

Leaven

by Vic Almen

The parable of the leaven teaches us that the power of God can transform us, making us into new creations, and that we must yield ourselves to Christ, allowing him to work in us.

Duration: 37:55

Scripture: Matthew 6:33, Matthew 13:1-33, Luke 13:20-21, John 1:14

Topics: "Leaven"

Description

In this sermon, the preacher focuses on the parable of the leaven in Matthew chapter 13. He explains that this parable is about transformation and how Christ changes us from the inside out. The preacher emphasizes the importance of allowing the gospel to penetrate every part of our lives, just like leaven permeates the dough. He also highlights the significance of sharing Christ with others and being a positive influence on those around us.

Transcript

It's good to be here tonight. When you have to go someplace and speak before a group of people, I'm sure all of you do that frequently, when you do that, does anyone ever get nervous? You know, like the night before, you think, have I really got the right topic down? You ever do that? I do that all the time. And every time I do that, I go to sleep at night, I have a dream.

And the dream usually is something that really relates to the message, right? Max knows, don't you, Max? Last night I fell asleep and sometime during the night I had a dream. And I dreamt that I died and went to heaven. And that's great, okay? But I got there and St. Peter met me at the gate and he said, boy, I'm sure glad to see you here.

And I said, yes, good to be here. I said, can I come in? He said, well, just about. There's something you have to do first.

I said, well, I'll do anything to get into heaven. He said, well, it's real simple. All you have to do is take this piece of chalk and go to that ladder over there and just start writing all your sins on the wall.

I thought, for everyone to see? He said, yeah, everyone has to see them. But just go there and write every sin on the wall. I said, okay.

So I started writing and writing and writing and going up the ladder more and holding on to writing. And I got to the point I was really slowing down. I couldn't think of any more sins I'd committed.

And I thought I was just about done. And all of a sudden, I looked up and the clouds above me. Here come some feet out of the clouds coming down this ladder.

I wonder who's coming down this ladder. I looked up and it was John Strapazon coming down this ladder. And he stopped by me and said, boy, John, it's good to see you here.

And I said, have you finished your sin list and all? He said, no, I'm going down for some more chalk. That really encouraged me. It has absolutely nothing to do with what we're talking about tonight.

But I like the story. And John's a good illustrator. Take your Bible, would you please? Turn to Matthew chapter 13.

Matthew chapter 13. In this chapter, you see four parables. And a parable is really God's own story about himself as told through his son, Jesus Christ.

And each parable has one central thought. And don't get mistaken. In a parable, there are not allegories.

Not every part of the parable has to mean something. There's one theme that pervades the parable. In chapter 13 of Matthew, the first one you see is the parable of the sower or the parable of the soil, depending how you had it described to you.

And we see how the word of God goes out. It is sown. And we see how it goes on different types of soil.

And some, it takes root and grows. Others, it dies. The next parable we see is the parable of the wheat and the tares and how among the wheat, some tares were sown, the wheat being God's own chosen, the tares being false fruit, unbelievers who look like Christians.

The third parable we see is the parable of the mustard seed, a very good parable. It talks about faith and what happens if you have faith. It grows and becomes an abiding place.

And that's very good. And the fourth parable we see is in verse 33 of that chapter. And I'm going to lodge here tonight a little bit.

And it says, And he spoke another parable to them. The kingdom of heaven is like leaven, which a woman took and hid in three pecks of meal until it was all leaven. Let's have a word of prayer, could we please? Our Father, now as we come to open your word and to study it, we pray for divine wisdom, that each one of us might have an insight into your word and that your spirit might teach us the things that we need to learn.

And may you take these things and apply them to our lives. And may we not go out of here as people who have listened, but people who have listened and have been changed because of your presence here tonight. Thank you, Jesus, for all that you do in our lives.

Thank you for the privilege we have to be here tonight. We pray these things in your name. Amen.

Now, most of us are the result of past experiences in our lives. We are conditioned people, right? Most authorities say that we cannot change what we are. Some of you don't want to change what you are.

Some of you are very happy the way you are. But they say that we are a product of all that we've experienced in our lives. Personality, what we are on the outside, is really just what we are on the inside.

What we are on the inside comes out through our outward personality. Our disposition, our beliefs, our emotions, our convictions, our appetites, our desires, our attitudes that are expressed outwardly all come from within. Personality is observable.

That's what people see about you, right? They don't see within you what you are on the inside, but they see you on the outside. And our personality is shaped by our environment, by people, by circumstances, by the church, by whatever. We are shaped by those things.

The person inside of us will always control the person on the outside. Remember that. The person on the inside always controls the outward.

If you want to change the outward part of us, we have to change the inward part. That must be changed. Our values, our goals, our feelings, our attitudes must be changed on the inside so that people can see the change readily on the outside.

Now, the parable of the leaven, which we read here in verse 33, is the parable of transformation. It very vividly dramatizes how Christ changes us and then how we, as changed people, will affect those around us. Jesus, Christ, tells how the gospel gets into us, as we believe, and then how we must get into the world.

Now, if you've read this parable before, if you've heard people preach on it, there's much controversy about this one verse in the Bible. Now, to me it seems very simple and it seems very logical, but there is a lot of debate about it. Many people say that in the Bible, leaven is always spoken of as being sin.

Jesus warned his disciples, beware of the leaven of the Pharisees. In the book of Leviticus, back there, it says that leaven must be taken out of the homes because it's a sign of sin. In the Passover, they eat unleavened bread, and we see that leaven seems to be a sign of evil or of sin.

However, I believe that Jesus used the example here of leaven as good as an attention getter because everywhere else in the Bible it seems to be evil. But look again in verse 33. It says, The kingdom of heaven is like what? Yeast or leaven, right? And if we take one central truth from each parable and if leaven means evil, then is the kingdom of heaven like evil? No, it can't be, right? It must be something more than that.

So, we'll see as we go through here that I believe that Christ was using an example that is different than any place else in the Bible, but the truth there is so very important that we must not miss it. Now, as we see that leaven was a little piece of dough that was taken from a previous baking and it was set aside, and as it was set aside, it would just ferment. And then when a new batch of dough was made, that little piece of starter was placed into the dough, it was kneaded into the dough, and what happened? The leaven permeated the entire bread, right? All the dough was leaven.

Then when it was all leavened, they took another little piece, set it aside, and became the starter for a new batch. Jesus saw in his life in the flesh as leaven. The power of God was being kneaded into the dough of humanity, and when Jesus came in this life in a physical body, he came to alter completely the shape of mankind.

Just as leaven takes over the entire dough, so the gospel of Christ brought a new element into life, and that is the reign and rule of God within believers. Jesus' life and message was the putting in of the leaven. His death was the infusing of that power, but his resurrection was the releasing of that power, and now the presence of his Holy Spirit in the world is the permeating, that one thing that permeates the whole of life.

Now just as Christ came to be leaven to the world, so believers are supposed to be leaven in the kingdom of God. The individual is always the key. Jesus came to be leaven, to leaven each one individually, that individually each one of us might be that one thing that causes a change in the world.

So the individual is the key. Now the leaven of Christ enters our life when we by faith accept his love and forgiveness. Then this leaven, this Christ comes to dwell within us, and as he comes to come into us, he reorganizes the total dough of what we are.

We're just a lump of dough until he comes in and begins to do a work, and he'll continue to do that work until we are completely and entirely conformed to the image of his Son, Jesus Christ. So we see that the leaven will work on us. Now, the leaven works inadvertently.

We don't see leaven at work. But the more we keep our eyes on the leaven himself, the more we look to Jesus Christ, then the more we become like him. Now, we are not to try to develop Christian virtues, right? We cannot develop Christian virtues.

It is impossible for us to do that. But we are to yield ourselves to Christ that he might infuse those within us. Just as the dough must yield itself to the leaven or to the yeast, so that the yeast may permeate the whole, we must yield ourselves to Christ that he might permeate all of us.

I've heard people say, if I could just get out of the way, if it were possible to get self back in the back corner somewhere, then I could be the Christian I ought to be. You ever hear that? You ever said that? I think at some time we've all said that. But that's ridiculous.

It really is. That's like the dough saying, I don't want to be dough. What we are is what God made us.

That's how he made us. He wants us the way that we are so he can take us and mold us. I like to use the example of a flower garden.

We're talking about food, but I'm hungry, so let's get off that for a minute. Not everyone can be a beautiful rose like me. Some are marigolds, like Linda.

Now a rose smells very sweet. Anybody ever smell a marigold? I'm sorry, Linda. I wasn't going to pick on her tonight, but I did.

But each one has a place. Do you know that if I should plant rose bushes by a garden, a vegetable garden, that it attracts certain things? But if I plant marigolds around a vegetable garden, you know what happens? It keeps the bugs away. So marigolds are very good.

I'm the buggy person, she's not. So you see, it's the same thing. The dough can't refuse to be dough and we have to be what we are so that the infusing power of Christ can come in and dwell us.

As the dough rises, we don't dissect the dough to see which is dough and what's leaven, do we? We put them together and we say they're so intermingled that we can't separate them. And that's with a Christian. When Christ comes to live within you, our lives should so be intermingled with Christ that they can't see

the difference between us and Christ.

And with Christ living within us, that's exactly the way it is. He is the leaven that has come into the dough to mold us and change us. Now what is the secret of this transformed life? What is the one thing that allows Christ to work within us? It's found in John chapter 15 and verse 4. It says, Abide in me and I in you.

As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself except it abide in the vine, no more can ye, except ye abide in me. What's the key? Abiding. When I was first saved, I was a mess.

My wife still says I'm a mess. But I had many objectionable traits. And some people say I still have those objectionable traits.

Right, Linda? Thank you. Anyway, after six years as a Christian, I was a Christian for six years before I learned about the indwelling Christ. Can you imagine someone being a Christian for six years, going to church, reading the Bible, designed to live the Christian life, living six years before I ever heard anybody ever tell me that Christ, my Lord, lived within me.

So for six years, I didn't know that. It was a hidden secret in my life. But when I found out about that, and I could yield myself to that one who lives within me, then the change began to take place.

And since that time, he has been working to change me and to mold me and to make me into what he wants to be. His power is beginning to permeate through my entire being. It's not there yet.

I'm not conformed. I still sin. I still have many faults.

But I know that he's working within me. And he'll do that until I'm completely conformed to Jesus Christ. Let me read something from you.

I was reading in a magazine. It went very well with my lesson tonight. And see if in school, you've heard some of these things.

Now, if you've been in psychology, you've heard some of these things. If you've been in sociology, you've heard some of these things. But let me read it to you.

Word for word. If a man is a philanderer, he will always be a philanderer to the end. It is only in novels that a miracle occurs in the last chapter that makes the drunkard reform and become sober, the grouchy sunny and sweet-tempered, the miser generous and open-handed, the shrew so mild that butter wouldn't melt in her mouth.

In real life, these things never happen. People continue to be what habit and usage have made them. Now, I don't believe that.

People can be changed. Personality can be changed. If I didn't believe that, I would not be doing what I'm doing today.

Because I believe that Jesus can make a difference. But it has to start on the inside and work its way outside. Psychologists tell us to do what? Start changing what you are on the outside and you'll be better on the inside.

Look at the disciples. They were a strange mixture of people. Think in your mind about the twelve disciples.

Maybe you can name six of them. If you can name all twelve of them, even better. But they were insecure.

They were pushy. Some were introverted. Some were very insensitive people.

Some were very arrogant. Some were very competitive. But Jesus called each one of those men and he called each one of those men to be something special for a specific task.

And when he called them, that's when the leaven slipped into their lives. And like the woman in the parable here, the Lord hid his power within them in his lordship in their hearts. And the process began.

When the process began, Jesus began to need them. K-N-E-A-D. Jesus began to need them by his ministry and by the things that he taught.

And many things that he taught, the disciples rebelled against. Remember Peter at Caesarea Philippi? He stands up and makes the great declaration. You are the Christ, the son of the living God.

And Jesus said, Peter, that's a great statement because God revealed that to you, not man. And two verses later, Peter tells Jesus, You don't know what you're talking about. You're not going to go to Jerusalem and die.

But at least Peter had the leaven within him. And the leaven began to be needed into Peter. Now after Pentecost, the leaven really began to take hold of those disciples and make them into apostles.

The book of Acts goes on to describe that leavening process through the lives of the apostles. And Jesus continued to work in their lives all the time that they walked upon this earth. Let me give you two apostles that are exact opposites.

You probably thought, when I asked you to name the twelve apostles, you probably thought of Matthew, right? That's the first book in the New Testament. You remember Matthew. One you probably didn't mention was Simon the Zealot.

Now think about these two men. They are exact opposites of the spectrum. Here's Matthew.

Matthew is a Jew, a member of the Levitical tribe, who sold out his nation, his family, his faith, everything he believed in, he sold it out to the power of Rome in order to become a tax collector for Rome. On the other side of the spectrum is Simon the Zealot, who was so convinced and so sure of his heritage and his faith and his country that he would just as soon kill a tax collector as to look at him. But when Jesus came as the leaven into both of them, what happened? They were able to get together in a very close association in twelve people and work together for a common good because the leaven began to transform both lives and mold them into what Jesus wanted, not what they wanted.

The classic example of all time is Paul. It's a very vivid illustration of this leavening power of Christ. Paul was a very rigid, determined Pharisee.

Now all of you know what a Pharisee is, right? You do? Good. I don't feel into that. They were very adamant in their faith.

They were the legalists of the day. A Pharisee had to know from memory the first five books of the Old Testament, the Torah. They had to do certain things.

They knew the law. They followed the law exactly. And Paul was really, he said, a Pharisee of the Pharisees, one who so loved what he was that he went out to persecute the church.

And that's where the problem began because as he was persecuting the church, he ran across one of those people he was going to kill, Stephen. And when he came across Stephen, the leaven slipped out of Stephen and slipped into Paul. Now Paul met that leaven himself on the road to Damascus, but he encountered it in Stephen.

The next thing we see is he goes to a man named Ananias. And Ananias begins to take this leaven, this Christ, and begins to knead it into the life of Paul. So we see that Paul had a dramatic change in his life.

And it started on the inside. And the leaven begins to work. Paul, I think, was amazed at the transformation in his own life.

Turn, if you would, to the book of Philippians, chapter 3. And this is kind of Paul's testimony, beginning at verse 4. I'm going to read quite a bit here, so just follow along if you would. Philippians 3, beginning at verse 4. Although I myself might have confidence in the flesh, if anyone else has a mind to put confidence in the flesh, I far more. And he tells here about who he was, right? What he was and what he did.

And what he did, verse 6. As to zeal, a persecutor of the church. As to righteousness, which is in the law, found blameless. But whatever things were gained to me, those I have counted as lost for the sake of Christ.

More than that, I count all things to be lost in view of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them but rubbish in order that I may gain Christ, and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own derived from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which comes from God on the basis of faith. Look at verse 10. Look what the 11 is going to do to him.

Look how it's changed Paul. That I may know him, Jesus Christ, and the power of his resurrection, and the fellowship of his sufferings being conformed to his death, in order that I may attain to the resurrection from the dead, not that I have already obtained it, or have already become perfect, but I press on in order that I may lay hold of that, for which I also was laid hold of by Christ Jesus. Now, Paul says my life was dramatically changed because of this 11 within my life.

And he prays the same thing for us. Look if you would at Ephesians chapter 3. And let's begin at verse 14. And this is what Paul wants for all of us.

Ephesians 3, beginning at verse 14. And for this reason I bow my knees before the Father, from whom every family in heaven and on earth derives its name, that he would grant you, that's everyone in this room, that he would grant you according to the riches of his glory, to be strengthened with power through his Spirit in the inner man, so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith, and that you, being rooted and grounded in love, may be able to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know the love of Christ, which surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled up to all the fullness of God. Now, those two verses there, those two sections of Scripture shows this transforming power of 11.

We, you and I, everyone in this room is a Christian. We are needed in society. N-E-E-D-E-D.

We are needed in society. Our influence is absolutely essential in our society. But more than that, we must be needed, K-N-E-A-D-E-D.

We must be worked into the society by Christ. Our influence in the lives of others is just like Christ's influence in us. The word Christian doesn't mean someone like Christ.

It means someone who is a little Christ. And therefore, the people in the world see Christ in us. And what we are to the world, that's what the world sees as Christ.

We must be the leaven of the world. As the leaven pervades the inner person, the result is for everyone to see. Remember, personality? What comes out on the outside has to take place first of all on the inside.

And as Christ works within you, then that leaven is observable as it is working. And notice that. Leaven is only observable when it's working.

After the bread is baked, the leaven action stops. And you can no longer see the changes taking place. So leaven only works until it is baked.

In the Christian life, as you live this life as a Christian, Christ will always be working in you until the day that you are perfect, baked. And that's in heaven, folks. But until that time, leaven must work until the baking is done.

What is the test of a leavened person? Is it how much we know? Is it how much we can absorb? Is it how much we can withstand? Is it how much faith that we have? What is the test of a leavened person? I think it's found back there in Matthew 13, 33. Where was the leaven put? On a shelf? No. It was put into the meal.

And the test of a leavened person is how much influence, how much of a change are you making on those around you? Are you taking a part of yourself as starter and giving it to other people? For you see, the Spirit came into the world, yes, to fill us, yes, to give us power, yes, to be our comforter. But He came, first of all, to give us the power to be a witness, to change us on the inside, that we might verbally and experientially and every other way possibly make a difference in the world that others might come to know Christ. Some of you can't relate to this story, and I'm not that old, but I had a grandmother who lived in Pennsylvania, and until the day she died, she cooked in a coal stove.

Anyone know what a coal stove is? Raise your hand. Oh, there's a few. Very good.

How many of you have ever come down to a coal stove? Very good. You know what I'm talking about. Every morning, my grandmother would get up and stoke up the coal stove in the kitchen.

She died at 82 years of age, and the week before she died, she baked bread. We went to see my grandmother about once a year in the summertime and spent about two weeks with my grandparents. The one thing that remains in my mind more than anything else is the smell of the kitchen.

She had a very, very large kitchen, and in the kitchen was the coal stove on one side. On the other side was the flour bin, a huge box where she kept her flour and her baking supplies for making bread. And when we were there, every morning, my grandmother made fresh bread for us.

If you've never had fresh homemade bread baked in a coal stove oven, you haven't lived. Okay? Oh, I'm getting hungry. And I remember I would never get up that early in the morning.

It was sinful to arise so early on vacation. But I can remember one time, I don't recall why, I don't know how old I was, but I remember going downstairs and watching my grandmother bake bread. And she taught me a lot about life when she made bread.

And let me tell you what she did. She stoked the coal stove, get it good and hot. She would then take the ingredients and begin to put it all together.

On the back porch, which was screened in, was cool. She kept a little pot in the corner. And that was the leaven, the starter.

Next to that, she had buckwheat pancake mix. And right next to that crock was German liverwurst. It's great, let me tell you.

It's overflowing the crock. And she'd take that and she'd put it on the top of her flour bin and she'd begin to punch it. And she'd say, this is grandpa, this is grandpa.

She'd get at it. And she'd begin to knead it in. And then she'd beat it all down real small.

She'd put it back in the crock, she'd set it behind the stove. Sometime later she'd get out again, you know, I'll get you, old man. And she'd punch down the bread.

And then she did this three times. She'd take the dough that she had, she'd divide it into loaves, she'd put it in the pan. She'd set it behind the stove for a while.

She'd open up the front of that oven and she'd put them in there. And 30 minutes later we had fresh homemade bread with fresh homemade butter with fresh homemade apple butter. Every day.

What am I trying to say to this? I don't know, let's go out and get something to eat. First of all, leaven works only in heat. Grandma would put that behind the stove to get the heat to it.

If you put a bread dough with starter, with leaven in the refrigerator, it doesn't rise. It's got to have heat to work. And that's why you are in the world.

The world's the heat. The world is that influence around you that heats you up, that gets this leaven to work. It's confrontation with people.

It's meaty people. Wherever you go, that keeps that leaven working in your life. You've got to have contact with people.

Number two. She had to take that bread and beat it down so that the leaven could get to all the part of the dough. That's kneading.

And that's the circumstances of life. It's the bad and the good. It's God kneading us, punching us, trying to get that leaven all the way through us so we can be a full loaf of bread.

We have a tendency as Christians to shy away from the bad things in life. None of us like problems. I hated math because it was all problems.

We have a tendency to say, if there's a problem here, I will do anything to get away from that problem. Some people go through their lives never confronting problems. You've got to confront the problems.

Circumstances of life is what needs you to force that leaven of Christ to every part of you. And then you can see that bread begin to rise. And you can see Christ working in your life.

And other people can see Christ working in your life. Number three. Before grandma baked the bread, she always took a little piece of the dough and put it back in the crock, in the corner on the porch, so she could start another batch sometime later.

That's taking a part of ourselves and giving ourselves to somebody else. That's sharing Christ. We have to be witnesses.

We must share our faith with other people so that they can also get that leaven and they can be transformed. There's one interesting thing about leaven. Do you know that if I should take that little piece of leaven and put it into the dry ingredients and begin to mix it up, that before it ever rises the first time, I could take a bit of that dough and put it out in the back porch and it'll be leavened? It'll sit there and just leaven.

But I don't have to have the entire loaf leavened before I take a piece off of it. Now some people think that they've got to know all about being a Christian before they share their faith. That's not true.

You can be saved today and share your faith tomorrow with somebody else. You don't have to know all the answers. I thought for a long time if someone came up to me and asked me a question I couldn't answer, I could never witness again.

Listen, I've had more questions asked me I couldn't possibly answer than stopped me from witnessing. Because I don't have to be completely changed. I don't have to be baked.

I don't have to be perfect in order to witness. And wherever Christ is in your life, how much he has of you? How much has he permeated you? How much difference is there in your life? Are you half-raised? Are you fully raised? Have you been beaten down? Wherever you're at, God can still take that little bit of you and you can plant that in someone's life and you can make a difference eternally in someone's life. Remember those things.

First of all, got to have leaven. Got to be a Christian. Number two, got to have heat.

Got to have heat. Problems. Number three, got to be needed, right? Got to be punched down once in a while.

That's problems and difficulties, circumstances of life. Four, you don't have to be completely leavened to be a starter. We must start where we are.

Let me bow for just a minute, please. I want you just to close your eyes just a minute and kind of be introspective. That means to look inward.

And I want you to think about this example that Christ gave to us here of leaven. How much of you have been leavened? Are you abiding in Christ as much as you know how that he can take and just begin to work in your life? Look at that for just a minute. And then say, am I willing to be put behind the stove in the heat? Or am I willing to be punched down once in a while? You see, until you can say to Christ as he

comes to you, Lord, I'm willing to give you all the dough of my life that you can fill me fully.

And I know it's going to be hard. I know that it's going to be rough out there. But I'm willing to do it for you.

And lastly, have you been a witness? Have you given a part of yourself actively, tried to do it daily or weekly or on a regular basis to take a part of yourself and plant that leaven in somebody else? Father, I want to just come before you tonight and confess to you that I have not been as faithful as I should in witnessing. And Father, I don't know if I have to do it once a day or once a week, maybe once an hour. But I know, Father, that around me every day there are people who are lost without you.

And Father, just today I went into a store and I bought something. I didn't share a testimony or anything with that clerk. And for all I know, Father, she was lost.

And she couldn't see a difference in me because I didn't say anything. And Father, I pray for these men and women here tonight that they might be so yielded to your leavening power that they would take the heat by verbally, actively, boldly witnessing for you. And that Jesus, you might be so real in their lives that it would bubble over and people would see you in them.

Thank you, Jesus, for all that you're doing. I want to pray now as we go to the Glen tomorrow that you might give us safety as we travel, give us a blessed time of fellowship with one another. And Father, teach us while we're there to be the people you want us to be.

And we promise that we'll give the glory to you and our lives are in your control. We love you, Jesus, and thank you. And we pray these things in your name.

Amen.

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