

Dear Friends,

Yeast has a strong ability to permeate the whole dough mixture to which it is added. Likewise, the gospel has power to invade every nook and cranny of our lives and to make a difference in how we live it. I believe that is a major lesson to be learned from this parable. We can submit to the gospel, and it slowly impacts every part of our lives. Or we can stand in the way and try to micromanage our lives and kill much of that transforming power in the gospel. Sometimes you hear believers say, "Jesus is my co-pilot." Not the right idea. If we hope to serve God according to Scripture and to live that truly transformed life of faith, we need to resign from trying to run our life our way and look to Him as our Pilot. Our compromised superficial faith wants Jesus, but we want Him to rule only one carefully carved-out plot on Sunday morning. We prefer to keep Him out of the remaining six days of the week. Jesus' parable reminds us of the true nature of His "Kingdom." If allowed to follow its intended course, it will find its way and wield its influence in every corner and aspect of our lives. And that is the reality of authentic New Testament Christianity.

Are we willing to pay the price necessary for this kind of "Kingdom" living? Many dear people around us choose not to pay that price. They enjoy the reputation and the pretense, but they refuse to allow the power, that life-transforming power, to govern their lives.

Yeast, "Leaven," is rather confined in its ability to survive and do its work. When you mix the yeast with the flour, you can put the dough in a hot environment and kill the yeast. You can also put the dough in a cold environment and kill the yeast. For the yeast to do its work, you need a moderate temperature. Likewise, the Lord's kingdom requires the right setting to grow and accomplish its work in us. We may be too harshly religious and legalistic for it to survive in us, or we may become too carnal and worldly for it to survive. You can't be passive and realize the authentic New Testament power of the gospel to govern your life.

I love the directness and wisdom of a preacher friend who was greeted after a sermon by a wealthy church member who had boasted about how little he gave to his church. When the man said, "Elder, I wouldn't take a million dollars for that sermon," my friend immediately responded, "How much would you pay for it?" Well, when we examine our lives and ponder the true impact of the gospel in every area of our personal life, how much are we willing to pay to experience that pervasive "Kingdom" living power in every area of our life?

Lord bless,
Joe Holder

Parable of the Leaven

Another parable spake he unto them; The kingdom of heaven is like unto leaven, which a woman took, and hid in three measures of meal, till the whole was leavened. (Matthew 13:33 KJV 1900)

This brief parable has been the object of varied interpretations. Because leaven is such a common Bible symbol for sin or corruption, some commentaries view this parable as dealing with the sinful "Leavening" influence of the religious leaders of Judaism on God's pure form of worship. The point is true whether the parable intends this lesson or not. I would observe that, despite Jesus being depicted as the

“Lion of the tribe of Judah,” (Revelation 5:5) Satan is also represented in the New Testament as a lion. (1 Peter 5:8) How do we resolve the problem? Context, not a stereotype, should always dictate the meaning of a passage or of a symbol within a passage. In 1 Peter 5:8, context clearly dictates that Satan’s aggressive and destructive character earns the comparison to a “roaring lion.” And Revelation 5:5 as clearly indicates that Jesus, the “Lion of the tribe of Judah,” is the intended meaning. Since Jesus taught all His kingdom parables in Matthew 13 with a consistent focus on “His kingdom,” I can find no compelling reason to regard leaven in this parable as representative of sin or other negative influence in the Lord’s kingdom. True enough, women in the first century often made unleavened bread, but they also made large quantities of leavened bread, and their families ate it with satisfaction. My mother made biscuits daily during my childhood for breakfast. However, on occasion she also made yeast rolls. We always relished the days when she made those delicious yeast rolls. Yeast is leaven, and we had only positive anticipation of Mother’s rolls.

The prevailing sources I’ve checked indicate that a measure of flour was just less than three gallons. Three measures of flour would then be something less than nine gallons. Start with that much flour, add the other ingredients to make bread, including yeast or leaven, and you are baking a large quantity of bread. But the quantity itself helps to make Jesus’ point in the parable. He just taught the Parable of the Mustard Seed with a similar theme. Something very small grows into something quite large.

Most commentaries focus on the numeric growth of Christianity. If we group all denominations of Christianity, it is the single largest religion in the world, followed by Islam. However, once you acknowledge the wide variation in beliefs within that broad umbrella, the actual number of Christians in one “Camp” is not nearly so large. Given that the New Testament church started with a hundred twenty believers in the upper room, we can understand the inclination to view this parable as referring to the numeric growth of Christianity.

In this study, I want to explore a different application of the parable. However large the quantity of flour, Jesus treated it as one “Batch” of flour. The whole dynamic of the parable is the permeating effect of yeast on the flour.

Anyone who has served as a pastor for any time has encountered the superficial believer who seems content to warm a pew on Sunday, but not to do much more in his commitment to the faith.

Thankfully, we’ve also observed the more common believers who grow ever more involved and intertwined with their faith. Although I started speaking in the church within three months of my baptism at age 14, I became increasingly committed and involved over the years. Day in and day out, I spend as much time each week, likely more, than at any time in my life. And my personal assessment is that I fail to invest nearly as much time in my faith as I should. How fully does our faith permeate every aspect of our life? Or do we carefully carve out areas that we do not allow faith to enter? We need this lesson.

Who is left among you that saw this house in her first glory? and how do ye see it now? is it not in your eyes in comparison of it as nothing? (Haggai 2:3 KJV)

Think back a year, five, or even ten years. How did you regard your faith and your church family then? How do you regard it today? More or less? Pastors observe the sad reality. You recall people in your congregation who hung on every word preached, rejoiced in the good news, and were keenly sensitive to their brothers and sisters in the faith. They go through the motions today. Bless them, they likely sense the slippage and try to do something about it, but they are unwilling to face the reality. The problem is not in the pulpit or in the pews near them. The problem sits squarely in the seat where they sit, and only they can repair the breach and restore their joy. Only they can restore the rather precise climate in which the "Leaven" of the Lord's kingdom will grow and permeate their whole life. But the change requires a price, and they are not convinced to pay that price, so they drift through the years, trying to act the right role, but knowing they have hindered the permeating growing influence and transforming power of the gospel in their lives.

Jewish literature suggests that, when the temple was restored after the Babylonian captivity, it wasn't nearly as glorious as Solomon's temple before it. When the final construction was finished, it was reported that there were two distinct reactions. Some of the older people who remembered Solomon's temple grieved and wept that their new temple was not as magnificent as the old temple. And others wept in joy that they had been blessed to restore the temple and return to worshipping the Lord as He directed. Haggai's probing questions suggests just such a scenario. Forget a temple in a far-away place and way of worship. How do you regard your place of worship today? What stokes the fires of your zeal, your passion? The Lord and His way of faith? Or some other philosophical or political passion? The Lord's good news? Or your imagined bad news?

We think of yeast as a powerful, somewhat independent force, but it requires a rather precise environment to grow so as to permeate the dough. When my mother frequently made yeast rolls, I remember well how carefully she mixed the yeast ingredients and added them to the recipe. Then she would mix the dough well and put it in a warm place to "Rise," the process of the yeast growing in the dough. If she didn't mix the right ingredients, or if she didn't put the dough in the right temperature, the yeast would die or barely rise at all.

Our experience of the Lord's "Kingdom" influence in our lives is similar in many ways. Ponder one of the simplest explanations in the New Testament of the "Kingdom" of God.

Let not then your good be evil spoken of: For the kingdom of God is not meat and drink; but righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost. For he that in these things serveth Christ is acceptable to God, and approved of men. (Romans 14:16-18 KJV)

We often quote only Verse 15, but all three verses belong to the one thought. A confused and undisciplined (Unbiblical) mindset among professing believers in our day has contributed painfully to a bad reputation for the Lord and His kingdom. Many of these dear people do good things, but they are often more passionate about their politics or their posture regarding an invisible virus than they are about their faith. They profess to be honorable citizens in the Lord's kingdom, but their conduct causes that kingdom to be despised, to be "evil spoken of." Do we regard honorable status in the Lord's kingdom to relate to our diet? On what day of the week we worship? Do we despise other believers who think

differently from us regarding such trivial questions? That is the context of Romans 14 and Paul's conclusion in these verses.

Try honestly to ponder what fires your strongest passions, where you spend most of your time and mental energy. Are you personally invested in New Testament "righteousness," living your faith according to New Testament description and teaching, or according to your private definition? Does your chosen perspective of your faith and of your "Kingdom" demeanor produce a pervasive sense of joyful peace, or does it leave you agitated, worried about the future, and effectively believing the Lord has abandoned His "Kingdom" altogether? Does this view of your world leave you with peaceful "joy in the Holy Ghost"? Or does it leave you longing for joy which you have given up on realizing?

In my more zealous youth, I found myself in a situation where many of the leading and respected pastors in the area became discouraged. For an extended time, whenever a special meeting occurred, their only topic of discussion between services was a gripe session about what was wrong with our people and our churches. They had a house full of people present, so they could have used that time to teach those folks the right way, but they chose to waste their time obsessing over what was wrong. After several such meetings occurred with this theme, I attended a meeting and was asked to speak. Before introducing my subject, I mentioned this habit of talking about what was wrong. No surprise, several of these men gave a loud "Amen" to my observation. They became quickly quiet when I continued, "The main thing wrong with our folks these days is that no one ever talks about the goodness of God and the good things of Scripture. All they ever talk about is what they think is wrong." Not my most diplomatic moment, but I must observe that the gripe sessions did end after that meeting.

If you and I take a long careful examination of our personal "Kingdom" conduct over the last year or two, can we conclude that we have contributed to "Righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost," or have we contributed to the gripe sessions that tear down godly faith rather than edify? Have we contributed to a godly environment of edification in which the permeating potential of the gospel and the Lord's "Kingdom" can grow strong and spread within the hearts and minds of the people present? Or have we done more to kill that permeating influence in the gospel?

For he that in these things serveth Christ is acceptable to God and approved of men. I wonder. If our conduct "serves Christ" and "is acceptable to God," will it result in the Lord's blessing our lives and labors? Will the Lord take note and either chasten or bless our path? If we are actively engaged in faithful, New Testament "Kingdom of God" kinds of "...righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost," versus chasing our private windmills and imaginations, will the Lord care? Will He intervene in our lives to show His presence and blessings? If you pause to answer the question, it is a good time for a season of prayer, self-examination, and repentance. The Lord in His time and way will show you the difference, and it will be powerful.

Elder Joe Holder