

Yeast in the Kingdom?

Scripture Reading — Luke 13:20-21

*“The kingdom of God ... is like yeast that a woman took and mixed into about sixty pounds of flour.”
—Luke 13:20-21 —*

Like the parable of the mustard seed, the parable of the yeast also points to something small that produces amazing results. But in Israel, yeast often represented sin and evil. Did Jesus intend to speak of yeast that way in this parable? Apparently.

Only bread without yeast could be used at Israel’s feasts. The smoke of yeasted bread was unacceptable to God (see Leviticus 2:11). Jesus had also warned against the yeast of the Pharisees, citing their hypocrisy (Luke 12:1). And Paul wrote, “Get rid of the old yeast, so that you may be a new unleavened batch” (1 Corinthians 5:7). Leaven (yeast) was regularly identified with the pervasiveness of sin and wickedness.

So, mentioning yeast in a parable about the kingdom of God would throw his Jewish audience off guard. What was Jesus saying? It didn’t sound like he was talking about sanctified bread!

Again, Jesus often used shocking imagery to make a point. God could use even something despised to produce great results in his kingdom. Jesus may well have been saying that a despised group of former fishermen, prostitutes, and tax collectors could permeate the dead lump of religious Judaism with the good news of the kingdom of God.

And if God could use yeast, he can certainly use you and me!

Prayer

Powerful God, you who use the unexpected in your plans, use us to carry out your purposes and to spread your glory. May your kingdom keep spreading throughout your world. Amen.

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