

“A little influence can do wonders.” (12)

A market research interviewer was stopping people in a sports shop after they picked up their trainers. One guy picked up a pair of Nike trainers, and the interviewer asked him, "Sir, would you be willing to answer a couple of questions about your choice of trainers?" The man responded, "Yes, I'd be happy to." "Fine," the interviewer said, "the question I'd like to ask you is this: Do you feel that your choice of trainers has been at all influenced by their advertising program?" The guy looked shocked and said, "Of course not. I'm not influenced by that sort of thing at all!" "Well then," said the interviewer. "Could you tell me just why you did choose Nike trainers?" "Of course I can!" the man replied. "Because I just want to do it."

And the point of the story is that we are influenced by the world in all sorts of ways, but **how much do we as Christians influence the world with Christ?** We are going to look at “**The parable of the Yeast,**” which is found in **Luke 13:20+21**. Jesus is still teaching about the kingdom of God and in this parable He shares a lesson from something He saw His mother doing time and time again.

You see as we know bread was made at home in Palestine during this time and everywhere you went you would see women making bread. Everybody knew about the little piece of dough, which had been kept over from the previous baking, which was called yeast, and the yeast was basically a piece of fermented dough.

Let's set the scene and keep the parable in its proper place. In **Mark 13:10ff** Jesus was teaching in one of the synagogues on the Sabbath and a woman was there who had been crippled by a spirit for **eighteen years**. She was bent over and could not straighten up at all. And so Jesus saw her and called her forward and then healed her, but the rulers of the people weren't happy because Jesus had healed her on the Sabbath and so Jesus rebukes them.

And in **Luke 13:18+19** Jesus compares the kingdom of God to the mustard seed, which we looked at last time. And it's in **verse 20** where Jesus again says, "**What shall I compare the kingdom of God to?**" Now let me ask you this question, **has anyone ever said anything to you, which has greatly offended you?**

I remember driving a couple of saints to a Bible study one evening and when I was driving this car pulled out right in front of me and I said a word. Now I won't repeat it because those people found it offensive, but it was a word which Scottish people use all the time but down here in England it has a different meaning, so I apologised and I never use that word anymore.

Now I offended someone without realising I was doing it. But Jesus told a parable here, which would have highly offended those who were listening. Jesus said in **Luke 13:21** "**It is like yeast that a woman took and mixed into a large amount of flour until it worked all through the dough.**"

You see you might be thinking well, what's the big deal; He's talking about yeast. Well to understand why they were offended we need to enter the mind of the Jews again. You see in Jewish thinking, yeast or leaven is almost always connected with an evil influence. The Jews connected fermentation with deterioration and rotteness, and yeast stood for that which was evil.

For example in **Matthew 16:6**, when Jesus is speaking to His disciples He says to them, "**Be careful; be on your guard against the yeast of the Pharisees and Sadducees.**" In **1 Corinthians 5:6-8** Paul says to the Corinthian Christians, "**Your boasting is not good. Don't you know that a little yeast works through the whole batch of dough? Get rid of the old yeast that you may be a new batch without yeast--as you really are.**" And again in **Galatians 5:9** Paul says to the Galatian Christians about those who are distorting the truth, "**A little yeast works through the whole batch of dough.**"

So now we can understand why the Jews would struggle with this parable. **They would be thinking how could the kingdom of God be compared to yeast? How can God's kingdom be compared with evil? Remember when God spoke to Moses and Aaron about what the Israelites were to do in preparation for the Passover?**

He told them in **Exodus 12:8-10** "**That same night they are to eat the meat roasted over the fire, along with bitter herbs, and bread made without yeast. Do not eat the meat raw or cooked in water, but roast it over the fire--head, legs and inner parts. Do not leave any of it till morning; if some is left till morning, you must burn it.**"

One of the ceremonies of preparation for the Passover feast was that every scrap of yeast had to be taken out of the house and burned and destroyed. Now I believe that Jesus chose this illustration of the kingdom deliberately.

Imagine if you were a Jew and you were there listening to Jesus, there would be a certain shock in hearing that the kingdom of God is compared to yeast. But that shock would arouse interest and get attention, as an illustration from an unusual and unexpected source always does.

It's a bit like the man named John who was a fantastic salesman. John had a great job and made lots of money by going door-to-door selling signs that read, "No sales people allowed."

He had a job that everyone hates and turned it into something good for everyone, and that's what Jesus done. Jesus spoke of yeast in the good sense; He saw how the women use it for a good purpose to make light and wholesome bread. And so when you look at yeast the way Jesus looks at yeast you can understand that the kingdom of God is like yeast in many ways. So now that we understand the background to this parable I would like to share with you 3 thoughts about this yeast or leaven as some translations have it.

1. The yeast of Christ works from the inside out. Those of you who are bakers and make your own bread will know exactly what I'm talking about. When you are making bread, you know that yeast will do nothing to your mixture unless you mix it through, and that's because yeast does its work from within. In other words yeast can do nothing to the dough unless it is put inside; it has to get right inside the dough to work properly.

And loved ones Christianity works the same way. The influence that changes a person works within a person's heart. You know we are living in a totally materialistic country and people are trying to change themselves all the time. Some women go for surgery to improve their looks, some men go to the gym to work out and have a better-looking body. But they fail to realise is that a new house, a new job, better material things only changes the surface. You can have a million pounds in your bank account but you will still be the same person. You can change the external things about your life but your heart will still be the same.

When you look at some of these poverty stricken countries, you can't help but feel sad in your heart for them, and every now and then we will send them some money to help them out. And you get the advertising campaigns on TV, where they say things like "£1:00 will feed this family for a week."

Now please don't misunderstand me here, I'm not saying don't help these people. But what I am saying is that a poverty stricken nation may receive food and clothing and better housing, but that nation will not really be changed until it is given something within.

You see the task of Christianity is to make new men, not new things. Jesus said in Mark 7:21+22 "For from within, out of men's hearts, come evil thoughts, sexual immorality, theft, murder, adultery, greed, malice, deceit, lewdness, envy, slander, arrogance and folly."

You see it's not the outward things that are the problem; it is the human heart that is the problem. In other words once the new people are created, the new world will follow. A man is not converted unless he is converted within; a person is not converted unless their heart is changed. So Christianity is like yeast, it's not the outside trying to get in, but the inside trying to get out. Proverbs 27:19 "As water reflects a face, so a man's heart reflects the man."

And that brings me to my next point, there's real quality in the transforming power of yeast. Did you know that when yeast is put into the baking meal, it changes the ingredients? It does, what happens is that the dough is turned into a bubbling, seething mass. You when Christ and His kingdom are introduced to people, great changes take place. And that's because Christianity is a disturbing thing, it disturbs people, it upsets people.

Remember in Acts 16 when Paul and Silas were arrested for healing a slave girl who could predict the future? The Bible says in Acts 16:20+21 "They brought them before the magistrates and said, "These men are Jews, and are throwing our city into an uproar by advocating customs unlawful for us Romans to accept or practice." The Gospel of Christ upsets people and some people don't like it.

Remember in Acts 17 when Paul and Silas went to Thessalonica and he was preaching Christ? The Bible says in Acts 17:5-8 "But the Jews were jealous; so they rounded up some bad characters from the marketplace, formed a mob and started a riot in the city. They rushed to Jason's house in search of Paul and Silas in order to bring them out to the crowd. But when they did not find them, they dragged Jason and some other brothers before the city officials, shouting: "These men who have caused trouble all over the world have now come here, and Jason has welcomed

them into his house. They are all defying Caesar's decrees, saying that there is another king, one called Jesus." When they heard this, the crowd and the city officials were thrown into turmoil."

When Christians talk about the Gospel, people get very angry. Now why do they get upset? Hebrews 4:12 "For the word of God is living and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart."

They get upset because God's word exposes their sin. And sometimes you don't even have to say a word about God but because they know you are a Christian, you're exposing their darkness, and people don't like being exposed. John 3:20 "Everyone who does evil hates the light, and will not come into the light for fear that his deeds will be exposed."

There's a TV programme called, "Cowboy builders." And what they do is set up a house with camera's everywhere and they set up faults, which can be easily fixed. And these men will come in and tell the owner their toilet needs fixed and it will cost around £200, when in actual fact it would only cost around £20 to fix the problem.

And what that programme does, it exposes those workers who are not genuine people, they are con artists. But you see that is the sort of person that Christ can help, because when Christ comes into a person's heart, that person becomes a new man or woman.

In Colossians 3:1-4 Paul says, "Since, then, you have been raised with Christ, set your hearts on things above, where Christ is seated at the right hand of God. Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things. For you died, and your life is now hidden with Christ in God. When Christ, who is your life, appears, then you also will appear with him in glory."

Paul says when a person lets the yeast of Christ work in them and through them, they have new thoughts. A Christian starts to think differently about themselves and the world they live in. Following on in Colossians 3:5-7 Paul says, "Put to death, therefore, whatever belongs to your earthly nature: sexual immorality, impurity, lust, evil desires and greed, which is idolatry. Because of these, the wrath of God is coming. You used to walk in these ways, in the life you once lived." He says that a person who comes into contact with Christ starts to live differently. But something else happens to a person when they accept the yeast of Christ.

When the disciples were talking about places of honour, Jesus said to them in Matthew 20:25-28 "Jesus called them together and said, "You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their high officials exercise authority over them. Not so with you. Instead, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first must be your slave-- just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many."

What is Jesus saying? He's saying that when you become a Christian your idea of work changes, you get new ambitions of work and service. You see the yeast of Christ is so powerful it can take a person like the apostle Paul who said that he was the worst of all sinners. He can take a drug taking, looser and abuser like me. He can take anyone, no matter where they are from or what they have done in the past. He can take these people and totally transform their lives.

And how does He do that? 2 Corinthians 5:14-17 "For Christ's love compels us, because we are convinced that one died for all, and therefore all died. And he died for all that those who live should no longer live for themselves but for him who died for them and was raised again. So from now on we regard no one from a worldly point of view. Though we once regarded Christ in this way, we do so no longer. Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come!"

Christ does that because He loves us and He has told us that whoever becomes a Christian is a new creation because the old has gone. When you allow Christ to influence your life with His words, you will be amazed at the results. Jesus Christ can change someone who is willing to allow God to change them.

And what are the results of a changed and transformed life? Galatians 5:22-24 "But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law. Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the sinful nature with its passions and desires." The yeast of Christ is powerful loved ones and there's not a person you have ever met or will ever meet who cannot be changed by the word of God.

And finally, **the yeast of Christ cannot be contained**. You see yeast works contagiously, or in the words of Jesus in the parable in **Matthew 13:33**, "Until it worked all through the dough."

I heard a story about a postman who was out delivering letters one day, when he approached a garden gate he was greeted by a little boy and a huge dog. The postman asked the young boy "Does your dog bite?" The little boy said, "No." Just then the huge dog bit the postman in the ankle and so the postman shouted to the young boy, "I thought your dog didn't bite?" The young boy said, "He doesn't, but this is not my dog."

I guess the point of the story is that we all know that some dogs can be dangerous and sometimes very aggressive. And that is just what yeast is like; when yeast gets put into the mixture it doesn't stop until it has spread through the whole mixture. And Jesus says that is exactly what the kingdom of God is like, it spreads like an infection. When you think about some of Jesus' first disciples, other people brought them to Him.

In **John 1:40-45** John records that, "Andrew, Simon Peter's brother, was one of the two who heard what John had said and who had followed Jesus. The first thing Andrew did was to find his brother Simon and tell him, "We have found the Messiah" (that is, the Christ). And he brought him to Jesus. Jesus looked at him and said, "You are Simon son of John. You will be called Cephas" (which, when translated, is Peter). The next day Jesus decided to leave for Galilee. Finding Philip, he said to him, "Follow me." Philip, like Andrew and Peter, was from the town of Bethsaida. Philip found Nathanael and told him, "We have found the one Moses wrote about in the Law, and about whom the prophets also wrote--Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph."

In other words, Andrew found Peter and Philip found Nathanael, and from then onwards the number of disciples just grew and grew and grew, the early church multiplied by leaps and bounds. You know when you think about the Lord's church, it is very much in the soul winning business. Where we are reps for Jesus Christ and the only way the church can do its business is for every single member to be a soul winner for Christ too.

We have seen today that yeast used in the Scriptures is for either good or bad. A good example is contagious like yeast, but a bad example is also contagious.

In the news a couple of years ago they were telling us about the super bug **MRSA**, which was spreading throughout our hospitals but to a certain degree they can control it and keep it contained in the hospital.

But Jesus said that God's kingdom is not like that, it grows and spreads like yeast and it cannot be contained. Because God's people just can't help but tell others the news concerning the kingdom of God. Even today, just over 2000 years later people are still giving their lives to Christ and God's kingdom continues to grow.

And the question you need to ask yourself this morning is this; **is your influence contributing to that growth?** You see it always comes back to your heart. God will not change a person's heart, if that person's heart doesn't want to be changed. It doesn't matter what is on the outside, it is in the inside that counts, it's the heart that matters. **1 Samuel 16:7** "The Lord does not look at the things man looks at. Man looks at the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart."

If your heart is right with God then you will win souls for His kingdom. If your heart is not right with God then today would be a good day to do away with that old creation and put on the new. Or as Paul would say in **Galatians 6:15** "Neither circumcision nor uncircumcision means anything; what counts is a new creation."

Why not come to Christ and allow Him to begin to work in and through you today.