

## **The Increasing Influence of the Kingdom**

Scripture: Luke 13:18-21

Code: 42-183

Let's open our Bibles now to the word of God. It's the 13<sup>th</sup> Chapter of Luke, and it's verses 18-21. Luke 18, verses 18-21. The big issue in the preaching ministry of Jesus was the kingdom of God. In Luke Chapter 4, verses 43-44, He said, "I must preach the kingdom of God." But it didn't look from the human perspective even to the disciples like much of a kingdom. There was so much hope at the beginning, I mean at really the beginning, angelic announcement to Zacharias and Elizabeth that they're going to have a son in their old age and that son is going to be John the Baptist, the forerunner of the Messiah.

An angelic announcement to Mary and to Joseph that there is going to be a virgin born Son of God, Immanuel, God with us, named Jesus who will save His people from their sins. He will be the holy offspring who will rule on the throne. There was a miraculous angelic announcement to the shepherds in the field of good tidings, good news of great joy to all people about the arrival of the redeemer, the Savior, the King, the Messiah. It all looked so good.

And when John the Baptist began his ministry all of Judea and all of Jerusalem flooded out to the Jordan River where he was baptizing to be themselves baptized in order that they might be ready for the arrival of the Messiah and the glorious kingdom that He would bring. And one day out there John pointed to Jesus and said "Behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world." And Jesus began His ministry and the crowds were huge. Tens of thousands of people, but as the months went on the leaders of Israel made it very clear that they rejected Jesus totally. Not only did they reject Him, but they saw that He was a problem, a serious problem. He was a threat to their religious structure. He was a threat to the people's trust in them and confidence in them. It wasn't enough to ignore Him. They had to get rid of Him, and so they began to plot His death.

And they began to spread all throughout the land that He did what He did by the power of Satan. That was their spin on Jesus and the people began to buy it. They ignored his miracles as if they didn't happen, and continue to plot His death, until they finally brought it about. The inner circle that followed Jesus was very small, just twelve. And one of them was a traitor. There were a few dozen more that are identified as the 70 who actually went out to proclaim the message of the kingdom also.

Not even 100 when you add those two together. And throughout all His ministry in Galilee when He met there with the believers after His resurrection, there were 500. And when the Spirit of God fell in the upper room in Jerusalem, there were but 120 believers and that was after His resurrection. It's

beginning to become pretty apparent to the disciples that things aren't happening the way they expected them to happen. Jesus is always talking about a kingdom. I mean, He's talking about a kingdom every day. Everywhere He went, every day He preached, He preached the kingdom of God. And He spoke of things pertaining to the kingdom. That was all He ever talked about. The realm of those who are under the rule of God because they have believed, repented, and been saved. That's what His message was. It was about the kingdom.

But in their minds the kingdom was more than internal. The kingdom was external. Where were the trumpets and where were the horses and where the conquering armies and where was the throne and where was the palace and where was the exaltation? They were so eager about this that the best of them came to Jesus and said via their mother, "can I sit on your right and your left hand when you take your throne." And Jesus answered by saying, "Can you drink the cup that I drink?" Speaking of His suffering.

A little ragtag band hand no money, a meager little purse with which they could buy food from day to day. They had invested everything in this. They had dropped their nets and dropped their professions, dropped their jobs, walked away from their families to follow Jesus for this three year adventure. And as it got closer and closer to the end, their hope that there was really a kingdom was beginning to diminish. They had never seen a kingdom like this, nor had they ever seen a king like Jesus. When Jesus met with Pilate during a phase of His trial, Pilate said, "are you a king?" It really wasn't clear to anybody? Are you a king? Certainly a statement of doubt. And Jesus said, "My kingdom is not of this world."

Not of this world? Well, what kind of a king is He? There was nothing about Him that looked kingly. There was nothing sovereign, visibly sovereign about what He did in terms of exercising any kind of authority over the nation Israel or over the world. In fact, if He was a king, He was not a visible king. And if they were a kingdom, they were not a visible kingdom. That form of the kingdom and the current form of the kingdom is invisible. The world doesn't see Jesus as the king now anymore than they did then. And they don't see us as a kingdom now anymore than they did then.

And so they moved painfully to the cross with all their Messianic dreams dying along the way, because it just wasn't going the direction they thought it would go. And frankly, it looked as if the mission of Jesus was going to be a colossal disaster. And when they killed Him, they just fled. They ran. One can only imagine what their thoughts were. What kind of a king are you hanging on a cross? What kind of a kingdom is this? Powerless, small, weak, obscure, despised, those are the kind of questions that prompted Jesus to say what He said in our passage. Look at verse 18. "Therefore, he was saying, what is the kingdom of God like? And to what shall I compare it? It's like a mustard seed which a man took and threw into his own garden, and it grew and became a tree. And the birds of the air nested in its branches. And again he said, to what shall I compare the kingdom of God? It's like leaven which a woman took and hid in three pecks of meal until it was all leaven."

You say frankly that doesn't help. Those sound like riddles to me. And a parable unexplained is a riddle. By the way, these were familiar stories that Jesus told. You will find the very same two little parables or illustrations in Matthew 13. And they're just essentially verbatim. Jesus had spoken of the kingdom in this fashion before. And you can be certain that He explained the meaning of these things before. Small beginnings can have great endings. Tiny little mustard seed, huge bush. Leaven, leavens everything.

Jesus is saying to His disciples, don't be deceived. Do not be deceived about the power and influence of this kingdom. Nor should we be deceived about it and we're certainly in a better position to see what Jesus meant, aren't we? Two thousand years later we have seen the bush grow and we have seen the leaven permeate. But it must been a huge stretch for them to grasp what He was talking about. They could understand that the kingdom of God was a tiny little thing hidden, so much as to be invisible. They could understand that it was like a little bubbling fermenting piece of soured dough stuck in the middle of all the rest of the flour and dough.

Because they lived in that world which was filled with those kinds of images, agrarian, bread making, those things were part of their daily life. But what did it mean? Well, let's look at the two. The first one indicates that there will be external power demonstrated by this kingdom. There will be external power demonstrated by this kingdom. It's like a mustard seed. A man took threw it in his own garden. It grew, became a tree, the birds of the air nested in its branches.

Now a mustard seed produced a bush. Typically it could grow to eight feet high and 15 feet in diameter. That is a big plant. As far as garden plants go, that is the biggest garden plant that they new anything about. And of course, in Matthew 13:32 where Jesus taught the same little parable, He said, "the mustard seed is the least of all seeds." The smallest of all seeds. Now the critics of the Bible, oh they said Jesus is wrong here. He's wrong. The Bible can't be trusted, because it's not correct, it's not scientific. Not only that, Jesus can't be God or He would know better than to say something like that that's not true.

But the fact of the matter is with a little bit of investigation the critics are the ones that look foolish. Seed is a word used to describe a planted herb, vegetable, something you put in a garden. He's talking in the category of seeds sown by farmers. Of all the seeds that were ever agriculturally sown, this was the smallest. And Matthew 13:32 also says, "it became the greatest of the garden plants." And it uses the word lachanan, which refers to garden vegetables and greens and not wild plants and other things outside the garden.

So of all the seeds that were used in the garden, of all the seeds that were planted to produce food or herbs condiments for food, it was the smallest, it became the largest. And by the way, in case you wonder whether, in fact, the Bible is true, this is affirmed a Dr. L. H. Shinnors, Director of the

Herbarium at Southern Methodist University down in Dallas. They contain there 318,000 botanical specimens from around the world, and this doctor is a lecturer at the Smithsonian Institute. He said this, "The mustard seed would indeed have been the smallest of those likely to have been noticed by the people at the time of Christ. The only modern crop plant of importance with smaller seeds than a mustard seed, the only one in modern day, for a crop plant is tobacco," he said, "and that plant is of American origin and was not grown in the old world until the 16<sup>th</sup> Century."

So of those seeds planted in the garden, it was the smallest. And of those seeds in a garden as a crop, it grew to be the largest. But the Lord had more in mind than just the scientific accuracy. He was really using a Proverb. Because the Jews used the mustard seed to refer to something that was small. The mustard seed in the east was proverbial for smallness. For example, the Jews would talk about a drop of blood as small as a mustard seed. Or they would talk about a tiny breach of the law of God as a defilement the size of a mustard seed. Or the rabbis would speak about a spot or blemish as small as a mustard seed.

To this day, Arabs in the Middle East have a phrase about faith weighing no more than a mustard seed. Jesus then was speaking in the vernacular. He was using terminology that they used every day. You remember our Lord used that very same analogy in another context in Matthew 17:20 He said to them, "If you have faith the size of," what, "a mustard seed you consider that mountain be removed." And what He was simply saying was something very familiar to them. He was referring to small faith. If you just had small faith and that was the way they spoke of something small.

And it grew to be a tree it says, it's not a timber tree, but a large shrub is in view here. In fact, this thing is so large it says that birds of the air nested in its branches. And the word nested here is permanent dwelling. They set up their home, they put their nests there. It's branches were big enough and broad enough to build permanent nests in. A little unusual for a garden plant. That's the picture. They get so big and so sturdy and so strong that the birds find it a good place to put their permanent home. We're not talking about lighting on it and flying away. We're talking about building a nest and staying.

You say well, what's the point? The point here is about, listen to this, the external growth of the kingdom. Okay? External is the operative word there. The external growth of the kingdom. The kingdom, let's talk about that, we'll start small, from the external viewpoint looking at it and it's virtually invisible. I mean there was nobody just sort of looking from the outside at Jesus and His disciples and His apostles and saying wow, I see the King and the kingdom. I don't think so.

That's why the whole idea that Jesus was the King was so ridiculous. That's why when they crucified Him, they put a placard up over His head to mock Him in the way that came first to their minds, Jesus of Nazareth, what? King of the Jews. It's ludicrous. It's an absurdity. There was no way to view the kingdom. It was obscure. You couldn't see the king. You couldn't see anything about His followers

that looked anything like a kingdom than anyone else had ever seen.

No pomp, no show, no worldwide publicity, no power, no sovereignty over anything, no resources, no money, no buildings, no facilities, no nothing. Over in the 17<sup>th</sup> Chapter of Luke, in verse 20 says the Pharisees came to question Jesus. And it says He was questioned by the Pharisees as to when the kingdom of God was coming? When's the kingdom going to come? Well, that'll tell you one thing. They didn't think it was there, right? They couldn't see it. And the natural man obviously can't see the things of God. They couldn't see the kingdom. Well, He answered them and said this, "The kingdom of God is not coming with signs to be observed." It's not going to be visible nor will they say look here it is or there it is, for behold the kingdom of God is, what? It's within you.

It's in your midst. It's here. It's inside. It's the sphere of salvation. It's the redeemed who are under their king. You can't see it. There aren't going to be any marching armies. There aren't going to be any trumpets blown. There isn't going to be any loud music. There aren't going to be any palaces right now, but it's here. It's a small tiny little seed hidden, small beginning, but it's not going to stay that way. Jesus born in stable, infant in a feed trough, it's kind of like the mustard seed, buried in the ground, hidden, and yet He was the eternal God. For 30 years, 30 years, never left His family. Never left His town, except to go to the Passover in Jerusalem. For 30 years He didn't do a miracle, didn't teach a lesson. Talk about a seed hidden. And then for three years He ministered in towns and villages and occasionally at Jerusalem. Made a few converts, mostly from the poor. And was killed at the age of 33. But He was, you know, that seed that fell into the ground and died. Talked about that in John 12. And unless the seed falls in the ground and die, abides alone, and when it dies it brings forth fruit.

Here was Israel. Israel's so obscure. Israel this little feeble nation, wriggling like a little child in the arms of imperial Rome. Galilee and Judea were dots on the earth, nothing more. Nazareth, a town despised, uncouth, uneducated, uncultured. The disciples, small, inadequate, unqualified, powerless, faithless often. They were despised and they were mocked and laughed at. This doesn't seem to be a kingdom. But the story that Jesus tells about the mustard seed indicates that it will have a small beginning, but a great ending, and that's the second point to keep in mind. It grew when it was planted. And it became a huge shrub so big the birds of the air nested in its branches.

This is the part that the Jews expected, because this is what the prophet said. If you go back to Psalm 2, for example, that great Messianic Psalm, it says in verse 1, "Why are the nations in an uproar and the peoples devising a vain thing? The kings of the earth take their stand. The rulers take counsel together against the Lord and against His anointed. And it pictures the Messiah, the Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God, pitted against the nations of the world, the kings of the world. And verse 4 says, "He who sits in the heavens laughs, the Lord scoffs at them, then He will speak to them in His anger, terrify them in His fury. As for me, I have installed my king upon Zion, my holy mountain."

In spite of what all the kings of the world say, the Lord is going to install His king on Mount Zion and at that point, He says in verse 8, "I will give the nations as an inheritance to Him. The very ends of the earth as thy possession. Thou shalt break them with a rod of iron and shatter them like earthenware." I'm going to give you the power over all of the kings of the earth and you're going to rule them and you're going to shatter them. That's what the Old Testament said. That's the king they were looking for. Where's the king on the holy hill? Where's the rod of iron? Where's the devastation of the enemies?

It wasn't just Psalm 2, there are lots of Psalms. Psalm 72 is one among many. It says, "Give the king thy judgments oh God and thy righteousness to the king's son. May He judge thy people with righteousness thine afflicted with justice. Let the mountains bring peace to the people and the hills in righteousness." In other words, there's going to be an overflowing and an extension of the rule of this great king. "He's going to rule," verse 8, "from sea to sea, from the river to the ends of the earth. Let the nomads of the desert bow before Him and His enemies lick the dust. Let the kings of Tarshish and of the islands bring presents. The kings of Sheba and Seba offer gifts. And let all kings bow down before Him. All nations serve Him." Goes on to say He'll deliver the needy when He cries for help, the afflicted also and them who have no help have compassion on the poor and needy and allies the needy He will save and rescue their life from oppression and violence, etc., etc.

So may He live and may the gold of Sheba be brought to Him. This is the king they look for. Isaiah talked about this king. He talked about this king in more than one place, but just one illustration, Isaiah 54, "Shout for joy oh barren one, you who have born no child. Break forth into joyful shouting. Cry aloud you who have not travailed for the sons of the desolate one will be more numerous than the sons of the married woman says the Lord. Enlarge the place of your tent. Stretch out the curtains of your dwellings. Spare not, lengthen your cords, strengthen your pegs for you will spread abroad to the right, to the left, your descendents will possess nations and they will settle the desolate cities."

Get ready Israel. The one described in Chapter 53, the suffering servant who dies and is risen again is going to come back and reign. Get ready to expand the kingdom. The wonderful prophecy of Micah also looks at the glory of this extensive kingdom. Micah Chapter 2, "I will assemble all of you," verse 12. "I will surely gather the remnant of Israel. I'll put them together like sheep in the fold, like a flock in the midst of its pasture. They will be noisy with men. The breaker goes up before them. They break out, pass through the gate, go out by it, so their king goes on before them and the Lord at their head.

All Israel's going to be gathered. They're going to overflow the fences. They're going to flood out of where they've been confined following their great king. In Chapter 4 of Micah, "It will come about," verse 1, "in the last days the mountain of the house of the Lord will be established as the chief of the mountains." This is Messianic. "Raised above the hills. All the people will stream to it. There's going to be a new Jerusalem with a new king and all the world is going to stream into it. Many nations will

come and say come let us go up to the mountain of the Lord to the house of the God of Jacob that He may teach us about His ways that we may walk in His paths. For from Zion will go forth the law. Every word of the Lord from Jerusalem, and He will judge between many peoples and render decisions for mighty distant nations. And they will hammer their swords into plowshares. Their spears into pruning hooks. Nation will not lift up sword against nation. Never again will they train for war. And they'll gather under the vine and under the fig tree and the mouth of the Lord has spoken it in that day God is going to set His king on His hill."

Chapter 5 of Micah, the same thing. "He's coming. He's coming from Bethlehem. He's coming, the one who is from eternity. He will arise," verse 4, "shepherd His flock in the strength of the Lord in the majesty of the name of the Lord is God." He is going to do more than that. "He's going to reach out to Assyria, the land of Nimrod. He's going to conquer our enemies. He's going to gather the remnant of Jacob like dew. He's going to destroy enemies."

They looked at the kingdom in that perspective. Where is all of this? But Jesus says that's not how it starts. That's how it ends. The consummation of the kingdom will be amazingly out of proportion to the beginning. Dear friends, this is powerful prophecy by the way. This is powerful prophecy. The foolish people will say well Jesus' mission went astray and He got killed for trying to be the Messiah. He made a noble attempt at it, but obviously He never was able to fulfill it. Have to explain the external development of Christianity to now being the largest religion on the planet. It's going to grow out of all proportion to its beginnings.

So He was saying to the disciples, guys you're just seeing the start of this. Think of the mustard seed. Think of how little it is. Think of it being hidden so nobody can see it. Think of what eventually happens. It'll all culminate in the language of Revelation 11:15. "And the seventh angel sounded and their arose loud voices in heaven saying the kingdom of this world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of His Christ and He will reign forever and ever." And Revelation 19 says, "He comes out of heaven on a white horse and He has written on Him King of Kings and Lord of Lords." And He establishes His kingdom in a visible way. The great millennial kingdom and after that, the eternal kingdom.

But that's in the future. In the meantime, the kingdom is growing and growing and growing. It's far bigger now than it was in the day of Jesus, right? It was confined to one little nation, one little group of people. And when they gathered all in Galilee after the resurrection, there were 500. And when they gathered in Jerusalem, there were 120. That's meager. And there's another element to this. The statement at the end of verse 19 about the birds of the air nesting in its branches, this is borrowed from Old Testament language. And what it meant was, even people who are not apart of the kingdom will benefit from it.

They're not part of the plant. They don't have the life. They don't come from the root. They don't possess the life of the plant. They're not branches connected to borrow the imagery of John's gospel to the vine. But they're going to build their nests in the trees. What is that? It simply means that the nations of the world are going to find a resting place and protection and security and blessing because of the influence and the growth of Christianity. It's a pretty simple concept really. And they would understand it well and I'll show you why. Go back to Daniel Chapter 4. There is the real kingdom that grows with divine life, but there are also those who don't possess that life, but they find their protection from the kingdom.

This is an old concept. You go back to Daniel and Daniel, of course, was in the kingdom of Nebuchadnezzar, the Babylonian kingdom, and in Chapter 4, verse 10, he had a vision. Okay, and here's his vision. He was laying on his bed and he sees this great tree, verse 10. "This great tree in the midst of the earth." And its height was great, just huge, tall tree. Now look at this. "The tree grew large, became strong, its height reached to the sky. It was visible to the ends of the whole earth. Its foliage was beautiful. Its fruit abundant and in it was food for all. The beasts of the field found shade under it. The birds of the sky dwelt in its branches. And all living creatures fed themselves from it."

Do you know what that tree is? Well, you do if you have a MacArthur study Bible and you're cheating. You know what that tree is. That was a way to describe Babylon. It was a massive tree. And it was beautiful and it was abundant. And it provided food and shade and shelter for everyone that got into it. All that the Babylonian empire did as it went through the world and conquered nation after nation after nation and embraced them in its greatness was beneficial. However, verse 13, "I was looking in the visions in mind as I lay in my bed and behold an angelic watcher, a holy one, descended from heaven, shouted and spoke as follows. Chop down the tree."

Hmmm. The imagery here is of a great nation that becomes a protector and a provider and a benefit to all kinds of people being symbolized in the image of this tree. Look at Ezekiel Chapter 31 backing up into that prophecy, Chapter 31. And you'll see the same imagery again. Chapter 31, and we'll just look at verse 2. "Say to Pharaoh king of Egypt, whom are you like in your greatness?" Now Egypt was great. The greatest library in the world, you know, eventually developed in Egypt. Tremendous wealth, power. Egypt had great influence. "So to whom do you compare Egypt?" Verse 3, "Assyria, you're like Assyria in the greatness of the Assyrian empire." Assyria one of the great empires of antiquity along with Babylon.

"You're like Assyria." How does He describe the greatness of Assyria? "It was like a cedar in Lebanon with beautiful branches, forest shade, very high. Its top was among the clouds. The waters made it grow. The deep made it high. With its rivers it continually extended all around its planting place. It sent out channels to all the trees of the field. Therefore, its height was loftier than all the trees of the field. Its bows became many. Its branches long because the many waters as it spread them out." Here it is, "All the birds of the heaven nested in its bows and under its branches. All the beasts of the



field gave birth and all great nations lived under its shade."

This is a way to describe the greatness and the power, the external influence and protection and benefit that comes from a nation. Now look at Ezekiel 17, because in Ezekiel 17 you have the same imagery related to the Messiah, to the Messiah. Obviously the great kingdom will be the kingdom of Messiah. Verse 22, Ezekiel 17, "Thus says the Lord God, I'll take a sprig," this is transplanting, "from the lofty top of the cedar set it out. I'll pluck it from the top most of its young twigs. A tender one and plant it on a high and lofty mountain." This is the Messiah and His kingdom. I'm going to take out of it, if you will, the tree of Israel, the portion, a man.

Obviously, the unique God man. I'm going to plant Him on a high mountain. Verse 23, "On the high mountain of Israel, I'll plant it. It'll bring forth boughs and bear fruit and become a stately cedar. And birds of every kind will nest under it. They will nest in the shade of its branches. And all the trees of the field will know that I am the Lord. And again, there's that same imagery. They would know that. So when Jesus says and all the birds would nest in it, they saw wow. It's going to be like the great Babylonian empire. It's going to be like the great Assyrian empire. It's going to be like the great Egyptian empire. It's going to be the Messianic kingdom.

That's what that language expresses to them. And you know, as the kingdom grows in its external visible form as Christianity develops, what comes with it? The greatest civilization, the most advanced civilization, the greatest comforts, the finest medicine, the best education, the best harnessing of human resources and the resources in the earth. Christianity is the one that brought along all of the graces that grace this otherwise pagan world.

And just like 1 Corinthians 7:14 says, "That an unsaved spouse is sanctified by being married to a Christian." So unregenerate people are sanctified by being around the influence of the growing kingdom of God. I mean, we who live in America should understand that, right? Don't call America a Christian nation. It isn't. But Christians have been such a dominating force in this nation's history as to have provided the best possible life on the planet for all the non-Christians that nest in the tree of Christianity. So the Lord shows by simple power...a simple parable, don't underestimate the power, the external growth of this kingdom. Christianity, as we speak today, in name is the largest religion in the world; in the world. And it came from such a small and obscure beginning. Just as Jesus said it would. And nesting in the tree are many nations throughout the history of the world benefiting from the blessing of the growth of the kingdom. That's the external.

Let's look at the second story. It looks at the internal. It views the kingdom of God, not in its external growth, but in its internal influence. Verse 20, "Again He said, knowing what's on their mind," He asks questions He knows they're asking, "to what shall I compare the kingdom of God?" He knows they're struggling. They just...they can't see it. It looks invisible. He doesn't look like a king. They don't look like rulers in a kingdom. Doesn't even look like a kingdom. You keep saying it, you keep preaching

you're a king, this is a kingdom, we don't see it. So what am I going to compare the kingdom of God to?

"It's like leaven, which a woman took and hid in three pecks of meal," or three measures of meal, "until it was all leavened." Simple story, they were very familiar with this. Jesus grew up watching His mother make bread. Apparently they made a lot of bread when they made bread. Calculating three measures, there might be a little bit of variation, but most scholars would probably equate this with about 50 pounds of flour. That's a lot. That's a lot. That would make bread enough to feed 100 people at one meal. So this bread would be made for the family and the extended family and anybody who served in the family and perhaps anybody who came by. So this was a very typical scene. They were very familiar with it. And the way they made bread was to get this huge amount of flour and mix it together as dough and then take the sour dough from the prior that had fermented and put it in there.

And eventually it bubbled up in its fermentation, permeated the whole amount of flour to cause the bread to swell up, bubble up, and expand. This time Jesus is not looking at something outward growing. He's looking at something inward influencing. Don't underestimate the kingdom. We may not be having much impact on the Jewish leaders. We may not be having much impact on the nation Israel. And you're going to see worse things coming. Not only was Jesus killed, but most of the apostles as well, right?

It isn't going to be very quick, but over time this leaven is going to permeate the whole amount of dough. What is the dough here? What is...it's called the meal, pecks of meal. It's just flour. What does it mean? The world; the world. What is the leaven? The kingdom. It's hidden in the world. The world, they can't even see it. You know, Romans 8, Paul says "The glorious manifestation of the children of God has not yet happened." Right? If you walk down the street, they're clueless. They don't know you're a subject to the kingdom of God. They don't know that you're headed to be a co-regent with Jesus Christ in the glories of eternal heaven. They don't know that, right? You could put a Christian fish on your bumper, they still can't see it.

You can put a cross on your lapel or around your neck, they still won't see it. You just don't look like a transcendent heavenly citizen. You just don't look like somebody who possesses eternal life. You don't look like somebody in whom God lives in the presence of His spirit. It's not possible for them to discern it. You're just sitting there at dinner out eating your cheeseburger like everybody else and they cannot tell, because the glorious manifestation of the children of God has not yet happened.

But while they don't see it, you're influencing the world through your testimony and your righteousness and the gospel and the work of the spirit. Lives are being touched, lives are being changed, and just like leaven that permeates, we bubble up and we change what's around us. It isn't just chris and dumbChristianity, this big bush that's visible on the outside. Not all of which by any means are true believers, but it's the real deal going on on the inside. Leaven again is that fermented

dough that changes the character of the bread. If you don't have that, you're going to get flat, dry, unappetizing, hard...crackers. I don't know about you, I'd rather have bread than crackers.

By the way, this was women's work and so appropriately a woman did this. The men work in the field, sowing and reaping, and the women made the bread. It's hidden, it's not seen. You can't see the kingdom, but it's moving and it's expanding and it's permeating and it's growing and here we are 2,000 years later and we know that, don't we? Can you imagine what a stretch it was for those guys around the time of Jesus who were following Him and had given Him their lives to try to conceive this? Especially when they were standing around at the time of His arrest and wondering just where this thing was going down.

The key truths here, the power of the kingdom is extensive. The influence of the kingdom is extensive. The kingdom is like leaven. Now sometimes when you see the word leaven, you're going to say wait a minute isn't leaven bad? Isn't leaven evil? Well, certainly the kingdom of God is not evil. Jesus would never use the word or the term or the idea of leaven if it conveyed only something evil. No, the concept of leaven is the concept of influence. Something that permeates and saturates and changes.

Go back to Chapter 12, verse 1, end of the verse. He said to His disciples, "Beware of the leaven of the Pharisees, which is hypocrisy." What is the leaven there? False religion, false doctrine, false righteousness. Beware of it. Why? Because it permeates. It influences, get out of that system. That's why the Bible warns and warns and warns and warns the people not to be involved in false doctrine. Don't subject yourself. It influences. It permeates. Back in Matthew Chapter 16 there are a couple of verses there that essentially give us an indication that Jesus said this often. Matthew 16:6, "Watch out, beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and Sadducees."

Down in verse 11, "How is that you do not understand that I did not speak to you concerning bread, but beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and Sadducees." Now what He did mean? Verse 12, "The teaching of the Pharisees and Sadducees." You can't just expose yourself to false teaching. It has an influence. So does the truth. And the truth has a divinely energized influence whereas false teaching has a Satanically energized influence.

If I get a little worked up about false doctrine, will you understand why? This is an analogy for influence. In 1 Corinthians Chapter 5, Paul used it to refer to immorality as an evil influence. In Galatians 5, verse 9, he used it to refer to legalism as an evil influence. So when He talks about leaven here, He's talking about it as influence that's good, transforming, saving influence, sanctifying influence. When Israel left Egypt, they were told to have a Passover to celebrate the exodus. And they were told to make bread, but it was to be what kind of bread? Unleavened bread. Why? It was a symbol that they were taking anything out of Egypt. It was a clean separation. To do leavened bread, you had to take something from a past batch and put it in the new. Unleavened bread symbolized

taken nothing from here. This is a clean break. By the way, after they had been gone seven days, they could then make leaven bread again.

On the other side, when a young Hebrew girl married, her mother would give her some things as mothers do when girls get married, but one of the things that a mother gave a Hebrew girl was some fermented sour dough. That was a wedding present and she took it to start her first batch of bread in her new family. And it symbolized the wonderful continuity from her family into that new family. There are some things you want to leave behind, like the wretchedness of Egypt. There are some things you want to take with you like the love of a family.

And so this idea of leaven symbolized all kinds of influences. And He is saying so it is with the kingdom. It's amazing. Kingdom permeates, not by politics, not by laws, not by lobbying, not by forcing things. Hidden in the dough of society it permeates and permeates and bubbles and bubbles under the power of the Spirit of God transforming lives one at a time. It's the power of gospel truth in the work of the Holy Spirit. And that leads us to a final thought on this that the positive influence of the kingdom comes from inside. It comes from inside. Again it's hidden. It can't be seen. But it works on the inside.

And sometimes folks, you know, you look at the world and you look at the way things are going and you say to yourself, you know, we're not making any headway in Washington. We're not making any headway at the United Nations. We're not making any headway in the Hague. We're not making any headway in all the great capitals of Europe. We're not making any headway at the university level. And you hear people say oh we need to get more Christians in politics. We need to get more Christians in the Presidents of universities. We need to get more Christians in secular faculty positions. I'm not against that. But let me tell you something, the advancement of the kingdom is hidden and it works its powerful transforming work through your lives, person to person to person to person.

It transforms society by its hidden influence. And when you think about it it's amazing. It really is amazing. I read recently that 95% of the world's population presently have part of the Bible or all of the Bible in their language. It's working. Ninety percent of all tribes have had an opportunity to hear the gospel of Jesus Christ. You think about Ethiopia, claims to have something around 35 million "Christians." Talk about 50 million plus Christians in China. Did you know Cuba has 50 Christian denominations operating there under Fidel Castro? Somebody estimated that about 65,000 people profess to give their lives to Christ daily somewhere in the world.

And about 1,500 new churches start every week. We don't need the political power. We don't need the military power. Christians through the years have gotten that very confused. It happens through influence. And Jesus put it this way, "I will build," what, "my church and the gates of hell will not prevail against it." And some day He will come as King of kings and Lord of lords. And at that time, let

me tell you folks, every eye will see Him as King of kings and Lord of lords and we will be revealed as the glorious manifestation of the children of God becomes evident to the whole world, and we'll reign with Him in glory for 1,000 years and then on into eternity forever.

But until then the kingdom grows externally. Christianity advances in name and in reality, but it also grows invisibly and hidden by Christians who permeate society. I was told this week, I'll close with this, that many of the relief workers in South Asia helping with the Tsunami victims are Christians. In fact, this word that I received was that Christians are flocking in there realizing that these nations are anti-Christian, persecute Christians, kill Christians, burn churches, etc. I heard a story this week about a whole seminary that was burned to the ground. They know there's a window of opportunity and that the relief work is permeated by Christians. The world doesn't know it. The world doesn't see it. It can't be seen. But it's a way that God advances His kingdom, and it comes down to this, it's you and it's me in the sphere of our influence. That's how it happens. It's not going to happen in the great capitols of the world. It's not going to happen through bureaucracies and civil government and authority. It's going to happen the way it's always going to happen, hidden as we influence the world. What a glorious calling and what a great ending. Pray with me.

If you don't know Christ, if you have never received Christ as your Lord and your Savior, you've never repented of your sin and embraced Him fully, this would be a great time to do that. If you will open your heart to Christ confess your sin, confess Him as Lord, the one who died and rose again for you, you can enter His glorious kingdom and the hope of heaven.

Father, we not thank You again for the greatness of the kingdom. How thrilling it is to be a part of what You're doing in the world. Your kingdom has spread across the face of the earth. We can see that, but it also moves in ways we can't see through the hidden influence of the Spirit of God working through believers, as instruments to change others. Thank You for making a part of this great enterprise we long for it to be completed because when it's all done, then we know Christ will come and visibly reign and rule. We long for that day until then use us mightily as leaven in this world. Thank You Lord for our high calling in Christ's name.

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