

SIMILIE: Like Yeast or Leaven

By: Pastor Timothy Corder

Often Jesus taught people about the kingdom of God, using examples taken directly from everyday life. That could likely be the case with the Yeast hid in the Wheat. So let's read this very short parable.

Matthew 13:33. 33 He told them still another parable: "The kingdom of heaven is like yeast that a woman took and mixed into about sixty pounds of flour until it worked all through the dough." NIV

Luke 13:21 Jesus asked, "What is the kingdom of God like? What shall I compare it to?

It is like yeast that a woman took and mixed into about sixty pounds of flour until it worked all through the dough."

You all know that bread made simply from water and flour is dry and flat. That is why many mix it with yeast. When you put the yeast into dough, at the right temperature, the yeast changes the quality of the bread by making it porous and moist. Through this process of fermentation. A theory for the origins of leavened bread dates back to Egyptian's adding beer in lieu of water, thus introducing yeast into the dough.

There are two opposite views: concerning the teaching of this passage? There are essentially two interpretations of this parable.

(1) Some say that the yeast represents God's work and the bread is the world. This means that the church is the leaven working inside the world, the bread, and its influence spreads throughout the world. If that is the picture, all society will be affected in one way or another by this yeast.

(2) The other way to understand this parable is that the world is spreading into the church. The portrayal of yeast taken by a woman and hidden in the meal' indicates a mixture of evil within the good. It is a picture in which the yeast symbolizes evil that is hidden in God's kingdom, His church.

Throughout history of the church, both views were held. Most Bible commentators of our time prefer the first, namely that the church, like leaven mixed in with dough, and is transforms the world.

The more I have studied this second interpretation seem to be the more accurate. The parable is a picture of evil scattering itself through the church. It seems to me that the arguments supporting that point of view are stronger than those of the first one. Let's see.

The Simile, is not saying according to my research that the Kingdom of God is like yeast.

The parable of the yeast begins with the words: The kingdom of heaven is like leaven/Yeast... Here we have to be very careful how we read the Scriptures. If we read the story like this, The kingdom of heaven is like yeast, then it would seem like Jesus is saying that the kingdom of God is the yeast which penetrates the world. But that is not exactly the meaning of Jesus' words. His comparison is not strictly the noun which follows that expression but the parable as a whole.

The parable of the sower. It is not the 'man who sowed' who is compared to the

kingdom, but the situation resulting from his sowing. In the parable of the mustard seed, again, the point of comparison is not the mustard seed in itself, but what happens when it is sown. The kingdom of heaven is like a mustard seed, which a man took and sowed in his field (Mat. 13:31).

The kingdom of heaven is not like yeast. It is like yeast hid in the wheat by a woman. Look at the whole picture, not just the first word. The meaning of the statement will not change if we say, 'The kingdom of God is like a woman who took yeast and mixed it with flour.' or, 'The kingdom of God is like meal which a woman took and put yeast into.' The meaning remains the same.

Next what does 'yeast/leaven' mean in the Bible? Well, the word has a lot to say about it. Look it up in NT concordance and look under the word 'yeast,' it always refers to something bad.

There are two other places outside of this parable where the verb form is used: 1Cor. 5:6 and Gal. 5:9. Let's look at these two.

1Corinthians 5:6. Your boasting is not good. Don't you know that a little yeast leavens the whole batch of dough? 7 Therefore purge out the old leaven, that you may be a new lump, since you truly are unleavened...

See the picture? Paul says, 'You, Christians, are a loaf of bread which should not be leavened. You are in fact unleavened. Clean out the old yeast of sin in your life.'

Paul wrote to the church of Corinth concerning immorality. Stating it to be very serious sin, a man committed incest. Paul was furious, 'Such a thing is disgusting even to the non-Christians. How dare you tolerate a sin like this in your church? You should have disciplined this one!' Paul said, 'I have decided to excommunicate this man.' By this action, he removed the yeast from the church. He took out this sinful influence so that it does not affect the entire Church. Paul says these and other things mentioned in passage should not be tolerated by those calling themselves Bro/Sis.

Galatians 5:9. A little leaven leavens the whole lump.

'Paul says, false teaching. If we let it spread, it will invade and mislead the whole church.' The world was getting into the church, back then! What about now! Hmmm. 12 other times in the NT, it is always used in reference to corrupt doctrine or to fraudulent practices. Symbol of evil

In the OT, the word 'yeast' also represents something evil as well. That is why yeast was forbidden in all offerings to God by fire (Lev, 2:11; 6:17). We read in Leviticus 2:11, 'Every grain offering you bring to the Lord must be made without yeast, for you are not to burn any yeast or honey in a food offering presented to the Lord... Not only that, they were banned from having any in their homes or in their land during Passover.

In the Bible, yeast is never used in a good sense. The interpretation that makes the yeast to be the gospel influencing subtly the whole world is inconsistent. It is more logical. evil penetrates the Church.

The dough: Let us consider another question. The kingdom of heaven is like yeast that a woman took and mixed into a large amount of flour until it worked all through the dough. What does this dough represent? Dough is used in Romans 11:16 as a picture of the people of God.

In the parable, the original word for 'flour' or 'meal' was precisely to wheat flour. This

does not come out in the English translation but it is very clear in the Greek text. And when we speak of wheat flour, we are talking about believers. Remember the parable of the tares. According to Jesus, the tares are the sons of the devil, and the wheat, stands for the children of God (Mat 13:38).

In John 6, Jesus said, I am the bread of life,. And we, by extension, being the body of Christ, are called 'bread'. So the wheat, the flour, the bread, all refers to believers. If yeast symbolizes evil and wheat refers to Christians, then the lesson of the parable is that evil is able to penetrate the kingdom /church and corrupt it. The world is fermenting in the church with its bad influence and Jesus is telling us to watch out for this. That, to me, is a more natural interpretation of the parable.

Hidden: Many translations bring out the word 'hid.' Which a woman took and hid in three measures of meal. This action, 'to hide,' indicates a cover up. Can we say that God takes His kingdom and hides it in the world? No, this little light of mine I'm going to let it shine!

The influence of the church works in a way that is obvious to anyone. In Mat 5:14, A city that is set on a hill cannot be hidden.

Jesus is not the only one who gives us this warning. Jude tells us that Certain men whose condemnation was written about long ago have secretly slipped in among you (Jude 4). In 2Peter 2:1, we read that False prophets also arose among the people ... who will secretly introduce destructive heresies, even denying the Master who bought them, bringing swift destruction upon themselves. 'Watch out for the leaven of the world that you do not fall. Beware of the leaven that can bring destruction upon you if you are not careful.'

Three kinds of yeast, Jesus tell the disciples to beware of? The yeast of the Pharisees? It is hypocrisy. Beware of the yeast of the Pharisees, Jesus says in Luke 12:1, which is hypocrisy. The Pharisees were guilty of saying one thing and doing another.

Some so called Bro/Sisters honor God with their lips; but their hearts are far from Him. They have departed from their first love, being neither cold nor hot.

In this connection, have you ever noticed how yeast works best in a lukewarm environment? In that sense, THE church cannot be the yeast, for the church must be either hot or cold, or Jesus says in Rev 3:16 (...because you are lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will vomit you out of My mouth).

And the Sadducees? Luke 20:27 that it is unbelief. Then some of the Sadducees, who deny that there is a resurrection, or in the miracles, slowly, their faith is eroded by unbelief.

Finally, Jesus warns in Mark 8:15. Beware of ...the leaven of Herod. What is it? 'That fox,' Jesus called Herod in Luke 13:32. This has reference to the subtle diplomacy and cunning political management. He was willing to be nice with everybody so long as you leave him to be king of his little empire. They promote political correctness, which is no correctness at all. What God has called good is, and what he has called evil is also!

So Jesus, by His use of the word yeast in these three instances, is warning His disciples of the danger of allowing their thinking to be assimilated to that of the world around them, the world of the Pharisees, Sadducees and Herodians. And if we are to judge from the use of the word yeast in the rest of the Scriptures – an unseen

pervasive evil influence – we have to interpret the parable of the leaven as a picture of the spreading of evil within the church.

In some churches today there are ministers who don't even believe in the virgin birth-allowing Jesus to be divine, nor do they believe in resurrection and they are more concerned about P/C than J/C.