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**Grace Fellowship Church, Port Jervis, New York**

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**Advancing the Kingdom**

**Matthew 13:33**

**Prayer:** *Father, we just again, we thank you for what you have provided for us during these strange and difficult times. We just continue to thank you for your church, however it expresses itself, whichever way. Again we just think of your word which is again a gift, we just pray as we open your word, as we again plumb its depths that we would have the privilege of the presence of your Holy Spirit guiding us as we do that. Again Father, we pray that you would guide us, accompany us and make this of permanent value, and we pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.*

Well, we have spent the most of this summer looking at the kingdom of God. We've been looking about what kingdom citizenship is, what kingdom citizens do, we've spoken about the joy of kingdom citizenship, the growth of kingdom citizenship, conflicts that are involved in being part of the kingdom, among other topics. Today we want to talk about how we advance the kingdom of God.

I want to piggyback on a message I gave just last year about

Jesus's parable, and this parable was the leaven in the loaf, because that message in that parable tells us how to do what might seem to be impossible. It's what Jesus described in *Matthew 11:12*. He said this, he said: *From the days of John the Baptist until now, the kingdom of heaven has been forcefully advancing, and forceful men lay hold of it. For all the Prophets and the Law prophesied until John. And if you are willing to accept it, he is the Elijah who was to come.* This has always been a difficult passage to translate, a difficult passage to understand but I came across an article by Bob Dodson that really opened it up. And like many of the things that Jesus said that are difficult to grasp, it has to do with an understanding that the people around him in that day had that people don't necessarily have today. Jesus is referring to things that they knew and understood. In this case it had to do with the scripture that you find in Micah and it's a scripture that speaks about sheep and shepherds. Shepherds oftentimes would pen up their sheep for a night in a temporary sheepfold. And the sheep would be all gathered together and crowded together, very anxious to get out and Micah uses that very analogy to talk about God freeing his sheep to advance his kingdom. This is what Micah says or what God says through Micah. This is *Micah 2:12*. God says: *I will surely assemble all of you, O Jacob; I will gather the remnant of Israel; I will set them together like sheep in a fold, like a flock in its pasture, a noisy multitude of*

men. He who opens the breach goes up before them; they break through and pass the gate, going out by it. Their king passes on before them, the LORD at their head. So in this passage, one of the sheep breaks open the sheepfold beforehand and he allows the king to lead the sheep out of the sheepfold, and Jesus goes on as he's explaining his analogy to identify that particular sheep as Elijah because that's precisely what Elijah did. He went before Jesus breaking open the gate of the sheepfold so that Jesus could lead his sheep into the very kingdom that we as Christians are now called on to advance. And so forcibly advancing the kingdom is akin to the sheep bursting out of this temporary pen that they're all crowded into. You know the closest thing that I could come to imagining what that picture was like is customers bursting into Wal-Mart, you've seen those things on black Friday or Thursday or whatever day it is. That's always been a very disturbing image to me, but when I think of those sheep bursting out of the sheepfold, not into Wal-Mart but into a world that has really nothing better to offer them than Wal-Mart, then I can really see the picture that Jesus is trying to paint. I mean we believers have been busted out of the pen that we've been hemmed in by by the prince of this world. The king has led us out and he's now expecting us as newly freed sheep to forcibly advance his kingdom to bring that same energy in busting out into advancing the kingdom not as men see advancing the kingdom but as God sees it. And we've seen all along

this whole summer that Jesus is using parables as a means to teach his disciples these hard, hard truths. These are truths about this new mystery that God is unveiling that was never spoken of in the Old Testament. He's talking about this thing called "the church." The parable of the sower and the seed showed us that the church is going to be a mixture of rocky and thorny and good soils and that only the good soil would be the true believer. The wheat and the tares parable showed us that God intends this thing called "the church" to be in the world but not of the world. The mustard seed showed us that God's church would have humble beginnings but that at its height, when the mustard tree was capable of hosting all of these birds that could nest in it, would still not have the external trappings of power that worldly kingdoms did. And you have to understand how all of these things that Jesus is teaching the disciples, they came as a complete shock to them. I mean Jesus is turning their whole understanding of the world upside down, or to put it more correctly, right side up. And to this day the kingdom of God still represents a radical departure from everything the world sees as normal. I mean just think about the kingdom. In the kingdom strength is weakness, it's rooted in weakness. First is last, last is first. Fools are wise, the humble are exalted, and dying is the key to living.

So this morning we're going to look at yet another parable that

Jesus is teaching his disciples. It certainly is the shortest but it speaks volumes to us as to how we are to advance the kingdom of God. This is Jesus' parable as told in *Matthew 13:33*. It says:

*He told them still another parable: "The kingdom of heaven is like yeast that a woman took and mixed into about sixty pounds of flour until it worked all through the dough."* And that's all he said.

What Jesus is saying is the kingdom of heaven is like yeast or like leaven but even that statement is considered controversial.

There's a lot of commentators that say leaven is just a metaphor for sin. It's understandable because the many instances of where it's referred to, particularly by God in the Old Testament, Jesus in the New, there's always a warning about leaven. But in fact what they're warning about is not really sin, per se, they're warning about influence. The warning's about influence, good and bad. In 1 Corinthians Paul warns his readers about bad leaven and he speaks about it with regard to boasting. This is what he says in 1 Corinthians 5, he says: *Your boasting is not good. Don't you know that a little yeast leavens the whole batch of dough? Get rid of the old yeast, so that you may be a new unleavened batch -- as you really are. For Christ, our Passover lamb, has been sacrificed. Therefore let us keep the festival, not with the old bread leavened with malice and wickedness, but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth.* You see, the bread leavened with malice and with wickedness in this instance clearly represents the

bad influence of Egypt. Paul's reference of getting rid of the old yeast goes back to the days when the Jews were leaving their slavery in Egypt. In that time God instituted the feast of Unleavened Bread. For one week the Jews would eat bread without leaven, remembering where they came from in Egypt. And on the first day of that week Jewish women were instructed to rid their house of every trace of leaven. That was to remind them that when they left Egypt they were to leave it in haste without even waiting for the bread to rise, and when they were to leave, they were to leave with no trace whatsoever of Egypt's influence remaining, not even the leaven in their bread.

Jesus spoke often about leaven also as influence, both good and bad so often that oftentimes he was misunderstood even by his disciples. I mean in one instance we see Jesus and he's growing frustrated with the disciples' dullness of hearing. He's telling them about yeast, he's telling them about leaven repeatedly and repeatedly they just don't get it. This is *Matthew 16*. It says: *When they went across the lake, the disciples forgot to take bread. "Be careful," Jesus said to them. "Be on your guard against the yeast of the Pharisees and Sadducees." They discussed this among themselves and said, "It is because we didn't bring any bread."* Aware of their discussion, Jesus asked, *"You of little faith, why are you talking among yourselves about having no bread? Do you*

*still not understand? Don't you remember the five loaves for the five thousand, and how many basketfuls you gathered? Or the seven loaves for the four thousand, and how many basketfuls you gathered? How is it you don't understand that I was not talking to you about bread? But be on your guard against the yeast of the Pharisees and the Sadducees." Then they understood that he was not telling them to guard against the yeast used in bread, but against the teaching of the Pharisees and Sadducees.*

So clearly Jesus, even Jesus understood that yeast or leaven wasn't particularly sin, it was influence or teaching that could be either very good or very, very bad. And when Jesus or Paul spoke out about leaven, it was always as a metaphor not for sin but for influence, and again that influence could be good or bad and Jesus and Paul repeatedly warns us of the dangers of even tiny little amounts of leaven. When Paul says, *"Don't you know that a little yeast leavens a whole batch of dough,"* he meant only a tiny bit bad influence could cause profound damage. I mean the whole point of cleansing the whole house of leaven was meant to cleanse it of every single trace of the leaven of the Egyptians. And when Jesus says, *"Be on your guard against the yeast of the Pharisees and Sadducees,"* he was using an especially good metaphor for how profoundly good and bad influence works, because yeast describes it perfectly. You see leaven or yeast is really a single-celled

organism that feeds on sugars in bread dough and it produces more sugars and it produces carbon dioxide. You bakers all know that. But when leaven is mixed into dough, its sugars affect the taste and its carbon dioxide affects the texture. The dough rises because the CO<sub>2</sub> produced by the yeast, literally it bubbles into the dough, that's what causes it to double in size. And when you bake bread, the dough sets in those little tiny pockets and that's what gives bread its spongy texture. It's been theorized that thousands of years ago somebody actually accidentally let some dough stand and some leaven was there that contaminated the flour and it caused it to rise and it wound up producing a much lighter, much tastier bread. What's more, they found it could be reproduced by adding a little bit of the old dough to the new. And over years dozens of different times and places wound up producing different batches of yeast and each produced a unique type of bread.

And so by taking a piece of the old dough and mixing it with the new, you could use leaven to do three specific things. It would penetrate, it would permeate and it would transform the "staff of life" into something far greater than it was originally. Well for Jesus, leaven is a perfect metaphor for what the kingdom would do through the church. Jesus is teaching that it is the church that is to penetrate, permeate and transform the dough of the culture. It was to first penetrate the culture, bringing with it something



very new, something very different and at the same time, very old and very established. That's just what God expects the church to do. Again, this is Jesus' words: *"The kingdom of heaven is like yeast that a woman took and mixed into about sixty pounds of flour until it worked all through the dough."* Well what is the flour, what is the dough? It's work, it's school, it's family, it's friends, it's neighborhood, whenever, wherever, whatever God has placed you and it's not by chance or accident. You see, it is God's design to use you and me. We are the leaven in the dough, and leaven is influence. And the Egyptians, the Pharisees, the Sadducees, they were what is known as bad leaven. They were used by the enemy to extend his kingdom and his influence and no one can doubt how successful he's been. You've got to understand, Jesus is laying out these parables, he's giving us basic instruction for the war plans for his kingdom. And first and foremost the kingdom has to penetrate the culture to exert his kingdom's influence. I mean this is not just a task for missionaries because every day the battle for who gets to penetrate the culture gets laid at the feet of all of us. And you know, maybe I need to correct that statement because it is a task for missionaries and missionaries should be part of the definition of what every believer is, wherever he or she is. I mean just think for a minute, what would you do if you were an actual missionary sent down into a totally new place? Let's say you've already learned the culture, you've already

learned the language, you've been studying the people and now you're looking for some way to penetrate the culture. At some point you're going to realize that it doesn't matter what you've learned, it's all going to be for nothing until you actually start rubbing elbows with individuals. I mean there's no such thing as penetrating the culture from the ten thousand foot level. It all happens at street level and it starts by simply interacting with people who might not think or act like you do.

I was speaking with somebody the other day on the phone who wound up having to develop a whole new set of clients that they never expected to run into and this person is very liberal, has very liberal thinking, suddenly he found himself having to deal with some very important customers who were all, for want of a better word, they were rednecks. So I asked him, I said, what's it like dealing with these different types of people? And he said, it's shocking but once you get past the stereotypes, he found these people would be warm and caring and intelligent and genuine and he was actually glad for the opportunity to get past his initial reluctance to even engage them. He had been presupposing that people would be every bad thing that he'd heard about them. Well, that's the problem with presuppositions, and it's a huge problem for kingdom citizens because once again we have to put this in the context of the war that's been going on between the kingdoms. And

once you understand that everything in this life comes down to that battle between the kingdom of light and the kingdom of darkness, then you understand that it made perfect sense for the ruler of this world to exercise as much leaven, as much yeast as he can to make people presuppose that Christians are uptight, unhappy killjoys who just want to take away other people's freedoms. I mean Jesus told us to beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and the Sadducees. I would contemporize that statement by saying beware of the leaven of Hollywood, of TV and of the Internet. He's done a masterful job of presenting Christians as not the kind of people you really want to get close to.

I have a friend that I first met when I was still working as a cabinetmaker and actually he was a client. Shortly after I started working with him, we got to chatting, I quickly learned that he had no use whatsoever for religious people, for conservatives especially for what he called "fundamentalists." I considered myself more or less to be all of the above. And before we met, he had this notion of Christianity and Christians that was based entirely on the enemy's leaven influence. His understanding of Christians was based on Hollywood, TV, and popular culture. And so it was extremely easy for my friend to dislike -- quote -- "Bible thumpers," as he referred to them. In his mind they were rigid, unthinking, uncaring, pharisaical hypocrites. But then he met one.

In this case it happened to be me. I didn't do anything special. I did give an account for the hope that was within me. I did it with gentleness and respect, and he wound up asking me lots of hard questions and if I didn't have an answer, I told him, "I'll get back to you," and I did. And we had a great working relationship and I kept constantly being able to push back against the stereotype that he had about Christians, and we went about our lives. So some two years after I had seen him, he called me to tell me that Jesus Christ was now his Lord and Savior. Now folks think you have to be some kind of a Bible scholar in order to represent Christ when all you have to be is not what the leaven claims you are: rigid, unthinking, uncaring, pharisaical hypocrites. You've got to understand that's not really a difficult task, I mean the bar's not set really high here. Don't be a jackass. I mean, is that hard? I mean we penetrate the culture by doing the most basic thing that Christians can do, and it's what Jesus commanded of us. Listen to what he said in *Mark 12*. He said: *'And you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.'* The second -- he's speaking of commands -- is this: *'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.'* There is no other commandment greater than these. Jesus is telling us just love your neighbors as yourselves. So the most basic question I would ask today is do you pray for your neighbors? I mean imagine yourself

as a missionary plunked down into the very place where you live so that God could use you to penetrate the culture that you're in for the kingdom. I mean the best place to start, best place that I would start if I was a brand new missionary would be my immediate neighborhood. I'd ask myself do my neighbors know me? Do they know who I am? Do they know me as a believer and as a good neighbor? Advancing the kingdom starts with loving my neighbor, understanding that the most loving thing you could ever do for your neighbor is to introduce them to the kingdom of God. That's the end goal. But loving my neighbor starts on a practical level, not necessarily a theological level. I mean it's not my job to make my neighbors into Christians. That's God's job. It is my job though to give an account for the hope that's within me and to pray that God would grant them salvation.

Peter says in *1 Peter 3: In your hearts honor Christ the Lord as holy, always being prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you; yet do it with gentleness and respect.* I mean I find when my first concern is really loving my neighbor, I am anticipating that God will give me opportunity. I've had lots of interactions with my neighbors and some of them don't want -- they love interacting with me as neighbors. They get completely turned off when we start getting theological. I just keep praying for them, just keep praying for

opportunities. And that opportunity is how I penetrate the culture. I mean if you remember Jesus' parable about the good seed sown in good soil that was over sown by an enemy. Remember the servants, they come to Jesus and they ask him, well, do you want us to pull up the weeds? And this is what Jesus says. This is *Matthew 13: "'No,' he answered, 'because while you are pulling the weeds, you may uproot the wheat with them. Let both grow together until the harvest. At that time I will tell the harvesters: First collect the weeds and tie them in bundles to be burned: Then gather the wheat and bring it into my barn.'"* Now you've got to understand what he's saying here. In other words what Jesus is saying is much of the good seed is going to start out, it's going to look just like weeds. The only way that they will complete the transformation from weed to wheat, from one kingdom to another is by the gospel penetrating the field where there's good and bad seed together, and that field is the world. And so we penetrate the culture by forging relationships with those who are outside the kingdom.

Next we permeate. We penetrate, next we permeate. We permeate the flour with the good leaven of the kingdom. Again: *"The kingdom of heaven is like yeast that a woman took and mixed into about sixty pounds of flour until it worked all through the dough."* The woman mixes the leaven into sixty pounds of flour. That's a lot of

flour. And it's to point out that just a tiny amount of leaven is all that you need to influence an enormous amount of flour. That's because when leaven is worked into flour, it starts reproducing itself until it raises up the whole loaf. So you put this into context of Jesus and his disciples, I started off with Jesus and twelve disciples and no money, no power, no status, only the leaven of the kingdom penetrating, permeating and transforming the dough that it touches. Well, 2,000 years later those twelve disciples have become 1.5 billion Christians. Christianity in numbers alone is now the greatest of all religions. It has permeated the entire world not by political or military power but by the power of individual transformed lives. But understand, there are still plenty of places where there's a form of false Christianity and it may be politically and militarily powerful and it, too, has permeated the world as well. That's the leaven that Jesus is warning us about. See, Jesus was constantly drawing lines between his kingdom and the phony pseudo kingdoms that masqueraded as his own. And because leaven is leaven whether it's good or bad, it's still going to permeate the whole batch. *"Beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and the Sadducees,"* Jesus would say, beware of the influence of the phony is really what he's getting at.

I watched a debate the other day. It was between a conservative evangelical pastor and a quite liberal progressive pastor, and they

were in essence, they were having a debate as to which one of their Christianities was the real one. And the progressive pastor decried the conservative as being narrow and restrictive and unloving and uncaring, saying that the essence of the gospel is love. Well, the conservative pastor insisted on sticking to what the Bible itself taught was clearly demonstrating a lack of love towards his fellow man, he said. Well the conservative pastor protested that he was none of these things that he was accused of and that truly loving his people meant staying faithful to what Jesus had revealed in his word as to what is true and right and good as opposed to what is false, demeaning and deadly. And the thing that stood out in this debate is that both sides, both sides were representing themselves as the real Christianity versus the phony. And so what you can conclude from that is that the true and the phony forms of Christianity had now equally permeated the culture. And that leaves the viewer of a debate like this to have to guess or choose, which one of these guys is real? Which one of these Christianities is real? Well, I thought of two scriptures, I thought of *Matthew 24* which says: *"For false Messiahs and false prophets will appear and perform great signs and wonders to deceive, if possible, even the elect."* And *2 Timothy* which says: *Preach the word; be prepared in season and out of season; correct, rebuke and encourage -- with great patience and careful instruction. For the time will come when people will not put up*



*with sound doctrine. Instead, to suit their own desires, they will gather around them a great number of teachers to say what their itching ears want to hear. They will turn their ears away from the truth and turn aside to myths.* Clearly I knew where I stood.

Where I stood, the pastor who stood on the word of God as Jesus' revealed will represented the good leaven. But I can certainly see somebody watching that debate being torn between trying to say, okay, which one of these guys is the real deal? I mean to be sure the progressive pastor's vision seemed open and expansive and broad and inclusive. He was touting what our culture says now is the good. But that's not at all what Jesus defined as "good." Listen to what Jesus said in *Matthew 7*. He says: *"Enter through the narrow gate. For wide is the gate and broad is the road that leads to destruction, and many enter through it. But small is the gate and narrow the road that leads to life, and only a few find it."*

When Jesus said that he wasn't drawing a line between sinners and saints, at least in terms of their own opinions of themselves, he was in fact drawing a line between what's real and what's phony. And oddly enough it's the phonies who thought of themselves as being on the road to life and the real folks who often thought of themselves as unworthy sinners. And you see that line Jesus draws all the time, he drew it between the Pharisee and the publican, between the prodigal son and his older brother, between the sheep and the goats, and if you step back a few steps, you realize what

Jesus is saying there is that it's extraordinarily easy to counterfeit Christianity. I mean Jesus knew that a little leaven leavens the whole loaf. He also knew that false faith can reproduce itself easily with disastrous consequences. In *Matthew 23* he said: *"Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You travel over land and sea to win a single convert, and when you have succeeded, you make them twice as much a child of hell as you are."* So you ask how can the Pharisees possibly make somebody's situation worse? Well, by substituting a false sense of righteousness, they can take a person from ignorant to self-righteous and absolutely convinced of their own goodness, thus they leave them far worse than had they been simply ignorant. So permeating the dough is bounded on both sides by grave difficulties. You know on one side we have Hollywood and Hollywood is extending its influence in every single area it touches. On the other side we have the claims of false religion telling people -- taking people from a bad place and making the situation even worse.

So against such odds, how do we permeate the dough that Jesus is speaking about with the truth? Well again, God brings us back to something else that permeates. God's talking about aroma. Aroma is something that influences, it surrounds and it moves us. I mean think of the smell of fresh perked coffee or someone cooking a spicy meal with lots of garlic in the air. Now think of its

opposite. I mentioned awhile back we had the pleasure of having a fully grown deer die right on our property line. And by day three I was standing over a hundred yards away and I was overpowered by the aroma of a rotting deer carcass. I mean for better or worse we are moved by aroma. But it's what permeates that makes the aroma and whether it's perked coffee or a rotting deer carcass, whatever permeates our character will produce its aroma. Listen to what God says in *2 Corinthians 2*. He says: *For we are the aroma of Christ to God among those who are being saved and among those who are perishing, to one a fragrance from death to death, to the other a fragrance from life to life. Who is sufficient for these things?* What God is saying here is that Christ should so permeate our lives that we literally become the aroma of Christ. And why? Because if you are a believer, you have the Spirit of Christ living inside you. You're not just a person, you're a temple. You're a walking, living temple, a living stone in the temple that God has created. God has moved into you and he is changing your likes and your dislikes and what you think and how you act and how you respond and so if you are genuinely a Christian, the smell of Christ should be coming out of you. We are to permeate the dough by letting that aroma do its work. And because a little leaven leavens the whole loaf, even a small amount of God's influence can move mountains because everywhere that the good leaven has penetrated and permeated, it has blessed. I mean remember the parable of the

mustard seed? The tree grows and the birds of the air build their nests in it. Remember John MacArthur's quote? He was talking about those birds are basically the blessing that the whole world sees regardless of whether or not they're Christians. It's the influence of the kingdom. Things like civilization and progress and security, even prosperity accompanied that leaven. For us in the United States those blessings started from the Declaration of Independence. We say this, "We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed -- and here's the key -- by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness." We can see that aroma through the Constitution and the Bill of Rights. All of these instruments are also part of the leaven, the influence that the kingdom of God has permeating the culture.

We have examples of how the leaven of other kingdoms penetrates as well, because it, too, works its way through the entire loaf. I mean just compare us to North Korea. North Korea is a place where rape, murder, kidnapping, sex slavery and starvation are so common that the entire population has actually shrunken, they've physically shrunken. According to Open Door Ministries, however, this is the situation with them before this leaven attacked. It says: "Before the end of World War II, there were more Christians

in North Korea than there were in South Korea. North Korea was even known as the 'Jerusalem of the East.' Estimates vary about how many Christians are currently in North Korea, but Open Doors places the number around 300,000, most of whom operate in secret networks of house churches." Secondly, this is just amazing to me, "Kim Jong Un's great-grandfather was a part-time missionary. The current leader of North Korea, Kim Jong Un, is known for continuing the trend of brutal crackdowns on Christians. Under his leadership, like that of his father, Christians have been thrown into labor camps and subjected to unspeakable conditions because of their faith. And yet, there is a history of Christianity in Kim's own family! The founder of North Korea, Kim Sung II, was born to parents who were reportedly devout Christians. His father was even a part-time Protestant missionary! And his mother's name, Kang Pan-sok, was the Korean word for 'Peter,' since she was named after Jesus' disciple of the same name."

So to compare, compare the leaven and what it did in North Korea then, to what it's doing in North Korea now, and it doesn't take a rocket scientist to see how the good leaven blesses and the bad leaven curses. I mean it was all a matter of which one gets to permeate the culture. And that's where we come in. See, penetrating and permeating the culture is not optional for believers or for the kingdom for that matter. I mean it's God who

can transform the person, the household, the neighborhood, the country, and we've seen that happen. I mean we've seen it in Europe and America, now we're seeing it in Africa and China. In each case the transformation that God is doing takes place through his church, takes place through his people penetrating and permeating the pattern of this world for the pattern of the kingdom. God says in *Romans 12: Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is -- his good, pleasing and perfect will.*

So we ask, okay, what is the pattern of our world today? Well, it's evolutionary naturalist materialism. We started out as nothing but slime answerable to no one, and time and chance has evolved us into what we are today. We are highly sophisticated slime. We're evolved from nothing, we're answerable to no one, we're a glorious accident of chance but somehow magically we're significant. I mean even on the surface that makes no sense whatsoever. It's just that very few people have the guts to admit it. Then you have as opposed to that you have the pattern of a transformed mind which says that we are fallen sinners loved by a God who took on flesh to become one of us, lived a perfect life, then took on my sin at the cross in order to ransom us through his blood so that we could be with him forever. And really in our

culture those are the two choices that we have. And we're in a unique time in our history. We're in a time where we're actually seeing the leaven of Hollywood and TV and the Internet produce what we've seen. And what are we seeing? We're seeing strife, and fear, and despair, and violence and now riots. That's become the pattern of this world. It's the old bread leavened with maliciousness and wickedness. And over against that we can offer this world the pattern of a transformed mind and each pattern is established by the leaven of both kingdoms as Jesus works, he works his pattern into the dough of the culture. Just to repeat. Jesus says: *"The kingdom of heaven is like yeast that a woman took and mixed into about sixty pounds of flour until it worked all through the dough."*

So here's how we do it, we penetrate the culture by building relationships with those who are outside of our comfort zone, and we permeate the culture by producing the aroma of Christ as it permeates us. We transform the culture not by what we do but by what God does through us. Jesus says in *Matthew 5:16*: *"Let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven."*

So how do we transform the culture? We transform it by God shining his light through us. So that makes the obvious question, and

that's what kind of a light am I? Is there something unique, different and attractive about the light in my life? You see it's the light in my life that produces the leaven in my life that penetrates and permeates the dough and leavens is influence, for better or for worse. And there's a reason why Jesus said beware of leaven. It's also because leaven usually takes the path of least resistance. I repeat the old saying of Chuck Swindoll who asks what happens when you plunge a gloved hand into a mud puddle? Does the glove get muddy or does the puddle get gloveey? Does your life influence those around you for God's kingdom or does the world around you influence you for its kingdom? I mean Hollywood, TV, and the Internet can now cite thousands of angry condemning Christians as leaven against our kingdom. Can you cite your own personal example of leaven for the kingdom? Because it really comes down to you and me. We are the leaven that the woman works into that dough. We are the mystery that Jesus is progressively unfolding to his disciples through all of these parables. We are a mixed batch of soils. We are commingled wheat and tares. We are a mustard seed that has birds now nesting in our branches and we are leaven worked into a loaf penetrating the culture, permeating it by reproducing it in other believers and transforming it simply by being the leaven in the loaf. And Paul captures it perfectly in *Colossians 1:24*. He says: *Now I rejoice in what I am suffering for you, and I fill up in my flesh what is still lacking in regard*



*to Christ's afflictions, for the sake of his body, which is the church.* I remember the first time I read that I said what? What is he saying? I fill up in my flesh what is lacking in regard to Christ's afflictions? What could possibly be lacking in Christ's afflictions? Well there's only one thing lacking here and that's his physical presence. He's not here. What Paul is saying is that now it is we who make up what is still lacking in Christ's affliction. What he's telling us is we are the ones who are now physically in the flesh making up his body.

I have to tell you, Elvia is a single woman in our church who is moving to Honduras to become a missionary. She had to move -- this was a couple weeks, two weeks or a week or so ago, and we had half a dozen people and a bunch of trucks and guys -- you know who you are -- they worked all day, I mean, up three flights of stairs, down three flights of stairs carting furniture. You know what they were doing? They were showing Elvia that Jesus loves her and cares for her and they were showing her exactly the way he intended, through the body. That's why the body of Christ is so incredibly important, because we are his body and when you bring a meal to somebody who's in need, Christ is bringing that meal. When you stand up for the injustice of racism or sex slavery or abortion, Christ is standing up there with you. And when you weep with somebody who's in deep pain, Christ is there weeping just like he

did outside Lazarus's tomb. And what Jesus is trying to explain to the disciples is that this mystery that had been kept hidden for ages, he's disclosing and says you are living out what it means to be his body, the church. He says in *Colossians 1:27*: *To them God chose to make known how great among the Gentiles are the riches of the glory of this mystery, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory.* There it is. I mean that's exactly what the leaven is talking about. God wants to make his Christ known to the world through you. My prayer is that your leaven, your influence is that the world will look at you, and that's just what they see, Christ in you, the hope of glory. Let's pray.

Father, we thank you for the immense privilege that you have given to us, to your church. Lord, you expect us to be your body. You expect us to be the ones who are caring and moving and being your arms and your legs and your lips and your tongue and all of those parts of you that are not there now. They are there now through us. And so I pray you will give us the grace, the peace, the power and the wisdom to do what we need to do to advance your kingdom so that we can penetrate and permeate and transform this culture around us that is literally rotting. And I pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.