

The Kingdom: Living Within: Part 12

In our overview discussion last week I brought up the concept of “what is the Kingdom?” And I did that because it is very important that we understand that the Kingdom is not just a thing that can be boxed in from end to end. It refers to God’s rule and reign over all that is His. It is critical that you understand the nature of the Kingdom or you are going to get tripped up and bothered by what I am teaching. For example, I know that some people had concern with what I taught last week as it relates to the literal words in **Matthew 13:31–32**. The verse says, “**The kingdom of heaven is like a mustard seed, which a man took and sowed in his field.**” I then proceeded to say that the mustard seed is the piece of the Kingdom of Heaven that represents the kingdom of the Devil.

This might seem like a contradiction or a blatant twisting of what the written words are intending but please hear me out when I say that it is not. Of course there is resistance to the idea that the kingdom of the Devil is a part of the Kingdom of Heaven because for all we feel they are diametrically opposed to each other. The kingdom of the Devil, however, plays a very integral role in the Kingdom of Heaven ultimately being fulfilled and coming into its full measure of power and authority both in our individual lives and in the end times. It is a part of God’s plan. Never forget the lessons we learn from the book of **Job**, from **1 Kings 22**, and from **2 Chronicles 18**: the enemy is just a tool to accomplish the Lord’s purposes. He has no independent rule; rather, he must receive all approval from Jesus for everything he does.

We proved this out last week when we discussed those two verses in Isaiah where God takes responsibility for the presence of evil (*Isaiah 45:7, 54:16*). In those verses He states, “I am the Lord who does all these things” and “I have created the armies that destroy.” God has done these things not the enemy; yet with the death of Jesus on the cross, Jesus has also begun to take back what He allowed the enemy to temporarily control. Now, He is systematically possessing all that is His—one soul at a time. From a time perspective, this will culminate in His physical reign during the Millennium, but for now He is casting down the enemy (who is His footstool) and adding to His Kingdom one person at a time.

Remember as I stated last week, the Kingdom that Jesus spoke of is first and foremost spiritual and not yet fully tangible. It is a realm where God's plan's and purposes take place; therefore, it is made up of ALL of the necessary components for those purposes to be accomplished. The Kingdom, however, has indeed come and it includes many aspects some of which we would naturally expect and some we would not. These parables in *Matthew 13* describe many of the necessary components of the Kingdom; and, although, individually they may seem very unlike the Kingdom (such as the mustard tree), together they accomplish the purposes and will of the Father. Keep in mind, Jesus uses the parables to reveal secret mysteries reserved for those who believe (*Matthew 13:10-17*). These things are not going to make sense to the naked eye. They will demand scriptural context, consistency with Biblical imagery and use of metaphors, understanding of deep spiritual realities of the Word, and a critical mind that is willing to seek out those realities without giving up.

Keep in mind, we consistently seek to let the Word of God interpret the Word of God—not our feelings about the Word of God. And this is definitely not the first time that we have concluded something that is not exactly mainstream Christian ideology. The idea that the mustard plant represents the kingdom of the Devil made some of us just uncomfortable enough to push back; but the reality is that all of these parables have broken “rules” that we would never expect a perfect God to break. In the parable of *The Sower and the Seed*, we see Jesus making the truth indiscriminately available to everyone as He is imaged as a Farmer throwing out seed on any kind of soil, even soil where He knows the seed will get stolen, burned up, or choked out by thorns. He sowed in places where the seed would be utterly wasted. In the parable of *The Wheat and the Tares* we also see Jesus intentionally sowing his children (wheat) into His field only to find that the Devil has also sown his own children (tares) into the exact same field right next to the sons of the Kingdom. Was that a big “oops” moment for God where the enemy got the best of Him or is He in control? Next, in the parable of *The Mustard Seed* we saw Jesus plant a very aggressive, uncontrollable weed in the center of the field for demonic spirits to come and nest within. He created evil and literally planted it in His field in order that it might work His purposes. Was God out of His mind because this is not how we would have built a kingdom? No, He does not have the same reaction to evil and sin that we have. After all, He always had a plan to be the atonement for our sin. Sin is simply not the issue we make it out to be; and it no longer is an issue between us and God for God forgave our sins and every accusation that could ever be made against us has been nailed to the cross (***Colossians 2:13-15***).

Besides, this evil serves a purpose. On-the-one-hand, for those designated for life, it corrupts them through and through until they are prepared to be brought forth into new life. This partially explains the concept behind the parable of *The Leaven* we are going to study tonight. Evil is often the reason people can finally leave their notions about this life behind and run toward the light of Jesus. On-the-other-hand, for those who are designated for spiritual death, this evil seals the destiny they choose as they indulge and take delight in their evil, harboring in the shade of evil, and blatantly rejecting God. The darkness doesn't cause them to run to the light, it causes them to nestle within it because they hate the light (**John 3:20**).

These are the components of the Kingdom of God and the mysteries He is revealing to us. Please don't get stuck in the literal place that I did where it seems like it should be impossible for the kingdom of the Devil to be contained within the Kingdom of God, or even a part of it. God is sovereign over ALL things. The way He does things is not the problem; instead we are the problem. We are so afraid of concepts that land outside of the preconceptions of our comfort or experience. But remember, it is the truth that truly sets us free no matter how initially scary or inconceivable it might be.

With that in mind, if you don't trust me as I am delivering these things then please, I encourage you to look for yourself and come back to reason with me. **Matthew 13:19** states that the birds are of the evil one and come to snatch away the truth of the Word of God from people and only 13 verses later in not only the same chapter but in the same conversation **Matthew 13:32** states birds come and nest in the branches of the mustard tree. A large majority of mainstream Christian

teachers will say they are different birds, the first are bad birds the second are good birds—but I cannot say that. Quite honestly, I don't need to say that. It does NOT bother me that the Devil is part of God's plan for redemption; God is big enough to handle it. It does not bother me that I am planted next to and around tares, God is big enough to handle that too. It does not bother me that my heart is filled with all kinds of soil that rejects, burns, and chokes out the Word of God; again, He is big enough to deal with it. Can you see that this is more an issue of faith, living in the reality of the three foundations of truth (Jesus being Lord, only God being good, and us being aliens and strangers in this world), and trusting yourself to Jesus than it is about the meaning behind the parables?

If we will approach our lives in the reality of the truth of the Kingdom, no matter how inconceivable or out of the box, we will have freedom and victory. If we keep trying to fit the Kingdom into a position in which we are comfortable, we are going to continue to get confused leaving more room for delusion to have its way. The comfort that comes from the Spirit is very distinguishable from the comfort that comes from our flesh. One is peaceful and the other is completely obsessed. We must pay attention, as our delusions are not always as obvious as the ones we have highlighted and taped to the wall in front of our faces. Some of them are subtle and surround areas of our lives over which we are very protective. Formidable fuel for the fire of delusion can be the subtle and very sneaky ideas that keep us trusting in our own ability to please God. Consider this word we received:

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There is a specific delusion happening in our body and the other three northern cities. This is the delusion of “It’s not that bad.” This delusion is about areas of our heart and our flesh that we give space and allowance for, because we see them as “It’s not that bad.” These things don’t “seem like a big deal,” or maybe they “aren’t as bad as they used to be,” or perhaps they “don’t happen much so it’s ok.” God reminds me that all of these allowances is the evil that keeps us from His gifts.

We all need to let go of the ideas we manipulate about what the Word is conveying about our reality. It is delusion and it is dangerous. Our spiritual choices are God or evil, there is no other middle ground. In this particular example with the mustard plant, our minds delude the truth with the idea that the Devil being involved in our process somehow means that God is out of control. He is not. In the parable we are studying tonight about *The Leaven* it will be other notions of self-sufficiency that send you scrambling back for your own crumbs of control through the delusion that God wouldn’t darken us to save us.

Let the mysteries behind these parables accomplish their purpose: to grant you to know the mysteries of the Kingdom of Heaven (***Matthew 13:11***). Settle with the reality that His Kingdom has all the attributes that it should have so that we can become transformed into His image. According to the mustard plant the Devil having access to us (and us him) is a part of those attributes. Keep in mind, Jesus, as a man was not even spared from the influence and temptation of the Devil. In His humanity, He was tempted on several occasions because interacting with the Devil IS an ordained part of our spiritual journey as men. To accomplish a victory

you must have a battle to fight and win. No one ever became a warrior sitting in the comfort of his or her personally defined safety—aka delusion.

Remember, the Kingdom that Jesus spoke of is first and foremost spiritual and becomes very tangible through the lives of those to whom the Kingdom belongs. So please don't let your boxes hinder you from hearing the true message here. These pictures and metaphors are individual examples used to describe aspects of a Kingdom that is not just one thing but is many things. Don't allow their true meaning to be neutered by your fear or unwillingness to come out of the box.

With that in mind, let's revisit our quick overviews of each parable so that you can stay familiar with the direction we are heading and then get started on the parable of *The Leaven*.

-The parable of *The Sower and The Seed* (**Matthew 13:1-9, 18-23**) depicts the reality of the human heart and condition, which we picked apart and studied in great detail through the four types of soil.

-The parable of *The Wheat and the Tares* (**Matthew 13:24-30**) depicts the reality of the state of mankind as a whole on this earth, which we also studied in great detail last week.

-The parable of *The Mustard Seed* (**Matthew 13:31-32**) depicts the reality that Jesus created evil in the midst of His Kingdom displaying the necessity for evil as a tool to accomplish God's purposes in the hearts of man.

-The parable of *The Leaven* (**Matthew 13:33**) depicts the reality of the individual and how the "tool" of evil works to perfectly corrupt all three pecks of flour—represented in the heart/soul, the mind, and the body (**Matthew 22:37**).

-The parable of *The Hidden Treasure* (**Matthew 13:44**) and *The Costly Pearl* (**Matthew 13:45-46**) depict God's love for us by putting a stake into the heart of religious delusion about our own goodness and any notion that we can do anything at all to be loveable.

-The parable of *The Dragnet* (**Matthew 13:47-50**) depicts the reality of how the Kingdom operates on the earth pulling in every kind of person both good and bad, from every kind of people group, like a fishing net. Yet, in spite of being dragged in by the net, there will still be a separation at the end between the called and the chosen.

-The parable of *The Householder* (**Matthew 13:52**) depicts the reality that we, as true believers, bring forth the old law and the new covenant under the light of the truth of God's redemption; and that as the Body of Christ (or the scribes), we are charged to give it away.

Now, onto *The Leaven*:

Matthew 13:33

He spoke another parable to them, **"The kingdom of heaven is like leaven, which a woman took and hid in three pecks of flour until it was all leavened."**

When I was summarizing the parables I stated that *The Leaven* is a symbol for the corruption of men. Let me explain an overview of what I believe this parable is communicating. So far in these parables we have seen the image of men used to depict Christ. I believe the woman in the parable represents our humanity.

Remember, man is the image and glory of God; but the woman is the glory of man (**1 Corinthians 11:7**). So this image of a woman depicts our humanity. The three pecks of flour symbolize all that make up who we are as individuals in our humanity (our heart, mind, and soul). Lastly, the added leaven speaks to the corruption of sin invading our life experience so tangibly that it finally allows us to connect to our depravity and choose to surrender ourselves over to God's redemption.

Leaven is first discussed in the Bible during the first Passover (**Exodus 12:15**). Essentially, God commands the Israelites to remove it from their presence as they are preparing for their deliverance from Egypt. Egypt is a typology of the world and basically of everything that stands in opposition to God: sin and corruption. Leaven is a picture of all that corrupts permeating all that is corruptible. Throughout the New Testament as well, leaven is used as a symbol of sin and corruption. The picture of leaven throughout the New Testament embodies false teaching, immorality, raw evil, hypocrisy, legalism and blatant disregard for God's Word (**Matt 16:6-12, 4:1-12; Mark 6:14-29, 8:15; Luke 3:18-21, 12:1, 23:7-12; Mark 8:15; 1 Corinthians 5:2-13; Galatians 5:9**). The Word has communicated that characteristics of leaven are in opposition to God's plans, purposes, nature, and character. Not one time in the Word does leaven out rightly represent anything in and of itself holy. Leaven is of the world and of darkness representing the sin and corruption of man.

So if leaven is the thing that separates us from God but (according to this parable) is also the thing that binds us to God, where is the bridge between being completely corrupted and being completely redeemed? Follow me to **Leviticus**.

Characteristically in the Bible, we find that leaven represents corruption and is restricted from the offerings, but there are two scenarios where God instructs His people differently. The first example is during the *Festival of Harvest* when presenting the *Wave Offering*. The second example is when presenting a *Peace Offering* specifically as a *Thanksgiving Offering*. In these two scenarios God's people were instructed to present leavened bread as part of the offering.

The first of these offerings, the *Wave Offering (Leviticus 23)*, was a sacrifice of dedication or presentation to God during the *Festival of Harvest*. In this offering two loaves of the leavened bread was not burned or placed on the altar but waved in the air before God and then given to the priests to be eaten (**Leviticus 23:17**). The second of these offerings, the *Peace Offering* given as a *Thanksgiving Offering*, was a public admission where one would lay down their pride acknowledging that all things come from God and more specifically give thanks to the Lord for His love, care and redemption. This offering includes cakes made with leavened bread that are presented to the Lord and then shared as a supper between Him and the Priests (**Leviticus 7:13**). So there are two examples where we see leavened bread being offered as a symbol of personal dedication and personal thanksgiving to God. These are most holy offerings and are only to be enjoyed by the priests.

In both of these offerings the leavened bread is a symbol communicating exclusive dedication to and acknowledgement of the Lord's dominion and mercy over our weakness, corruption and humanity. In understanding the parable of *The Leaven*, we get even more insight to what the bread truly means as a part of these two offerings. The Lords chosen are fully corrupted by sin, but can fully exchange it for the Lord's redemption when they simply acknowledge the reality of it. This

seems backwards from how we view leaven as we are always instructed to avoid it because it brings us down, but the bread serves as an example of sin's purpose in our lives. Its purpose is to help us realize the moment we are ready to forsake our humanity and present ourselves to God forever. This spiritual journey that starts with pride and ends in humility is the bridge connecting the corruption of the leaven with the redemption of God and can only be realized by letting the leaven run its course.

You see, the *Old Sinful Nature* cannot and will not believe God, it is not even able to do so (**Romans 8:7**). **Romans 8:11** says, "The Spirit of God, who raised Jesus from the dead, lives in you. And just as God raised Christ Jesus from the dead, he will give life to your mortal bodies by this same Spirit living within you." Many of us try HARD to give ourselves life instead of letting the Spirit give us life. We stand on whatever we can scrape together and then we access our delusion. We analyze and reanalyze all the places within our character and nature that "aren't so bad;" yet, in this parable Jesus is declaring that His plan is to bring us to a full leavening just like the pecks of flour. The full leavening is not meant to provide a forum for us to conquer sin on our own, it is meant to provide a forum for us to be defeated by it so we will finally relent and let God have His role in our spiritual awakening. He has to allow us to drown in our depravity and be thoroughly corrupted before we will ever know our true need for God. This is how it works; our human nature is so stubborn and deluded that we don't concede easily. The only time we question ourselves is when we somehow manage to threaten our own comfort and our own wisdom fails us. The really cool thing is that Jesus is trying to tell anyone who will listen what is really going on so that we have an advantage and can proceed with

confidence. He is equipping us to realize we have been fully leavened, and He is giving us every opportunity to succeed by giving us as much context and information as we are willing to hear. Sadly, most of us tend to roll our eyes and go “meh” when we hear that our hearts are wicked and more deceitful than all else and no one can understand the depth of its sickness (**Jeremiah 17:9**). But the truth is we have been fully leavened, and Jesus is asking us to see the truth, believe the truth, and then act on this truth.

Someone asked me the other day why I get choked up and cry every time I mention the cross. I would love to say because I’m special, spiritual, spend so much time in the Word that He is my best friend and I just think He’s great. But the reason I cry every single time I teach, talk, sing or think about the cross is because when I told God that I truly wanted to be His (not having a single realistic clue what I was saying), the first thing He showed me was who I truly was. He showed me that fully leavened person and it was disgusting. Of course delusion came hunting for me through the whole process in the form of blaming everyone else, justifying myself constantly, saying all the usual: “I’m not that bad”, “it could be worse”, “nobody understands me,” and, of course, “I did nothing wrong.” But God did what He said and brought me to the end of myself. I would have never stepped over into the light if it was not for the leaven.

At times I feel as if I escaped a communist country of self. I was so, SO deluded. The voice of my *flesh* made so much sense but it WAS in opposition to God. That reality had to matter. There are many in our fellowship that are in different stages of realizing the true extent of their leavening. This state of existence reminds me of walking the “tight rope” as we spend all our time trying to find the very middle

crack between giving up personal goodness and letting Jesus be THE goodness He already is. It's embarrassing because there IS no middle crack. Even now I know some of you answered that statement with "you don't know that." But it's just another delusion we use to fight for our *flesh* because we are so afraid we are not good enough; yet, we just can't stop giving it our best shot.

What is so hard about agreeing that who we are in the *flesh* isn't enough, can never be enough, and is not even able to be enough? Why are we fighting for our pride so much? If we would be honest about what we are trying to save, each one of us would cry every time we talked about the cross because our leavened selves would be bowing before it leaving stacks of leavened bread at the foot of the cross as a symbol that "we get it" and we finally surrender.

That is what happened to me. I was His enemy but now I am His friend and have proven myself to Him in my faith. My faith made a path for me to walk in His will and be available for the work He appointed for me and saved for me until my leavening was fully realized. The full leavening of our humanity stands as a representation of His perfect ways yielding His perfect results. And this is truly all about our willingness to let the Lord's transformation of our lives have its uncontested way. I know this is about our willingness because God forbids that the leavened bread be burned on the altar. You see, the debt for our sin has already been sacrificed and He doesn't need to burn the leaven again. **Exodus 23:18** says, "You shall not offer the blood of my sacrifice with leavened bread" and this is because the blood of the Burnt, Sin and Guilt Offerings had already made atonement for the sin. In the same way, but far more permanent and exacting, Jesus' blood has already paid the full cost for all our sin. We no longer need

deliverance from the leaven, but we always need deliverance from ourselves; and, again, that is why the leaven is necessary.

Praise the Lord that we have an alternative to placing the leaven on the altar. **Hebrews 13:15** says, “Therefore, let us offer through Jesus a continual sacrifice of praise to God, proclaiming our allegiance to his name.” For us this sacrifice of praise can be an authentic thankfulness for His generosity to complete us in spite of us. It can also be a “waving” of the symbol of our corrupt humanity before Him declaring that our lives are in ruin without Him and we want to be His to do with as He pleases.

This is the Kingdom, where the woman allows herself to be fully conformed into the image of Christ by learning how and why to die, so she can live. Finally coming to grips with the truth of the cross and how dark we are. Thanking the Lord for what he has done for us. That’s where people can truly connect and walk away from it. Those two offerings are tied to us coming to our true understanding.

A couple other really neat things to wrap this all together is that we are dealing with three pecks of flour. The Bible tells us in **Genesis 1:27** that we are made in the image of the Triune God. He is a three part being and so being made in His image we are also in a sense three part beings. I previously used **Matthew 22:37** to illustrate this because in this passage Jesus Himself names the three parts of us as He tells us that the greatest commandment in the Law was to **“LOVE THE LORD YOUR GOD WITH ALL YOUR HEART, AND WITH ALL YOUR SOUL, AND WITH ALL YOUR MIND.”** Similarly, we talk about these parts of our being all the time using the terms “soul” to represent our mind and our soul, “*Old Man*” to represent our heart and then we also talk about the “*New Creation*” which Jesus is not addressing in this verse or in this

parable, but represents the place where the Holy Spirit dwells within us.

So you see, the terminology is slightly different simply because of language semantics, but we talk about these three pecks of flour ALL the time. Another really cool connection is the consistency of this mentioning of three measures of flour. You may remember the story I told from **Genesis 18:6** where Abraham and Sarah prepared a *Peace Offering* for Jesus. In that story, when Abraham told Sarah to make bread cakes he instructed her to prepare three measures of fine flour. Likewise, in **Leviticus 23:17** where the leavened bread for the *Wave Offering* is instructed to be made it says, “These loaves must be baked from three quarts of choice flour that contains yeast.” Then of course we have our current reference from the parable referencing the three pecks of flour that are to be fully leavened. I believe this speaks to two things: 1) the intentionality of God’s plan to use the leaven to draw us to Him all along; and 2) the fact that everything in this life (even our heart, mind, and soul) is fully corrupted by the leaven. That is why Jesus said that He makes all things new, beginning with our *New Creation*.

In the same way, we talk about the Cross not being the alternative “plan B” to handle the issue of sin in the face of our failure. The full leavening of the flour was intended all along as part of God’s plan. We see this playing out with Abraham, the very first person God made a covenant with, within the Levitical Law, and in the New Covenant of the cross. Once Jesus died, then we could realize our full leavening and embrace a life in the Spirit; but it was God’s plan all along to use the corruption of our humanity to draw us to Him. It is only through our failure that we come into touch with our need. It is only through our brokenness that we understand our helplessness. It is only through the death in our lives brought about

by sin that we come to understand new life in Jesus Christ.

We also discussed the significance of fine flour a few weeks ago in *Living Within the Kingdom: Part 9*, and how it symbolizes a refined and thoroughly prepared provision for the work of the Kingdom of Heaven. But I'm also hoping that you remember that we are the wheat (the sons of the Kingdom) and the wheat is gathered and placed into the barn to be used by God for His purposes. If you recall, the imagery around flour represented people prepared for the work of the Kingdom as they are put through the millstones of training and testing. So even the metaphor of the flour fits into the message and is coherent with the mysteries Jesus has been unfolding in the parables regarding the Kingdom. The leaven is just another aspect of our flour being transformed into the image of Christ who is the "Bread of Life."

In closing, I think it is fascinating what God has allowed us to find in this study. So far we have a Kingdom that is like many things:

- Like a farmer who plants seeds on four various soils, yet only one soil will ever produce fruit;
- Like a farmer who plants a field and an enemy who corrupts it;
- Like an invasive and aggressive weed that houses demons; and,
- Like a "woman" who hides leaven in three measures of dough until it is completely corrupted by the leaven.

Next week we will continue uncovering the mysterious components of the Kingdom of Heaven by studying that it is also like a treasure that a man discovered

and like a merchant on the lookout for pearls.

He who has ears, let him hear.

Let's pray.