

Affecting the World 1-2-05

Matthew 13:31-35 (NIV)

³¹ He told them another parable: "The kingdom of heaven is like a mustard seed, which a man took and planted in his field. ³² Though it is the smallest of all your seeds, yet when it grows, it is the largest of garden plants and becomes a tree, so that the birds of the air come and perch in its branches." ³³ He told them still another parable: "The kingdom of heaven is like yeast that a woman took and mixed into a large amount of flour until it worked all through the dough." ³⁴ Jesus spoke all these things to the crowd in parables; he did not say anything to them without using a parable. ³⁵ So was fulfilled what was spoken through the prophet: "I will open my mouth in parables, I will utter things hidden since the creation of the world."

Jesus did not speak to the people without using parables. Matthew wrote that it was the fulfillment of Psalm 78:2. In the sermon *A Heart Condition*, we saw that Jesus used parables so that the hardhearted who had grown calloused by their continual rejection of the love of God, those who insisted on closing their eyes, would not have to face the truth and reject even more. (Matthew 13:15) We are held accountable for the truth we have heard. The more we know, the more we are accountable. (Luke 12:48) The Lord gave me a parable that I can relate to, in regards to this. When I went on my diving vacation, I caught a cold. The Lord had plans for me other than my own, but I had gone to dive! So I went about trying to do my own thing. I went diving anyway! Or I should say that I tried to. The Eustachian tubes between my ears and throat were clogged so I could not equalize the pressure in my ears. The more I tried to go deeper, the worse it hurt.

I recently came across a verse in my devotions in Jeremiah that explained to me what was happening. ⁹ *The heart is deceitful above all things and beyond cure. Who can understand it?* ¹⁰ *"I the LORD search the heart and examine the mind, to reward a man according to his conduct, according to what his deeds deserve."* Jeremiah 17:9-10 (NIV) Does that sound like a contradiction? God examines our heart to give us what our deeds deserve. You see, our deeds may look good, but God looks at the motivation behind our deeds. You may have just given \$1000 to the benevolent fund. If you did it to boast and tell people how good you are, God will judge you for your prideful act. If you did it because the love of God moved your heart to help those less fortunate than yourself, you will be rewarded as if you did it for the Lord Himself. (1 Chronicles 28:9)

If I hear what God wants me to do, and my heart will not let me do it, I have this pain called guilt. God holds me accountable. I may even go ahead and do it to get rid of the guilt. Sorry, but that does not count for anything. I need a changed heart. I need to equalize what I know is of God and what my heart desires. Without a changed heart, I am like a person diving with a cold. I only create pain when I hear God's instruction. He says to speak out to someone, and I refuse. I feel guilt. I harden my heart. I am accountable to God for my disobedience. The result is pain! My heart has to be changed before I can hear without pain. God, in His incredible love for us, speaks in parables. If your heart is changed, transformed by His Spirit, you can hear and there will be no pain for your heart desires His will. However, every time God's instruction to you conflicts

Commented [notes1]: ² I will open my mouth in parables, I will utter hidden things, things from of old-- Psalms 78:2 (NIV)

Commented [notes2]: ¹⁵ For this people's heart has become calloused; they hardly hear with their ears, and they have closed their eyes. Otherwise they might see with their eyes, hear with their ears, understand with their hearts and turn, and I would heal them.' Matthew 13:15 (NIV)

Commented [notes3]: ⁴⁸ But the one who does not know and does things deserving punishment will be beaten with few blows. From everyone who has been given much, much will be demanded; and from the one who has been entrusted with much, much more will be asked. Luke 12:48 (NIV)

Commented [notes4]: ⁹ "And you, my son Solomon, acknowledge the God of your father, and serve him with wholehearted devotion and with a willing mind, for the LORD searches every heart and understands every motive behind the thoughts. If you seek him, he will be found by you; but if you forsake him, he will reject you forever. 1 Chronicles 28:9 (NIV)

with an area of your heart that has not been transformed, a rock in the soil of your heart, there is pain. (Proverbs 17:3) Thank God that in His mercy He speaks in parables.

Commented [notes5]: ³ The crucible for silver and the furnace for gold, but the LORD tests the heart. Proverbs 17:3 (NIV)

Even when He spoke plainly, there are deeper truths for those whose hearts are prepared to receive them. "...he did not say anything to them without using a parable." Does Jesus change? Thankfully, He is the unchanging One! The author of Hebrews wrote, "Jesus Christ, the same yesterday, today, and forever." Hebrews 13:8 He was declaring that Jesus is the great I Am. He always speaks in parables, then and now. Your life is filled with parables every day. If your heart can receive it, you will have an ear to hear. It is my conjecture that part of the wonder of heaven will be to look back over our life and be able to hear and see the many things God was showing us in the parables of our daily lives. That will increase your awe of the Sovereign One!

For those who were willing to hear, in Jesus' day and in ours, the truth is there as treasure to be stored up in abundance. Let us move on to these two parables and see if we have ears to hear. The first was of the mustard seed.

³¹ He told them another parable: "The kingdom of heaven is like a mustard seed, which a man took and planted in his field. ³² Though it is the smallest of all your seeds, yet when it grows, it is the largest of garden plants and becomes a tree, so that the birds of the air come and perch in its branches."

When I was in Israel, I picked up a little packet of mustard seeds. They really are a tiny seed, much smaller than a pinhead. The mustard plant of Israel can grow 12 to 15 feet with branches strong enough for birds to nest in. The point of the parable is obvious. Something very small becomes much larger than you would imagine. At that time, the kingdom of heaven was Jesus and His band of disciples. You might extend it out to the outer group of disciples, and even to those in the world like the Centurion who had faith in God. Still, that was a very tiny part of the world. Looking at the huge crowds of thousands that gathered to hear Jesus, it would tell us that only a small fraction were yielding their lives to the rule of God.

We are tempted to look at the world through the eyes and heart of man and think that bigger is better, that if it is small, it must be insignificant. (1 Samuel 16:7) Jesus was saying that at that time the kingdom was small, but it would get larger than you could imagine by looking at that little seed of a beginning. Even now we are tempted to see in worldly terms as the disciples must have been seeing. They saw a man who had given up His carpentry business to preach to the poor. The movers and shakers did not care about Him or His message. If anything, they were antagonistic. Rome did not give Him a second thought. The religious system thought His influence would end when they killed Him. But that little mustard seed...

Commented [notes6]: ⁷ But the LORD said to Samuel, "Do not consider his appearance or his height, for I have rejected him. The LORD does not look at the things man looks at. Man looks at the outward appearance, but the LORD looks at the heart." 1 Samuel 16:7 (NIV)

That little seed that was insignificant to Rome, within a few decades, became a great plant that had them so worried that Nero blamed the fire of Rome on them to slow them down. It was only 300 hundred years until the greatest empire on earth bowed its knee to a poor carpenter turned itinerant preacher from a little insignificant town on the Jewish frontier. He never raised an army, never wrote a book, and only a few historians even bothered a brief mention of him. Yet, no other man has so shaped human history

and touched mankind. Even today, 2000 years later, the greatest national power on earth is divided over this one man and what He taught. This prophetic parable continues to be fulfilled. (Zechariah 4:6)

Commented [notes7]: ⁶ So he said to me, "This is the word of the LORD to Zerubbabel: 'Not by might nor by power, but by my Spirit,' says the LORD Almighty. Zechariah 4:6 (NIV)

For a moment, consider your part in it. I was just thinking about a guest in our home. I shared a little bit about who Jesus is and what He had done in my life with this man some 20 years ago. He came to Christ and began to grow in Him. Others watered this young man. (1 Corinthians 3:5-6) About 10 years later, he began to teach Bible studies and people were affected by his life in Christ. Some of them have gone on, no doubt, and affected others, who affected others, who affected others. One day, when I go to my reward, I will see the enormous amount of fruit that God produced through my pathetic and flawed witness. My witness was barely a mustard seed. What God produced through it is, I am sure, beyond my imagination. (Ephesians 3:20)

Commented [notes8]: ⁵ What, after all, is Apollos? And what is Paul? Only servants, through whom you came to believe--as the Lord has assigned to each his task. ⁶ I planted the seed, Apollos watered it, but God made it grow. 1 Corinthians 3:5-6 (NIV)

I am telling you that for two reasons. I believe Jesus was encouraged to keep going because of the joy that was set before Him, a vision of the fruit of transformed lives that His work would ultimately produce. (Hebrews 12:2) We can find encouragement to go on, to face opposition, when we see what Jesus saw. If we will get a glimpse of what God can do through a kind act, a word of testimony, a witness when given the opportunity, we should be not only encouraged, but also excited about what a great plant can come from a little seed. (2 Corinthians 9:8)

Commented [notes9]: ²⁰ Now unto him that is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that worketh in us, Ephesians 3:20 (KJV)

Commented [notes10]: ² Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before him endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. Hebrews 12:2 (NIV)

³³ He told them still another parable: "The kingdom of heaven is like yeast that a woman took and mixed into a large amount of flour until it worked all through the dough."

Usually, we think of yeast in a negative connotation. If you look carefully in Scripture, it is not evil in itself but represents the action of permeation whether for good or evil. In this case, it is compared to the kingdom of heaven, like the mustard seed was. A woman takes a little yeast and mixes it in a batch of dough. The dough is placed in a warm moist place, and before long, the yeast has worked its way into the entire batch. That is what some call contagious Christianity. In an earlier chapter, Jesus said it is like a city set on hill, you cannot hide it. (Matthew 5:14) People will see it and want it. They will want some of that light and life and inevitably encounter the One who is light and life in you. (Psalm 27:1) This is the main point of the parable. Just being a real Christian will affect the world you live in. Your life will rub off on others. (Isaiah 60:3)

Commented [notes11]: ⁸ And God is able to make all grace abound to you, so that in all things at all times, having all that you need, you will abound in every good work. 2 Corinthians 9:8 (NIV)

Commented [notes12]: ¹⁴ "You are the light of the world. A city on a hill cannot be hidden. Matthew 5:14 (NIV)

Commented [notes13]: ¹ The LORD is my light and my salvation-- whom shall I fear? The LORD is the stronghold of my life-- of whom shall I be afraid? Psalms 27:1 (NIV)

Jesus was predicting that what He was beginning was going to saturate the earth. That was quite an expression of faith. 2000 years later, Christianity is still the fastest growing religion on the planet. Indigenous missionaries are targeting the last few places on earth that have not been saturated. Jesus warned us that this gospel would be preached in all the world, and then the end would come. (Matthew 24:14) I am not into getting all worked up over the last days. Been there; done that. However, it does look to me like it will not be long. Regardless of how long we have, we should live every day as if it were our last! (James 4:14)

Commented [notes14]: ³ Nations will come to your light, and kings to the brightness of your dawn. Isaiah 60:3 (NIV)

Commented [notes15]: ¹⁴ And this gospel of the kingdom will be preached in the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come. Matthew 24:14 (NIV)

We are supposed to be that infecting kind of an influence, like yeast in flour, on our culture, our community, and our family. Too often, however, we end up being changed instead of changing those we come in contact with. The yeast has to permeate you before you are going to really affect those you come in contact with. The more you are

Commented [notes16]: ¹⁴ Why, you do not even know what will happen tomorrow. What is your life? You are a mist that appears for a little while and then vanishes. James 4:14 (NIV)

saturated with it, the more likely it will affect those who encounter you. This is the first need. The yeast has to have some potency. (Matthew 5:13)

Commented [notes17]: ¹³ "You are the salt of the earth. But if the salt loses its saltiness, how can it be made salty again? It is no longer good for anything, except to be thrown out and trampled by men. Matthew 5:13 (NIV)

For a moment, let us focus on how to be potent Christians. One thing that really troubles me is Christianity that needlessly offends and pushes people from Christ. It seems to evolve out of a works religion and guilt. When we do not trust God to lead and guide us in our witness, and do not trust that He will work in people's lives, we get the idea that we have to follow a program or perform in a certain way. People sense our focus is on ourselves. It becomes about me doing what I am supposed to do to please God. God is only pleased with you when you are in His Son. (Matthew 3:17)

Commented [notes18]: ¹⁷ And a voice from heaven said, "This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased." Matthew 3:17 (NIV)

God often works in unique ways with different individuals because He created them uniquely. Watch for His guidance. Listen to the Spirit. When you share with someone out of the love of God, there is a power that comes with your message. Your heart is broken for them as you share God's heart. The Spirit of God directs your message out of genuine love and concern. The person you are witnessing to is moved by the Spirit of God. They may or may not accept the Lord on the spot, but you both know God was present and at work in their life. That is thrilling. You cannot orchestrate that, but you can pray for it. The Bible calls it walking in the Spirit. (Galatians 5:25) A potent Christian is one that keeps in step with the Spirit. Their life can be described by the fruits of the Spirit. (Galatians 5:22-23)

Commented [notes19]: ²⁵ Since we live by the Spirit, let us keep in step with the Spirit. Galatians 5:25 (NIV)

So how do you become a potent Christian, one that walks in the Spirit, infectious? If you are in Christ, you are a new creation. (2 Corinthians 5:17) You cannot help but be infectious. Jesus tells us to remain in Him; (John 15:4) for it is when you are living in Him that your life reflects Him. Whether you like it or not, you represent Jesus. When you call yourself a Christian and you blow your stack, complain and whine, insist on your rights, every act reflects on Jesus. How urgent then is it for us to live in Him? We draw people to Jesus or repel them from Him. We act as a positive yeast spreading the desire for the goodness of God and the satisfaction we find in Him, or we lie about who He is to the world by our poor example. Frightening thought isn't it?

Commented [notes20]: ²² But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, 23 gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law. Galatians 5:22-23 (NIV)

Commented [notes21]: ¹⁷ Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come! 2 Corinthians 5:17 (NIV)

This thought is always with me. How will my actions affect that person's perception of Jesus? What will my words say about my Savior's goodness? When I hear a Christian scold someone in the service industry, even if it is deserved, I wonder, do they think that represents Jesus? Christians often have a bad reputation because so many of us do not live in Him. We do not let Him respond to our circumstance. Our old nature so quickly demands our rights and privileges.

Commented [notes22]: ⁴ Remain in me, and I will remain in you. No branch can bear fruit by itself; it must remain in the vine. Neither can you bear fruit unless you remain in me. John 15:4 (NIV)

Before you get too depressed thinking on that, let us look at the fruit of living in Christ. When you respond in the Spirit of God, people are irresistibly infected with the yeast of the kingdom. When you express loving concern out of your relationship with Jesus, the flour cannot help but be affected. Moreover, remember, that ball of yeast will affect more flour and so on. What a wonderful chain reaction takes place! How do we stay potent? Stay in Christ! Stay in His word. Stay in prayer. Live in Him. (Galatians 2:20)

Commented [notes23]: ²⁰ I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me. Galatians 2:20 (NIV)

The next problem is the need to be in the flour. Most Christians come into the Family of God and slowly lose all their worldly friends. Before they know it, 90+% of their friends

are Christians. Nothing wrong with that, except that how are they going to infect the flour when they are not exposed to the flour? This takes an intentional effort. It is only natural to lose friends that you no longer have things in common with and to make friends with those who share your love for the Lord. However, we must make an intentional effort to connect with the world. We need to hang on to those relationships in which God is giving us a burden for the souls of those who do not know Christ. Life will inevitably bring you into contact with the world. Jesus said we are in the world but not of the world. (John 17:14-16) As those contacts take place, watch for those the Spirit of God would have you invest your time in. You might share hobbies, your children may be friends, or it may be business related. Develop those friendships and God will influence their lives with the yeast within you. In Christ, your words will have the power of God to penetrate their hearts.

There have been studies done about conversions that show that the most common conversions are those who are related to someone who attends a church. In Christ, you cannot help but be yeast to your own relatives. The second most common type of converts are those we have some kind of relationship with. In other words, researchers are finding out that what Jesus was saying is true. The life of Christ in us is contagious. Do not force Him. Just cooperate with Him. His life in you is an influence.

Be honest in your conversations. Topics will naturally come up in which your answer will be completely shaped by your faith. You know it will sound very strange to your friends. Do not shy away or water that down. That is your opportunity. The truth of how faith affects your life will be that yeast that will affect them.

In the ancient world, a woman would take a small ball out of her last batch of dough and save it to leaven a future batch. She would put that ball in the center of the next batch of dough (hide it) and after it rose, she would take a new ball out of the risen dough. When her daughter would marry, one of the most meaningful gifts would be a ball of dough. It was the nourishment from that family passed on to a new family. It was a continuation of an expression of love and concern from generation to generation. The same is true when we share our life in Christ with a new believer. He or she takes that life and feeds on it all through their life, passing it on to others.

The challenge for us this morning is to examine ourselves to see if we have been living in Christ. Are we potent yeast? Do we believe God can take our little mustard seed actions in Him and create something big? Are we affecting our world for the kingdom because of the life of Christ in us, or are we being drawn back into the world? Hear Jesus' promise from John 15:4. *Remain in me, and I will remain in you. No branch can bear fruit by itself, it must remain in the vine. Neither can you bear fruit unless you remain in me.* Have you been remaining in Him? If not, it is time to make a change. If you have, look at that wonderful multiplying affect He has promised and be encouraged today! You may not see it happening, but if you are in Him, it is in a greater way than you can imagine! You are affecting the world, and laying up treasure in heaven.

Commented [notes24]: ¹⁴ I have given them your word and the world has hated them, for they are not of the world any more than I am of the world.
¹⁵ My prayer is not that you take them out of the world but that you protect them from the evil one.
¹⁶ They are not of the world, even as I am not of it.
John 17:14-16 (NIV)