

Living Like Leaven

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[0 : 0 0] Now, if you turn with me, please, to Matthew chapter 13. We're looking for a short time this morning at verse 33. Matthew 13 at verse 33.

He told them another parable. The kingdom of heaven is like leaven, that a woman took and hid in three measures of flour, till it was all leavened.

Leaven is a fascinating substance. You can either say that leaven is yeast. Sometimes leaven is a little batch of dough that has yeast added to it.

And generally, in the practice of using yeast in olden times, you would take part of that and add it to a batch of dough. You would keep some back. And what you had kept back would still retain the properties of leaven and keep increasing.

And then you would just take another bit when you're making the next batch of dough for bread and so on. It has these properties in itself. It's fascinating to see it working.

[1 : 0 6] And you can imagine very easily Jesus watching his mother, Mary, making bread and using leaven, using this yeast in order to make the bread expand when it was to be that sort of bread.

And of course, Jesus would have, as he is here, seen that and given it a spiritual meaning and taken it and used it, as he's using here, with a spiritual purpose, as he did for so many other things that you find in the ordinary course of life.

Jesus is the expert at illustration, taking things which are around us and things about ourselves, to which he then gives a spiritual meaning and uses in a spiritual way.

And leaven is used, as you know, throughout the Bible, mostly to illustrate something bad. The effects of sin, for example, are frequently in the Bible compared to the working of leaven.

Sin, if it is left untreated, if it's lying in your life, it's not going to just stay the way it is. It's going to grow. It's going to increase. It's going to affect more parts of your life.

[2 : 1 8] That's why it's so important to have the Lord Jesus Christ in your life and the power of Christ and his resurrection in your life, because it's specifically to deal with sin, the sin that belongs to each one of us naturally and that will, if it's left to itself, simply grow.

And that's why we have to cast out this old leaven of sin in order that the new batch, which is the regenerate person, will actually itself take over from it and ultimately come to have all the leaven of sin eradicated from our lives.

That's really very much what the Lord is about. That's what our salvation is about. But leaven is used here in a good sense. It's used here to illustrate for us some of the properties or one of the properties of the kingdom of God, the kingdom of heaven.

Now, there are many different ways in which the kingdom of heaven is described, especially through these parables. The kingdom of heaven is like such and such. We've seen some of them there.

And the kingdom of heaven is itself something that takes some time, if you were going to go into all the detail of what it means. But essentially it means where God establishes his reign, where the kingship of God through Jesus Christ has been established, either in a person's life individually, or in a group of people such as a congregation of people, or in a society at large, whenever God comes to bless his word so that many people come to be affected by it.

[3 : 53] Well, you can see that the kingdom of heaven is really what you're seeing at work there. And the properties of the kingdom of heaven, you can actually see it in all these different ways in which the Lord describes it.

And here he says, it's like leaven that a woman took and hid in three measures of flour till it was all leavened. And the two things I want to mention in relation to that that help us to understand the kingdom of heaven or the kingdom of God, as we come to the end of this year and look forward, God willing, to the next year as it opens up for us and as its prospects and the opportunities and privileges in it open up before us.

There's a lot in this little verse that we can take in reflection on the year that's by and in anticipation of the year that's ahead. The first thing is that leaven is a living organism and that is something true of the kingdom of heaven.

It's a living organism. Secondly, and more fully, it's a change-bringing organism. Leaven doesn't leave the batch of dough into which it's put the way it was.

It changes it, and remarkably, it changes it so as to become like itself. It's a change-bringing organism. But it's a living organism.

[5 : 17] This leaven, this mysterious, this remarkable thing, has the property in itself of being a living organism. You can see it's something that, in its own way, grows.

It's something that adds growth to the batch of dough into which it's put, and says here, the kingdom of heaven is like leaven that a woman took and hid in three measures of flour.

In other words, she worked it into the three measures of flour, the dough that she was using to prepare the next batch of bread or another loaf, but she worked this leaven into it.

And that living property, the living organism of the dough, then went through, as we'll see, the whole of the batch of dough to leaven it until it was all leaven, until it was all like the original little bit of leaven that was introduced into it.

And the kingdom of heaven is a living organism. Because when you think about it, the grace of God that's at work in the kingdom, whether it's in a person's life individually or in a wider sense, the kingdom of God has this remarkable property.

[6 : 27] It is, if you like, itself a living thing. It's a living organism. It has spiritual life in it. It's not like any other kingdom. It's different to every other kingdom. Because every other kingdom, whoever is the king, even if he's a despot or a tyrant, he cannot always bring about what he himself wills to do or wants to do or would like to do.

Sometimes people, as we know, will stand up against tyrants and will say, we've had enough of this. We don't want your will anymore. And so he has to be, he is deposed and he has to, or she has to go away and go into exile or whatever it is.

The kingdom of God always has the will of God and the purpose of God actually brought to its fruition. It's a living organism that through the grace of God, through the power of the Spirit of God and the Word as you have it here read or preached along with the sacraments God has given to his church and prayer and the witness of God's people and especially the Word and the sacraments and prayer all of which are made effectual to God's chosen people for their salvation.

Because they are blessed by God, they have together with the working of the Holy Spirit this living property which when it's introduced into a person's life shows its power and its effectiveness so as to begin to take over that person's life until it is all leavened, until it is all like the grace, the God, the image of the Christ who is introduced in it or introduced himself into it.

In other words, this vital ingredient of spiritual leaven, this kingdom of God, this reign of God, this power of God, this salvation of God that's in Christ has all of these things through the gospel, the gospel in the Word being preached and the sacraments and the witness of God's people and prayer.

[8 : 35] That's where you find all of these ingredients if you like coming together to form this living organism. What a privilege is yours today and mine that you don't belong to a dead organism, that this gospel that you know of, this kingdom of God, this kingdom of Christ that you know of is not just like any other form of teaching which however much it might indeed inform your mind, however much it might indeed capture your mind, however much you might enjoy reading it and reading it if it's a philosophy or any other type of thinking or even if it's just a novel that you're reading and that you enjoy and there's nothing wrong with enjoying them.

That is quite different to this living organism of the kingdom of God, of this gospel and of the way it works into the lives of God's people.

Bless God today that in His kindness He has made you to be part of His church, that He's brought you to know the power of the gospel, of the kingdom of God, of the leavening influence of the grace of God in your life.

And if you're not yet saved and if you're not yet a Christian and have come to the Lord and have come to have this leavening of God's power working in your own life, well, the next few points hopefully will set out things that will help you to come to be that and will help you to come in this new year to really commit your life to the Lord and come to have this leavening of God's kingdom working in your life individually as well.

So it's a living, it's a living organism. But secondly, it's a change-bringing organism. And if you think of leaven, first of all, we'll then think of that and then how it's applied spiritually in terms of the leavening influence of the kingdom and the properties of the kingdom.

[10 : 39] In three ways, it's a change-bringing organism because first of all, leaven permeates or infiltrates every part of the dough or the batch of dough into which it's introduced.

You see what it says here? The kingdom of heaven is like leaven that a woman took and hid in three measures of flour. She didn't just throw it in. She worked it in.

She had to knead that dough until the leaven was thoroughly worked into it and then it began to show its own properties because when you see bread made that way, of course, you'll then see the bread or the dough beginning to rise before it's put in the oven and then it goes through the process again, I think, if I'm right.

I'm not an expert in those things by any means, but you then redo it until it's risen again and then it's eventually put in the oven and it stops. Then once it's baked, the leaven stops, it's increased and it becomes a loaf of bread.

And it's a remarkable thing when you think about how it actually works. Now, if you take that and apply it to the kingdom of God as Jesus is doing here, that's one thing that we have to think of as we anticipate another year in the life of a congregation that we are and our life individually as people who would want to serve the Lord and be influential for the Lord.

[12 : 06] As the leaven permeates the whole of the batch of dough, that has to be our purpose, that has to be our vision, that has to be how we see our life as Christians and how we see our life as a congregation operating in the year to come.

We have to put it before ourselves that it's our responsibility and our privilege and our duty to make this Christian influence actually come to permeate the batch of society that God has placed us in the midst of.

God has introduced your life and my life. God has introduced our life as a congregation into this batch of dough, if you like to think of it, of all of this humanity around us, of all the people in this town and in these districts that don't know the Lord and don't want to know the Lord and sometimes even are hostile to the idea of the gospel or to the Bible and want to remove it from public life.

How do we counter that? You take your life and the gospel that's working in your life and the power of the kingdom that's working in your life and you actually bring it so as to infiltrate, so as to let it permeate through into every layer of society that you can possibly come and influence by your life.

And you see, that's really the property of leaven. It's designed to work in that way. And so is the life that God has given to His people.

[13 : 38] It's designed for this. It's designed to be introduced into society. It's our part to be the leaven that we must be for God. We can't change people.

The Holy Spirit alone can change people. But God is saying to us through this verse today, let your life be a leavening life. Live like leaven, which is the title we've given to our study this morning.

Live like leaven. Be persuaded that the life that God has given to His people is itself sufficient by His blessing to bring change to those around, to influence those around, to act for good to those around, even if they themselves are not presently interested.

And it's your duty and it's my privilege and your privilege to be the leaven in this world of ours that God will introduce into this batch of society.

In other words, we have to access all kinds of people in all the ways possible. That's why we're doing the things that we're doing as a congregation and the way we're doing them.

[14 : 52] That's why perhaps introducing a change which is not a major change like what we want to do monthly on the Wednesday evening. It's not just change for change's sake.

That's not what we're about. And it's not just change because maybe other people elsewhere are doing it. Whether they are or not, that's not the important thing. It's that we have to be the leaven of God. And it's that we ourselves have to act in a way that in every possible way makes that leaven more influential in our own lives primarily.

And then our lives will be more influential as God's leaven in the world in which we live. That's really the first thing about this leaven and the way it's used spiritually that it permeates every aspect of the dough and therefore every aspect of society.

You see, we're living in a world where people think that even those in government think that the main problem with people's lives is external. It's the conditions they live in.

Or it's the conditions that sadly some have brought on themselves or it's the condition that sometimes through no fault of their own they're in if they're homeless or whatever, having lost their job, having lost relationships, whatever has led to the situation they're in.

[16 : 11] And people think, well, the main aspect of that is external. Change the conditions and you will change the person. Well, no, it doesn't work that way. Much as you want to change the condition, of course you do.

The problem, however, is an internal one. It's the problem of the soul. It's the problem of the heart. It's the problem of a godless life. It's the problem of Jesus being absent from that life.

And that's where the leaven of the gospel and the level of God's people as God's people is so important as you introduce it to society in every area of society.

You're introducing something that by God's power will actually permeate that life that it's introduced to and come to change it as we'll see for the good. So here is something to ask yourself and I must ask myself today.

am I letting my life be a leavening influence for God? Am I keeping back something that I ought to give as an influence for good in my life?

[17 : 21] Am I holding back from taking the next step in my spiritual life? And by that holding back am I actually preventing myself being the kind of influence and the kind of leaven in society that God wants me to be?

Am I a Christian but I've not yet come to publicly show it? Am I a Christian but I've held back up to now from taking communion from actually involving myself in other things where I could actually be more involved for Jesus than I've been up to now?

Here's something to reflect upon then at the end of this year. As you think of life your life and my life as a leavening influence where am I in relation to that? Where are you in relation to that?

How much of your life is still not as leavening in its effect as you would want it to be either in your own development as a Christian or in your influence as a Christian for those around you?

It permeates the whole batch of dough it works its way through it and that's what we have to envisage as well as a people and as individuals. Secondly it transfers its properties to the batch of dough that it's applied to.

[18 : 38] You see it's saying here a woman took this leaven she introduced it to three measures of flour this batch she was preparing till it was all leavened. Till it was all leavened.

And what that really means is till it had all become like the little batch of leaven that was introduced to it. it takes over the dough it changes it from what it was.

It introduces a power that was not there until it was introduced and then once it's introduced it goes on working until the whole batch is leavened and ready to be put in the oven to be baked for bread.

Now you see that's something that you and I must also put to ourselves here really is what you and I must see the kingdom of God as like and your own life as like as a Christian it's not simply that you witness to people but your life has that potential by God's blessing to actually change people I know it's God that changes but when God blesses your life as a witnessing Christian to Christ when God introduces that life into a batch of dough that still does not know of this for itself once it's introduced it changes when God blesses his gospel or blesses your witness to somebody then God begins to work in that person's life and that person's life takes on a change a change from inside and that person's life then begins to show those changes the dough was very different to begin with from what it ended up as and that's what you want isn't it for your own life to be and that's what you want for those around you that society that you live amongst you can generalize it that way because you see the great thing about this is that this leaven this spiritual leaven actually has divine properties it has in itself the power of God the properties of God so that when you introduce it into human life whatever that life is or has been then that leaven begins to take over and as it permeates it changes that life into something like itself that is the wonderful thing about Jesus

Christ when he is introduced into the life of any individual that individual takes on a likeness to Jesus himself and the Bible tells us that that is God's aim and God's purpose in saving his people to his own glory they will actually be like himself ultimately perfectly like himself that is what heaven is it is perfect likeness to God and that is what this kingdom of God really ultimately reaches unto that is what it ends up as a state and people human beings perfectly in the image of Christ perfectly like their saviour their God and that is due to the effect of God's own power God's own grace at work in their lives she put it into these three measures of flour till it was all leavened now you see that gives you huge huge encouragement today as a

[22 : 29] Christian doesn't it gives me huge encouragement as a preacher of the gospel because God has given me the privilege of coming as everybody else who is called to preach the gospel of opening this Bible of preparing a sermon to preach in the presence of people like yourselves and here we come and we're so concerned for our own inability and we're so aware of our own inability so aware of our own weakness so aware of the impossibility that I by myself should influence anybody for good however much my discourse may be according to scripture I cannot of myself influence your life one whit for the good you know Thomas Chalmers before he was converted he preached the gospel he was a minister of the gospel and then he was converted and his whole life to gone had very different perspective the leaven of Christ was introduced into his life he came to know the Lord and his preaching to gone a different perspective because up to then he'd been preaching morality he'd been preaching live a good life don't swear don't steal don't do any of these bad things you'll be a Christian that's what a Christian life's about he would say but now he says let me tell you this he says to the congregation after he was converted all of my moral teaching all of these great discourses on morality they didn't have the weight of a feather upon your conscience why because there was no

Christ in them no life in them kingdom kingdom of God is a living organism a living organism operate in your life of living people people living spiritually who know the Lord and that means that God transfers the properties of the kingdom into the lives of those who come to have it introduced into their lives have you ever seen somebody who was converted that did not act differently to what they once were maybe some people it's different difficult to see the change if they were living upright lives if they were always living decent upright moral lives it's sometimes very difficult to see the change and where it occurs but depression themselves are still quite adamant that the life they now live the outlook they now have the priority they now give to

God and to Jesus it means that they know that they're not what they used to be they're not what they used to be they've got a different property in their life a different property to their life a different aspect to their life the leaven of God's life is working in them and they're conscious though they can't explain it's working you can't explain the workings I can't even explain the workings of leaven in the ordinary sense maybe some scientific explanation for it as to how indeed it sets about working in the batch of dough and spreads its influence throughout that batch of dough well maybe that's possible for somebody to explain to us as to how exactly that takes place how the molecules or the atoms work or are changed I'm not sure maybe it isn't I'm not sure but one thing is sure there's no way of knowing exactly how the properties of the kingdom of God actually carry out the work of God in a person's life or in the life of a congregation there's a mystery to it it's divine it's it's the life that God himself brings about it's imparted by his spirit

I can't explain the mechanics of that the different ways in which that comes about but you see its results you see a changed life you see a life that now gives priority to Jesus and to serving Jesus and to being his people and that's where third property is that it grows it's a change bringing organisms it permeates it transfers its properties to the batch and it grows once it's activated yeast keeps on growing until you kill it with heat by putting it in the oven or whatever but until something like that keeps on growing and that is hugely encouraging as well because that's really what gives us our vision for evangelism our vision for evangelism is not really confined or even primarily in the gifts that God gives to his people important or they are or in the actual application of those gifts by ourselves as God's people as we seek to apply them in living for him our confidence in evangelism is that the kingdom of God has in itself this property by which growth comes about by God's power and by God's blessing

I know that's something to bear in mind the property of leaven is to grow and the property of leaven as it illustrates the kingdom the property of the kingdom is to grow don't go along with this idea that well you know supposing we're just a tiny few in number and I know that growth is not confined to numbers don't get me wrong but the idea that well we're just very low in numbers we're just hardly significant numerically but we're faithful to God and we're keeping to the things that were passed on to us and all of that and we're not really interested in growing let's just be sure that we're faithful that idea does not come from the Bible that idea does not come from the kingdom of God described as leaven because leaven is something that's growing and we should be concerned to grow as individuals to grow in grace and in the knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ because if you don't grow and if I don't grow spiritually how do you expect those you influence to grow how do you expect the whole batch to grow if you and

[28 : 39] I don't see it that our life is a growing life a life in which the leaven of grace is operating increasingly in our lives and that that is what we want well here he's saying it gives us this property of the kingdom that is something which grows have us the vision that you must have as an individual let's have as a congregation too in our vision for evangelism this property of leaven as part of our vision because when you see leaven introduced to a batch of dough you expect that to grow and I know that God is sovereign and we respect the sovereignty of God with all but when you introduce your Christian life is introduced to the world in which we live when you're living your life for Jesus you expect growth you have the warrant from God to expect growth and not to see things diminish it's something that gives you confidence in your evangelism not confidence from the way that we're doing things not confidence from any ability we have ourselves or from gifts that

God has given us even naturally your confidence is in the property of the kingdom the growth that's inherent in God's power at work in the lives of people so as this new year unfolds be confident in the gospel be confident in the God of the gospel be confident in the power of Christ that was demonstrated in his resurrection from the dead that's the power of the kingdom be confident against all those powers out there that want to undermine what you're doing and overthrow what you're doing and stand against the gospel be confident as you live for Christ that you have properties that they don't that you have a power in your life that far exceeds the power that's in their lives great though it might be influential though they might be great in numbers though they might come to be the kingdom of

God is like leaven and leaven grows and you expect its growth and if you don't see its growth then what do you do well you go on your knees and you plead with God that he will show the properties of his own spiritual life by his spirit and the Lord's people that he will make them more influential that he will give you to grow more spiritually faith to he after all it's mostly on our knees that we grow anyway isn't it and if we're not growing on our knees we're not going to be growing anywhere else if we're not growing through prayer don't expect growth any other way because the properties of the kingdom expect growth look at the early church look at the church in the time of the apostles I'm just winding down to the end of the study but think about the properties of the kingdom in the days of the apostles the way in which the Lord prepared them for that time when they would go out the disciples of

Christ and then they were sent out by God into the most inhospitable places in the world with the gospel where paganism had been reigning for generations where resistance to the gospel was really so bad and so powerful that some of them lost their lives when they went to take the gospel into those areas but what happened did the power of the world extinguish the gospel did the power of paganism actually mean the church just reduced until it disappeared no it's the opposite that little batch of leaven in the apostles and in those disciples of those early days when it was introduced into society and God blessed it what a growth you had all these new churches established in centers of paganism Ephesus Rome itself throughout Galatia Corinth isn't that where our confidence lies that this kingdom has in itself the properties for growth that we need to see and you find the same thing in revivals in the life of individuals as well when

God brings the power of the gospel as sometimes has happened well that's what happens he's really just letting the leaven more and more influence those people that come under the gospel and the influence spreads more than at other times we pray for that as well so here is something to take with us into this new year you see it's saying here she kept it until the hole was leavened and that's our vision as well isn't it we're not going to be satisfied until the whole batch is leavened whether it comes about in God's sovereign purpose or not it's got to be our aim as long as one person in stone remains unconverted we have to use our leaven to influence that person I know that sounds dramatic sounds rather excessive what else can we do if we follow out the teaching of the kingdom of

[34 : 32] God being like leaven which was taken until the whole batch was leavened she kept on working it into the door don't give up don't slacken don't lose your vision don't lose your confidence in the gospel don't hold back in this new year if you've been doing that up to now let your life be a leavening life live like leaven for Jesus let's pray Lord our God we give thanks that it is by your power and your grace that we are enabled to live our life we pray that you would help us to see our responsibilities are right to realize the potential that exists in each one of us which comes to be expressed through our commitment to you and which comes to Lord be influential through your blessing and through your grace we pray oh

Lord that you bless your word to us this morning and we pray that its influence might be evident in our lives that it may indeed have its own leavening influence in our life this morning and in the days ahead and we ask that you would be pleased oh Lord to bless us to our neighbors and to our friends and to those around us so that they would have cause to bless you that we have used what you have given us to be influential in the world hear us we pray for Jesus sake amen well let's conclude our service now by singing in psalm 65 psalm 65 that's on page 82 and from verse 8 through to verse 12 well we can sing again to verse 13 through to the end of the psalm that's the five stanzas from verse 8 those who inhabit distant lands with all regard your ways where morning dawns and evening fades you call forth songs of praise you tend the land and water it you make it rich and good as you ordained your streams are full to give the people food so that's no psalm 65 on page 82 and verses 8 through to 13 the tune is

Denfield verses which express the richness the fullness of God's blessing and therefore of God's kingdom as well so these five verses in conclusion to God's praise thanks to those who inhabit distant lands with all regard your ways where morning dawns and evening fades you call for songs of praise.

You tend the land and water it. You make it rich and good.

As you ordain, your sins are full to give the people food.

[38 : 14] You drench the furrows of the land. You level off the ground.

You soften it with showers of rain and make its crops abound.

You crown the year with fruitfulness. Your harvest overflow.

The grass and florations again. The hills with gladness glow.

The pastures green with flocks are clothed, the meadows covering.

[39 : 17] covering the valleys covering. The valleys decked themselves with corn. They shout for joy and save.

I'll go to this near door this morning after the benediction. Now may the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God the Father, and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with you now and always.

Amen. Amen.