

Parables Of Matthew 13 (Part 2): Leaven

The Parable of the Leaven

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The last time I spoke we were able to get through the Parable of the Mustard Seed. Before we go on, I think it's a good idea that we should review a few things to kind of get up to speed. This review may be quite lengthy.

In the last four weeks I've done a bunch of research, and I think what I found gives a lot of credence to what I said the last time. I'd like to stress here that this is an interpretation. This is not church dogma. This is not church doctrine. This is not an official teaching of the church in the sense that if you believe otherwise, we're going to come down on you for some reason. That is not the case. You are free to hold the traditional interpretation if you feel that is correct, but using the principles of Bible study that we know about and we understand, I feel that what I've come up with is correct, because the Bible itself supports it.

Given the symbols that we have seen (and what the Bible says about those symbols), you can only come up with this interpretation. So I will continue to preach it strongly, because I feel that it is correct. I feel that it contains vital lessons for us at this time, especially given what we understand about the Church of God, in this end time. I think this is very important.

You will remember the last time I gave you quite a long section of Jesus' use of the Kingdom of Heaven, and I'd like to review that, because there are still a few people who are uncertain about what I was getting at.

The basic understanding that I tried to get across to you was that the New Testament writers often use it in a present tense form. There is a form of the Kingdom of God, or the Kingdom of Heaven, that exists right now. We've always thought of it strictly in a future tense, that Jesus would come sometime in the future, and He would establish His Father's government on

the earth. This is absolutely correct. This is what we believe, but there is something about the Kingdom of Heaven that exists now, and that is what Jesus was getting at.

In fact, you may remember what we heard in last week's sermon about the word interpreted or translated "being saved." It's very similar to that, in that there is a past, present, and future application of the Kingdom of Heaven. We have to make sure just what the time is (the tense) so we can get the most out of the Scripture that we are reading.

One of the big principles we need to remember is here Romans 4:17. I'll paraphrase that: "*God calls those things that do not exist, as though they did.*" This is one way of looking at it. God, from His eternal perspective, thinks of the Kingdom of God as existing already. He can look back, and He could look forward and see that situations will work this way, and the Kingdom of God will exist. So we can say that the church is the Kingdom of God in embryo. If it continues along its present path, it will become the Kingdom of God when Christ comes back to this earth. It will be a major part of the Kingdom of God.

Now let's go to Hebrews 11. I want you to see where the writer of Hebrews (I'll just call him Paul, because that's who I believe wrote the book of Hebrews) in the space of two chapters uses different forms of this idea of the Kingdom of God in all three of these ways that I've just mentioned—the future, present, and in process. It's something that's going on. In Hebrews 11:13, he's talking about the heroes of faith.

Hebrews 11:13-16 These all died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off were assured of them, embraced them, and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth. For those who say such things declare plainly that they seek a homeland. And truly if they had called to mind that country from which they had come out, they would have had opportunity to return. But now they desire a better, that is, a heavenly country. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God, for He has prepared a city for them.

This is something they are looking forward to in the future. They're seeking this, and it's still out in front of them. In Hebrews 12:22 it is used in its present tense.

Hebrews 12:22 But you have come [already] to Mount Zion and the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, to an innumerable company of angels . . .

Hebrews 12:23 ...to the church of the firstborn.

Flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom. But this is like being saved. God sees it already happening, and so He says "*You have been born into the church of the Firstborn.*" It hasn't happened yet—not in its fullness—but it will, if we continue in God's way, and allow God to work His salvation out in us.

We will see it "in process" in Hebrews 12:28.

Hebrews 12:28 Therefore, since we are receiving a kingdom which cannot be shaken, let us have grace, by which we may serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear.

So this writer, in two chapters, tells us that this is something that we're looking forward to, that this is something that we already have, and it's something that we're in the process of receiving. That is what I mean about Jesus' use of the Kingdom of Heaven. He is using it in its present tense form. Remember, we went to Colossians 1:13 where it says that "God has already translated us into the kingdom of the Son of His love." He has translated, or transferred us. It's done. It's something He has done.

Philippians 3 is a very well-known scripture.

Philippians 3:20 For our citizenship is in heaven, [right now] from which we also eagerly wait for the Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ.

Our citizenship is there now, but we're still waiting for Christ to return.

Philippians 3:21 Who will transform our lowly body that it may be conformed to His glorious body.

We are already citizens of that heavenly kingdom, and all these other things are going to happen in the future, if things continue as they should.

II Corinthians 5:20 Therefore we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God were pleading through us...

We are ambassadors. We already have our citizenship, and we've been sent as representatives from that Kingdom into this world. Therefore we must live as if we are genuinely and truly part of that Kingdom. And we should.

I want to read from *Vine's Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words*. This is the Greek word *basileia*. It's the word that's normally translated kingdom. This is what he says:

Strong's #932: "*Basileia* is primarily an abstract noun denoting sovereignty, royal power, dominion. [I might add here reign, or realm. They would all be fine translations of this word—sovereignty, royal power, dominion, reign, or realm, as well as kingdom.] Then by metonymy . . ."

I'll explain the word metonymy. It means a word that is part of a whole that stands for the whole. We say "Jerusalem", and we mean all of Judah, or all of Israel. We say "Washington, D.C.", and we mean all of America. You hear reporters say, "In Paris today, Paris says,..." It means all of France is saying this; the government of France or that this is what the whole government is saying will be done.

Then kingdom, by metonymy, is a concrete noun denoting the territory or people over whom a king rules. It not only stands for this abstract idea of what a kingdom is, but it also stands for the land, and also for the people.

Vines:

"It is used especially of the kingdom of God and of Christ. The kingdom of God is: (a) the sphere of God's rule. Since however this earth is the scene of universal rebellion against God, the kingdom of God is (b) the sphere in which at any given time His rule is acknowledged."

Meaning the kingdom of God comes into force as soon as we come under its laws, and we acknowledge that we then are part of it, that we're accepted into it.

Vines:

"This kingdom is said to be in mystery now."

Mark 4:11 And He said to them, To you it has been given to know the mystery of the kingdom of God; but to those who are outside, all things come in parables.

Jesus Himself says it's in mystery. It's something that's hard to understand right now. That is, it does not come within the range of the natural powers of observation.

Luke 17:20-21 Now when He was asked by the Pharisees when the Kingdom of God would come, He answered them and said, The Kingdom of God does not come with observation: nor will they say, See here! Or See there! For indeed, the Kingdom of God is in your midst.

Vines:

"The kingdom is now spiritually discerned. When hereafter God asserts His rule universally, then the kingdom will be in glory. That is, it will be manifest to all."

Everybody will know it.

Vines:

"Thus, speaking generally, references to the kingdom fall into two classes. The first, in which it is viewed as present, and involving suffering for those who enter it, and second, in which it is viewed as future, and is associated with reward and glory."

Let me show you something here that's very interesting in Matthew 21:43. In verse 23 we can see that He's talking to the chief priest and the elders of the people. The context goes down through verse 43. This is what Jesus says:

Matthew 21:43 Therefore I say to you, the Kingdom of God will be taken from you [the Jews, from Israel] and given to a nation bearing the fruits of it.

When Jesus was there on earth, where did He say the kingdom was? He said it resided with Israel. There's the past. In I Samuel, when they asked for a king, what did God tell Samuel? "They haven't rejected you, Samuel, they've rejected Me as being king over them." That's the past of the Kingdom of God—the people, the territory, and the laws of which God is King. That's what the kingdom is. Wherever God reigns, *is* the Kingdom of God.

Does He reign in the church? **You'd better believe it!** He is our King, as we heard today in the sermonette here in Charlotte, and we go to the Feast to worship the King. In I Peter 2:9-10 we'll find out what nation it is that is going to receive the kingdom.

I Peter 2:9-10 But you are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, His own special people, that you may proclaim the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light; who once were not a people. [We all came from all different walks of life—all different nations, all different races and ethnic groups, all different social strata. There was nothing that bound us together. We were not a people, but now are the people of God] Who once were not a people, but are now the people of God, who had not obtained mercy, but now have obtained mercy.

That is the nation whom God, whom Christ will give the kingdom to, and it began as soon as He died, was resurrected, and formed the Church of God. *Now, YOU ARE THE ONES HE RULES OVER. YOU* are representatives of the Kingdom of God.

The parables in Matthew 13 give no indication whatsoever that they take place beyond Christ's return. The only indication that this may be so, is in the Parable of the Tares and the Parable of the Dragnet—where it talks about them being judged (the wicked being judged).

We can take that in several different ways, but the main idea that comes through the parables is that Jesus is talking in the present tense form, because He's not instructing us about something that's going to happen many years into the future. He's giving us instruction that we can use right now. It's kind of just an ephemeral hope to see something happening in the distant future, but this is instruction that's going to help you right now, and provides great hope, because you can see it being applied in your own life in producing the fruit.

Listen to what Herbert Lockyear writes in his book *"All the Parables of the Bible"* about this point.

What must not be forgotten is the fact that all the parables of Matthew 13 have to do with our age, and that by them our Lord was not teaching the complete and ultimate success of His kingdom in this age, which extends from His first advent right over to a second advent to earth. Further, in these prophetic parables our Lord was not illustrating the true nature of His kingdom.

I think we have that.

He surveyed this age and looked toward its consummation and described the mixed condition that would prevail until His return as King of kings when uniformity would prevail. Each of these kingdom parables must be interpreted within its imposed limit—namely this present age.

I think he got that right, but I want to add a little caveat here about what I've just said. Even though Jesus uses the term Kingdom of Heaven to describe what is going to happen within His church, we should not in any wise think of it in the same terms that we think of the literal future Kingdom of God (in all its fullness and literal reality) when He comes to set it up after His return.

The reason why I say that is because the kingdom in the main is composed of regenerated human beings. We're *there* in the spirit (in type) as we will be in the future, but right now we still have to battle our human nature. We still have to battle Satan the Devil. We still have to battle this world, and sometimes we're going to fail. While we are in the flesh, Satan has great opportunity to throw stumbling blocks in our way. That is why I read to you earlier that Vine says, "*the Kingdom of God right now is associated with suffering.*"

In Matthew 11:12 Jesus Himself tells us this very fact.

Matthew 11:12 And from the days of John the Baptist until now the Kingdom of heaven suffers violence, and the violent take it by force.

Do you know what He's saying there? The Kingdom of God is going to be the recipient of slings and arrows and wars and temptations and all these things, and it's going to take its own peoples' violence in return. We're talking forcefulness. We're talking struggle in order to make it, because there are so many things going against us. Jesus warns us it's not going to be easy. We're going to have to do it vigorously and violently sometimes. We're going to have to take ourselves and force ourselves to do what is right, because the Kingdom of God right now is under siege in so many ways. Therefore we have to act as warriors in battle and violently face the enemy.

We know from John 17:11-18 that Jesus said that the kingdom functions in the world, and He wasn't going to take us out of it. But He asked His Father to give us His protection from the evil one so that we could at least have that strength added to us. We must constantly deal with the world, human nature, and the evil one himself and his demons.

If you go through the epistles of Paul, you'll see that he's constantly telling us how much Satan has tried to trip us up. It's a good study sometime. Go through your Bible with a red pencil or something, and every time Satan comes up, or demons, or the devil, or some sort of evil, mark that in red, and then go back and see how it comes up page after page after page. Satan is involved in trying to destroy the Kingdom of God. That's his whole purpose. He's not going to win, but he's going to do his best to make sure that it doesn't come to pass. He's going to cause as much damage as he can. I feel that is why Jesus gave us the parables in Matthew 13, because He wants us armed and ready to fight.

Remember *The Four Views of Christ*, when my father went through what Matthew focused on. Matthew focused on Jesus as Messiah and King. He used all the Messianic prophecies in the Old Testament to prove it to the Jews. He focused on Jesus in a kingly manner.

Now what does a king do? Well, one of his many functions outside of just simply ruling his nation is that he is the commander-in-chief. He is the one that sets up his armies. He's the one that commands them in battle. What we're going to see is that Matthew 13 does not exist in the vacuum of ideas. This was something that Matthew put in the order that he did, in order to get across a point. What we need to do, is to go back and see the context that these parables are in, so that we can get a running start on the parables themselves and see just what Christ was getting at when He gave them to us.

I think for most of us, we've taken the parables right out of the context. We see the chapter break right there in Matthew 13, and we say this starts a whole new section. But it doesn't. That chapter break is very unfortunate. God didn't put that chapter break there. Man did, and I think that has tripped us up.

These parables were given on what A. T. Robertson, in his *Harmony of the Gospel* calls "One of Jesus' Busy Days." Jesus had many busy days, but Matthew included almost the entirety of His teaching on this one day. From Matthew 12:22 through Matthew 13:52 are the events of one day. He said a lot in that one day, and it didn't begin very well. In Matthew 12:22, immediately someone brings Him a demon-possessed man, and He casts out the demon.

Matthew 12:22 Then one was brought to Him who was demon-possessed, blind and mute; and He healed him, so that the blind and mute man both spoke and saw.

And the Pharisees, in verse 24, say that He casts out demons by Beelzebub, the ruler of the demons. Jesus, in verse 25, knew their thoughts, and He gives them this comment that Abraham Lincoln quoted in one of his speeches.

Matthew 12:25-28 Every kingdom divided against itself is brought to desolation, and every city or house divided against itself will not stand. And if Satan casts out Satan, he is divided against himself. How then will his kingdom stand? And if I cast out demons by Beelzebub, by whom do your sons cast them out? Therefore they shall be your judges. But if I cast out demons by the Spirit of God, surely the kingdom of God has come upon you.

I don't necessarily need to tell you the details of this just to see the flow of the context here. Jesus' words refute the Pharisees' accusation that He did miracles, [saying] He cast out demons through Satan's power. He says, "How can that be? Why would Satan want to cast himself out? He'd be losing the ground he had just gotten." He said, "That's ridiculous. His kingdom would not stand. But I cast out demons through the spirit of God, and therefore by showing you that I cast out demons through the spirit of God, I show you where I come from, whose representative I am. I represent the Kingdom of God. Satan is a whole other kingdom. He's the king of this world, the prince of the power of the air."

What have we just seen? What has Jesus just told us? "Satan and I are bitter enemies. We're on opposite sides of the fence. We're on far ends of the spectrum. I wouldn't do a thing to help him. You guys have got it all wrong."

Then He goes on to verse 29 and He says:

Matthew 12:29 Or else how can one enter a strong man's house and plunder his goods, unless he first binds the strong man? And then he will plunder his house.

What is He saying here? "I've already defeated him."

Go back to Matthew in the temptations. He showed who was boss, didn't He? He showed who was the superior person. He showed who was truly King. He's already bound the strong man, and He's saying here that He can do whatever He wants in Satan's house. He can call whomever He will. Satan has no power over Christ. So this verse tells us who the superior one is. "Satan and I are on opposite ends of the spectrum, and I am the most powerful. He's weak and base. I've already bound him."

Matthew 12:30 He who is not with Me is against Me, and he who does not gather with Me scatters abroad.

Now what is He saying? He's laying down the ground rules for the fight. He says, "There are only two sides. There's Satan's side, and there's My side, and you'd better pick which side you're going to be on."

Matthew 12:31-32 Therefore I say to you, every sin and blasphemy will be forgiven men, but the blasphemy against the Spirit will not be forgiven men. Anyone who speaks a word against the Son of Man, it will be forgiven him; but whoever speaks against the Holy Spirit, it will not be forgiven him, either in this age or in the age to come.

This is the unpardonable sin. It says if you commit blasphemy, there's no forgiveness for that. Now what is He saying? He's telling you the terrible fate of those who choose the wrong side. What He's saying here is that if you blaspheme the spirit of God, which is God's power and the agency by which He works, you've just said that God has no power, and that's a lie, because He just told you that He is the most powerful One.

If you deny God's power, you're denying God Himself. He said you can blaspheme the Son of God here, but try blaspheming God's power, and you're saying that God has no power, and you're making Him into something else—*that* is unforgivable. So choose your side carefully, because if you blaspheme what God is able to do, guess where you end up. You end up in the lake of fire. Not very pretty.

Well then, it must have come to the mind of Jesus that people out there would be thinking, "How can I tell which side I'm on?" How can you tell which side somebody else is on? He tells us in verses 33 through 37:

Matthew 12:33-37 Either make the tree good and its fruit good, or else make the tree bad and its fruit bad; for a tree is know by its fruit. Brood of vipers! How can you, being evil, speak good things? For out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks. A good man out of the good treasure of his heart brings forth good things, and an evil man out of the evil treasure brings forth evil things. But I say to you that for every idle word men may speak, they will give account of it in the day of judgment. For by your words you will be justified, and by your words you will be condemned.

We can tell which side somebody is on by the fruits of his life. If you're on Christ's side, then you produce Christ-like fruit. But if you're on Satan's side, you produce Satan's fruit. It's pretty easy to tell then, considering.

The Pharisees hear all this. So what do they do? **They ask for a sign.** Jesus must have wanted to go home! They asked for a sign. He just told them, "Judge by fruits, not by a sign." What's a sign going to prove? He said, "You've totally missed My life. You've totally missed what I've been saying. Look at My fruits. You didn't see it, and by that it shows Me that you've chosen the wrong side." What else does He say?

Matthew 12:41-42 The men of Nineveh will rise in the judgment with this generation and condemn it, because they repented at the preaching of Jonah; and indeed a greater than Jonah is here. The queen of the South will rise up in the judgment with this generation and condemn it, for she came from the ends of the earth to hear the wisdom of Solomon; and indeed a greater than Solomon is here.

He says that the men of Nineveh are going to rise up in judgment and condemn this generation because they didn't hear the message of repentance that Christ brought. Then He says the queen of the South will rise up and

condemn this generation because they didn't understand the wisdom that Jesus brought—wisdom that was far greater than Solomon's. Strong words, aren't they?

Then He goes on (in verses 43 and 45) to another parable—The Parable of the Unclean Spirit.

Remember that? One gets cast out and seven more come back, because the person out of whom the demon was cast didn't do a thing with his clean mind. Do you know what this is? This section (three verses—43, 44, and 45) is a summary of His entire morning. First He talks about an exorcism. Then He talks about nothing happening. The person remained neutral after the demon was cast out. And then He says seven other spirits come back in, and his latter state is worse than the former state. So it will also be with this wicked generation. The cap stone on this, as He says, is "Satan's gotcha, and you will be condemned like I just said."

He was genius. On the spot He was able to come up with a parable that explained everything that they had just said that day. "You didn't get it. You're going into condemnation. Satan's got a hold of you. You've chosen your side."

What have we seen here? We've seen that Jesus has been talking about black versus white; Satan versus Himself; good versus evil. He's showing the two sides in the fight, and that these two sides are going to come into conflict at every turn, and we must choose which side we're going to be on. You're either for Him, or you're against Him. Then there seems to be an interruption here.

Matthew 12:46-50 While He was still talking to the multitudes, behold, His mother and brothers stood outside, seeking to speak with Him. Then one said to Him, Look, Your mother and Your brothers are standing outside, seeking to speak with You. But He answered and said to the one who told Him, Who is My mother and who are My brothers? And He stretched out His hand toward His disciples and said, Here are My mother and My brothers! For whoever does the will of My Father in heaven is My brother and sister and mother.

What does He say? He said, "These are My people. You guys were looking, and you've seen yourself, and you're the other side. Do you want to know who's on My side? My mother, my brothers, and my sister. Everybody who does God's will is on the right side."

So what have we seen here? Jesus, in however many verses there are here (about 30), shows the bad side, and He shows the good side. And then He launches into His parables which tell you what's going to happen with these two sides. It's just incredible to see the structure here, how this was all set up. He immediately talks about how Satan is going to fight against His people. It's really incredible.

Now we will go into the parables. We saw last week that the first four parables make up a section that I entitled "Satan's Plan To Destroy The Church." You see how it follows from this wonderful introduction that Matthew provided for us. I mean, can't you see that these two sides were then introduced and just waiting there. When chapter 13 starts up, that battle is joined, and Jesus tells us what's going to happen. Knowing who's who, Jesus then tells us how the other side works.

Remember, I said that Matthew is talking about the King in the form of a general—the commander of his army. Now doesn't a general want to tell his troops the other side's battle plan? Isn't that the one thing—if He could tell them nothing else—that he would tell them? "The enemy is going to act like this, and I want you prepared to meet them on this front. The enemy can't do anything else, so I want you to be there and stand and do all that you can to stand." (See Ephesians 6.) So what is Satan's battle plan?

Step 1: Attack God's people early in their calling before they get their strength up.

Step 2: Send secret agents in to infiltrate the church, to do as much damage and wreak as much havoc as they can to keep the good side in turmoil and confused. Undermine them at whatever cost.

Step 3: Influence the church to become large, strong, and worldly, to skew their strategy from what God intended. (We saw this in The Parable of the Mustard Seed.)

Let's go back and review The Parable of the Mustard Seed in bit. Remember that we saw that the common interpretation of The Parable of the Mustard Seed was that it would begin tiny, and grow into a worldwide system and become the home for many peoples. We saw, after analyzing the symbols, that it didn't fit very well. Now we understand that the man, the sower from the other parables, is Christ. It's very clear. And He said that the field is the world. You can look in Matthew 13:37-38 to see that. It's very clear that the sower is the Son of Man, and the field is the world.

I said that the "mustard seed" represents the church, and I'd like to expand this a little. We saw that the mustard plant was just a common mustard plant—the one we get table mustard from. It is mustard spice. Since then I found out that mustard is related to broccoli, cauliflower, Brussels sprouts, cabbage, kale, caroube, rutabaga, and turnip.

Now have you ever seen any of these grow into trees? All of these things are medium-sized plants. We would call them herbs. We would call them vegetables. The mustard plant itself grows to about four feet high, and it will send up a stalk with some spindly little branches on it, and it has flowers. Mustard plants have been known to grow as high as about 15 to 20 feet—but they're still not a tree. With their spindly stalk, and their spindly little branches, they may resemble a tree, but they're not a tree. In fact one man told my dad, and it was relayed to me, that even when they get kind of big, they're still not steady—they can hardly hold a humming bird's nest.

We know that something is wrong here, when a mustard plant could become a tree and support birds with their nests. Something's wrong when this mustard plant can hold up all these birds and nests. For it to become a tree, a drastic, unnatural change must occur. The only real clue we have to the interpretation of the mustard seed is its smallness. We went through several verses to show that the church is invariably called small, little, few, only a remnant—even a seed in a couple of other places.

So it fits, that this seed grows into a plant, obviously giving us a picture of structure. This is something that I didn't go into last time, but a plant has structure. I think that is the idea that Jesus is trying to get across here. This plant has a structure that He wants it to grow into, but it grows beyond that and into a structure that He didn't intend.

Yes, we talk about having a family tree... with a lot of nuts in it probably. Well, a family tree is an organizational structure, an organizational chart done by birth or death, or relationship. I think that's kind of what He is getting at here with the church—the mustard seed represents the church in its organizational form. It doesn't matter really if it's one church's organization. It could be the whole church in its organization. I'm talking about the greater church of God in its organization. It goes beyond what God intended.

We know that the mustard plant grows bigger than the herbs and becomes a tree, and we looked at this. Luke says that it becomes a large tree—that just doesn't fit nature. It's not right, and that's the point. It's gone beyond something that is natural. It goes beyond the bounds of God's designed limit. It becomes something that God never intended.

Now here's a new thing that I want you to look at. That's the word "becomes"—"the mustard plant becomes a tree." This is the Greek word *ginomai*. This is a very common Greek word. It's used 667 times in the New Testament, and its meaning is very similar to the word "becomes" in English. We would use it in pretty much the same way. Let's go to Matthew 18 and see how it's used there.

Matthew 18:3 Assuredly, I say to you, unless you are converted and become as little children, you will by no means enter the kingdom of heaven.

"Become as little children..." This is a Hebrew construction here. "...unless you become converted," and "...unless you become as little children." It's called parallelism. The word "becomes" is paralleled with the word "converted." Now what does this word "converted" mean? Well, it means "to turn." *"Unless you become turned, you won't enter the kingdom of heaven."*

And so *ginomai* ("become") takes on the meaning of "to turn," or "to change—change into." "*Unless you change into little children, you won't enter the kingdom of God.*"

John 2:9 is an astounding one. It really gives you the idea of what Jesus was getting at in The Parable of the Mustard Seed. This is when water was turned into wine.

John 2:9 When the master of the feast had tasted the water that was made wine...

We don't need to go any further. Those words—"was made"—is *ginomai*. Do you know what "was made" means there? It means that it was "turned into." It was "transformed into." The water became something other than what it was naturally. The water became wine. It was changed into wine. It was turned into wine. It was transformed into wine. Put that back into Matthew 13. The mustard plant was changed into a tree, just like magic. Poof! Abracadabra! You're no longer a mustard plant, you're a tree. Something went wrong.

I just want to go over the birds of the air too, because I think that's important. Let's go to Mark 4:4, and this is all I'm going to say about the birds of the air. This is the Parable of the Sower in Mark's account. Now remember, in Matthew's account (in Matthew 13:4) it says simply that "the birds came and devoured them." Notice what Mark records.

Mark 4:4 And it happened, as he sowed, that some seed fell by the wayside; and the birds of the air came and devoured it.

If we go down to verse 15, Jesus Himself said:

Mark 4:15 And these are the ones by the wayside where the word is sown. And when they hear, Satan comes immediately and takes away the word that was sown in their hearts.

I don't think I need to prove that any further. Jesus Himself said that this phrase, "the birds of the air" means Satan, and I'm going to take His word for it. Luke 8:5-12 says the exact same thing.

Luke 8:5 A sower went out to sow his seed. And as he sowed, some fell by the wayside; and it was trampled down, and the birds of the air devoured it.

Luke 8:12 Those by the wayside are the ones who hear; then the devil comes and takes away the word out of their hearts, lest they should believe and be saved.

So this parable tells us that we need to become concerned when the church organization begins to have ideas of material greatness and influence. When it starts going beyond the bounds of what God intended for the church—preach the gospel and feed the flock—and begins to do ancillary things that don't have much to do with those two things, then we've got to start to become concerned. The red flags should fly.

Now notice when the church *is* supposed to get big. Let's go back to Daniel 2, because the idea behind the traditional interpretation of The Parable of the Mustard Seed *is* in the Bible, but it doesn't happen now. In Daniel 2:34 is the dream that Nebuchadnezzar had of the great image.

Daniel 2:34-35 You watched while a stone was cut out without hands, which struck the image on its feet of iron and clay, and broke them in pieces. Then the iron, the clay, the bronze, the silver, and the gold were crushed together, and became like chaff from the summer threshing floors; the wind carried them away so that no trace of them was found. And the stone that struck the image became a great mountain and filled the whole earth.

Now there is the traditional interpretation of The Parable of the Mustard Seed. But notice when it happens. It happens after Christ's return. And then the Kingdom of God comes and fills the whole earth.

But we're talking about now. As Herbert Lockyear said, Jesus looked from His own time right up to the time of His coming, and He saw the mixed conditions that would prevail until that time. And so He warns us in the parable that, up until then, there are going to be times when the church is going to be tempted to grow into something that He never intended.

He will add to the body as He sees fit. He will send the church to do the things that He wants it to do. We don't need to become large, strong, and worldly to do His work. In fact, God turned the world upside down with twelve men.

The Parable of the Leaven

Matthew 13:33 Another parable He spoke to them: The kingdom of heaven is like leaven, which a woman took and hid in three measures of meal till it was all leavened.

Most of the time, commentators interpret this parable just like they interpret The Parable of the Mustard Seed—that the kingdom would grow big and eventually encompass the whole earth, and everything would be great. Hallelujah! That's kind of how they interpret it. But after what we've seen, is that correct?

When the people (Jews, remember) heard this parable, they must have been astounded. Think of it. If Jesus told you that the Kingdom of God was like leaven in bread, what would you think?

That doesn't sound very good, because we know what leaven is. How can this be? It's almost unthinkable that the Kingdom of God would be full of leaven throughout, till it was all filled. Is the kingdom evil? Is it full of sin? That doesn't square with what we heard in the Old Testament. The kingdom was supposed to be glorious and pure, and You're telling us then that the kingdom has leaven in it. How can this be?

They were right! Everywhere else in the Bible where the word "leaven," or "unleavened" appears, "leaven" carries with it a negative implication...except

in this one case? 87 times out of 88 times, it means something bad, according to the commentators. Now, why would it be that 87 out of 88 times it means something bad, and that one time it means something good?

It doesn't make for a God who is the same yesterday, today, and forever. This *must* still be negative.

They are uncomfortable with the idea that the Kingdom of God, the Kingdom of Heaven, in its present form can have leaven in it, that it could be full of sin. But remember, Jesus was looking and seeing what was going to happen between the time He died and the time He returned. He saw that the people were full of leaven, and they would always be, until they were changed.

That's the beauty of grace—that while we were yet sinners—Christ died for us, and that we then could come under His blood and be cleaned. That doesn't mean we're clean forever. We still sin after we're cleaned. So we have to go back and plead for mercy and forgiveness again, and again, and again—even up until the time that we're changed, or that we die. We sin, and have to go back before the throne of grace, because we're full of leaven, and we're busy our whole lives getting rid of it.

Every year we keep the Days of Unleavened Bread to depict just this process, and to be thankful that we have this sacrifice—Christ our Passover—who saves us and forgives us. In the Levitical sacrifices no leaven could be in any of the offerings that could be made (Leviticus 2:11), because they typified the sinless Christ. The two wave loaves that were offered on the day of Pentecost (Leviticus 23) were made with leaven, because they represent you and me, the Old Testament, and the New Testament, or the Old Covenant, and the New Covenant—the churches of those times that were full of leaven. But God accepts them, because the blood of Christ cleanses us from all sin. He knows our frame, and then gives us grace.

In the New Testament, in I Corinthians 5:6-8, I just want to show you that this goes all the way through. Remember they were glorying about the fact that they were being so "loving" toward this man who had sinned, and Paul said:

I Corinthians 5:6 Your glorying is not good. Do you not know that a little leaven leavens the whole lump?

It sounds like The Parable of the Leaven. It went throughout.

I Corinthians 5:7 Therefore purge out the old leaven, that you may be a new lump, since you truly are unleavened. For indeed Christ, our Passover, was sacrificed for us.

"You're supposed to be pure. Get that sin out" he says, "so you can repent and come back."

I Corinthians 5:8 Therefore let us keep the feast, not with old leaven, nor with the leaven of malice and wickedness, but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth.

What is leaven? Paul defines it here as "malice and wickedness." In other words, it is sin.

Galatians 5:7-9 You ran well. Who hindered you from obeying the truth? This persuasion does not come from Him who calls you. A little leaven leavens the whole lump.

Do you know what he called leaven there? If a "persuasion does not come from Him who calls you,"—that hinders us from obeying the truth. If you want to put those three verses together, this is how he defines leaven—"A persuasion that does not come from God." *Pretty interesting*. In Luke 12:1 he says that the leaven of the Pharisees is hypocrisy—hypocrisy in religion.

Luke 12:1 Beware of the leaven of the Pharisees, which is hypocrisy.

In Mark 8:15 He says, "the leaven of the Pharisees and the leaven of Herod." I don't know if you knew that was in there, but Herod had leaven too, and his was basically secularism, or the use of religion for political purposes.

Mark 8:15 Then He charged them, saying, Take heed, beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and the leaven of Herod.

Then we have Matthew 16:5-6, 11, where Jesus very clearly says that the leaven that He was talking about *was* the doctrine of the Pharisees and the Sadducees.

Matthew 16:5-6 And when His disciples had come to the other side, they had forgotten to take bread. Then Jesus said to them, Take heed and beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and the Sadducees.

Matthew 16:11 How is it you do not understand that I did not speak to you concerning bread?—but you should beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and Sadducees.

So what is leaven? In its most basic sense, it is a symbol of corruption. Its tendency is to multiply and spread just like yeast. A little bit of yeast in the dough will make the whole thing rise, because that yeast ferments and goes throughout the entire loaf and makes it all rise. That's the symbol of the leaven—sin that corrupts and spreads.

What about this woman here in Matthew 13? This is kind of interesting, because in all the other parables it had been a man—the sower—who went out to sow, which is the Son of man. Now He throws in a woman. What is "a woman" in Scripture?

In Revelation 12, a woman is symbolic of the church of God. In Revelation 17, a woman—a fallen woman—is symbolic of the false church, or the false system. In Isaiah 47, a woman is symbolic of Babylon (whether you're talking about the nation Babylon, or you're talking about the system of Babylon). In Galatians 4:21-31, Paul uses "women" there to symbolize the Old Covenant and the New Covenant. In Ezekiel 16, God uses a woman to symbolize Israel. In other places "*Aholah*" is Israel, and "*Aholibah*" is Judah.

What can we get from all this? Every time a symbol of a woman is used, the common denominator is the idea of a system of beliefs and practices that influence other people. A church, or religion, is a system of beliefs and practices. This world has a system of beliefs and practices that go contrary to God.

To find out what kind of system is being referred to, you have to look at the context and see how this system works, how it reacts, and what it does. So what is the characteristic of this woman in the parable? First she *took* leaven. Now this is the common word used to mean "to come into possession of." It's a common Greek word, but it can also have the connotation of "to seize," "to take by force." It doesn't say which connotation is here, but the next verb is hidden there.

Now this is an interesting word. It's the Greek word *enkrupto*. It means "to hide in," or "to mix." It is used here, *enkrupto*, in only this way. It's kind of interesting that he used this word here. This word *enkrupto* is the same word from which we get our word *encrypted*. A general tells his lieutenant, "Encrypt this message and get it to my major [or whoever] in the field." What does he do when he encrypts it? He mixes up the letters, or he gets a code, and that code stands for something else. And then it goes out, and only a person with the key to the encryption knows what the message is saying.

The root word for *enkrupto* is *krupto*, and it means "to cover, to conceal, to keep secret." Its major connotation is "to be sneaky, or to be secret, or covert, or surreptitious." So this woman is up to no good whatsoever. First she takes something, then she hides it. She's a bad lady. She's a bad system. She's up to no good. Now she hides this leaven in three measures of meal. This is really interesting that Christ uses the very phrase "three measures of meal," and it is a key, because this told His audience something that He didn't have to explain. It was something that they were familiar with. It was a normal practice and meant something to them.

Now it's been suggested that he used this amount because it's the average quantity of meal a housewife would employ in her daily baking. This is pretty funny when we consider that three measures of meal equal about 2 gallons of meal (7.3 liters). This seems like a lot.

We figured out that an average loaf of bread contains about three cups of flour. So, two gallons of meal, which is the equivalent of about eight quarts, or thirty-two cups, would make nearly eleven loaves. That's a lot of bread! Even the most bread-gorging family on this earth would not eat eleven loaves in a day. Normally one loaf would be enough for one person for a day. I know we have big families, but that's a lot of meal! So He's probably speaking a special occasion.

Now let's go back to Genesis 18, and we're going to see the first usage of "three measures of meal." This is when the One who became Christ and two angels came up to Abraham, and he made them a meal. Jesus tells him in verse 5, "*Go ahead and make a meal.*" So Abraham hastened into the tent to Sarah and said,

Genesis 18:6-8 Quickly, make ready three measures of fine meal; knead it and make cakes. And Abraham ran to the herd, took a tender and good calf, gave it to a young man, and he hastened to prepare it. So he took butter and milk and the calf which he had prepared, and set it before them; and he stood by them under the tree as they ate.

Now what was "three measures of meal" here? There's a law—a principle of Bible study—that says (it's called the law of first mention), "the first time a thing is mentioned in the Bible influences how it should be interpreted throughout." What we have here is the first time "three measures of meal" is used. It's used in the context of a fellowship meal—giving hospitality, and to God—so it has a spiritual connotation.

There is some instruction on the law of grain offerings in Numbers 15:8.

Numbers 15:8-9 And when you prepare a young bull as a burnt offering, or as a sacrifice to fulfill a vow, or as a peace offering to the LORD [That's very interesting—a burnt, a vow, or a peace offering.], then shall be offered with the young bull a grain offering of three-tenths of an ephah of fine flour mixed with half a hin of oil.

We need to learn a little bit about Israelite dry measures. The smallest unit of measure is an *omer*. Three *omers* equal one about one *seah*. This *seah* is

what is translated "measure" in Matthew 13:33, except it is in Greek *saton*. There is also the *ephah*, which is ten *omers*. Three *seahs* made up of about three *omers* equal one *ephah*. These verses show that the smallest meal offering that could be given was one *seah*, one-third of an *ephah*. It had to be of fine flour. Abraham gave three *seahs*, three measures. He went above and beyond what was required for the meal offering.

Judges 6:18-19 shows Gideon's offering to Christ. How much did he give?

Judges 6:18-19 Do not depart from here, I pray, until I come to You and bring out my offering and set it before You. And He said, I will wait until you come back. Then Gideon went in and prepared a young goat, and unleavened bread from an *ephah* of flour.

Gideon gave an *ephah*—three measures of meal.

In I Samuel 1:24 is Hannah's thank offering. How much?

I Samuel 1:24 Now when she had weaned him, she took him up with her, with three bulls, one *ephah* of flour, and a skin of wine, and brought him to the house of the LORD in Shiloh. And the child was young.

Hannah's offering was one *ephah*—three measures of meal.

In Ezekiel 45:24, and Ezekiel 46:5, 7, 11 are the offerings given at the Feast during the Millennium. How much is given?

Ezekiel 45:24 And he shall prepare a grain offering of one *ephah* for each bull and one *ephah* for each ram, together with a hin of oil for each *ephah*.

Ezekiel 46:5 And the grain offering shall be one *ephah* for a ram, and the grain offering for the lambs, as much as he wants to give, as well as a hin of oil with every *ephah*.

Ezekiel 46:7 He shall prepare a grain offering of an ephah for a bull, an ephah for a ram, as much as he wants to give for the lambs, and a hin of oil with every ephah.

Ezekiel 46:11 At the festivals and the appointed feast days the grain offering shall be an ephah for a bull, an ephah for a ram, as much as he wants to give for the lambs, and a hin of oil with every ephah.

An *ephah*—three measures of meal—is given.

With these examples in mind we can understand that Christ's use of this phrase would have made His Jewish audience think immediately of the meal offering in Leviticus 2, and they would have been absolutely shocked out of their shoes to see that someone had the audacity, the blasphemy, to put leaven in a meal offering. That wasn't kosher! You didn't do it. You might have gotten zapped by the next lightning bolt out of heaven. That was sin. So what would the normal Jew here have thought? He would have understood immediately that the Kingdom of Heaven was subverted. Something good had been subverted.

What does "three measures of meal" represent? Fortunately we've had some instruction in The Offerings, and we know that the meal offering represents the offerer's service and devotion to fellowman, and it's typified by what Christ did throughout His whole life by offering Himself in service to fellowman. Symbolically it represents the Second Great Commandment, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself." It represents the Second Great Commandment Meal Offering—Christ's sinless service and devotion on behalf of man.

If "three measures of meal" represents our love, service, and devotion to fellowman, this parable warns us that the false system will make a concerted and covert effort to corrupt the true church through false doctrine aimed at how we treat each other. It's going directly at the jugular of how we treat one another.

The "three measures of meal" basically represents the church's teachings. This squares with our understanding of what Christ is. He's the Word. What is one of His titles? "**The Bread of life.**" Where do our teachings come from? **The Word of God.** This is the Bread that we have to eat. That's what fine meal is. It's the major component of bread. What Satan would try to do would be to corrupt the word, corrupt the teaching, so that we wouldn't treat each other well, and maybe lose our salvation. And the woman succeeds—"till it was all leavened!" *Sobering, isn't it.*

Think about this. The church has been pretty successful in guarding the major doctrine that has to do with our identity: the Sabbath, the nature of God, the identity of Israel, the Holy Days, God's plan. Most of the splinter groups out there have kept those things intact, haven't they? Where has the church shown its greatest weakness? The church has shown its greatest weakness in the area of personal relationships.

What do we hear about out there? Distrust, offense, marriage problems, disunity, selfishness, gossip, rumor, tale-bearing, judging and condemning, comparing ourselves among ourselves, giving place to wrath—the works of the flesh—how we treat one another. All of these are involved in the meal offering—our service and devotion to each other. These are the areas where we have to focus our greatest attention, overcoming how we treat each other. We've got to get along as God intends us to get along, or we might not be there.

What did the Apostle John write about in his gospel, in his epistle, as the church was rapidly going into apostasy in the first century? What did he say? His epistles and his gospel say, "Love one another." Love God. Love one another. It has become... I don't know where it is—either in the Catholic Church or in the Greek Orthodox Church—where they report that at the end of his life, the people got sick and tired of the Apostle John, because all he said was "Love one another."

Do you remember Mr. Armstrong saying, "There were two trees in a garden"? And we said, "*There he goes again.*" They said that about the Apostle John. "He's going to talk about love again. Haven't we had enough of this?" Well, there was a reason. That's the key! "Love one another."

Let's read some verses in I John to close here. I want to show you what John said.

I John 1:3 That which we have seen and heard we declare to you, that you also may have fellowship with us [fellowship, our devotion to one another]; and truly our fellowship is with the Father and with His Son Jesus Christ.

I John 1:5-6 This is the message which we have heard from Him and declare to you, that God is light and in Him is no darkness at all. If we say that we have fellowship with Him, and walk in darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth.

Remember what we talked about in chapter Matthew 12—the two sides? John brings it up.

I John 3:10-11 In this the children of God and the children of the devil are manifest: Whoever does not practice righteousness is not of God, nor is he who does not love his brother. For this is the message that you heard from the beginning, that we should love one another.

Pretty interesting, isn't it?

I John 3:14 We know that we have passed from death to life, because we love the brethren. He who does not love his brother abides in death.

I John 3:16-18 By this we know love, because He laid down His life for us. And we also ought to lay down our lives for the brethren. But whoever has this world's goods, and sees his brother in need, and shuts up his heart from him, how does the love of God abide in him? My little children, let us not love in word or in tongue, but in deed and in truth.

I John 3:23 And this is His commandment: that we should believe on the name of His Son Jesus Christ and love one another, as He gave us commandment.

I John 4:7-8 Beloved, let us love one another, for love is of God; and everyone who loves is born of God and knows God. He who does not love does not know God, for God is love.

I John 4:11-12 Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another. No one has seen God at any time. If we love one another, God abides in us, and His love has been perfected in us.

I John 4:17 Love has been perfected among us in this: that we may have boldness in the day of judgment; because as He is, [love], so are we in this world.

I John 4:20-21 If someone says, I love God, and hates his brother, he is a liar; for he who does not love his brother whom he has seen, how can he love God whom he has not seen? And this commandment we have from Him: that he who loves God, **MUST** love his brother also.

Pretty strong words from the apostle, aren't they? Do you think this might be important for us?

Matthew 24:12 And because lawlessness will abound, the love of many will grow cold.

Sobering...

So here we have the fourth step in Satan's plan: Inject into the church false teachings regarding personal relationships.

SUMMARY

Step 1: Attack God's people early in their calling. Step 2: Send secret agents to infiltrate the church. Step 3: Influence the church to become large, strong, and worldly. Step 4: Inject into the church's teachings false doctrines regarding personal relationships.

Basically, it sounds like the last quarter century of the Church of God. I hate to be a downer, but there is a reason why Jesus put these things in His word—because we need them now. Satan has duped us, and we've got to come out of it. Many of us have been had. Paul says in I Timothy 5:15, "For some have already turned aside to Satan." That's sobering.

So we've been warned. Will we give up, or will we fight the good fight? God has called us to be Christian soldiers. "Onward Christian Soldiers." An alternate translation of John 14:31 says: "*Arise. Let us go forward to meet the enemy.*"