she had weaned him, she took him up with her, with three bulls, one ephah of flour, and a skin of*

wine, and brought him to the house of the Lord in Shiloh. And the child was young.

We find the similar things in the book of Ezekiel.

Ezekiel 45:24 and 46:5, 7, & 11

Leavened bread is far superior to unleavened bread.

- Unleavened bread is flat, hard, dry, and unappetizing.
- Leavened bread is soft, spongy, warm, tasty, and good.

Meaning of the Parable.

In the Parable of the Mustard Seed Jesus teaches that the seed of the gospel message, like the mustard seed, will produce phenomenal growth.

It did and we will find true believers in every nation in every corner of the globe and wherever you find believers you find the Kingdom of heaven at work.

Jesus teaches that the bacterium of the gospel message like the leaven will produce phenomenal influence.

Jesus says that the housewife takes a small amount of starter and hides it in three measures of flour literally three pecks of flour about 1½ bushels of flour.

- **Jesus Christ, Himself, represents the housewife.**
- **The small lump of leaven represents gospel.**
- **The three measures of flour represent the Church.**

Jesus teaches His disciples that a small bit of leaven leavens the whole lump.

The Kingdom of God will eventually have an extraordinary influence upon this world.

Lessons from the Parable.

The Kingdom's influence will be pervasive, having the quality to permeate, to spread or flow throughout the world.

The loaf represents the Church, and the leaven is the Gospel of the kingdom of God hid in the hearts of true believers. Through God's people, the kingdom of God has gradually made its influence felt throughout all the world.

This does not teach that everyone will be saved, but that all the world will be affected by the preaching of the gospel and the presence of God's Kingdom people.

The Kingdom's influence is unassuming in its operation that even most Christians have never stopped to consider how the

life of Jesus, and His gospel changed. It is changing the course of their lives and the course of the world.

Like yeast causing dough to rise, the Kingdom of God has slowly, thoroughly, and steadily influenced all the world.

The Kingdom's influence spreads by contact.

- Yeast multiplies as it feeds on sugar.
- The Kingdom multiplies as Christians feed on the Word of God and spread their faith person-by-person.

When a Jewish girl was married, her mother would give her a small piece of leavened dough from a batch baked just before the wedding.

From that gift of leaven, the bride would bake bread for her own household throughout her married life. That gift, simple as it was among the most cherished that the bride received, because it represented the love and blessedness of the household in which she grew up and that would be carried into the household she was about to establish.

The same is true of the Gospel it is a gift that we share with family and friends, as they receive it, they pass it on to others.

The Kingdom's influence will be complete till the whole loaf was all leavened.

No part of the loaf, that is the world, will be untouched by the influence of the kingdom.

Kingdom will influence the Whole World.

Can you imagine what our world would be like if Jesus had never been born?

Many people over the course of history have made significant contributions to civilization in a particular field of endeavour their names are etched in the annals of history.

But Jesus Christ, the greatest man who ever lived, has influenced every aspect of human life.

Jesus tells his disciples that the Kingdom of Heaven is like yeast, it may seem insignificant, but its ultimate influence will be phenomenal.

Christianity's roots were small and humble – an itinerant rabbi preached and did miracles for three years.

Jesus gathered a core of believers who numbered only 120 at the time of His resurrection.

Despite its humble origins, the Church has influenced more changes on earth for the good than any other movement in the history of the world.

Dr. James Kennedy authored a book titled. **What If Jesus Had Never Been Born?**

“Consider some of the effects that God’s Kingdom has had on our world.

- Hospitals and Universities, most of the world’s greatest were started by Christians for Christian purposes,
- Literacy and education for the masses,
- Capitalism and free enterprise,
- Representative government,
- Civil liberties,
- The abolition of slavery,
- Modern science,
- The discovery of the New World by Columbus,
- The elevation of women,
- Benevolence and charity organizations and work,
- Higher standards of justice,
- The condemnation of adultery and sexual perversions that lead to the protection of the family,
- A high regard for the sanctity of human life,
- The codifying and setting to writing of many of the world’s languages,

- Inspiration of some of the world's greatest works of art and music,
- Countless saved souls and changed lives.

- Had Christ never been born,
- Had the gospel never been planted in the hearts of men,
- Had men's lives never been changed by the grace of God,

the course of the world would have been far different.

Don't measure the growth or success of the kingdom solely by visible standards.

Conclusion:

Is the Kingdom of God visible in your life?

Has the leaven of God's truth so impacted the whole of your life that the kingdom manifests itself in your behaviour as well as your thinking?

The massive dough is the world and from the inside it begins to bubble and boil.

Christianity troubles the world.

It influences it for good but it's sometimes painful for the world to endure it.

Think of what **King Ahab** said when **Elijah** showed up and he saw him face to face.

1 Kings 18:17, *Then it happened, when Ahab saw Elijah, that Ahab said to him, "Is that you, O troubler of Israel?"*

In **Thessalonica** they said the similar thing.

Acts 16:7, *But when they did not find them, they dragged Jason and some brethren to the rulers of the city, crying out, "These who have turned the world upside down have come here too."*

In **Philippi** they said, the same.

Acts 16:20, *And they brought them to the magistrates, and said, "These men, being Jews, exceedingly trouble our city;*

We have been disturbing people for two thousand years. But isn't it incredible, the results?

Started out with 120 little disciples there, banded together in Jerusalem, and look today. **3 Billions** across the face of the earth have been influenced by Christianity.

The world has been leavened, it's been influenced dramatically, in an incredible way.

What a hopeful parable for the disciples, so discouraged and distressed that the Lord wasn't bringing the kingdom in its fullness.

What is going to happen with this tiny group?

Jesus said to them you are like leaven, and you are going to bubble and foment and boil. Before it's over, you are going to permeate the whole thing.

The positive influence of the kingdom comes from within.

God has planted His leaven inside the world.

The reason He lets the two grow together is so that we can influence.

- This is the time for men to be saved.
- This is the time for Christianity to do its work.

The world doesn't think of it this way, but the world has been injected with eternal life and it's spreading.

A tiny piece of leaven that was planted in the incarnation, that little babe in Bethlehem, that little piece of leaven plunged into the world and, ultimately, will dominate the world.

Ultimately every knee will bow.

Think about **WCF ministry** as our church, how God had made us to influence the whole world literally.

Matthew 24:14, *And this gospel of the kingdom will be preached in all the world as a witness to all the nations, and then the end will come.*

Do you know where Christianity has gone from its little, tiny beginnings?

Not everybody who names the name of Christ is a Christian, but at least the message is out there.

The latest statistics indicate that there are more people who say they are Christians in the world than any other religion on the face of the earth.

It is distorted here and there, but, nonetheless, the kingdom has moved through the world.

Our Lord's Word is true.

We have **203,000** missionaries in the earth for Christianity.

Do you realize that when the church met in Jerusalem, it took them seven years before they established the first mission church in Antioch?

Now **16,000 Muslims** are becoming Christians every year.

Approximately **100 Million** people are becoming Christians every year which is about **275,000 people every day**.

95% of the population of the world have all or part of the Bible in their own language.

90% percent of all the tribes on the face of the earth have had the opportunity to hear the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Isn't that amazing?

The influence of Christianity.

With all this evil opposition, the mustard seed grows and the leaven influences.

It sums up really what our Lord said. In **Matthew 16:18**, He said this, *"I will build My church and the gates of hell will not hold it."*

Devereux Spratt was well-known **Englishman** who in **1641** was captured by the **Algerian pirates** and made a slave. As a slave, this nobleman founded a church. When his release was finally settled, accomplished by his brother back in England, he refused to accept the release and said he would remain a slave until the day he died in order to serve the church which Christ had privileged him to found among the slaves. Today there is a plaque in a church in Algiers that bears his name.

The power of the kingdom is great.

A little tiny bit of leaven influences the whole mass of dough.

Kingdom has the power to influence everything.

Application:

Cut off the Past:

Paul indicting the Corinthian church for their sin, uses an illustration here of leaven.

1 Corinthians 5:6, *Your glorying is not good. Do you not know that a little leaven leavens the whole lump?*

A simple proverbial statement.

You get a little bit of influence and it's going to mess up a whole lot.

A rotten one will influence all.

Leaven really makes bread better, but it can be used to speak of anything that ultimately influences a large mass from a small beginning. Permeating influence.

1 Corinthians 5:7, *Therefore purge out the old leaven, that you may be a new lump, since you truly are unleavened. For indeed Christ, our Passover, was sacrificed for us.*

Paul is saying that you are a Christian now. You are a new lump of dough. Don't put into that new lump leaven.

where did that leaven come from?

It comes from an old loaf.

When we bake the bread took off a piece, put it aside and let it ferment, and we stick it in that new one.

Do you know what Paul is saying?

You are a new creature in Christ.

Don't bring any of the stuff from that former life in to influence that new life.

It's the illustration of continuity.

Cut off the continuity because when you bake bread, you would bake this loaf, pull off a little piece, start the next.

This process is called bake bread from the starters.

You just keep one is coming from another.

Paul says that you cut it off right there. Start here with a brand-new loaf.

1 Corinthians 5:8, *Therefore let us keep the feast, not with old leaven, nor with the leaven of malice and wickedness, but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth.*

Every Jew who read that would know.
Christ is our Passover.

Exodus chapter 12

God told the Jews that He is going to take them out of Egypt, and they are going to leave from there. Their captivity of 400 years is over.

When they leave, they must keep the Passover. The Angel of Death will pass by and you ought to put the blood on the door post as per His direction.

You keep a Passover feast to remember that the God of grace passed over you, spared you in mercy.

When you keep the Passover feast, you use Unleavened bread. Keep that feast for seven days, unleavened bread for seven days.

Why?

Exodus 12:39, *And they baked unleavened cakes of the dough which they had brought out of Egypt; for it was not leavened, because they were driven out of Egypt and could not wait, nor had they prepared provisions for themselves.*

What was the symbolism?

You are leaving Egypt.

Here is Egypt, you are leaving Egypt.

You are a new people. You are going to a promised land.

Don't make leavened bread.

Why?

Because if you make leavened bread out here, **where is your little lump of leaven going to come from?**

Where did they make their bread?

In Egypt.

Cut off the cord.

The unleavened bread became a symbol of the disconnection from Egypt. Cut that off.

They were to cut off that leavening process was to symbolize that they were starting all over again with no Egyptian influence. They had a tough time letting go of Egypt.

Will you cut off your past?

Pass on the Blessings of God from Past:

When a Jewish girl was married, her mother would give her a small piece of leavened dough from a batch baked just before the wedding.

From that gift of leaven, the bride would bake bread for her own household throughout her married life. That gift, simple as it was, was among the most cherished that the bride received, because it represented the love and blessedness of the household in which she grew up and that would be carried into the household she was about to establish.

The same is true of the Gospel it is a gift that we share with family and friends, as they receive it they pass it on to others.

After seven days, then you can begin again to make your leavened bread.

Leviticus 23:17, *You shall bring from your dwellings two wave loaves of two-tenths of an ephah. They shall be of fine flour; they shall be baked with leaven. They are the firstfruits to the Lord.*

Don't keep quiet!

You are here to influence.

You are here to pass on!

Your family,
Your relatives,
Your colleagues, in work and Business.
One person at a time.