

LV. Matthew in Biblical Perspective  
The Kingdom of God and the Word of God  
“The Parable of the Leaven—The Kingdom in the World, Part 2”  
Matthew 13:33  
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July 5, 2015 – Morning Sermon

This is our study of the fourth parable of the seven Kingdom parables. I will start by reading the parable of the mustard seed which I call part 1 and we will study the parable of the leaven which is what I call part 2. These two parables go together and so look how they are read together as we read Matthew 13:31-33 which says [31] *He put another parable before them, saying, “The kingdom of heaven is like a grain of mustard seed that a man took and sowed in his field. [32] It is the smallest of all seeds, but when it has grown it is larger than all the garden plants and becomes a tree, so that the birds of the air come and make nests in its branches.”*

[33] *He told them another parable. “The kingdom of heaven is like leaven that a woman took and hid in three measures of flour, till it was all leavened.”*

The grass withers, the flower fades, God’s Word abides forever and by His grace and mercy may this His Word be preached for you.

I know you are a very perceptive people. I know this because if I make a mistake on Sunday which I usually do I usually get an email letting me know about the mistake. For instance, I quoted Ezekiel and kept saying Exodus and some of you let me know that. I also know some of you have been reading these seven parables. The Disciples took note of these parables from Jesus. Now Jesus is fulfilling the prophecy that the Messiah would teach in parables. He is exposing the conditions of the hearts of the people through the teaching of parables. He is accelerating the conditions of their hearts but seven of those thirty two parables that Jesus teaches are put together in a sermon on what the Kingdom of God is like.

A parable is an extended simile. It is not a collection of stories for that is an allegory. It starts out ‘the Kingdom of heaven is *like...*’ and therefore it has one point. The point will have multiple implications. There are seven lessons that Jesus is giving us about the Kingdom of God with these parables. This glorious Kingdom is now but not yet in its fullness. It’s spiritual and impacting everything around it. It goes from nation to nation and is international in nature. This Kingdom is moving steadily to its consummation.

What is this Kingdom of God like, this Kingdom that is in your heart, that is in the nations, that is spreading throughout all the world? Jesus says here are seven pictures for you. These seven parables seem to be given in three sets of twos with one as a summation at the end. There is the parable of the sower of the soils, the parable of the sower of the tares, the parable of the mustard seed, the parable of the leaven, the parable of the hidden treasure, then the parable of the costly pearl, and then there is the Gospel dragnet parable at the end. These parables are twins but they are not identical twins. This is kind of picking up on the Hebrew method of writing called parallelisms.

An example of parallelism in Proverbs would be a verse that says “Do not speak to a fool.” Then the next verse would say “Speak to a fool lest he be wise in his own estimation.” So then someone might think, ‘do I speak to a fool or not speak to a fool?’

He says that you do speak to them but you don't speak to them on their agenda but you speak to them on God's agenda. That is what is called a synthetic parallelism, two statements that parallel each other but there is something a little distinct in which they are building a composition picture. That's what is happening in these three sets of parables.

The first couple of parables are sowing parables. They are a set of fraternal twins. They are related but there is a little bit of a distinction about them. These first two parables tell us how the Kingdom comes to the world. Jesus is the Sower and He sows the seed, the Gospel of the Kingdom into the hearts of men but unless Jesus changes the hearts the fate of the seed is determined by the condition of the soil/heart. The fate of the Word is determined by the condition of the heart. A hard heart, rocky heart and thorny heart produce no fruit. So the Holy Spirit has to change the heart so that when the seed falls you get a root, a shoot and some fruit – some thirty, some sixty, some a hundred fold. That is how the Kingdom comes into the world. It comes not with bands, parades and armies but with the seed cast everywhere with the Holy Spirit creating good soil in the hearts of men and women to receive it.

How do you get into the Kingdom? It is through the seed and the heart changed. How do you know who is in the Kingdom? They bear fruit. John 15:8 says [8] *By this my Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit and so prove to be my disciples.* Wait just a minute because there is not just one Sower out there for there is another one out there and that is Satan.

Satan is sowing false seed. When Jesus sows the seed wheat will come up bearing fruit but when Satan sows seed it is called tares or another term is a bearded darnel. The bearded darnel looks like wheat and even looks like it has fruit but it's really a fungus which is poisonous. So Satan not only tries to intimidate and infiltrate God's Kingdom but he also imitates God's Kingdom and sows it as churchianity that uses Christian vocabulary but denies the essential message and truths of Christianity. It actually leads people to death instead of life as they sincerely believe the lie masqueraded in religion.

So we have two sowers here and that evil empire strikes back. With that evil empire striking back Jesus says to us not to tear it out. That is not our job because Jesus is going to be making tares into wheat. You respond to Satan's scheme of imitation by an unswerving commitment to Gospel propagation and anticipation so that when Jesus comes with His angels He will separate the wheat and the tares. The tares will be cast away into hell and the wheat will be gathered into the new heavens and the new earth with Him.

Now He moves to another set of two parables. That is where we are right now – the mustard seed and the leaven. The next set we'll look at from these Kingdom parables will be the hidden treasure and the costly pearl and notice how they're related. There is something so valuable that someone will give joyfully everything they have to own it. The mustard seed continues Jesus' agrarian stories where it grows up with all the other plants and proverbially is the smallest of all the seeds with the final analysis being that it is larger than all the other plants.

What is Jesus teaching us? He is teaching us that the Kingdom of God begins unimpressively, grows relentlessly, blesses significantly, expands quietly and triumphs ultimately. Unimpressively there is the King dying on a cross, in a borrowed tomb. The Gospel is going to this city and to that city, to this field and to that field. It grows

relentlessly to Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria and the utter most parts of the world. See this mustard see so insignificant yet it grows up and provides shade, nourishment and protection for all of the other plants in the garden, whether they want it or not its presence is blessing them. Birds represent the nations also and nations that will bow to its truth can benefit from its presence in their midst. It expands quietly but triumphs ultimately as the kingdoms of this world will all pass away but the Kingdom of God is forever. Hallelujah, King of Kings, Lord of Lords and He shall reign forever.

Now Jesus goes to a fourth parable. My guess is that as Jesus was growing up in Nazareth that Jesus and His brothers could have been helping with a building project that was taking place about 4 miles away in Sepphoris. Josephus refers to this. Jesus' father wasn't a farmer but He must have walked through all these fields and watched what they did for that 30 years that He is growing in wisdom, stature and favor with God and man until He begins His ministry. He also has quite a notable mother as well. She has a bunch of boys who have appetites and there is one staple in the Middle East in general and in the Israel in particular. That is bread. They have all kinds of bread. So Jesus goes from an agrarian parable to a domestic parable.

He speaks of this woman who takes leaven and hides it in three measures until all of it is leavened. What is Jesus telling us? In that one verse there are five elements I want to point out and then we'll look at the interpretation of the leaven. The first thing is the element that is singled out and that is the leaven or yeast. Leaven in something that would be placed in the dough.

Secondly, is the actor in this short narrative. The actor is a woman. The third element is a twofold action where the woman takes and hides the leaven in the dough. The Kingdom of God is like leaven in the hands of a woman. It's not just like leaven in the hands of a woman but it's like leaven in the hands of a woman who takes it and hides it. Fourthly, it is intentionally hidden in three measures of flour (dough). Not sure why Jesus would use three measures but I found out that three measures is 39 liters or 50 pounds worth of bread which would feed about 100 people or a large dinner party or about a week's worth for a family. This is very likely something Jesus has seen His mother Mary do on more than on occasion.

Do you remember three measures of dough anywhere else in the Bible? Jesus and two angels came to visit Abraham and Abraham offered them a meal. Abraham tells Sarah to fix a royal meal with three ephahs or pecks or measures of dough. In the book of Exodus three measures of dough are mentioned about seven times in the economy of how God is dealing with His people to set them free. This would have been very familiar in the minds of His listeners.

The fifth element is you patiently wait as you keep putting it in until all the dough is leavened. So now we want to interpret this parable about the Kingdom of heaven. Jesus interpreted the first two for us and the mustard seed I interpreted with the help of the Holy Spirit going by the fact that each parable has one lesson and multiple implications. Now we're in a twin parable with the mustard seed. The leaven has the same concept has the mustard seed but it's not an identical parable. It's a fraternal twin where it says the same thing but there is something just a little bit different about it.

To get to this I want to unfold it for you. The dough is the same thing as the garden, it's the world. The leaven is the life changing power of the Gospel of the Kingdom, the rule and reign of Christ in the hearts of men and women whereby you are

saved and can enter the Kingdom of God. Whereby you are directed as to how to live in the Kingdom of God and directed in how to expand the Kingdom of God. The leaven is that irrepressible power of the Word of the Kingdom and the saving grace of the King. I believe the woman is the church of Christ, you, that this message of the Kingdom has been entrusted to. What are we to do with it? We are to take it and everywhere we go we are to speak to the heart the message of this Kingdom. We are to take it and hide it; put it inside.

The Gospel of the Kingdom is not a religious code to whitewash nations and people. It's not a regiment whereby I check the boxes of religion. It is something that goes to the heart of a man, of a woman, a boy, a girl, a family, a city, a nation and you keep taking it, hiding it and putting it to the heart until the whole lump is leavened. Take hold of my life, all of it, my family, all of it, my city, all of it, this nation, all of it. This world is my Father's world and we want the Kingdom to go to all the nations of the world until it is all leavened. So Jesus has very simply taught us this through this parable.

I want to give you a takeaway and build on it. In a sense I can't do a different takeaway than what I gave in the last study on the mustard seed because I think it is obvious that the two parables (mustard seed and leaven) are giving the same message but I can add to it. The takeaway is since the Kingdom of God begins unimpressively, grows relentlessly, blesses significantly, expands quietly and triumphs ultimately... we will make disciples of all the nations prayerfully – intentionally – persistently – expectantly. So taste the Kingdom of God and see that it is good. It brings refreshment, nourishment and blesses significantly.

There is that little bit of leaven that is permeating, penetrating and working through all of that dough until it triumphs ultimately. See this bread fully rising tasty and good now not only penetrated but permeated everything. The mustard seed has the same lesson as the leaven. Just like the two parables of the sowers there is something that is united but there is something that is distinctly different. One is how the Kingdom comes to the world and how the evil empire strikes back in imitation.

These two parables (the mustard seed and the leaven) are telling us not how the Kingdom of God comes to the world but how the Kingdom of God moves throughout the world. The mustard seed is emphasizing the fact that it is dismissed as insignificant but those who dismiss it ultimately can benefit because there is nothing more significant in the garden, throughout the world. The leaven not only affirms what the mustard seed has said, but it gives us another little insight that I think in our day and time are very important. What is it that He is saying?

It is that we will make disciples of all the nations prayerfully – intentionally – persistently – expectantly. So if we're going to go to all the nations then we have to go to this nation (USA). We are going to do the work of the Kingdom. How do you expand the Kingdom? You do this by making disciples. How do you make disciples? You do this by personal evangelism. You make disciples in small groups where you're putting a life on a life. You make disciples by planting churches which is the outpost of the Kingdom of God in every kingdom of this world which is the colony of the Kingdom of God in every kingdom of this world which is the equipping center of the Kingdom of God in every kingdom of this world. In other words, the church is the center of God's universe and God puts her there to evangelize personally, to make disciples, putting life on a life.

We are to be consistently, persistently, and prayerfully engaged in gathered worship. We are engaged in family worship, personal worship and Gospel deeds of love, mercy and justice. We are engaged in meditating and memorizing the Scripture. In other words, what we're doing is what God called us to do and we do it even though the world says 'what is that? Where is your band, your brochure and your banners?' We go to our knees in prayer to bathe our intentional ministries utterly dependent upon God's grace and we're not innovative. We just do what He tells us to do. We bear witness of Christ personally with word and deed. We disciple others and make sure we're being disciplined. We evangelize our children, disciple our children, pray with our children and worship with our children. We do not despise the day of small things as is said in Zechariah. We keep doing the basics every single day, what God has called us to do.

We are prayerfully intentional, prayerfully persistent, and prayerfully expectant because we know how this will turn out. Lives will change. Families will change. Neighborhoods will change. Cities will change. Nations will change. Everything is going to change into a new heavens and a new earth and our King will reign forever. That's assured at the cross and the empty tomb. So we do this not simply wishfully but we do this expectantly.

We know this Kingdom is like leaven and a mustard seed. That mustard seed is going to dominate the garden. That leaven is going to penetrate, permeate and transform that bread from something flat that is tasteless to something that is glorious and nutritious. That's what our God is doing and yes there is an evil empire that is striking back but that is what our God is doing through the woman, the bride of Christ, you, His people.

I need to get very focused on this. The implantation of the Kingdom of God is initially insignificant and unimportant. I'm sure when those first missionaries showed up among those barbarian tribes of Europe, Africa and Asia they thought 'who is that landing on our shore? Why are they spending all that time translating a Bible into our language?' You may think it's very insignificant to teach a child catechism but the Kingdom of God begins in what is seemingly insignificant. It is then implemented in lives, in cities, in nations and its progress while gradual and hidden is irrepressible.

Jesus got a hold of my life at age 20 and He hasn't stopped messing with me since. I was once a cold, emotionless person and now I can't get through a hymn without blubbering long enough to get up here and preach. I'm an emotional wreck that God says I'm just getting you emotionally right. He has changed my thinking, my doing, my emotions and everything patiently, persistently and things have happened in my life that was seemingly insignificant that have proven much fruit. The same thing is true about you if you're a believer.

I am sure that when George Whitfield went out to those mine fields outside of Birmingham, England nobody knew there would be a great awakening that would spread all the way to North America, as they were throwing rocks, vegetables and everything else at him in that field. When Samuel Davies in this country would go from hamlet to hamlet to set up a pulpit to preach and then start small groups in that city I'm sure nobody had any idea what that would do as it propelled the great awakening throughout this country. When Jonathan Edwards went out to be a missionary to an abandoned tribe of Indians nobody knew that the greatest philosophical mind was going to penetrate and permeate our nation as he ministered to that tribe. I'm sure you wonder as you teach your

children the shorter catechism and sit down for family worship what impact this will have in the bigger picture?

It begins insignificantly, grows gradually and hidden. Many times you have no idea what God is doing in your heart or in the heart of your children or what God is doing in the heart of a city. We are supposed to expect His triumph and stay on mission, on message and in ministry. My dear friend Al Moler made a statement in this last Supreme Court ruling that I thought was utterly profound. With this ruling (legalizing same sex marriages across the country) nothing has changed yet everything has changed.

As you minister in this nation you have to realize something. I did a series on the book of Nahum about what God does with a nation He has blessed when they turn from Him. It will be one of two things – judgment or He does something again, revival. That is where we are. In a sense as the church of Jesus Christ you're in this nation and you learn how exiles lived in the Old Testament. How did God's covenant people live in Egypt? How did they live in Babylon? How did they live in Rome? Please understand that elections and political decisions are reflections of the culture. They accelerate the culture but they are a reflection of the culture. So please do not think that Christianity is the majority report in this nation. This is not simply if we could have just one change in this next election. No, there is something wrong with a heart and soul of a nation who once declared independence based upon dependence upon God and now with this recent ruling declared independence of God and even mocking God's ordinance of marriage, sexuality and life.

So how do you minister? I can't depend on the fact that when my child walks into a school there are going to be allies in what I want to happen in my child's life. I can't depend on a culture that is going to restrain itself on what it puts on a television or what it puts on a movie screen. So how do we live when we say we will not isolate and we will not accommodate? Everything has changed but then again nothing has changed. In the one sense we're in a nation like that in the book of Nahum where God would do something special for Nineveh and then they turned from Him.

We have two models. We're in a nation that has been blessed of God and has conscientiously apostatized, said 'no' but we're also exiles. We live as citizens in places yet we're not citizens. We're citizens in the Kingdom of God. So how is it and what do we do? In that sense nothing has changed. So not only do we plant churches but we'll revitalize them, not only have we taken the Gospel to neighborhoods but we're taking the Gospel back to neighborhoods. In the meantime, it's not business as usual because we haven't been doing business right. So we refuse to bring worship down to personal entertainment. We refuse to bring preaching down to five point talk me ups.

How and what does God tell us to do to extend the Kingdom? How do we get back to getting the people to say 'these people have turned the world upside down' for they didn't isolate or accommodate but they penetrated and permeated, so what will we do with the Gospel? We will do church planting, church revitalization, evangelism, discipleship and we'll speak to the hearts of our children, our families, our neighborhoods, our cities and our nation. We'll take it and hide it in those hearts! It won't be business as usual but it will be God's business done extraordinarily because we are ordinary but He is un-surpassing and His Kingdom cannot be stopped. It will penetrate, permeate and change everything where it goes from the inside out – hearts changed.

That lump of dough will never be the same. When you plant that Kingdom message in your life and family, you will never be the same and neither will your family. Our city and nation will never be the same and from our nation to all the nations that they would not be the same. O God we are not in a pagan nation that needs the Kingdom. We're in a nation that was taken from paganism because of Your Kingdom that now has said 'we want to go back to the anarchy of paganism.' So send us again to the hearts of men and women and a nation with the Gospel prayerfully, persistently, intentionally, and expectantly. Our God wins! Let's pray.

Prayer:

Father, thank You for the moments we could be together in Your Word. I thank You so much that You and Your kind providence have led us to such a text. If you are reading this and you know Jesus Christ, the leaven of the Gospel went to your heart and God worked in your heart to give you a new heart with eyes to see and ears to hear, would you just look to Him of what He is yet going to do from the inside out in you and then from you into the world? As you do it, think of us as a church that it would go to the heart of us inside out. If you are reading this and your heart has not been turned to the Lord but you have been seeking where eyes are being opened and ears are being fastened to your heart, our Kingdom is a King who died on the cross for you who lives in your heart by His Word and His Spirit, receive Him in your heart as He gives you a new heart and He will persistently and patiently grow you and transform you. He will penetrate and permeate your life. Come to Him and say "Jesus I surrender. I put my trust in You. I am into Your Kingdom so put Your into me." Father, thank You for Your Word. Thank You for the novel but clear and powerful way our Savior communicates simply the message of the Gospel of the Kingdom and the Kingdom in this world and its glorious triumph profoundly for I pray in Jesus' Name, Amen.