

The Parable of the Leaven

Matthew 13:33 (New American Standard Bible)

He spoke another parable to them: "The kingdom of heaven is like leaven, which a woman took and hid in three sata of flour until it was all leavened."

(kc: three sata: dry measure equivalent to 1 bushel. "just the average amount which would be needed for a baking for a fairly large family, like the family at Nazareth." (William Barclay, *The Daily Study Bible, The Gospel of Matthew, Volume 2, The Westminster Press, Philadelphia, 1958, p. 88*). For instance, Jesus' own family had four younger brothers, at least two younger sisters, mother (father—Joseph might have been diseased) and Jesus Himself. At least 8-9 people (Matthew 13:55).

Introduction

Let me begin my sermon with some **catch phrases of cartoon superheroes.**

Who said, "I can do this all day!"?---Captain America

"Truth, justice...."?--- Superman

"With Great Power Comes Great Responsibility."? — Spider-Man.

Another movie quote:

Who said, "You shall not pass!"? Gandalf in the Lord of the Rings

How about some **famous quotes of our presidents?**

Who said, "Four score and seven years ago..." ---opening of Abraham Lincoln's Gettysburg Address.

"Speak softly, and carry a big stick"---Theodore Roosevelt.

" The buck stops here," a paperweight on the desk of Harry Truman.

Let's Make America Great Again! ---Reagan, Clinton, and Trump.

(https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_United_States_political_catchphrases)

Did you know that our Lord Jesus Christ also had a slogan for His ministry on earth? His catch phrase was: "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand" (Matthew 4:17). The slogan gives us an idea why Jesus came to earth in the first place. To proclaim and fulfill God's Kingdom on earth. To bring God's people back to their Father through repentance and forgiveness. He started it 2,000 years ago, it's still going on, and it will fully consummate at His Second Coming!

Content

Jesus did three things on earth: teaching, *preaching*, and *healing*. He went through all the cities and villages, **teaching** in their synagogues and **proclaiming** the gospel of the kingdom, and **healing** every disease and every sickness (Matthew 9:35).

As far as His teaching method was concerned, He once said, “*How shall we picture the kingdom of God, or **by what parable shall we present it?***” (Mark 4:30). He never used big theological jargons that were over folk’s head. Instead, He utilized a simple image or story so that people would remember better and longer. So, He taught his lessons on God’s Kingdom in parables. By the way, what is a parable? A parable is a story where God’s truth is hidden. You must dig out God’s mysteries hidden in the parable.

Now, because Jesus told the kingdom mysteries in parables, the crowds often didn’t get it, neither did Jesus’ own disciples. So, when they were alone with Jesus, they asked Him to explain saying,¹⁰ “*Why do You speak to them in parables?*”
“*And Jesus answered them, “To you it has been granted to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it has not been granted.”* (Matthew 13:10-11). Then He went on explaining the parables in a plain language.

Thank God that all those kingdom parables are now recorded in the Bible. We are truly blessed to have the Bible in plain English. The Bible lists not only all the parables, but also Jesus’ explanations of what those parables mean. All we have to do is to get into God’s Word. The sad part is that most of us remain ignorant of God’s Kingdom mysteries, because few get into the Word of God. Ask yourself. When was the last time you opened God’s Word and heeded to God’s message? When was the last time you said to yourself, *Aha! This is what Jesus meant on God’s Kingdom!?*

Don’t expect God to spoon feed you with His Word. *I have given everything you need to know in My Book*, God says. *Do your work*. Folks, when it comes down to God’s Word, you have to desire and long for God’s Word. No one can/will do it for you. If you don’t desire the living Word of God, you won’t get into God’s Word. If you don’t get into God’s Word, you won’t get any spiritual insight or benefit from it. Simple as that.

Do you want a blessed life before God? Let me tell you how. Spend time in God’s Word, reading, hearing, and meditating on it. And you will be able to do the will of your Heavenly Father and bear fruits in your daily lives. Let me say it again. It doesn’t matter how many copies of the Bible you have at home. It only counts when you open it, read it, and do what you have learned from God’s Word. Do not bury God’s Word in the ground in your heart.

As you know, this year's theme for our congregation is "Thy Kingdom Come." As pastor, every day I remember you and your family in my prayers. This is what I pray for you: that God's Kingdom come and be realized in your hearts, in your families, and in our communities. To some of you, the phrase "God's Kingdom come" may still sound foreign and foggy. You may hardly understand what God's Kingdom is about. You may hardly pinpoint what it really means let alone experiencing God's Kingdom in your life.

Let me tell you one more time: What is the Kingdom of God? It is the kingdom where God is King, and we are His subjects. God reigns in our hearts with His commandments, and we obey His Law. In God's Kingdom, we walk in the ways that He commands us. God is enthroned in our hearts and lives. He calls the shots, and we obey. That's the Kingdom of God and Kingdom of Heaven.

As I said before, Jesus explained the mysteries of God's Kingdom in parables. They are all recorded in the Bible. It is your duty to understand His parables by studying His Word. It is my responsibility as your pastor to help you to understand the Kingdom principles in parables. So, for the next two months, throughout the summer, I am going to preach on Jesus' Kingdom parables. Today is the first lesson. The Kingdom of Heaven is like leaven.

What is leaven? It is,

Leaven: a substance, especially yeast, that is added to bread before it is cooked to make it rise
(https://www.oxfordlearnersdictionaries.com/definition/english/leaven_1?q=leaven)

In Jesus' time, "*Leaven was a little piece of dough which had been kept over from a previous baking; in the keeping it fermented; and leaven was simply a piece of fermented dough*" (William Barclay, *The Daily Study Bible, The Gospel of Matthew, Volume 2, The Westminster Press, Philadelphia, 1958, p. 88*). It's kind of sourdough bread, not commercially cultivated yeast.

The Meaning of the Parable of the Leaven

The story is very simple: A woman takes leaven and mixes it into dough. Eventually, the whole of the dough is leavened. What does it mean? By the way, in the story, the leaven is us. The woman is God. The dough is the world.

In this Parable of the Leaven, we learn three things about God's Kingdom and how it advances in the world. Each lesson stems from the nature of yeast.

1. *Life*: Yeast is a living organism. In it there's life. The life-transforming life. Only the living yeast is a good yeast. The dead one is no good. The purpose of yeast is to bring transformation to wherever it is put. The transforming power comes from its life within. Like yeast, we the believers are God's Kingdom agents. Before we talk about transformation of the world, we must have Christ's life within us. Only Christ's life brings life to the world. If we don't have Christ living in us, we have no life of Christ. If we have no Christ's life in us, we are no good agents in terms of bringing changes to our surroundings. God sends us to bring life to wherever we go and to change the lives of people in the world, one at a time. Be sure to have Christ's life in you.
2. *Mix*: Dough to yeast is the world to us. Remember the field God is sending us. It is the world. Not the church within. Christ's Church is never supposed to stay within the church walls. We are sent out to the world. The world is our parish, John Wesley said. Like the woman places the yeast in the flour, God sends us out into the world. Christ commands us to go out to the world and make them His disciples. Remember the Great Commission? ¹⁹ *Go, therefore, and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, ²⁰ teaching them to follow all that I commanded you; and behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age*" (Matthew 28:19-20).

Jesus once prayed to His Father as follows (John 17:14-18): ¹⁴ *I have given them Your word; and the world has hated them because they are not of the world, just as I am not of the world. ¹⁵ I am not asking You to take them out of the world, but to keep them away from the evil one. ¹⁶ They are not of the world, just as I am not of the world. ¹⁷ Sanctify them in the truth; Your word is truth. ¹⁸ Just as You sent Me into the world, I also sent them into the world.*"

It is not God's will to take us out of the world, nor to escape from the world. Do not avoid the world nor run away from the world. Christ knows that He is sending us out into the world like sheep among wolves (Matthew 10:16). Yet, He still sends us into the world. He still commands us to stay in the world, and be the changing agent, because without us there will be no transformation of the world. God's Kingdom must mingle with the world and change it.

Let's not forget. The born nature of yeast is to change the surroundings where it is put in, not the other way around. Learn from this aspect of yeast. God puts us in the world with an intention to change the world surrounding us, not us being changed by the world. Listen to God's Word. ² *And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, so that you may prove what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect*" (Romans 12:2). Why should we not

be conformed to this world? Because the world corrupts us with *the lust of the flesh (kc: the cravings of sinful nature) and the lust of the eyes and the boastful pride of life, is not from the Father, but is from the world* (1 John 2:16).

Reality check: The state of today's Church tells us otherwise. Lots of churches, and too many Christians, are conformed to the secular teaching and practice to the point where we don't see any difference at all between the world and the Church. It is time that we reversed this conformity lest we lose our strength to change the world.

3. **Grow:** Every good and living yeast makes the dough grow. If it doesn't, it fails its purpose. Same with God's Kingdom. God's Kingdom is destined to grow. It must grow. Believers advance God's Kingdom to grow. It has been growing. Speaking of God's Kingdom growth, history proves it. From a humble start of 120 disciples, now the Church of Christ is about 1/3 of entire global population (over 2 billion believers).

When God's Kingdom stops growing, it is time that we examined ourselves, our faith and practice, asking 'where have we gone wrong?' Ask yourself: am I transformed to Christ's image before I go out there to change the world? (2 Corinthians 3:18). Remember #1 principle of God's Kingdom: your own transformation into Christ's image. Then, we are ready to bring changes to our family, our workplace, and communities.

Conclusion

We are the yeast and leaven for the world. God sends us into the world, not out of the world. Be the Kingdom agents. Do not avoid it. Do not run from it. Go into the world. Into your family. Into your workplace. Into your community. Stay there and love the people around you. Pray for those who persecute you. Be thankful in all circumstances. Forgive your enemies, do not curse them. Bring glory to God in all you do.

That's what the Early Church did and that's how God's Kingdom started growing. They shared with each other of what they had, they started the first soup kitchen in Jerusalem, and they forgave their enemies. It is time that we did the same. We are the Kingdom agents. You are the kingdom agent. Do your thing in the world.

Let us pray.