

THE PARABLE OF THE LEAVEN

SERIES: PARABLES | WEEK 4 | 6.27.2021

Good morning. [CONGREGATION RESPONDS] Yes. Those of you online, good morning. You're on vacation watching us, good, thanks for joining us.

Matthew Chapter 13, we've been studying parables from Matthew 13, and in Matthew Chapter 13 Jesus tells eight parables, eight stories, to tell us what the Kingdom of Heaven is like. Let me read the parable we're gonna cover today. It's one parable, it's one verse, Matthew 13, verse 33, listen to these words Jesus said:

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."

– MATTHEW 13:33 (ESV)

So the verse starts out He told them another parable, one of the eight in this chapter, a parable, a very simple story that Jesus tells—very important that we interpret it well. There's one main point in a parable. We shouldn't try to change the story to try to maybe make it clear because when Jesus tells these stories He's telling them to a 1st Century audience, He's using illustrations, He's using symbols to say *this is like this* using something they're very familiar with. You can't miss it. It makes sense. We should speculate on the meaning of this parable as little as possible; jump to that one thing, and when we find out what that one thing is – BOOM! – apply it to our life.

So He says here, "**The kingdom of heaven is like leaven**" – let's talk about the Kingdom of Heaven for a moment. What He's going to make clear to us in these parables is that we are presently in the Kingdom of God, in the Kingdom of Heaven. Yes, there is a future time where His permanent Kingdom will be set up, where He will reign and rule here on earth, but right now He says there's a kingdom that's taking place here on this earth. There is a king in a kingdom, one who oversees everything, who reigns, who's in charge, who is sovereign over that entire kingdom. He is the King, we are the people within that Kingdom. Those of us, just what we just talked about, who have given our lives to Jesus Christ, who have trusted that shed blood on the cross at Calvary saves us from our sins. And we've repented of those sins and turned towards Jesus and say, "I believe in You and what You did for me," and at that moment we enter into His Kingdom. And Jesus is trying to say here let's explain what that Kingdom is, what it's like, so that we can understand it a little bit more.

That Kingdom we're going to learn this morning is expanding, it's growing, it's moving forward, even though it doesn't look like it to us. Even though at times it feels like, "Is it really moving forward?" As long as I've been alive, as long as I've been in ministry, all I've heard is, "Boy, there aren't as many people attending church as there used to be. There aren't as many people who are professing to be Christians as there used to be." That has been the case forever I'm told, and it's been the case my entire ministry. Actually, the Kingdom of God is moving ahead, it is moving forward. Those of us who are in it are part of it, and Jesus wants to explain this Kingdom of Heaven to us.

By the way, the disciples pulled Jesus aside in the midst of this teaching and said, "Can you tell us a little bit about these parables?" And in Matthew Chapter 13, verse 10, is exactly where they did this. In verse 11 it says Jesus answers them:

¹⁰ And he answered them, "To you it has been given to know the secrets of the kingdom of heaven . . . "

– MATTHEW 13:10 (ESV)

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Aaah, He says there's going to be a bunch – and He goes on to explain this – I'm going to give you the high level overview of it. He says there's a bunch of people that hear these stories, *simple* stories, today's story is going to be about bread, simple stories to explain the Kingdom of Heaven and they don't get it, just goes over their head because their eyes have been closed. They've chosen not to believe. They've chosen not to listen. They've chosen to turn it down. But He says to those of us who have said, "Yes, I want to believe in You, God. I get this. I want to follow You," He says when I tell you these stories you're going to understand them. And He says in so doing we learn the secrets of the Kingdom of Heaven.

Whenever you hear a secret our ears perk up and we listen, we're going to hear the secrets of the Kingdom of Heaven. Later on Jesus would say this in verse 17, He says:

17 For truly, I say to you, many prophets and righteous people longed to see what you see, and did not see it, and to hear what you hear, and did not hear it.

– MATTHEW 13:17 (ESV)

And there was a time when this wasn't revealed. He said now these secrets are revealed and this is here for us to know, to understand what's going on, that you as believers are part of the Kingdom of God. What all this has a tendency to tell us is that this message will be understood, will be important as something coming from Jesus to those of you who have already entered into a relationship with Jesus Christ. Thus, you are subject to the King of the Kingdom and He's in the process of changing you and making you new and this will be powerful information that you will hear. Even though it doesn't feel like it's moving ahead, Jesus in this parable says this: **"The kingdom of heaven is like leaven that a woman took and hid in three measures of flour, till it was all leavened."**

When I hear "three measures of flour" – [HE SHRUGS] no clue. Quick little look up and I find out that three measures of flour was approximately 50 to 60 pounds of flour, and so I went down into my basement and I got a bag of flour. You all have bags of flour in your basement ready for moments like this? I do. I have more than one, too. Fifty to 60 pounds of flour would have fed, if you made bread out of it, 150 people loaves of bread, and it would have made about 60 to 70 loaves of bread. Can we all eat a half a loaf of bread? If you put the right jelly on it, toast it just right, put all the goodies on top of it, you can just eat and eat, especially when it's warm right out of the bread machine. Right? Yep. You're all ready to eat it.



He says the Kingdom of Heaven is like leaven. I brought some yeast in here today. In fact, I pulled some out of the opened container and put it in my bag here. I saw David up here in-between services, David Virgo, looking at this leaven. And it's small, it just looks like a little bit of sand in here and, um, He says the Kingdom of Heaven is like leaven. He's going to use this little stuff called leaven that ferments to cause the dough to rise, He's going to use this as an illustration of the Kingdom of Heaven.

And here's what the illustration of this little bit of stuff is that goes into, in this story that Jesus tells, 50 to 60 pounds of flour in this big mixing bowl with a bunch of water, mixed up, and then this [LEAVEN] taken and hidden inside of that. He's going to use this to express to us one simple message—to understand a parable you need to go find out what that one simple message is—and

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the one simple message of leaven in this parable is influence, is permeation. When the woman in this story takes this leaven and takes it and it says she takes it and pushes it into the dough and hides it in the dough, it will begin to have its effect in that big pot of dough. You don't see it immediately. It starts small and it begins to build until all of a sudden that pile of dough in the pot



starts small...

starts getting bigger and bigger and bigger and bigger and it rises. So He says the Kingdom of Heaven is like this leaven, looks really small like nothing's taking place, like what they said is there's less Christians today, and there's less people with a Christian influence, we have a lot less people with a Christian worldview, and a lot less people interested in God and Jesus. He says ah, don't let



gets bigger and bigger

them tell you that. The Kingdom of Heaven is just like this woman, she just takes and sticks this leaven into this dough, you don't see anything, and all of a sudden it just starts to get bigger and bigger and move forward. So leaven represents influence.

I've had a couple questions already here today, and earlier this week as we've been having a conversation about this, was, "Wait a minute, I thought in the Bible when you heard the word *leaven* it was referring to evil." Good catch. Good question. There's a verse that Jesus talks about this, He says, "beware of the leaven of the Pharisees."¹ Remember, the Pharisees were these religious leaders that were not in relationship with God, they were in relation to rules. And He says beware of the leaven of the Pharisees for its hypocrisy, and you see that sin in their lives.

And He says the reason why He says beware of the leaven – it's a small little thing that has influence in their life, and it starts to have influence in other people's lives. Is that not exactly what evil does? You get around it and you let a little bit in and you don't see anything, you think, *Oh, I guess this is all right*. And all of a sudden and [HE GIVES A SOUND EFFECT/GESTURE OF SOMETHING EXPANDING] it just sort of takes over your life. Happens in churches, it happens in businesses, happens in homes, where you just allow a little bit of it, this leaven in, and it influences. That's the evil end of things.

So people will say if that's how it's referenced in Scripture, wouldn't *this* be speaking of evil? Well, it says very clearly here the Kingdom of Heaven is—Jesus is saying *like* leaven. He wouldn't say the Kingdom of Heaven is like sin. No. He's using this idea of leaven here to let us know that this leaven and the Kingdom of Heaven is this *influence*. Doesn't look like much, it starts out really small—Jesus comes into your life, Spirit of God comes into your life—it doesn't look like much, nothing seems to be happening, and then all of a sudden it starts moving forward.

A great example of this was Jesus' disciples. They're with Him, even as Jesus teaches them, leads them, works with them, you don't look at Him and say, "How are you going to build a movement that's going to last out of these guys?" You've read the stories, you've heard the stories. And yet as Jesus goes to the cross, He dies, He comes out of the grave alive, He has His final words with them. He says here's my assignment for you, I want you to go, I want you to make disciples, I want you to baptize them, I want you to teach those disciples to obey everything. And He said I'm going to be with you. In fact, I'm going to leave but when I leave, you just wait, wait quietly, you can't do anything without this, I'm going to send the Holy Spirit into your life to empower you to

¹ "beware of the leaven of the Pharisees" – see Matthew 16:6, 11-12, Mark 8:15, and Luke 12:1

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do my work. And so they wait on that Holy Spirit and Jesus leaves, and God's Holy Spirit comes upon these followers of Jesus and all of a sudden they are able to do what He has called them to do and His work begins to spread.

You picture this lump of dough, you picture this leaven being placed in it and all of a sudden just slowly but surely it goes out from there and it begins to take more and more effect. Leaven in a life changes that very life, changes the very nature of that life. That dough without the leaven – nothing happens, it just lays there flat, but you put that leaven in and it begins to grow and it begins to change. When God's Spirit comes into our life, when He begins to change us He takes us from what we once were and He moves us to who He wants us to be in the future. And when we truly trust Him it changes us. You just wait a little bit, like putting leaven into the dough, you wait a little bit and you begin to see words and actions and motives – they change. And you no longer are who you once were and all of a sudden you begin to make a difference and change around you. Starts small but it goes big eventually. Listen to Acts Chapter 6, verse 7:

⁷ Then the word of God spread, and the number of the disciples multiplied . . .

– ACTS 6:7a (NKJV)

Luke Chapter 17, verse 20, says this:

²⁰ Being asked by the Pharisees when the kingdom of God would come, he answered them, "The kingdom of God is not coming in ways that can be observed,"

— There was this mindset that when Jesus sets up His Kingdom we're all of a sudden going to see these physical markers of such and all of a sudden we take over and we rule and something changes. He says no, actually you're not going to be able to say:

²¹ "nor will they say, 'Look, here it is!' or 'There!' for behold, the kingdom of God is in the midst of you."

– LUKE 17:20-21 (ESV)

The Word of God, prayer, the Spirit of God moving to change a heart and to change a life. Permeation, um, influence among us.

I – I tend to like things big. I tend to like things loud. I like the things bright. I like motions large. I like when you can build energy in a room—but that's not the Spirit of God. That's not the Kingdom of God moving forward. This isn't something that we can gin up. This isn't something that we can produce, that somehow if we just do enough of it that all of a sudden God's Kingdom begins happening around us that so much so that all of a sudden you all just start standing to your feet and clapping and going, "Yes!" No. He says actually, it's just like this leaven; she takes it and she hides it in the dough. Dough couldn't have made that happen. It took her putting it in there and once it's placed in there you don't all of a sudden see all sorts of noise. You don't even see an outside influence just pounding at it or yelling at it or trying to make something happen and standing back and watching. No. Instead, you place that in there and it begins to expand and move forward. The Kingdom of God, the Kingdom of Heaven is in motion. If you're a child of God you're part of it, awesome things are happening, great things are happening.

For the original hearers of this, the Jews in the 1st Century, this bread thing was a staple of their diet. They lived on this. This was their diet. They understood a loaf of bread. They understood

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this leaven being placed into the bread. Interestingly enough we understand it today, even so many years later, which is what's so awesome about Jesus' illustration.

Back in the 1st Century they would have this dough that was a starter, so they may not have had baking soda or the yeast like I'm holding up where I have a packet of dried stuff to dump in, but rather they would have and oftentimes used to leaven their existing dough, they would actually take dough from yesterday that was leavened. It would be what you and I would call in a sourdough type of situation as a starter, and that starter had been used in the family. They just take a lump of yesterday's dough and save it, and then today put that into the dough. And that starter existed all the way back in their family for generations before.

I was given some starter not too long ago and the person told me, "This has been in our family for many, many, many generations into several different countries." I was like, "Oh, wow. I feel like I'm holding something of insane value." She goes, "Oh, yeah. Ours has a very specific flavor that you won't ever taste anywhere else." You go that is crazy, that's awesome. And that was the case in that time. But a mother at the wedding of her daughter would take a piece of a lump of this bread starter and she would give it to her daughter, and when she gave it to her daughter as a wedding gift that was the most wonderful thing that daughter could receive. Because in taking that she was taking a piece of their family and who they were and she was including all of that to become part of the family that she was now putting together as she married her husband. And she knew that even the day would come that she would pass that down to the next generation.

As I was thinking about this influence of the Kingdom and the passing on of what the Scripture talks about this faith that has been given to us, that has been passed along to us, and how it most naturally comes and passes on to each one of us. And I wondered, could that be through our family that that faith is most easily passed? It's as if that starter being passed to that daughter where it was a special gift to take something that had been given from generations ago.

I read just this week a Barna study that was done in 2019 and in the study what he was trying to prove and he gave a bunch of statistics and numbers, they were all in like the 60-70% range, but what he was saying is that he found it surprising that teenagers, at least in 2019, went to their families for spiritual input. And he listed out all these things and he was speaking specifically of mothers, that teenagers went to their mothers for prayer, for spiritual guidance, for trying to figure out their faith.

Again, as you saw 60-70% of teens, of all teens being surveyed, saying I'm going to my family to try to figure out this spiritual thing, I saw this demonstrated at even a higher level. My wife and I were at a social gathering just, I don't know, a week or two ago. We were all walking around people we didn't know and these weren't Christian people, weren't church people, and so you're talking, shaking hands, saying, "Hi," and you're trying to get to know the people. And there was this couple, they were probably about our age, and they had with them a daughter who I think she was a junior or senior in college, seemed very nice, seemed friendly, was talking back and forth. And so we were doing those things that you normally do at a party, an activity, a social event—so tell me about yourself... how long you've been married... oh, yeah... how many kids do you have... and, um, and then they get to the thing is looking at me and say, "What do you do for a living?" "I'm a pastor." "Oh."

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And it was one of those things, eye-raised moments, like, "I don't know if it's wrong to ask you this question, but what would make a person ever want to become a pastor?" I said, "Well, you know, it's funny that you'd ask that." And I use this kind of moment because it happens to me quite often, it's sort of this opening and I, but it's the truth, I just said, "The reason I became a pastor is because I know that everyone's searching for this thing that's missing inside of them that can be found in a relationship with Jesus that'll get them to God. And I know that each person just has this pile of questions they're trying to figure out, that when they get to know Jesus those questions are answered, and I just love bringing that to people on a weekly basis."

And like the lady stops and she goes, "That is – I'm just taken back." And I said, "Oh, I don't know why you're taken back by that." She says, "My daughter and I last night on the porch were just having this very conversation, because I asked my daughter, like, when you graduate from college and you, like, start doing life on your own, like, are you going to have a faith? Are you going to have a religion, um, what about God?" And she goes, "I guess we haven't modeled this very well, but we just began to talk about that and we didn't really know what to do with that." And the daughter looks at me and she goes, "This is weird that after that conversation last night you're the one we're talking to."

Families, is it possible that through our families our faith and the building up of the Kingdom can have *the* most influence of anywhere else? I realize it's one of the hardest places, but is it possible because we spend the most time together and we know each other the best. That when we're actually living out the life that Christ gave us and we're living out the truths of this, that those there are having a daily conversation on these things? So I did a little looking up.

I guess we have on average two children in our families, that's some sort of a stat, I think it's two point such-and-such, you can figure out what the point such-and-such is, but let's say two. And the stats went on to say that it was at average age of about 25 point such-and-such that we had those children. And the study went on to say that that means that in our lifetime we will have the opportunity, because of the average age which we get to live to, to have influence over three generations. And the study did the math on the two kids, parents, two kids, parents, two kids, and came up and said that we should see about 14 people in those three generations if you just had the two. You know, you might have a lot more and then it would be a whole lot more, it'd be different depending what each generation does, but the study just basically said you're going to see in your family system 14 people. That's 14 people that you can be close with, 14 people that you can have influence over, 14 people that your faith will absolutely by necessity speak into because you're there, there's proximity. That's when there's proximity there's permeation, there's influence.

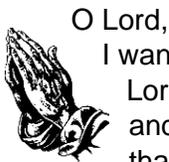
How might the Gospel most move forward in our midst? Could it be through our family? So you're young parents, those children, and you're sharing with them the Gospel making sure they know Jesus as their personal Savior. As their kids grow older you're making sure they're getting their questions answered, making sure they're growing in their faith and knowing their faith, trying to figure that out, wrestle through it. As they get married, helping them and having influence over them that they'll marry someone that knows Jesus so that when they come together as a couple they will follow Jesus as a couple, and then influencing those children that they have. And – you see you see how this passes down? And just the simplicity of what it takes.

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That's why we push here at Calvary all the time, we're taking really good care of the next generation. Our job is to get the Gospel out to the next generation so that each generation that comes the Gospel can be moving forward. Jesus says, "**The kingdom of heaven is like leaven that a woman took and hid in three measures of flour, till it was all leavened.**" The Kingdom of Heaven is moving forward.

I'll leave you with these final words. A lot of people think it's something big and all sorts of rules and all sorts of things that you've got to do. He says it's like leaven. There's a phrase I like to use – "the normal Christian life" – nothing fancy about this stuff that looks like sand. It's like leaven, it's doing the normal things – to know Jesus, to be part of His life that's placed into that dough and as a result the Kingdom of Heaven, that those who follow Jesus are part of, is expanding and growing until – listen – "**it was all leavened.**"



O Lord,
I want right now to thank You for this reminder that we're part of that Kingdom. Lord God, thank You for those that we have influence over, it's incredibly few and yet we have a huge responsibility within that influence. I just thank You that the Kingdom of Heaven is moving forward, in and through each one of us today. And so right now as we turn our worship to You to praise You, we praise You as the King of kings and Lord of lords; the one we worship, the one we follow, the one we love, the one who gave His life so we could have life. It's in His name that we pray. Amen.

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