Grace to You :: *Unleashing God's Truth, One Verse at a Time*

The Power and Influence of Christ's Kingdom, Part 2
Scripture: Matthew 13:33
Code: 2302

In our time of teaching, this morning, we again are drawn to Matthew chapter 13, looking at the parables of our Lord to describe the kingdom in the time between His rejection and His second coming. And I want to read as the setting for our lesson this morning, from verses 31 to 33 of Matthew 13, two parables. We began by looking at the first one last time, we'll look at the second one today. But we need to tie them together because they deal with the same theme.

"Another parable put He forth unto them saying, 'The kingdom of heaven is like a grain of mustard seed which a man took and sowed in his field, which indeed is the least of all seeds. But when it is grown it is the greatest among herbs and becometh a tree so that the birds of the air come and lodge in the branches of it.' Another parable spoke He unto them saying, 'The kingdom of heaven is like leaven which a woman took and hid in three measures of meal till the whole was leavened.' "

Now, both of these parables speak to the same theme. They speak about influence. They speak about small beginnings with great conclusions. John Greenleaf Whittier, the poet, once wrote, "Nothing fails of its end. Out of sight sinks the stone in the deep sea of time, but the circles sweep on till the lowrippled murmurs along the shores run, and the dark and dead waters leap glad in the sun." You throw a stone in a lake and its influence touches every shore.

And we said last time that that is what our Lord is saying, something starts very, very small but ends very, very large. And so it will be with the kingdom. It will start small. But, ultimately, its influence will be global. That's what He's saying here. He's speaking about the kingdom in its ultimate greatness, that it will move to its fruition, it will move to its fulfillment, it will move to its God-intended worldwide power. We live in the time when that is going on.

Never in the history of the world has Christianity had the global influence that it has today. It is staggering to think about it. Christianity begins with such obscurity, a handful of individuals, to the proportions that we know it today. But that's exactly what those two parables tell us would happen. They are prophetic. The integrity of Jesus Christ is at stake in their fulfillment. The truthfulness of the Word of God is at stake in them reaching the objection that the Lord said they would reach.

Now let me just give you a little background so that you'll understand what our Lord is saying in its context. In the Old Testament, the prophets predicted that the kingdom of God would ultimately come to the earth, and in coming to the earth would ultimately touch the globe at every point, would be

farreaching. Jesus Christ would be God's representative, the greater Son of David, the anointed, the Messiah, the King who would sit on the throne in the city of Jerusalem and rule the world.

And there would be worldwide peace, and there would be the end of war, and crime, and poverty, and the alleviation of suffering and even death. There would be salvation among the nations, as well as the Jews. And Jesus Christ would be revered and honored as King. All rebels would be destroyed. All blasphemers would be condemned when the kingdom came. And they had reason to believe that.

Micah, the prophet, wrote this in chanter 4, "But in the last days, it shall come to pass that the mountain of the house of the Lord shall be established in the top of the mountains, and it shall be exalted above the hills and people shall flow into it." And Micah is seeing the kingdom in the last days, exalted, lifted up, and Christ is reigning on the throne and the nations are flowing in to worship, to adore, to give homage, to come under His rule.

And many nations shall come and say, "Come, let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, and to the house of the God of Jacob and He will teach us His ways and we will walk in His paths, for the law shall go forth from Zion and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem." In other words, the ruling will come out of Jerusalem and the nations will respond and flow back in. "And He shall judge many people and rebuke strong nations afar off."

In other words, He'll control the world. The ones that don't come, the ones that resist, He'll rebuke even though they're afar off. He will dominate the world and, "They will beat their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning hooks, nation shall not life up a sword against nation, neither shall they learn war anymore." The end of all war across the earth, scrap all their weapons.

"And every man shall sit under His vine and His fig tree." In other words, there will be food for everybody. Everybody will possess all his own resources. "And none shall make them afraid." There will be no crime; there will be nothing to fear. "For the mouth of the Lord of hosts has spoken and all the people shall walk, everyone in the name of his God, and we will walk in the name of our Lord our God forever and ever."

The world will come to the feet of the Messiah and wherever the rebels are they will be rebuked. And the other prophets have said that God will rule through His Son with a rod of iron and justice will be swift and immediate. And then another word comes to us from Zechariah, the prophet, in chapter 8. And it's a most interesting word.

It says in 8:18 of Zechariah, "The word of the Lord of host came unto me saying – " and here's another picture of that great future kingdom – "Thus saith the Lord of host, 'The fast of the fourth month, and the fast of the fifth, and the fast of the seventh, and the fast of the tenth shall be to the house of Judah, joy and gladness and cheerful feasts.' " In other words, the fasts will be turned into

feasts.

Now, fasts were times of mourning, times of sorrow, times of remembering tragic events. And the Jews remembered the captivity. They remembered the times when they were devastated and destroyed and carried away captive. And they memorialized that memory by identifying certain fasts. And they would go without food in order to remember those sorrowful times.

And it begins by saying, “The fast of the fourth month.” They, in the fourth month, fasted because they remembered the flight of the royal seed and the taking of Jerusalem. And then there was the fast of the fifth month, when they fasted because of the destruction of the temple. And then there was the fast of the seventh month. They fasted, remembering the murder of their governor Gedaliah. And then the fast of the tenth month, the beginning of the siege that eventually led to their captivity.

And some Jews in the world today are still observing those fasts. But the prophet says the fasts shall be turned to cheerful feasts. No more fasting, no more need to remember the sorrow. Everything is going to change. It shall come to pass that there shall come peoples and the inhabitants of many cities. And the inhabitants of one city shall go to another saying, “Let us go speedily to pray before the Lord, and to seek the Lord of hosts. I will go also.’ Many peoples and strong nations shall come to seek the Lord of hosts in Jerusalem and to pray before the Lord.” The world is going to come to Messiah.

In those days, it will come to pass that ten men will take hold of the skirt of a Jew and say, “We will go with you for we have heard that God is with you.” And the Jew will be the agent to bring the world to the feet of Christ. In other words, there’s coming a day when Messiah reigns and there will be feasts and joy and gladness and the world will bow at His feet. The rebels will be purged out. That’s the kingdom.

Well, the Jews lived in anticipation of this. I mean, they expected it all to happen and here came Jesus and He was the King. But none of this happened. There was no purging of the rebels. There weren’t a lot of Gentiles grabbing on to their skirts and saying, “take us to Him, take us to Him.” There was no sitting up on a throne. There was no throwing out the Roman power. There was no purging of the world.

There was still war. The people weren’t beating their swords into plowshares or spears into pruning hooks. There wasn’t peace in the world. There wasn’t the punishing and condemnation of the rebels and rejecters and blasphemers. And so as much as they believed that Jesus was the Messiah in their hearts, they struggled with doubts because they didn’t see the fulfillment of their expectations of His kingdom. And so they struggled. And we’ve been looking at that. The Jews, frankly, just couldn’t believe He was the King because He didn’t do what they expected the King to do.

Look with me for a moment at the 18th chapter of John, and I think you'll gain another insight. The 18th chapter of John. Here we find our Lord before Pilate. And Pilate said to Him, in verse 33, "Are You the King of the Jews?" Now, you see, that was the question. He said He was. He gave some absolutely, incontrovertible evidence that He was, in His miracles and in His words.

They couldn't deny that He, for all intents and purposes, banished disease from Palestine for the period of His ministry. Incredible power displayed, marvelous, incomparable communication that could only have come from the infinite mind of God. Insight into the human heart that was omniscient. But they struggled with it because it didn't jive with what the kingdom was going to be.

On one occasion, they even tried to make Him a king and force Him into the kingdom, force Him into the throne, force Him to overthrow Rome, and He escaped and would not allow them to do it. And so, frankly, they just couldn't accept the fact that He was the King, even though the credentials were there. And so Pilate poses the question that isn't his question; he doesn't even understand Messianic prophecy.

He says, "Are You the King of the Jews?" And Jesus says to him, "Are you saying that by yourself, or are you a parrot?" Are you asking that question or are you parroting what the Jews are asking? And what it tells us is that that is exactly what they were asking. Can He, can this be the King? Pilate said, "Am I a Jew?" In other words, do I know anything about these things? Of course I don't know anything about them.

"Your own nation and Your chief priests delivered You unto me." This is their problem. What have You done? He doesn't even know what He's done. But the issue about being a King is their issue, not his. Jesus then says this, "My kingdom is not of this world." Pilate, My kingdom isn't something you understand. And My kingdom isn't something they understand either.

If My kingdom were an earthly kingdom, a worldly kingdom, as you understand a kingdom, then My servants would fight. They wouldn't let Me be delivered to the Jews. But My kingdom is not from here. My kingdom is different than your kingdom, or your understanding of a kingdom, or theirs. And Pilate then says, "Well, are you a King then?" And Jesus says, "You said it, I'm a King. I was born to be a King and I came into the world to be a King and I am a King."

Now, people, there is no question in my mind at all that Jesus is a King. That's why He was born. That's why He came into the world. And there is no question in my mind either that this is a kingdom in which we live. But it is not perceived as a kingdom as men understand kingdoms. It is first and foremost a kingdom from within the heart.

And that is why in Romans 14:17, Paul says, “The kingdom of God is not food and drink, it is not outward, it is righteousness and joy and peace in the Holy Spirit.” It is internal. You see on another occasion, in Luke 17:20, they said to Him, in effect, “Well, if You’re a King, where’s the kingdom?” And He said, “The kingdom of God is – ” where? – “within you.” In your midst; you just don’t perceive it because it isn’t discerned by human perception, but I’m a King nonetheless.

Now, the disciples are sort of scratching their heads and saying, “He’s the King. You can’t deny it. But where’s the kingdom?” Because they were looking for the outward display and they have just gone through the horrible rejection of chapter 12 where He’s been blasphemed and called Satanic. And so the Lord says, “Look, I’m going to teach you now how to understand this period of My reign, this period of My kingdom.”

The future will yet unfold the full glory of the kingdom in its outward early millennial majesty, such as Zechariah and Micah prophesied. But for now, there is a form of the kingdom which He calls, in verse 11 of Matthew 13, the mystery. And during this time the kingdom will be different than it will be ultimately. And so He goes on to describe it. He gives them seven parables, as we’ve been saying.

The first two describe the nature of the kingdom, the nature of the kingdom. The parable of the soils, the parable of the wheat and the tares, and the nature of the kingdom is that good and evil will co-exist. There will be soil that rejects; there will be the true soil.

In other words, there will be people who refuse the kingdom, people who receive the kingdom. The second parable says and they should grow together until the final judgment. So, you’re not to expect the rebels to be condemned, you’re to expect the rebels and Christ rejecters to be devastated, burnt up, consumed or whatever. They’re going to go along together. Now, having said that, He then discusses the power of the kingdom in the next two.

And He says, “In spite of that, in spite of the coexisting of the good and the evil, in spite of the tremendous power of sin and the power of Satan, in spite of the very massive oversowing of tares and the wheat, in spite of the fact that three of the four soils are evil and rejecting, still the power of the kingdom is so great it’s going to grow. From a small beginning like a mustard seed, it will become a massive tree. From the littlest seed it becomes the biggest bush. And like a little tiny piece of leaven, hidden in a massive pile of dough, it permeates everything, and influences everything.

Now, this is a hopeful word, beloved, after two parables that were not hopeful at all. The first two parables told us we’re going to have to allow evil to go along in this world. And I’ll be very honest with you, I hate sin. And there are many times when I sense that Davidic heart where David cried out for God to destroy the sinner and destroy sin.

And there are times when you just wish you could just act as God's executioner and purge. But the first two parables said no. No, that's not for you to do. This is the time of God's grace. Judgment awaits the future. So they go together. That's a message of…of fearfulness, of intimidation, of distress because we tolerate all this stuff.

But the message of hope comes in the next two parables. In spite of that the kingdom's going to grow, and finally, it's going to fill the earth. And I believe these two parables actually usher us right into the millennium when the bush is at its largest and the trees are…and the tree is filled, as it were, with birds, when the leaven has leavened the entire lump. And we look forward to that. And so these are parables of great hope, great hope.

By the way, the next two parables also have a common subject. They're about the person appropriation of the kingdom. The first four see the kingdom in general; the next two see it in specific. So the first two parables speak of the nature of the kingdom, the next two the power of the kingdom, and the next two the appropriation of the kingdom. That's very important. Because when you interpret this parable, you want to interpret it in the homiletic consistency that our Lord uses as He unfolds these parables. And we'll see about that in a moment.

Now, this is going to be like a…like a Bible study lesson. And I'm going to take you into an interpretive situation that I think needs to be made clear. Because I believe that the Parable we're to look at today, the parable of the leaven, has been greatly misunderstood. Let's look at it. The parable of the leaven in verse 33. Now, we've already looked at the parable of the mustard seed and we've learned three lessons from it. The kingdom will start small; it will become large and the nations will ultimately enjoy its benefits. But now we're going to look at a very similar lesson in the parable of the leaven.

"Another parable spoke He unto them saying, 'The kingdom of heaven is like leaven, which a woman took and hid in three measures of meal till the whole was leavened.' " Now, as always, our Lord picks His parables out of common life, very common life. As a boy growing up, He would have seen His mother do this many, many times. Make bread, and make bread using yeast, or leaven, or sour dough, as it's sometimes called. And this was a common occurrence in the home.

You take a new batch of dough which is all prepared and kneaded and ready, and you take a piece of sour fermented dough from a former loaf and you place it in that new loaf and it foments and bubbles and permeates until it leavens the whole loaf and causes it to rise. And our Lord would have seen this, as everyone would, myriad of times. Now, the leaven is a very small piece, very small. But you'll notice that it is hidden in three measures of meal.

Now, that is a massive amount of dough. You want to know how much? Three measures of meal is the equivalent of an *ephah*. Aren't you happy about that? And by the way, it was not uncommon for them to prepare that much bread. Because it was the staple of life and the families were large, and

the servants in the house and everybody, and so they made great amounts of bread.

Just as a footnote I did a little checking when I first saw that three measures of meal, I was sort of stunned by it. I mean, it would make bread that would be just an almost inconceivable amount. And so I went back and found that when the Lord and two angels in Genesis 18 visited Sarah and Abraham, Sarah made bread. You know how much she used? Three measures of meal.

And then I went into Judges chapter 6, verse 19, and I found in the case of Gideon that bread was prepared using three measures of meal, or one *ephah*. So this must have been the common recipe. I mean, if that's the way Sarah made bread for God, no matter…no wonder they just kept it up, right? Now, the large amount of meal, I think, is indicative of the tremendous enormity of the task accomplished by a little bit of leaven.

It's very parallel to the smallest seed resulting in the largest bush. Here you have the little tiny piece of leaven, ultimately extending its impact and affect to a massive amount of dough. So…oh, by the way, a woman is used here because wom…this was women's work, men were in the field and women were in the kitchen, or whatever; outside in those days, working with the oven. And that's still pretty much how it breaks down.

And leaven is a piece of fermented sour dough from a former loaf, left out so that it would ferment somewhat and it acts as yeast causing the leavening of the bread. Now, frankly, let me just add a footnote, leavened bread is far superior to unleavened bread. Would you agree to that? Unleavened bread is flat, hard, dry, unappetizing stuff. Leavened bread is soft, spongy, warm, tasty good stuff, right?

I don't want to get too much into this or you'll all be leaving. But, here's another thing to keep in mind. The leaven influences a massive amount of dough. Secondly, it influences it positively. It has a positive affect. It makes it better and makes it more tasty. It has a good influence, ultimately, on it. Makes the bread better.

Another thing we see here is that she hid this…this in it. The leaven has to be inserted; it can't sit on the counter and yell at the bread. God didn't approach His extending…His influence in the world by standing on a cloud and hollering down, you see. The leaven has to be injected. It has to be placed within, and then it begins to permeate, and permeate and permeate. Now this was something that every Jew would know, everyone would understand, this is not very difficult.

What are the lessons? It's a very simple story with very simple lessons. And yet I'm telling you, so far of all the parables I've studied, people are more confused on this one than any other parable, and it is so simple. If I didn't tell you what the alternative view was to what I'm going to give you and you had never heard it, I don't believe you'd ever guess it. It's that obscure in my thinking. But I'm going to tell

you what it is so in case you're confronted you can help those folks who don't agree with me.

Now key truths. Here we go. Here are the lessons. Number one, the power of the kingdom is great. That's the lesson. The power of the kingdom is great. I mean, a little tiny bit of leaven influences the whole mass of dough. That's what He's saying. The fact that the kingdom begins small is not necessarily debilitating because it has the power to influence everything.

The meal here, the measures of meal, the dough is like the world. And you plant the kingdom of heaven in the middle of the world, and as small as it is, it will influence the whole thing because inherent in it is a bubbling, fomenting, supernatural power. I believe, without question, the leaven represents the good influence of Christ, His kingdom, His gospel, His subjects in the world.

First of all, I believe that because of the way the Lord laid out the parables. The first two have spoken of the nature of the kingdom. The next two, I believe, of its power to overcome the evil that is present. Now some people, at this point…I'll tell you the other and more dominant view. Some people think the leaven means evil and that what the parable is teaching is that evil is going to be in the kingdom permeating the kingdom.

Well, I have several problems with that. Problem number one, it doesn't fit the layout of the parables. We've already dealt with the evil in the world in the first two parables, now we're dealing with the power of the kingdom to overcome that. So, it's inconsistent with our Lord's pattern.

Secondly, the verse says this, "The kingdom of heaven is like – " what? – "leaven." Now if I just asked you, plain and simple, what the leaven refers to based on that statement, what would you say? The kingdom of heaven is like leaven, therefore the leaven refers to what? Good, class, the kingdom of heaven. And you really don't have to be Phi Beta Kappa to figure that out.

And it seems to me patently obvious that the kingdom of heaven is like leaven which means that the leaven refers to the kingdom of heaven. And I have to believe that, in that sense, He is seeing the kingdom of heaven in its good sense. The kingdom of heaven is good, and its influence is that which makes what it influences better as leaven does with bread.

At this point, now, we want to keep in mind what is the major argument of those who make leaven be evil here. And this is their argument. That leaven everywhere else in the New Testament always refers to evil; therefore, here there must be consistency. And they will say that Jesus even uses it to refer to evil. Now let me take issue with that. Hang on to your seats, those of you who have taught that that way. Leaven inherently never refers to evil. That is not its intention.

You say, "Oh, wait a minute. It says in Luke 12:1, Beware of the leaven of the Pharisees which is hypocrisy." Listen, the leaven there is not so much the hypocrisy itself as the influence that it has. You

see, leaven is only an analogy that is good when applied to permeating influence. You understand? So the point of using the leaven to describe the hypocrisy of the Pharisees was that the hypocrisy of the Pharisees effects them the way leaven effects bread.

It permeates everything they do. So that leaven is not an illustration of sin, It is an illustration of permeation. That's very important. They…they were permeated with hypocrisy of which leaven is an apt analogy, so that the analogy is an analogy of permeation. Now if you take leaven any further than that, you've destroyed its analogy. It is not simply an analogy of something evil.

Now when the Bible wants to talk about something that's evil it calls it darkness, or blackness, right? We…we see those terms for evil. The absence of light, because that's a sort of static definition of evil. But when the Bible uses leaven as an illustration, it's talking about something that permeates. That is the usefulness of that analogy, and I believe that's the way we have to see it here. It speaks of something that permeates.

Now may I add another footnote? And this is something you might…it might go right by some of you, but for some of you it will be helpful. You don't take analogies and absolutize them into theological terms. In other words, leaven is only an illustration and does not have an absolute theological meaning. You can't…you can't assign it an absolute theological meaning so that every time you have leaven, you got sin. I mean, that's only an analogy. That's only an illustration.

And you'll really have a lot of trouble when you get into the Old Testament and you get to the feast of Pentecost and all the Jews are commanded by God to offer God leavened bread. Now you've got a problem. Are they offering evil to God? You see, you can't do that with a simple analogy or illustration. So you've got to go beyond the term itself. Its basic meaning is permeation; that is the analogy in its usefulness.

And as you look in the New Testament, it's used several times. It's used of different sins. Not just hypocrisy but different things. It's used of…of legalism in Galatians 5:9. It's used of immorality in I Corinthians 5. So it could be hypocrisy, or legalism, or immorality. It could be anything that influences, that permeates. That's the reason leaven is used. It is only an illustration of that which permeates. So, when you come here, you can't take leaven and give it an absolute theological meaning of evil, you have to use it as an analogy.

And it is an analogy of that which permeates. And there's just as much right to use it of an…as an analogy of that which permeates for good as an analogy of that which permeates for evil, even though it may never have been used anywhere else in the New Testament as an analogy of that which is good. Do you understand what I'm saying? The Lord can still use it once for that. So you can't extrapolate off of the other uses.

Now let me give you another reason why. Look at ICorinthians chapter 5, 1 Corinthians chapter 5. And I'll just give you an insight that might help you to see this. Verse 6, Paul in indicting the Corinthian church for their sin, uses an illustration here of leaven. He says, "Don't you know – " verse6, 1 Corinthians 5 – "that a little leaven leavens the whole lump?"

Now that is simply a proverbial statement. That's just a saying. It's a saying that…it's an excellent analogy. You get a little bit of influence and it's going to mess up a whole lot of stuff. Now we have a very similar one that the Bible doesn't use, our little analogy is one rotten apple what? Spoils the barrel. Only our analogy goes further because we've got what kind of an apple? A rotten one. So it influences for evil.

But leaven is neutral. It depends on how you want to apply it. Leaven really makes bread better but it can be used to speak of anything that ultimately influences a large mass from a small beginning. Permeating influence. But look at this. Now he applies this in verse 7. Here's how he uses the analogy. "Purge out the old leaven that you may be a new lump." Now, you've a lump of dough, right? And what is he talking about?

He's saying, "You're a Christian now. You're a new lump of dough, right? Don't put into that new lump leaven." Now where did that leaven come from? It comes from an old loaf, right? So when you were baking bread back here, you took off a piece, put it aside and let it ferment, and you stick it in that new one. You know what Paul is saying? You're a new creature in Christ. Don't bring any of the stuff from that former life in to influence that new life. See what he's saying? Beautiful illustration.

It's the illustration of continuity. Cut off the continuity is what he's saying. Because when you bake bread, you'd bake this loaf, pull off a little piece, start the next. That's what's called…and people who bake bread talk about starters, don't they? And you just keep…one is coming from another. He says, "Cut it off right there. And start here with a brand new loaf."

And verse 8…or verse 7, rather. "For Christ our Passover is sacrificed for us so let us keep the feast – " now he's talking in spiritual terms – "Not with old leaven, malice and wickedness, the stuff of our former life, but with unleavened bread." Now what is this all about? Boy, every…every Jew who read that would know. Christ is our Passover. Well, what does he talk about that for?

Now listen very carefully. Back in Exodus chapter 12…don't look it up, just listen…God said, "You're going to leave Egypt, I'm going to take you out of Egypt, out of captivity, been here 400 years. And when you go I want you to have a Passover feast." Remember that? And the angel of death will come by, and the blood on the doorpost, and so forth, you'll be safe. "When the angel comes by, and so forth, you'll be passed by, but I want you to keep a Passover feast to remember that the God of grace passed over you, spared you in mercy."

Now, when you keep the Passover feast, you use what kind of bread? Unleavened bread. And you keep that feast for seven days; unleavened bread for seven days. Why? Well, Exodus 12:39 talks about the fact that they had to leave in haste. But more than that, there was symbolism there as interpreted by I Corinthians chapter 5. What was the symbolism? You're leaving Egypt. Here's Egypt, you're leaving Egypt. You are a new people. You're going to a promised land.

Don't make leavened bread. Why? Because if you make leavened bread out here, where is your little lump of leaven going to come from? The bread you made where? In Egypt. Cut off the cord. You see, the unleavened bread became a symbol of the disconnection from Egypt. Cut that off. And after seven days, then you can begin again to make your leavened bread.

And then in Leviticus it says, "When you finally come to the time of the feast of Pentecost – " Leviticus 23 – "then offer to Me that leavened bread." Now if leaven was always sinful, there's no reason why God would have them offer it to Him. And there's no reason why God would limit that unleavened bread thing to a seven-day period. Because if leaven always meant evil then they went through the rest of their life demonstrating God's tolerance for evil every time they made bread.

But you see, it was a point of continuity. And the reason they were to cut off that leavening process was to symbolize that they were starting all over again with no Egyptian influence. They had a tough time letting go of Egypt, didn't they? They got out in the wilderness, they started complaining. "We want the leeks and the garlic and the onions and the – " they must have smelled something awful with the stuff they ate in Egypt. But they wanted to go back and get all the stuff they had in Egypt. And the Lord wanted to cut that cord, you see. That was the whole point.

Now when you come to I Corinthians 5, you understand what he's saying. Now in a spiritual sense, Christ is our Passover, right? He has delivered us. And now that we've been delivered out of our old life into a new life, don't take any of that leaven with you. So leaven is not so much the definition of a sin as such, but of the permeating influences that come from our past life. Don't…don't influence your present life with the stuff from the past.

So, leaven speaks of that permeating influence. You know, the Rabbis used to have sayings about that. The Rabbis used to talk about the fact that leaven was not necessarily negative, but even positive. One Rabbi said this, "Great is peace in that peace is to the earth as leaven is to the dough." See, they used it in a good sense. It was proverbial and could be used in any way.

You might want to know another interesting little note. When a Jewish mother's daughter was getting married, the mother would give her gifts. And one of the gifts that a mother gave a Jewish girl was a little piece of leaven from the last dough made before the wedding. And the girl was to start her first loaf in her new marriage with that starter from her mother. What did that symbolize? It symbolized

that all the best, all the good, all the blessedness of that family was to be carried into the next family. And the passing of a righteous seed on to the next generation was symbolized in that very simple Jewish custom of passing on leaven to the daughter. It speaks of continuity at that point.

All I'm saying is that the way leaven is used in the Bible is very broad. And it is a very excellent analogy of permeating influence. And so, we see that our Lord uses it, I believe, in that very same manner here. Sure it's used in the New Testament to speak of evil and its permeating influence but are we saying that God can't use it, also, to speak of the influence of good? Especially when He says, "The kingdom of heaven is like leaven," and especially when it's in a couplet of parables which obviously are geared to show how the kingdom's power is extended as over against the influence of evil given in the first two parables.

William Arnot has such a marvelous insightful word on this. He said this, "Boldly as a sovereign may, this teacher seizes a proverb which was current as an exponent of the adversary's successful strategies, and stamps the metal with the image and superscription of the rightful king. The evil spreads like leaven. You tremble before its stealthy advance and relentless grasp.

"But be of good cheer, disciples of Jesus, greater is He that is for you than all that are against you. The Word of Life which has been hidden in the world, hidden in believing hearts is a leaven, too. The unction of the Holy One is more subtle and penetrating and subduing than sin and Satan. Where sin abounded, grace shall much more abound," end quote.

And what he's saying is so good. He's saying Jesus knew that they understood the analogy of leaven related to evil, and that they perceived the massive moving spread of evil. And what better thing to grasp that which they understood and say, "And that's exactly how fast and how unstoppable and how penetrating will be the spread of the kingdom." A marvelous genius for imparting the truth for the spread of the kingdom.

And so, the leaven is the kingdom in the world. The massive dough is the world and from the inside it begins to bubble and boil. And you know, Christianity troubles the world, in a sense, doesn't it? It influences it for good but it's sometimes painful for the world to endure it. I always think of what Ahab said when Elijah showed up and he saw him face to face and he said, "Is it you, you the troubler of Israel?" And that's always the way the world reacts to the prophet of God.

In Thessalonica they said, "These men who have turned the world upside down have come here also." And in Philippi they said, "These men are Jews and they are disturbing our city." Good. We've been disturbing people for two thousand years. But isn't it incredible, the results?

You start out with 120 little disciples there, banded together in Jerusalem, and look today. Millions across the face of the earth have been influenced by Christianity, millions. To the point where all of

the social advances, all of the legal and jurisprudence systems, all of welfare and education and art and music and everything reflects the influence of Christianity.

All of the caring and benevolent societies, all of those things that help the poor and give aide to those that are downtrodden and depressed and so forth, comes out of the Spirit of Christ put through the hearts of His people are leaven in the world. If you don't think so, go to countries that have never known the touch of Christianity and see how they treat people.

The world has been leavened, it's been influenced dramatically, in an incredible way. What a hopeful, hopeful parable for the disciples, so discouraged and distressed that the Lord wasn't bringing the kingdom in its fullness. What is going to happen with this little tiny group? Ah yes, but He says, "You're like leaven and you're going to bubble and foment and boil, and before it's over, you're going to permeate the whole thing."

Second lesson, the positive influence of the kingdom comes from within. It comes from within. God has to plant His leaven inside the world. The reason He lets the two grow together is so that we can influence. This is the time for men to be saved. This is the time for Christianity to do its work. The world…and you don't think of it this way, but the world has been injected with eternal life and it's spreading.

I think about that little tiny piece of leaven that was planted in the incarnation, that little babe in Bethlehem, that little piece of leaven plunged into the world and, ultimately, will dominate the world. Ultimately every knee will bow. And here we are, extensions of that same eternal life. Christ dwells in me. The life I live, I live by the faith of the Son of God who loved me and gave Himself for me. "I don't live, not I, but – " what? – "Christ living in me."

The life of Christ in me is in the world leavening and leavening and leavening, and the influence moves and moves and moves. It's incredible. From the inside. We don't need a political position to do it. We don't have to be the President of the United States. We don't have to have the organization of the government to do it. We don't have to have laws and guns and soldiers and march and dominate the world with Christian ... Christianity. No, no, we can just begin to move from a small beginning.

I think about that first tape we ever made, from one tape to another…two little machines and make them one at a time. It took the whole hour to make the tape, each one. And now, every so many months another million of them. Small beginning. And the influence is incredible, permeating and permeating and permeating. You know, we made that film series on the family…just a footnote. And they sent out a notice to pastors if they would like to order the series.

And the folks from Moody Institute Films said they had three thousand orders the first week. Tremendous opportunity for influence. Three thousand different churches in one week. And that's

only the first week of response. It's incredible, isn't it, how Christianity moves in its influence. You know, "Before the Lord returns – " it says in Matthew 24:14 – "this gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in all the world." It's going to extend, it's going to go and permeate everything. And then, finally, our Lord will come and set up His kingdom.

Let me close with these thoughts. This is tremendous. Do you know where Christianity has gone from its little tiny beginnings? And I realize that not everybody who names the name of Christ is a Christian, but at least the message is out there. And people know what it is and they're getting…they're hiding in its branches somewhere. They're nesting there and they are made, in some sense, "sanctified – " I Corinthians 7:14 – "by the very presence of Christianity in the world."

But the latest statistics indicate that there are more people who say they are Christians in the world than any other religion on the face of the earth. One billion, one hundred and fifty million people identify themselves as Christians. The second is Islam with seven hundred and fifty million. One…nearly one out of three claim to be Christians. It's incredible, the influence.

And sure it's distorted here and there, but, nonetheless, the kingdom has moved through the world. And our Lord's Word is true. We have 80 thousand missionaries in the earth for Christianity. China just opened up. Do you want to hear an amazing statistic? They estimate, right now, that there are one-half million house churches meeting in Red China, with somewhere between 25 and 50 million Christians. That's just China.

We think about Cuba, Castro, communism, and all that. Forth-six Christian denominations today are functioning in Cuba. The church is alive there. Some have estimated that there are 63 thousand people per day embracing Christianity and 16 hundred new churches are started every week.

Do you realize that when the church met in Jerusalem, it took them seven years before they established the first mission church in Antioch? And now 16 hundred a week? Ninety-five percent of the population of the world have all or part of the Bible in their own language. And ninety percent of all the tribes on the face of the earth have had the opportunity to hear the gospel of Jesus Christ. Isn't that amazing? The influence of Christianity.

So, in spite of the weeds, in spite of the birds that snatch the seed, in spite of scorching sun, of persecution, there's some good soil. In spite of the presence of the darnels oversown, the wheat is going. And with all this evil opposition, the mustard seed grows and the leaven influences.

It sums up really what our Lord said. In Matthew 16:18, He said this, "I will build My church and the gates of hell will not hold it in." Isn't that a confident thing? Christ is building His kingdom. And the day will come when it all climaxes and it's indicated in Revelation and I read it to you. "And the seventh angel sounded and there were great voices in heaven saying, 'The kingdom of this world is become

the kingdom of our Lord and of His Christ and He shall reign forever and ever.' "

That's where it's going ultimately. Christianity will win, Jesus will reign, evil will be destroyed, evil men will be sent to eternal hell and the kingdom will come in its eternal fullness. What a hopeful, hopeful parable. Next time, we're going to find out how you and I appropriate personally the kingdom in our lives. Bow with me in prayer.

Our Father, we know that in Your revelation You have given us profound truth, eternal truth. You have given us that which proceeds from the infinite mind of God. Thank You for putting it in simple terms so that we can understand it. Thank You for the hopefulness that Your kingdom moves ahead to victory in spite of the opposition of the world.

Father, I pray that everyone in this place is a part of that kingdom, that none will know the weeping and wailing and gnashing of teeth of an eternal hell in the kingdom of darkness because they'll come to you through Christ. Thank You, Father, for vindicating the Word. Jesus said it would grow and it did. His Word is trustworthy. Thank You that we can stake our eternal destiny on its truthfulness. Amen.

Available online at: http://www.gty.org
COPYRIGHT (C) 2015 Grace to You
You may reproduce this Grace to You content for non-commercial purposes in accordance with Grace to You's Copyright Policy (http://www.gty.org/connect/copyright).