



# The Kingdom of Heaven is Like...

## Matthew 13

06-14-19

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Part 7, The Parable of the Leaven

Happy Friday and welcome back to our theme, "The Kingdom of Heaven is Like..." We are studying Jesus' Kingdom Parables as recorded in Matthew 13. Jesus used these to teach us the nature of His spiritual Kingdom.

The first four parables teach us how God's present spiritual kingdom interfaces and conflicts with another spiritual kingdom administered by the god of this world, i.e., Satan.

In Parable One, the Parable of the Sower and the Four Soils, we discovered that Satan is hard at work, doing anything he can to prevent the seed—the Gospel message—from taking root and flourishing into a genuine salvation experience (being born-again by the Spirit of God), and then bearing spiritual fruit.

In Parable Two, we discovered that Satan and his henchmen actively sow tares (pseudo-Christians) alongside the wheat (genuine, born-again Christians), to the end that he might cause confusion and even hate-filled opposition. Indeed, the greatest enemies of born-again Christians and the Lord's local New Testament churches over these past two millennia, have been organized false religions!

Last week, in Parable Three, we studied the first of two parables about **influence**. Jesus' disciples, having understood the first two teachings, must have wondered if God's spiritual kingdom could survive such a meager yield (remember, only one in four soils actually produced fruit) and such vehement opposition (the tares were seemingly sown with impunity and were allowed to grow without interference). And so perhaps this is why Jesus followed with two stories that taught how God's spiritual kingdom would grow and eventually triumph gloriously, despite the fact that it was initially small, seemingly insignificant, and even hidden (in the sense that it was spiritual and not physical).

And now in Parable Four, Jesus teaches a second story about influence: **the Parable of the Leaven**. We read in Matthew 13:33, *Another parable spake he unto them; The kingdom of heaven is like unto leaven, which a woman took, and hid in three measures of meal, till the whole was leavened.*

Again, Jesus uses a common experience to teach a spiritual lesson or principle. Baking bread, whether it be from the spring barley crop, or the summer wheat crop, was a major chore for Jewish women. And when they baked, they baked a lot! "Three measures" is described by some commentators to be equivalent to our US bushel (which is 64 US pints or 35.2 liters). The USDA has set the US Wheat bushel at 60 pounds. That will make a lot of bread! But, remember that bread was a major staple in the daily diet, that Jewish families were large, and they probably did not bake every day. So, what are Jesus' spiritual teachings from the Parable of the Leaven?

**Teaching 1 — In God's Kingdom, things that seem small to men, can have great influence when empowered and used by God (little is much when God is in it)**

Any baker knows that it takes just a tiny amount of yeast culture to eventually permeate a lump of dough and cause it to rise. How does this work? Yeasts are microscopic single-celled fungi. These fungal cells metabolize (i.e., "eat") the natural sugars in the dough, they grow, they produce by-products, and then quickly reproduce by vegetative budding. When the dough is kneaded the culture is physically spread throughout the lump.

The chemical byproducts of yeast metabolism are ethyl alcohol (a.k.a., grain alcohol, or ethanol, C<sub>2</sub>H<sub>5</sub>OH) and carbon dioxide gas (CO<sub>2</sub>). The carbon dioxide collects in pockets, causing bubbles in the dough. This collecting gas causes the dough to swell or "rise". When the dough is baked, the ethyl alcohol evaporates. The CO<sub>2</sub> also escapes leaving the cellular texture of risen bread.

The first teaching is this: those things that seem small and insignificant to men, are guaranteed to have great and highly significant consequences when they are energized and multiplied by God. Jesus took the meager lunch of a small boy, multiplied it, and fed 5000 men, plus their wives and children. In like manner, Jesus took 12 mostly unlearned laborers, and through them, He turned the world upside down (Acts 17:6).

The overall "little is much when God is in it" principle is taught by Paul in 1Corinthians 1:17-31.

*For Christ sent me not to baptize, but to preach the gospel: not with wisdom of words, lest the cross of Christ should be made of none effect. 18 For the preaching of the cross is to them that perish foolishness, but unto us which are saved, it is the power of God. 19 For it is written, I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, and will bring to nothing the understanding of the prudent. 20 Where is the wise? where is the scribe? where is the disputer of this world? hath not God made foolish the wisdom of this world? 21 For after that in the wisdom of God the world by wisdom knew not God, it pleased God by the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe. 22 For the Jews require a sign,*

*and the Greeks seek after wisdom: 23 But we preach Christ crucified, unto the Jews a stumblingblock, and unto the Greeks foolishness; 24 But unto them which are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God, and the wisdom of God. 25 Because the foolishness of God is wiser than men; and the weakness of God is stronger than men. 26 For ye see your calling, brethren, how that not many wise men after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, are called: 27 But God hath chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise; and God hath chosen the weak things of the world to confound the things which are mighty; 28 And base things of the world, and things which are despised, hath God chosen, yea, and things which are not, to bring to nought things that are: 29 That no flesh should glory in his presence. 30 But of him are ye in Christ Jesus, who of God is made unto us wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption: 31 That, according as it is written, He that glorieth, let him glory in the Lord.*

God purposefully used a tiny "pinch of leaven"—just 12, mostly-unschooled, blue-collar laborers, i.e., something that our proud, pompous, and arrogant lost world sees as insignificant, small, base unimpressive, or even vile—to start His Kingdom and to ultimately defeat this demonic World System (economy)... to the end that God will get the glory and show mankind's arrogant wisdom-so-called to be utter foolishness! Yes, God chooses to use the simple, the base, the small, and even the persecution of the wicked, to build His spiritual kingdom. Truly, when the Seventh Angel sounds, there will be tumultuous shouts in Heaven, ...*saying, The kingdoms of this world are become the kingdoms of our Lord, and of his Christ; and he shall reign for ever and ever* (Revelation 11:15).

## **Teaching 2 — God's Kingdom is unstoppable! It is as invasive as a yeast culture in the dough.**

The term *leaven* in scripture can incidentally represent something that is good, evil, or morally and spiritually neutral. The context will always tell us what God intended. BUT LEAVEN'S PRIMARY ANALOGY DEPICTS ITS PERVASIVE AND INVASIVE NATURE. This is leavening's most distinctive characteristic. Once yeast permeates a suitable substrate for growth and reproduction, there is literally no stopping it! In like manner, there is no way to stop God's Kingdom. Born-again believers are "overcomers" by the Blood of the Lamb. John writes in 1John 2:13 and 14, ...*ye have overcome the wicked one...*

Yes, leaven is sometimes used in conjunction with wickedness, evil, and sin. For example, Jesus warned, *Take heed and beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and of the Sadducees* (Matthew 16:6). In vv 16:11, 12 Jesus explained that He wasn't referring to the bread yeasts used by the religious leaders, but rather to the pervasive and invasive nature of their damnable heresies and hypocrisies (also see Luke 12:1). Like bread yeast, these leader's false doctrine and hypocritical arrogance would permeate and putrefy Truth! Furthermore, in 1Corinthians 5:8 Paul uses the analogy of leaven's invasiveness to picture the effects of malice and wickedness. But again, in both cases, the analogy is the pervasive and invasive nature of leaven. God is not saying that leaven is itself a picture of evil. This should be most obvious because Jesus uses leaven in our current parable to

depict a characteristic of the Kingdom of Heaven. Jesus says, *The kingdom of Heaven is like unto leaven...* In turn, we ask, "How is the kingdom of heaven like leaven?" Just as yeast is pervasive and invasive, God's Kingdom started small, like a pinch of leavening, but when it was hidden in the hearts of born-again believers it began to grow and spread, and eventually it will permeate the *whole*, just as Jesus predicted!

### **Teaching 3 — The growth of God's Kingdom is mostly hidden, out of sight, and unnoticed**

In our story, Jesus says that the woman took the leaven and hid it in three measures of meal. The yeast culture was concealed within the dough, just like the Kingdom of God is hidden in the hearts of born-again believers. There, out of the sight of men and without fanfare, the leavening performed its unstoppable work.

In like manner, the growth of God's Kingdom is unrecognized by this lost, dying, God-hating World. To them, God's Kingdom is, for the most part, out of sight, and therefore out of mind. And it is out of sight because this lost and dying World admires only what is carnal and temporal. This lost World celebrates glitz and glamour, physical strength and beauty, political power and control, and of course, sensationalism and abject hedonism. This World's opinion of the true faith and genuine, new-birth Christianity, is that it is either inconsequential, something to be ignored, or it is intolerant radicalism perpetrated by a very small minority of deranged and dangerous religious zealots that need to be eliminated.

Furthermore, God's Kingdom is unrecognized by the World because the World and its evil practices always seem to triumph, to come out on top, to succeed, and even flourish! Asaph was a godly Levite, a music director, and a leader in the service of God in the Tabernacle. In Psalm 73 he complained about the seeming successes and victories of evil, godless people. He wrote, *Truly God is good to Israel, even to such as are of a clean heart. 2 But as for me, my feet were almost gone; my steps had well nigh slipped. 3 For I was envious at the foolish, when I saw the prosperity of the wicked (Psalm 73:1-3).* The apparent successes of the wicked caused him to become discouraged and he started to doubt his own faith. But every generation of Christians has been faced with this seeming dilemma. The wicked always **seem** to be on top, in control, and victorious. This would have been especially grievous during the centuries of Roman persecution, and later in the Middle Ages of persecution by the Harlot Church! Even today in our own country we see evil men and women seemingly getting away with heinous crimes, we see immorality becoming the accepted norm, and eventually we will again see the persecution of those who take stands for Truth.

But then Asaph went into the sanctuary of God, and the Holy Spirit showed Asaph the end of the wicked. Regarding the wicked, he wrote, *Surely thou didst set them in slippery places: thou castedst them down into destruction. 19 How are they brought into desolation, as in a moment! they are utterly consumed with terrors. 20 As a dream when one awaketh; so, O Lord, when thou awakest, thou shalt despise their image (Psalm 73:18-20).*

Yes, what this lost World sees and admires are the out-workings of sin. All the while, the righteous and holy growth of God's Kingdom is mostly hidden, out of sight, and unnoticed. And as this world population grows exponentially, it seems that God's Kingdom is being left in the proverbial dust. But this is not the case. God's kingdom is growing silently, progressively, out of sight, in the hearts of repentant and believing men and women.

#### **Teaching 4 — Finally, Jesus gave these two parables of influence to encourage believers!**

Jesus' twelve disciples surely understood that in and through their own power, they were incapable of growing and furthering God's Kingdom. And they were correct! Jesus makes this fact undeniably clear in John 15:5, *I am the vine, ye are the branches: He that abideth in me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit: for without me ye can do nothing.* Note that Jesus didn't say that in and through our own power we could accomplish some things or a few things! He said we could accomplish absolutely NOTHING of spiritual significance and value unless His Spirit was leading and empowering. The Holy Spirit must do the work. Born-again Christians are the conduits of His work.

But these two parables of influence—The Mustard Seed and the Leaven—assuredly taught that "our little is much when God is in it!" God has chosen to use us, born-again believers, to grow His Kingdom through the institution of the Local New Testament Church and its Great Commission. Jesus promised His local churches the administration, empowerment, and guidance of the Comforter, His OWN SPIRIT (see John 14:16-20). Consequently, as Paul triumphantly proclaimed, "We can do all things through Christ who strengthens and empowers us!" (see Philippians 4:13).

Like a tiny mustard seed and like just a small pinch of leavening, God's Kingdom started small and inconsequential. But it will, at the end of days, triumph gloriously! It will fill and govern this entire globe. In Revelation 11:15 we read that when the seventh angel blows his trumpet, great, heavenly voices will cry out, *...The kingdoms of this world are become the kingdoms of our Lord, and of his Christ; and he shall reign for ever and ever.*

God bless and consider!