

UNSTOPPABLE
Parable 25: Leaven
Mt 13:33; Lk 13:20-21

I. ILLUSTRATION—THE MAGNIFICAT—A SONG OF JOY

Lk 1:46-55—**46** *My soul exalts the Lord,* **47** *and my spirit has rejoiced in God my Savior.* **48** *For He has had regard for the humble state of His bond slave; for behold, from this time on all generations will count me blessed.* **49** *For the Mighty One has done great things for me; and holy is His name.* **50** *And mercy is upon generation after generation toward those who fear Him.* **51** *He has done mighty deeds with His arm; He has scattered those who were proud in the thoughts of their heart.* **52** *He has brought down rulers from their thrones and has exalted those who were humble.* **53** *He has filled the hungry with good things; and sent away the rich empty-handed.* **54** *He has given help to Israel His servant, in remembrance of His mercy,* **55** *as He spoke to our fathers, to Abraham and his descendants forever.”*

❖ **God’s Three Great Disruptions**

- **Moral**—He scatters the proud-hearted
- **Social**—He brings rulers down from their thrones; exalts the humble
- **Economic**—He fills the hungry with good things; sends the rich away empty-handed

II. BACKGROUND

1. PEOPLE WERE EXPRESSING DOUBTS ABOUT THE KINGDOM PRESENCE
 - o **John’s question**—*Are you the Expected One*—Mt 11
 - o **Scribes and Pharisees**—wanted to see a sign—Mt 12
2. JESUS EXPLAINED NATURE OF KINGDOM—7 PARABLES IN **MT 13**
3. JESUS THE GREAT DISRUPTER—USED MOST UNLIKELY THING TO MAKE HIS POINT

THE KINGDOM OF HEAVEN IS PRESENT

III. BIBLICAL TEXT—Mt 13:32

33 *He spoke another parable to them, “The kingdom of heaven is like leaven, which a woman took and hid in three pecks of flour until it was all leavened.”*

IV. EXPLANATION

A. CONTEXT

1. PARALLEL PASSAGE = **LUKE 13**
 - o Luke almost identical
 - o Luke begins with question—*To what shall I compare the kingdom of God?*
 - o Luke says **kingdom of God**—Matthew says **kingdom of heaven**

2. 'MIRROR PARABLE' = MUSTARD SEED

a. **Mustard** seed

- About—gradual (method)—contrast small-big (quantitative result)—external growth
- Emphasis—contrast and growth

b. **Leaven**

- About—hiddenness (method)—transformation (qualitative result)—internal growth
- Emphasis—hidden and unstoppable
- Replaces Mark's 'Growing Seed'—which emphasizes hidden/unstoppable growth

3. SEVEN KINGDOM PARABLES

- o **Sower**—the seed is the word—the ground is the heart of the hearer
- o **Tares**—the seed is people of two types—of the kingdom—of the evil one
- o **Mustard seed**—the seed is the kingdom itself—it grows from small to large
- o **Leaven**—the seed is ground into flour for bread—it grows secretly
- o **Twin** parables of value—**Hidden Treasure**—**Costly Pearl**
- o **Dragnet**—the fish are two types of people—mirrors Parable of Tares

B. PURPOSES OF THE PARABLE

1. TO PROVE—THE KINGDOM IS PRESENT AND UNSTOPPABLE
2. TO DEMONSTRATE—THE PURPOSE OF LEAVEN IN THE KINGDOM
 - o Leaven does not destroy the flour—but changes its nature for good
 - o Purpose = to **transform** flour to something useful and enjoyable
3. TO SHOW—THE KINGDOM TRANSFORMS INDIVIDUALS **AND** THE WORLD
 - a. Some say—Mustard Seed is about church in the world—Leaven is only about the church
 - b. Their point—Kingdom leaven is for believers only—transforming them alone
 - c. I think this interpretation is wrong
 - Both parables are about the Kingdom of Heaven
 - This kingdom *includes* the 'field'—which is the *world*—see **v38** [Tares]
 - Kingdom leaven transforms believers—*and* changes secular society
 - Kingdom leaven benefits even non-believers

C. PARABLE

1. A WOMAN MAKING BREAD

- o Professional bakers existed—but only in larger towns
- o In villages—baking was done at home—in courtyard—sometimes communally

- o Baking—was one of 7 responsibilities—women did for husband (Mishnah)
 - o **Imagine—background—Jesus observing His mother Mary making bread**
2. THREE MEASURES OF FLOUR
- o Equivalent to one bushel—about 9 gallons
 - o Enough bread to feed 100-150
 - o She was baking for her whole village
 - o Required about—3-4 pounds of leaven
3. LEAVEN—MOST REFERENCES TO IT ARE NEGATIVE
- a. OT—leaven is **impure**—to be purged—to preserve sanctity and holiness
 - 1. Feast of **Unleavened Bread**—eaten 7 days of Passover—**Dt 16/Ex 12**
 - 2. Most **grain** offerings were unleavened—**Lev 2**
 - Exception—**peace** offerings—**Lev 7**
 - Exception—**first fruits** at Pentecost—**Lev 23**
 - b. Gospels—leaven symbolizes sinfulness
 - Beware the leaven of **Pharisees**—**Mt 16—Mk 8—Lk 12**
 - Their legalistic teaching—hypocrisy—refusal to accept Jesus’ messiahship
 - c. Pauline letters
 - Heretical **teachers**—legalism/Judaizers—**Gal 5**
 - **Sin** in your midst—adulterous man—**I Cor 5**
 - d. Rabbinical literature
 - 1. When a proselyte relapsed—they said he ‘returned to his leaven’
 - 2. **Example—Berenice’s husband**
 - **Bernice lived with her brother Agrippa II—rumors of incest**
 - **She married Polemon—ruler of Cilicia—he converted to Judaism for her wealth**
 - **When she deserted him—he ‘returned to his leaven’**
4. JESUS TURNED THINGS UPSIDE DOWN
- a. Used something negative—to communicate positive truth
 - b. Leaven makes things taste better—and is used on **joyful** occasions
 - c. Typical of Jesus’ life
 - 1. He did not fast when others fasted—**Mk 2**
 - Instead he said—**celebrate**—while the bridegroom is with you!
 - 2. He transformed water—to the very best fermented wine—**Jn 2**
 - 3. They accused Him of being too joyful!

Lk 7:33-34—*For John the Baptist has come eating no bread and drinking no wine, and you say, “He has a demon.” The Son of Man has come eating and drinking, and you say, “Behold, a gluttonous man and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and sinners!”*

- d. Here—leaven represents—**good and pervasive gospel** influence throughout the kingdom

D. MAIN POINTS—LEAVEN OF THE GOSPEL

1. IS HIDDEN

- a. Leaven works **secretly**—like the ‘growing seed’ parable—hidden
- b. Gradual and quiet work of gospel through the ages—transforms society
 - Ancient cultures purged disabled and female infants
 - No longer *lex talionis*—‘eye for eye’
 - Elimination of slavery

2. CHANGES THINGS

- a. **Disruptive**—disturbs things
 1. Jesus—the Great **Disturber**—Master of the **Great Reversal**
 - To be a leader you must be a servant—be last to be first—least to be great
 2. Paul
 - Philippi—*These men are throwing our city into confusion*
 - Thessalonica—*These men who have upset the world have come here also*
 - Jerusalem—*He stirs up dissension among all the Jews throughout the world*
- b. **Transformative**
 - Yeast does not destroy flour—but changes flour to its own nature
 - It gives not only flavor—but life—and life-giving nourishment
 - It changes *everything*—a little bit affects the entire batch

3. INTERACTIVE

- a. The dough cannot change itself
 - It is transformed by an outside agent
 - Alien Presence—a radically different element is inserted into flour
 - This causes a dramatic change
- b. The leaven does nothing by itself
 - It demonstrates its power—only when mixed with flour
 - It becomes powerful—only by losing itself in the dough
 - To make a difference—it yields up its separate identity
- c. Change occurs from the inside-out—not outside-in

- Leaven works only inside the dough—not just by external application
 - Kneading is necessary—leaven must be ‘worked’ into the dough
4. JOYFUL
- o Fresh—leavened bread is irresistible—and the nutritious norm
 - o **Example—German who misses brötchen—lunchroom rolls**
 - o Joy and celebration—should be the norm—not fasting and mourning
5. SHARED
- o Best bread is made from a ‘starter ferment’—‘pre-ferment’—‘mother dough’
 - o Passed on—and reduplicates itself many times

V. APPLICATION

A. THE GOSPEL—IS QUIETLY AT WORK

- It ultimately changes society
- But first—it transforms individuals—believers
- God does this—not we by ourselves
- It is a process—that He continuously works at—and He promises to complete

B. THE GOSPEL—WORKS WITHIN US

- We are the raw ingredients—the flour—the medium
- The Holy Spirit is leaven—the agent—Alien Presence—that makes a radical difference
- Individually—by sanctifying—giving gifts—and bearing fruit—of the Spirit
- Communally—working through the whole body—binding us together
- We apply leaven by preaching and teaching the Word—and demonstrating acts of the Spirit
- We knead leaven through the body—by stirring up the gift that is within us—**II Tim 1:6**

C. THE GOSPEL—TRANSFORMS THINGS

1. **Morally—*He scatters the proud-hearted***
 - o With Christ as our standard—we realize our inadequacy and pride—and need for change
 - o The Holy Spirit sanctifies us
 - o God transforms us into Christ’s image—from glory to glory—**II Cor 3:18**
 - o If we are in Christ—we become new creatures—the old passes away—**II Cor 5:17**
2. **Socially—*He brings rulers down from their thrones; He exalts the humble***
 - o God is no respecter of persons
 - o Jesus’ calls us to servant-leadership—united in a fellowship of priests
3. **Economic—*He fills the hungry with good things; He sends the rich away empty-handed***

- o We help the poor and dispossessed—we ‘do it to the least of these’
- o We learn—it is truly better to give than to receive

D. THE GOSPEL—IS JOYFUL

1. God calls us to be pleasant and positive
2. A fragrant and savory influence

II Cor 2:15—*for we are a fragrance of Christ to God among those who are being saved and among those who are perishing*

E. THE GOSPEL—IS TO BE SHARED

- We are **remnant** in the world
- We should be salt and light—but *also* leaven
- God deploys us into the world —to be ‘pre-ferment’ agents—spiritual starter kits

F. THE GOSPEL—IS UNSTOPPABLE

1. Nothing can separate us from the love of God—which is in Christ Jesus—**Rom 8:38-39**
 - o Not death—nor life
 - o Not angels—nor principalities
 - o Not things present—nor things to come
 - o Not powers—nor depth—nor height
 - o Not any other created thing
2. Nothing can stop the good work He is doing in us

Ph 1:6—*For I am confident of this very thing, that he who began a good work in you will perfect it until the day of Christ Jesus.*

VI. INVITATION

HOW CAN I KEEP FROM SINGING

**My life flows on in endless song;
Above earth’s lamentation,
I catch the sweet, though far off hymn
That hails a new creation.**

**Refrain:
No storm can shake my inmost calm
While to that Rock I’m clinging.
Since Christ is Lord of heaven and earth,
How can I keep from singing?**

**Through all the tumult and the strife,
I hear that music ringing.**

**It finds an echo in my soul.
How can I keep from singing? [Refrain]**

**What though my joys and comforts die?
I know my Savior liveth.
What though the darkness gather round?
Songs in the night he giveth. [Refrain]**

**The peace of Christ makes fresh my heart,
A fountain ever springing!
All things are mine since I am his!
How can I keep from singing? [Refrain]**