

Three Measures Leavened

By Elder David Pyles

The kingdom of heaven is like unto leaven, which a woman took, and hid in three measures of meal, till the whole was leavened. – Mt 13:33

This parable is so brief that it is told in only one verse, but many have questioned and debated its intended meaning. Jesus explained some of His own parables but gave no explanation for this one. His explained parables seem simple in retrospect, but the unexplained ones remain with a degree of mystery. This is, of course, the intended nature of parables. Their true meanings cannot be known with certainty without the revelation of God.

In fact Jesus said the reason that He spoke in parables was to conceal truth from many while revealing it to others (Mt 13:11-17). This was oftentimes done by teaching parables publicly to all, but by explaining them privately to a select few. Such is the nature of the word of God. It is to be taught publicly to all, but none will understand it apart from those who are personally taught by Him (Mt 11:27, Jn 5:38, 6:44, 1Jn 2:20 & 27).

As to the present parable, the leaven probably represents corruption because the Bible has a habit of using leaven this way (Mt 16:6, 1Cor 5:6, Gal 5:9). A plausible explanation of the three measures of meal begins by observing that Jesus repeatedly characterized the Old Testament as having two major parts, namely, the *law* and the *prophets* (Mt 5:17, 7:12, 11:13, 22:40, Lk 16:16, 24:27, 24:44). Adding the *gospel* of the New Testament, this would mean that the teachings of the Bible can be divided into three major categories. The parable would then be a prophecy and warning that His pure teachings would eventually endure pervasive corruption introduced by the errant interpretations by men.

This idea is corroborated by many prophetic scriptures:

Now the Spirit speaketh expressly, that in the latter times some shall depart from the faith, giving heed to seducing spirits, and doctrines of devils. – 1Tim 4:1

This know also, that in the last days perilous times shall come. For men shall be lovers of their own selves, covetous, boasters, proud, blasphemers, disobedient to parents,

unthankful, unholy, Without natural affection, trucebreakers, false accusers, incontinent, fierce, despisers of those that are good, Traitors, heady, highminded, lovers of pleasures more than lovers of God; Having a form of godliness, but denying the power thereof: from such turn away. – 2Tim 3:1-5

I charge thee therefore before God, and the Lord Jesus Christ, who shall judge the quick and the dead at his appearing and his kingdom; Preach the word; be instant in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort with all longsuffering and doctrine. For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but after their own lusts shall they heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears; And they shall turn away their ears from the truth, and shall be turned unto fables. – 2Tim 4:1-4

Knowing this first, that there shall come in the last days scoffers, walking after their own lusts, And saying, Where is the promise of his coming? for since the fathers fell asleep, all things continue as they were from the beginning of the creation. – 2Pet 3:3-4

It is very easy to see these tendencies in our times. Men are developing increasingly clever ways of interpreting the Bible to support their preconceived notions. This is called *eisegesis*, which means to read into scriptures what the reader wants them to say. This is the opposite of *exegesis*, which means to extract from scriptures the meaning intended by the writer. The parable of Jesus likely warns that the practice of eisegesis will grow as we approach the end of time. This means that sincere Christians must be on guard against it, carefully and prayerfully studying the word of God with earnest desire to find its intended meaning. God allows the leaven because it requires men to study the Bible for themselves. The pervasive presence of the leaven means that we cannot invest too much confidence in what other men say. Good Bible teachers must be appreciated and honored, but self-study is a necessity. This study will surely entail work. The fact that Jesus taught in parables clearly shows that God did not intend for the Bible to be easy. However, studying the Bible is much like solving a jigsaw puzzle. The reader will experience satisfaction and joy in fitting the pieces even if long before the whole puzzle is done.

09/15/24