

The Leaven of love

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- [0 : 00] Pray with me a moment. Lord, may the words you've given me speak the word made flesh.
- ! May our hearts be receptive to what you've got to say to us here in this place. Amen. You know, yeast or leaven gets a really bad press in the Bible.
- It's often seen as a symbol of sin and corruption. A small amount that permeates an entire batch of dough. A little bit of sin can spread and affect a whole community.
- Leaven is also used to indicate false teaching. Jesus warns his followers of the leaven of the Pharisees. And it's a picture of malice and wickedness which can infiltrate the church.
- So he, yeah, it doesn't get very, it isn't very well thought of, is it? But Jesus doesn't only use leaven as a picture of bad things, of negative things.
- [1 : 16] He uses it as a picture of God's kingdom. Because yeast or leaven has a transformative and an expanding nature.
- And like the yeast of the kingdom starts small and grows and spreads throughout the whole world. So, leaven in the Bible is a powerful symbol that can represent both the destructive force of sin, but also the transformative power of God's grace.
- We're going to spend a few moments this morning looking at the positive rather than the negative aspect of the symbolic nature of leaven.
- We're not going to see it as a symbol of evil. We're going to see it as a symbol of God's love, of kingdom love, if you like.
- Not the leaven of the Pharisees, but the leaven of love. So why is leaven or yeast a good picture? Well, it's not instant.
- [2 : 33] The effects of putting yeast into flour isn't an instant effect. That's one of the reasons why on the night of the first Passover, they were told not to make yeast bread.
- They were told to make the bread without yeast because they didn't have time to let it rise. As I said, my nan taught me how to make bread.
- And you have to set it up and you have to do the kneading and then you have to leave it. An hour, an hour and a half to do its first proving and then you knock it down and then it needs more time to prove.
- It takes time to make a loaf of bread with yeast. Because yeast is a living organism. It needs time to grow.
- It needs food to make it grow. It needs to be nurtured. So that when you're making bread, you put sugar as well as flour to feed the yeast.
- [3 : 35] It needs to be kept warm and looked after. Sometimes in the winter, I struggle if I'm making bread because my kitchen isn't warm enough to let the yeast work. Yeah, we do have love at first sight, don't we?
- That instant attraction. That instant attraction. That, wow, I love you. But even when that happens, those relationships need to grow and deepen.

That deep love, that agape love that the Bible talks about, isn't always instant.

It takes time to grow and deepen. It takes time to grow and develop. Like the love in a good marriage. We need patience to let it happen.

Patience is one of those fruits of the Spirit. Perhaps one of the ones that we're perhaps less keen to be developing.

[4 : 41] We like the love and the joy. But patience? Hmm. But it is good. Because it stops us wanting everything. Here and now.

It's a bit counter-cultural. In our society, we want everything yesterday. But heaven isn't like that.

And neither is true love. It needs to grow. It needs to grow. Like yeast, the kingdom life permeates everything.

Yeast affects the whole batch of dough. It gets everywhere. You don't have sort of little bits that rise and the rest stay flat. It all rises.

It's the same with God's kingdom. The disciples were told to go and preach the gospel. To the whole world.

[5 : 43] No country. No church. No individual. It's outside the scope of God's love. God wants to permeate every part of us with his love.

And in doing so, it brings about change. If you think about that lump of dough. A little bit like we had in the bowl. Without any yeast.

It's a bit solid and a bit dense. But with a bit of yeast. It becomes this lovely light bread. God's kingdom love can change us.

It affects our relationship with God the Father. We realize that God is our Father. And that we are his special children. And our attitude to him changes.

Rather than seeing him as some fearsome tyrant. We know that he wants the best for us. And our faith grows.

[6 : 52] And our trust grows. And we see the way God works. And our worship becomes more meaningful.

Our prayer more natural. Our desire to read the scriptures also increases. Our desire to spend time.

Perhaps on our own in a quiet place. Just enjoying God's presence. Something that we wouldn't have done before. And also our personal relationships change.

As we see the Holy Spirit working in the lives of our brothers and sisters. We see the difference kingdom life makes.

We become more welcoming and less selfish. More forgiving and less judgmental. More loving.

[7 : 55] We change. The leaven of love is powerful. And it doesn't surprise me that Jesus describes himself as the bread of life.

As we've seen. Bread is such a comforting thing. It sustains.

And it's familiar with it. Every culture in the world is familiar with the idea of bread. We don't have to think of what to translate that word to for different cultures.

Because everybody knows about bread. It's not like trying to explain sand to an Eskimo. When we read in John's Gospel.

That Jesus says I am the bread of life. It sounds quite a bit of a random saying. But we have the advantage.

[9 : 01] That we have read John's Gospel. From chapter 1 verse 1. Where John writes. In the beginning was the Word. And the Word was with God. And the Word was God.

He was with God in the beginning. Through him all things were made. Without him. Nothing was made that has been made. And the whole of the rest of John's Gospel.

Is evidence to support that. Is evidence to back up. That Jesus is God in the flesh. The Word made flesh.

The Word made human being. And so when Jesus makes this declaration. I am the bread of life. People knew.

That he was announcing. His divine nature. They knew. That he was saying. I am God.

[10 : 01] And as you can imagine. And as you know. It didn't go down very well. The Pharisees. Belittled him. Isn't this Jesus? The son of Joseph? We know his father and his mother. How can he say I came down from heaven?

As the bread of life. Disbelief. Scepticism. Heresy. That turned into a plot.

To have him killed. So what do we do with bread? We don't put it in a glass case.

And look at it. We don't just touch it. But we taste it. We taste. We taste.

[10 : 58] We taste. We taste. And see. That God is good. And that's what we're invited to do. In our communion service. To taste and see.

That God is good. When Jesus says this bread is my flesh which I will give for the world. His hearers would have been shocked.

it's quite shocking but clearly he wasn't talking about cannibalism but Jesus spoke in a lot of parables a lot of analogies a lot of metaphor to help people link spiritual realities to the everyday so that they would understand it so that they could grasp the deeper meaning of what he was trying to say to them and Jesus explains at the Last Supper with his friends what this is all about and you know back in the days of the early church one of the criticisms that was leveled at the church was that they did practice cannibalism because of the way they treated with the respect the Lord's Supper Jesus really is saying

I am I am what you can't do without you'll never be spiritually satisfied you'll never be spiritually nourished without me we need Jesus we need a relationship with him and you know we have a hunger and a thirst that only he can satisfy and we do try on our own to satisfy our spiritual hungers don't we we try to try to do it by acquiring money perhaps we find the bottom the bottom of a bottle perhaps we have failed human relationships but none of these things satisfy in the way that Jesus does we need to take him into our lives we need to be part of him and he offers that very thing as a promise in our reading we had these words because there is one loaf we who are many are one body for we all share the one loaf this one bread is the bread of life it's Jesus that's what Paul's talking about and he's referring to the practice of communion in his day where they would have had a single loaf of bread probably a flat bread and for communion they would have just pulled pieces off it symbolising Christ's broken body we're sharing in the one loaf and when it comes to our communion later in the service

I'm going to invite you to hold on to the bread so that we can all eat it together and share that idea of all from the same loaf but Paul in what he's saying is actually reversing that communion practice and he's saying that Christians are so different there's so many different people so many different cultures but we all come together to form one body and that's Christ's body here on earth so counter to our tendency today to divide to find things to fall out over and to and to and to and to split but Jesus gives us the bread and the wine to have fellowship with him to participate in our union with him but also to have fellowship and union with each other together the word it's in the title isn't it communion together and round the Lord's table is that place where we can build our unity where Jesus can build us up build us together and it's not just for today it's not just for this hour in our service it's for our whole lives as we move into the communion let's reflect on this beautiful double picture of what the bread is all about the bread is both

[16 : 27] Christ's broken body and a symbol of the unity of the whole body of Christ Amen Bum