

**THEME:** THE PARABLES OF JESUS

**TOPIC:** THE PARABLE OF THE LEAVEN

**TEXT:** MATTHEW 13:33; LUKE 13:20-21; 1 CORINTHIANS 5:6-7

## **INTRODUCTION**

1. Our previous study examined "**The Parable of the Mustard Seed**" – **Matthew 13:31-32**
  - a. Where the kingdom is depicted as having remarkable growth, despite humble beginnings
  - b. Perhaps the parable was told to reassure Jesus' disciples...
    - ✓ That their involvement in the kingdom would not be for naught.
    - ✓ 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.
2. Another parable that seems to have the same purpose of reassurance is found in **Matthew 13:33**. Which is known as "**The Parable of The Leaven**".
3. Immediately we can see similarities to "The Parable of the Mustard Seed"
  - ✓ Both are quite brief, with no explanations by Jesus recorded
  - ✓ Both appear to be describing the remarkable spread of the kingdom of heaven
4. But some differences can be noted, which is certainly worthy of careful consideration

## **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 – **Matthew 16:5-12; Luke 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 unrepentant brother – **1 Corinthians 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
  - ✓ A speaker or writer is certainly free to use a figure any way they wish, even differently in different situations.
  - ✓ To read the use of the figure as found elsewhere into this passage is a form of "eisegesis"
    - i. That is, reading something into the passage not actually there.
    - ii. 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!
    - ✓ The "leaven" is to eventually fill the whole loaf!
    - ✓ 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 (the two parables in **Matthew 13:44-46**).

**Q:** Is the use of “leaven” in the passage positive or negative as it concerns the growth of the kingdom?

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, **Matthew 13:19**).
    - ✓ As it is was proclaimed to all creation – **Mark 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 its work with less than noticeable effect
  - b. So the spreading influence of the kingdom is often unnoticeable, but real nonetheless!

## **CONCLUSION**

With an understanding of these two parables ("**The Mustard Seed**" & "**The Leaven**"), we can take heart in knowing that the work of Christ in regards to His Kingdom will not be for naught or in vain.

As we review this lesson, let me ask "**What kind of leaven are you?**"

- a. This parable has been describing "leaven" as a positive force
- b. But remember, "Leaven" is also used to illustrate that which is harmful.
  - ✓ The "leaven of the Pharisees, which is hypocrisy" – **Luke 12:1**
  - ✓ That which is a corrupting force, and needs to be purged – **1 Corinthians 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?