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20And again He said, "To what shall I compare the kingdom of God? 21" "It is like leaven, which a woman took and hid in three pecks of meal, until it was all leavened."

Those who have been coming regularly for some duration understand that we are simply doing our best to exegete from the word of God, verse by verse, book by book. We pick up each week where we left off the previous week.

We use a method called the historical - grammatical method of interpretation that looks at two things equally in biblical interpretation. What do the words mean, and given the historical context in which they were written what would they have meant to the original hearers and readers.

And then having discovered that, what do they mean to us in our own historical context. We believe this book still speaks to us in our day, in our time. It's not like Jesus spoke these words to this crowd on this day and the next day in a different time and place they don't mean anything.

We want to understand the biblical principle in the text that transcends time and applies equally to our lives. Sometimes the immediate context only applied to that far away culture and doesn't apply to us now, but there is an underlying scriptural principle that does apply to situations we will find ourselves in today. Principalizing the text.

Grammar, historic context, underlying principles, accountability, authority. Why would we bother working at studying and understanding this book if we do not believe it has authority over our lives today.

We study this book because we believe these words are given by the inspiration of God. They are infallible and inerrant. And they transcend time.

Jesus said; *Heaven and earth shall pass away, but my words shall not pass away.* Mt. 24:35

The world around us changes constantly. Especially in our day. We can't even begin to keep up. The world and our nation are like a whirlwind. Everything is in motion. The supreme court is in a flurry of activity before it's summer break handing down rule after rule that threatens everything this book says and stands for, and by association the judgements are a threat to the people who hold to the authority of this book over the authority of the Supreme Court of the United States.

We talked last week about conflict. The old conflict of Satan, cast down to earth, against God. That conflict has been non-stop since the fall in the garden. At least on this planet. Hard for our minds to try to even understand.

Conflict between good and evil is what the book is about. We read the beginnings of conflict in the garden, and we read the end of the conflict in Revelation where the title deed to this earth is given to the Lamb and He returns in triumph and glory and retakes this world. Locks the adversary up in a prison for a thousand years, and reigns in this world in glory.

If you've come for a time, you also know that when I study these verses, I don't approach them as disconnected texts. I always look for the connection in the context.

Why did Jesus speak about conflict in our verses last week, and why is He talking in riddles about something called the Kingdom of God in our verses this week? What is the connection? How do these incredibly short, but incredibly loaded with meaning parables fit into the broader context.

Let me try to set up that connection for you so that the placement of these two little parables just here will, I hope, have great clarity and meaning.

The entirety of chapter 12 and the first verses of chapter 13 are all a single sermon. And the message of the sermon is a call for people to come out of

this world, to leave this world with its false religion behind, no matter the cost, and to then, follow Jesus.

Time to make that decision, to leave this culture and the old false religion behind, at probable great personal cost, is short. His ministry is coming to a close. The conflict of those who oppose Him and hate Him is increasing, and the day is moving ever closer for His death.

And not only that, He also makes it clear, this time, this life, this moment is the only time you can settle out of court with God. Your death might even precede His, which is just a few months or weeks off, and if that happens, your opportunity, your moment to agree with God over your sin, and ask God for mercy is over. There is urgency. Life is short. Then you wake up in a courtroom before God, and it's too late to beg for mercy.

All of that urgency is embroiled in the conflict between this world and its ruler, and the next world and the rightful heir to this world, the Lord, Jesus Christ. Conflict. To follow Jesus, to leave the culture of this world, to embrace Christ and God and this book, cannot come without conflict.

As soon as you do that, you're making a statement to this current world that it stands in judgement, in the long conflict between God and Satan. Good and evil. You've changed sides. And suddenly . . . look around you . . . suddenly, you're massively outnumbered.

And as soon as you confess to the world that you've left it and its rebellion behind and left the darkness to cling to Jesus, the world will say, are you sure? The numbers don't add up. It appears that you left the side that's winning to join a group of losers. And Jesus is going to say, in these parables, appearances are deceiving.

Jesus has been calling the multitude out of this world to follow Him and the multitude is looking at the available physical attributes of the two opposing world systems, Jesus and His band, against everything and everybody else, and you have to ask; Really? Who does that. Who leaves everything behind

and follows Jesus? Your kingdom doesn't look like much, Jesus.

Let's look at the reality in the historic context. There's Jesus. Not impressive. Read Isaiah 53.

*2 For He grew up before Him like a tender shoot,
And like a root out of parched ground;
He has no stately form or majesty
That we should look upon Him,
Nor appearance that we should be attracted to Him.*

*3 He was despised and forsaken of men,
A man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief;
And like one from whom men hide their face,
He was despised, and we did not esteem Him.*

From our worlds fascination with rock stars sensibility, Jesus just didn't have much going on. Not attractive. No magnetism that draws you mysteriously to want to be with Him. He isn't regal.

He's from no-where. Middle of no where. He may as well have grown up in Tonopah Nevada. Nazareth had the same importance. Tonopah is a good equivalent. Nazareth was nothing. No place. That's where this guy hails from.

Well, but look at the important company He keeps. None. 12 rag tag nobodies. Fishermen from galilee? A tax collector. A terrorist. Not only nobodies, but not from around here, nobodies. Real hicks.

So you've got a guy who isn't attractive hanging out with a little rag tag group of hicks from nowhere, and I should leave ALL behind in order to join that outfit? Really?

You might want to think about it, yes. He speaks to the wind and waves and they cease to roar. He makes food for thousands out of basically nothing. He

sends demons fleeing away, begging Him to not cast them into prison before the time. He speaks and His voice calls the dead back to life. He heals every disease. He teaches with authority that is profound. It's almost like He speaks as though He were the author behind the book. He IS.

And that's what these two brief parables are about. Why should I come out of the world, the culture, comfort, family if necessary in order to have Jesus? Because looks are deceiving.

We have a conflict. We have a leader who isn't necessarily pretty. We have a group of followers who are incompetent nobodies. To tell you the truth, it looks like my side is winning this deal and the opposing side, the Jesus side, is losing. Tell me again why I would repent and switch?

18 Therefore He was saying, . . .

By the way, my entire introduction was about that word therefore. *18 Therefore He was saying,* The reason He will give these two metaphor's about the kingdom is because, simply, if you look at the odds . . . from what your eyes can see and tell you . . . this doesn't add up.

18 Therefore He was saying,
“What is the kingdom of God like, and to what shall I compare it?”

We have a conflict with opposing sides. We have the kingdoms of this world which are under the authority and control of the Ruler of this world, so-called by Jesus, the ruler of this world is Satan.

Let's define our sides in the conflict. Satan is the ruler of this world. He has usurped the authority to reign. He rules this world as an evil occupier. He is a harsh authority who doesn't love or care for the tenants of this world. In fact he loves to see them murdered. Better yet murder them in the womb. He murders who he can and he lies to the survivors.

And make no mistake; he owns it all. Every human born into this realm is

born into sin, born with a curse. Born condemned. God will not allow sinners into His presence. So, it's not like Satan has to recruit. We're all born into his kingdom by default.

John the apostle understood the data perfectly when he wrote; *We know that we are from God, and the whole world lies in the power of the evil one.* 1 Jn. 5:19

Those are the correct odds if you're a gambler. It's the believers from God against the whole world. There is a conflict and we are massively outnumbered. Perhaps. That's what the parable is about.

The kingdom of God could be translated; The authority to reign of God. What can we compare the authority to reign of God as opposed to the authority to reign of Satan. How can we draw a comparison between those two authorities in this conflict.

Well looks are deceiving. Perhaps we shouldn't calculate the odds based on what the kingdom of God looks like at the moment. Jesus and a few losers.

19 "It is like a mustard seed, which a man took and threw into his own garden; and it grew and became a tree; and THE BIRDS OF THE AIR NESTED IN ITS BRANCHES."

When Jesus used this same analogy earlier in His ministry, in Matthew 13, He added that the mustard seed is the smallest of all of the seeds that were used.

Now modern liberal theologians make an apology for Jesus because well, how could he know that there were smaller seeds. He isn't omniscient. He made mistakes because He didn't have scientific text books. It's a foolish argument made by fools who are fighting on the wrong side.

The fact is, for the farmers of Israel, it was indeed the smallest seed. And among plants that are grown on purpose by farmers anywhere in the entire world, the only seed that is smaller for a crop grown on purpose is tobacco.

But tobacco was a plant that only occurs in America until the 16th century. It wasn't a crop in Israel. If you do a word study in that text, you discover that the word Jesus used was for seeds used by farmers in order to produce crops.

Silly stuff to have to explain. Jesus created every seed. He knows what He's talking about. But that's a side bar.

“It is like a mustard seed, which a man took and threw into his own garden; and it grew and became a tree; and THE BIRDS OF THE AIR NESTED IN ITS BRANCHES.”

The authority to reign of God, in this world, is comparable to the phenomenon of a single tiny seed growing into a tree so large that it provides a place for the birds of the air to nest in.

What does that mean? Well, it means this whole deal, the authority to reign of God as opposed to Satan, has the most insignificant of possible beginnings. One man, who was murdered. A little rag tag group of incompetent nobodies who followed Him.

He rose from the dead and ascended back into heaven. And those rag tag nobodies turned the world upside down. Pinch yourselves. It's 2000 years later, and here we are.

You say, what does the birds thing mean? Most commentators will say, oh, birds are always evil in the Bible. Not necessarily. In the old testament we have this same picture 2 times. We have it in Ezekiel about the Assyrians, and we have it in Nebuchadnezzar's dream about his kingdom in Babylon.

The imagery in both of those uses is that the kingdom grows so large that it hosts other organisms. Birds take comfort and build nests in the host tree. Beasts live in the shade and security of the giant tree.

We could push that idea to our nation. We were built on christian principles

and our thriving spilled over to the whole earth. We fed the world. In some sense we protected the whole world. Many smaller nations are dependent on our branches for their survival. Israel for one.

But I think there's an even better image of what Jesus is describing in His metaphor of insignificant becoming overwhelming victor. And it's Nebuchadnezzar's first dream. Listen to Daniel give the image. It's about the same thing. Same conflict, same forces.

31 “You, O king, were looking and behold, there was a single great statue; that statue, which was large and of extraordinary splendor, was standing in front of you, and its appearance was awesome. 32 “The head of that statue was made of fine gold, its breast and its arms of silver, its belly and its thighs of bronze, 33 its legs of iron, its feet partly of iron and partly of clay. 34 “You continued looking until a stone was cut out without hands, and it struck the statue on its feet of iron and clay, and crushed them. 35 “Then the iron, the clay, the bronze, the silver and the gold were crushed all at the same time, and became like chaff from the summer threshing floors; and the wind carried them away so that not a trace of them was found. But the stone that struck the statue became a great mountain and filled the whole earth.

That glorious statue represents all of the kingdoms of this world under the rule of Satan, from Daniels ancient time up to and including today. All of the glorious kingdoms which Satan has ruled for thousands of years. You can study on your own if you're interested and learn what each part of the statue represents in the history of all of the world dominating authorities.

But notice what happens to all of the glorious kingdoms of this world. A stone crushes the feet of the statue and the whole thing collapses and is blown away like dust from a threshing floor.

Jesus is that Stone cut out without hands. And a day is coming when He will crush the opposing authority to reign. So that little mustard seed that fell into the earth and died and became a huge tree is ultimately the final ruler and authority over everything.

Every empire will crumble under the authority to reign of Jesus. All of it will become dust. Chaff for the furnace. So, yes, looks are deceiving. A homely unimpressive teacher and leader of a little group of nobodies from nowhere. A single stone, a cut choice stone, not cut with human hands, will crush all of the empires of this world to dust, and will grow from one stone into a mountain that covers the whole earth.

Insignificant beginnings. Ultimate victory endings. There's a second metaphor.

20 And again He said, "To what shall I compare the kingdom of God? 21 "It is like leaven, which a woman took and hid in three pecks of meal, until it was all leavened."

Yeast. Raise your hand if you've ever watched the process inside the dough that spreads throughout the lump of dough and creates millions of tiny air pockets that expand. Anybody seen that happen?

We see the effect, right. We understand the science. But it happens, out of our control and away from our direct sight.

This metaphor and the last one have one thing in common. The farmer can't make the tree grow, and the woman can't make yeast do it's magic inside the dough.

The farmer throws out the seed and goes to bed. Right. All the worry and wishing and fussing in the world can't make that seed in the ground crack open and begin to grow. That is magic that God does. Even science has a hard time explaining how it happens. The energy that causes a dead seed to burst open and life just keeps happening until the tree is huge and the birds land in it's branches and build nests.

What part of that did the farmer cause. None of it. None of it. That magic of life bursting forth from death is done by God. The farmer, if he's a smart

farmer, goes home and goes to bed. Life happens while he's asleep.

It's the same picture in this scenario. Again, the commentators will tell you, OH, leaven is always evil in the bible. Always evil.

Not necessarily. It can be evil. In the case of Jesus warning of the leaven of the pharisees, it's an image of evil that spreads like a cancer. Same thing. It can be evil. But it doesn't have to be. The image is of something that permeates its host and spreads from cell to cell to cell, invisibly.

And Jesus says, there is a component of understanding the authority to reign of God that is like yeast in dough. It's a permeating influence. The kingdom spreads like Covid 19. From person to person to person to person. That's how the kingdom grows from one teacher that gets murdered and a bunch of nobodies until it permeates the whole earth.

Again. All the fussing in the world can't make that happen. The woman hides the yeast in the dough and nothing else she can do will speed up or change that process. She can sing and dance and weep and do double back flips. Doesn't mean a thing to that yeast.

She may as well go into some other room and get the laundry done. Do the vacuuming. Wash the dishes she mixed up the dough in. Watch TV. Whatever. She doesn't have any control over the effect of the yeast. Yeast takes care of its own magic unseen by our eyes.

The kingdom of God begins with such a small group you don't run out of digits before the counting is over. But when it's finished, it will be an innumerable multitude. Like the stars of the sky or the sand on the seashore.

In fact, isn't that kind of like what God told Abraham in the first place? Pinch yourselves. Here we are.

Beloved, it would be hard to imagine anything less significant than a little group of people that doesn't even represent 1% of our local population,

gathered together in a building we don't own or have any control over, to listen to a preacher who has no formal training, no letters, no diplomas from higher education speak about a complete overturning of this world.

But that is what these parables are about. We win. Not us, us IN Christ. Actually it's Jesus who wins in the long ultimate conflict between God and Satan. But we who believe and have entrusted our lives to Him, are IN Him.

In spite of the ridiculously overwhelming odds, we win. We will watch from our safe place, in Christ, as this great conflict unfolds and Christ, the Stone cut out without hands, the Precious Cornerstone, crushes all of the kingdoms of this world and takes His place on the throne of David in Jerusalem.

You say, well I'm glad you said it's a safe place. A secure vantage point. In Christ.

Let me clarify. It's eternally safe. We have eternal security forever in Him. In Him we escape the judgement of God that has already been decreed for this lost and sinful world.

But as far as this current world is concerned, yeah, it's been murdering christians for as long as there have been christians. It's totally unsafe to be a christian if you're worried about this body, here and now.

Jesus covers that right at the outset of the sermon in chapter 12.

4 “And I say to you, My friends, do not be afraid of those who kill the body, and after that have no more that they can do. 5 “But I will warn you whom to fear: fear the One who after He has killed has authority to cast into hell; yes, I tell you, fear Him!

Two thousand years have come and gone since Jesus gave us these two brief parables that describe the obscure beginnings, against all odds, and the resulting progress to completion of the Kingdom of God.

In my lifetime I have watched from my very limited perspective of 50 or so

years in that 2000 years span, some interesting phenomenons. I've seen the kingdom wax and then wane.

From the Jesus movement of the late 1960's to the mega-church movement of our current time and the gathering storm clouds just off shore we've watched some interesting errors.

We have entire groups of christians who believe that it's up to us to bring in the kingdom. Somehow we have to help God get this done. It's up to us to finish up the evangelization of the planet so God can bring in the kingdom.

It IS important to evangelize the whole world. But it won't change God's schedule. The tree grows, we know not how. The yeast permeates through the flour and dough, we know not how. It's out of our control. God does that. At His speed according to His plan.

One group of christians, A-Millennialists, believe the christian church will bring the kingdom by it's influence gradually making things better and better and better until the kingdom is in place.

That was and is a popular idea as industry and science kept pace with the christianizing of the world. A few setbacks. World wars, but we bounce back and progress toward the kingdom continues. Gradually.

Suddenly that's a tough sell as the world shifts almost overnight it seems to secular godless atheism.

I like the biblical version better. Christ comes and receives the church out of the world and God finishes His promises to Israel, tribulation, salvation, and at the end of that seven years, Christ returns triumphant in judgement. A cataclismic crushing of the worlds empires and kingdoms replaced by Christ on His throne.

Another error we make as we try to help God form His kingdom. Friendship with the world. We need to help God gather folks into His kingdom by

adjusting the obvious bad odds. We need to close the gaps between the church and the world and do what we can to make un-attractive Jesus, more attractive to the world.

So we adopt the worlds music and we lower the bar, way lower the bar, any lifestyle welcome, come on in, we've put the book away, you won't have to hear what the old book says, you can sip a latte and listen to a rock band, and we can gather in the world by being just as cool, maybe more cool than the world.

Try to make that mess fit these parables. We've forgotten that James said, "*friendship with the world is enmity with God.*" James 4:4

One more closing thought this morning. I remember years ago while I still was in Southern California at a baptism at Grace church where I grew up. And when they baptize people there, they ask them to share how it was that they were saved. What happened that caused your salvation.

And without fail the stories come. I was working with this guy who was a pain in my neck and kept telling me about Jesus. This lady at the beauty parlor that cuts my hair told me about Jesus. Every time. My best friend got saved and he was totally different and I had to stop and listen to him explain why. And I believed. My wife was saved and I thought she was nuts, but I watched her life, and she had something I didn't have and I wanted to have it too.

Over and over and over the stories about person to person contact with the facts of salvation and the result, people believed and were added to the body of Christ. And then they told their friends and their families, and more believed, and then those all told someone else, and they believed.

It's just like that yeast spreading through that slab of dough until the entire piece of dough is completely permeated. And then you take a bit of starter from that dough and put it in the next dough and the same thing happens.

Over and over and over until the whole world has heard the news of Jesus. And for the third time this morning, I say, pinch yourselves, here we are. Now go and tell someone about Jesus.

You don't have to change anything or do anything to make the tree grow or the dough expand. God does that. That's His business. But you do have to tell people. Each of us is a little gas bag of yeast. Go make more gas bags.