

Parable of the Leaven

Matthew 13:33

INTRODUCTION:

- A. Our previous study examined **"The Parable Of The Mustard Seed" - Mt 13:31-32**
1. Where the kingdom is depicted as having remarkable growth, despite humble beginnings
 2. Perhaps the parable was told to reassure Jesus' disciples...
 - a. That their involvement in the kingdom would not be for naught
 - b. Especially after hearing two parables in which we see not all would receive the Word properly, and Satan's efforts to hinder growth of the kingdom would be noticeable
- B. Another parable that seems to have the same purpose of reassurance now follows...
1. Found in **Mt 13:33**
 2. This has become known as **"The Parable Of The Leaven"** (READ)
- C. Immediately we can see similarities to "The Parable Of The Mustard Seed"
1. Both are quite brief, with no explanations by Jesus recorded
 2. Both appear to be describing the remarkable spread of the kingdom of heaven
- D. But some differences can be noted, so this parable is certainly worthy of careful consideration
- E. In other Bible passages, "yeast" is used as a symbol of evil or uncleanness.
1. Here it is a positive symbol of growth. Like the parable of the mustard seed, this parable stresses small beginnings with great growth.
 2. While the seed grows, however, the yeast permeates and transforms; thus, we see another aspect of the kingdom.
 3. Although yeast looks like a minor ingredient, it permeates the whole loaf. Although the kingdom had small beginnings, it would grow to have a great impact on the world. What the Jews saw as insignificant (the man Jesus and his little band of followers) was actually the start of a great and world-changing event.
 4. Like leaven working its way through the dough, the kingdom message would spread across the entire world.

I. BACKGROUND INFORMATION ON "LEAVEN"

A. WHAT WAS "LEAVEN"?

1. A small portion of fermented dough used to ferment other dough
2. Once inserted into a batch, it continues its process of fermentation until the

whole batch has risen

3. **Today, we more likely use the term "yeast" instead of "leaven"**

B. SYMBOLIC USES OF "LEAVEN"...

1. In the New Testament, "leaven" is often symbolic of corrupting influence
 - a. Jesus warned of "the leaven of the Pharisees and the Sadducees", which included their teaching and hypocrisy - cf. **Mt 16:5-12; Lk 12:1**
 - b. Paul wrote of the danger of how "a little leaven leavens the whole lump", as he addressed the need to withdraw from the un-penitent brother - **1 Co 5:1-13**
2. This has led some to conclude that "leaven" in the parable represents something evil
3. But there are several reasons why this is not likely true...
 - a. There is no reason why its use elsewhere must be the same here
 1. A speaker or writer is certainly free to use a figure any way they wish, even differently in different situations
 2. To read the use of the figure as found elsewhere into this passage is a form of "eisegesis"
 - a. That is, reading something into the passage not actually there
 - b. Though in this case one may not be reading their own preconceived ideas into the passage, as is commonly done
 - c. But reading the ideas of another Biblical context into this one is still a form of "eisegesis"
 - b. As opposed to "exegesis", which is to read out of a passage what it actually says or means, and should be the goal of proper Bible study
- b. The last phrase would then suggest that the kingdom is destined to fail!
 - a. The "leaven" is to eventually fill the whole loaf!
 - b. If "leaven" represents corrupting influence, how discouraging!
- c. The close proximity of the parable to "**The Parable Of The Mustard Seed**" would suggest similarities in meaning (cf. the two parables in **Mt 13:44-46**)

[Well, if Jesus does not mean to use "leaven" in this context as symbolical of corrupting influence, then what does He mean?]

II. THE MEANING OF THE PARABLE

A. THE KINGDOM'S GROWTH WILL BE PERVASIVE...

1. That is, having the quality to permeate, to spread or flow throughout the world
2. One suggestion is that the loaf represents the world, and the leaven is the kingdom

3. Thus the reign of heaven (God) will gradually make its influence felt in the world
4. This "reign of heaven" could be manifested:
 - a. In the form of the gospel (the "word" of the kingdom, **Mt 13:19**), as it is was proclaimed to all creation - cf. **Mk 16:15-16**
 - b. In the form of the church, which spreads as people accept the gospel
 - c. In the influence of the Word and the church, as their influence is felt in society
5. This parable may also illustrates the "invisible" growth of the kingdom
 - a. As leaven does it work with less than noticeable effect
 - b. So the spreading influence of the kingdom is often unnoticeable, but real nonetheless!

B. THE KINGDOM'S INFLUENCE WILL BE COMPLETE...

1. Speaking of the loaf, Jesus said **"till it was all leavened"**
2. No part of the "loaf" (world) will be untouched by the influence of the kingdom
3. That the gospel did indeed spread in this way was expressed by Paul in **Ro 10:17-18; 16:25-26; Co 1:6,23**
4. Of course, not all have obeyed the gospel - e.g., "The Parable of the Four Soils"
5. Yet, we still see the leavening influence of the Word and Christ's reign...
 - a. In the growth of the church
 - b. In the influence of the Word in society (cf. our judicial system, charitable organizations, etc.)

III. APPLICATION OF THE PARABLE

A. DON'T LOSE HEART...

1. Don't measure the growth or success of the kingdom solely by visible standards
2. As Jesus said to the Pharisees...
 - a. **"The kingdom of God does not come with observation; nor will they say 'See here!' or 'See there!'" - Lk 17:20-21a**
 - b. **"For indeed, the kingdom of God is within you." - Lk 17:21b**
3. The spread of the kingdom (the rule of God) is taking place wherever the "word of the kingdom" is being sown, and fruit will be borne as it falls on "good and noble hearts"
4. Remain confident:
 - a. That what began as a mustard seed will become a great tree
 - b. That what started in one small portion of the loaf will eventually spread through the whole loaf

B. DO YOUR PART TO BE A LEAVENING INFLUENCE...

1. Allow the "leaven of the kingdom" to permeate your own heart and life
 - a. Take the Word of God into your own heart
 - b. Study and meditate upon it, and then seek to apply it!
2. Allow that Word to produce fruit in your life, so that you become an leavening influence for the kingdom of God!
 - a. By word, as you share the gospel of the kingdom with others
 - b. By deed, as you do good works that glorify God
 - c. For as leaven, we are also "the salt of the earth" and "the light of the world" - cf. **Mt 5:13-16**
 1. Designed to glorify God by our good works
 2. And so influence our world for good as well!

CONCLUSION

- A. With an understanding of these two parables ("**The Mustard Seed**" and "**The Leaven**"), we can take heart in knowing that the work of Christ in regards to His Kingdom will not be for naught
- B. As we close this lesson, let me ask "**What kind of leaven are you?**"
 1. This parable has been describing "leaven" as a positive force
 2. But remember, "leaven" is also used to illustrate that which is harmful
 - a. The "leaven of the Pharisees, which is hypocrisy" - **Luke 12:1**
 - b. That which is a corrupting force, and needs to be purged - **1 Co 5:6-8** Will you allow the grace of God to make you to be the kind of "leaven" that can be used to His glory?
- C. **God's Plan for Man's Salvation**