

# GracePoint: A Weekly Sermon Discussion

## 44 – The Parable of the Leaven

Announcements:

9/12 @6:30 -

*Men's Discipleship*  
- Chapter 21

9/14 @7:00 -

*Prayer*

9/15 @6:30 -

*Grace Group*

9/18 @8:30 -

*Sunday School*

**ICE BREAKER:** What is your biggest phobia?

**READ:** Matthew 13:33

As someone who prides himself on preaching through each and every verse of any book we are going through skipping a whole parable hurt me just a little bit. But why would I do such a thing? The best answer that I have is by sharing a phrase that they often teach preachers. "When there is a mist in the pulpit there will be a fog in the pew." In other words, if there is even a hint of confusion about a passage or point in the mind of the preacher there is no way that the congregation will understand what you are saying. Enter the parable of the leaven. This really short parable might be one of the most difficult in all of Scripture, and it boils down to one question: Is leaven a good or bad thing?

Many will interpret this parable by assuming that leaven is a bad thing. Their justification: pretty much EVERYWHERE ELSE in Scripture that leaven appears, it is a bad thing (think: the leaven of the Pharisees, "a little leavens the whole lump", and all the requirements for unleavened bread). Why should we read this little parable, with few contextual clues, any differently? A reading of the parable in this way makes it line up with a parable we did cover on Sunday, the parable of the net. There the kingdom is mixed with various fish and the bad ones will one day be dealt with. Here the leaven that is mixed is the pollution and sins of the world. Thus, some say, Jesus is warning his disciples, the kingdom of heaven must be protected from those who would corrupt it. Beware the leavening that may be mixed in the church - for just a little bit can infiltrate and corrupt the whole thing. In this regard this small parable comes with a huge warning!

**DISCUSS:** In what ways must the church be protected from bad "leavening"? What are some strengths of reading the parable this way? What are some weaknesses?

However, there are many who would argue that here the leavening is a good thing. "Sure", they may say, "there are *few* context clues, but there are *some*"! Specifically they reference two: the first is to note that the kingdom of heaven is not like the whole loaf, but directly the kingdom of heaven is like the leavening. It does not make sense, they argue for Jesus to call the kingdom of heaven some sort of corrupting agent. Secondly they note where Matthew himself chose to place this verse. It is right by mustard seed which no one argues is a bad thing. If this is to be read like the parable of the net, why wouldn't Matthew put it right by the parable of the net. Here then the message is completely different, instead of a warning to guard the church, this parable gives hope, though the church starts small, and is mixed within the world, its power is great and can change the world profoundly!

**DISCUSS:** Why is this particular encouragement so important to us? What are some strengths of reading the parable this way? What are some weaknesses?

So which one do *I* think it is? I lean towards it being a positive (because, you know, context!), but find the arguments of the other side convincing. So what are we to do, if this portion is, as I have been calling it, the final test of how we are to read parables? What do we do when we don't know a full answer on the test? Here Spurgeon can be a great encouragement (because it turns out, even he struggled to know *exactly* how to read this parable): "Let our friends take their choice of the two interpretations, and learn a good lesson from either or both. From evil leaven, the Lord preserve us; by holy influences may we all be wrought upon!"

**DISCUSS:** why is it important for us to learn to take a "good lesson from either or both"?