

Title: Sin like yeast - Matthew 16v1-20

Purpose: To look at the biblical picture of yeast as something that represents SIN.

INTRODUCTION

Q. What living thing is generally held to be mankind's best friend?

Yes - **DOGS**.

Well according to the latest SMITHSONIAN INSTITUTE MAGAZINE, one of the articles suggests there might be an "**alternative contender**" - let me read you the article's opening paragraph:

"Though dogs are usually considered humankind's best friend, if you really think about it, the animal that gives many people the most joy is **YEAST**. More specifically, SACCHAROMYCES CEREVISIAE is the species of yeast used for **making wine, raising bread and fermenting beer**.

Now, new research indicates that various strains of the wonder yeast may also give different regional coffees and chocolates their distinct flavours..."

This morning looking at YEAST

This morning we are **RETURNING** to our topical series on the subject of **SIN** and **today** we are going to look at **YEAST** - and we're going to do this:

- ***NOT*** in terms of its **general USEFULNESS**
- ***OR*** its **POSITIVE contribution** made to humanity over countless generations
- ***BUT RATHER*** by the way the Bible uses it - **as a common & regular metaphor OR picture for SIN**

The Passover celebration

Apart from a passing reference in Genesis - the first major place where yeast features in the Bible is in connection with the Passover in Exodus.

One thing that really strikes you about the instructions that God gives Moses about celebrating the first Passover (before they are to leave Egypt in haste after the 10th plague upon the firstborn of all the Egyptians) - is the way in which every detail of the Passover ceremony or procedure is stressed.

It is clear that this Passover meal is a lot more than just a good meal to keep them going as they set out into the desert leaving Egypt for good. You see:

- the blood must be painted on the lintel and doorposts
- the bones of the lamb must not be broken
- they must eat the roasted meat with bitter herbs and with UNLEAVENED BREAD - BREAD WITHOUT YEAST
- in fact, this bread without yeast, is mentioned no less than 8 times in only a dozen verses.

And we are very matter-of-factly told that if anyone eats anything with yeast in it during this 7 day festival of Passover, then they are to be cut off from Israel.

So very clearly the presence of yeast (or perhaps we should say) the absence of yeast - is something which is pointing to a very important aspect.

Yeast in Leviticus

As we follow **this theme of yeast in the Scripture** - the very next book, **Leviticus** tells us a little more:

- it points out **something that should NEVER find its way onto the LORD's altar**
- and **something** that, in contrast, **should ALWAYS make an appearance**:

Leviticus 2 verses 11-13 "Every grain offering you bring to the LORD **must be made without yeast, for you are not to burn any yeast or honey in an offering made to the LORD by fire.** You may bring them to the LORD as an offering of the firstfruits, but they are **not to be offered on the altar as a pleasing aroma.**

Season all your grain offerings with **salt.** Do not leave the **salt** of the covenant of your God out of your grain offerings; **add salt to all your offerings."**

Q. Now why exactly is God so specific, so dogmatic about what can and cannot be placed on His altar as an acceptable sacrifice?

Well clearly it is not simply that God is rather picky about things.

What it comes down to, and perhaps you already know this, is that all of the OT sacrifices are things that are symbolically pointing to that perfect, once-and-for-all, sacrifice of the Lord Jesus Christ on the cross:

- so the blood of the sacrifices being shed - maps onto the blood of the Saviour being poured out for us
- the blood is a picture of - the life of the sacrifice (it reminds us that a life is being given in order for a life to be saved)
- the aspect that the bones of the Passover lamb which must not be broken - is pointing to Jesus and the fact that at His crucifixion He was clearly distinguished from the criminals crucified with Him by the fact that His bones, His legs were ***NOT*** broken whereas the sinners on the left and on the right had their legs broken
- Q. And what of the yeast needing to be completely taken out of the Passover equation if it is to be able to paint the appropriate picture of the Saviour and His atoning sacrifice?

Well the answer is simply that Jesus was a perfect sacrifice, he was spotless and entirely free from sin. This is why the lambs that were chosen for offering on God's altar throughout the OT are always to be free from blemishes.

And similarly the yeast here is a picture of SIN and so it must be removed completely.

Now when we think of YEAST or LEAVEN (as it is sometimes called)

when we consider this particular picture OR illustration of SIN

we come to see that it is not just a rather 1-dimensional picture - and so this morning I want to look at 3 sides or faces of LEAVEN that reflect what SIN is like.

So aspect #1

1] "SIN IS HIDDEN"

Earlier on we had read to us [Matthew 16](#) and we were reading about "the yeast of the Pharisees" and this phrase comes up in Mark and also in Luke.

The [Luke](#) version is somewhat **brief** and more **succinct** - in [Chapter 12](#) this is what we read:

[\(Luke 12 verses 1-3\)](#) "...Jesus began to speak first to his disciples, saying: '**Be on your guard against the yeast of the Pharisees, which is hypocrisy.** There is **nothing concealed** that will not be disclosed, **or hidden** that will not be made known. What you have said in the **dark** will be heard in the daylight, and what you have **whispered** in the ear in the **inner rooms** will be proclaimed from the roofs.'

Now here we are given a direct clarification of what aspect of yeast we are to be understanding - and it is that aspect of hiddenness. You see HYPOCRISY is that condition where there is a difference between what you see on the OUTSIDE and what is the reality INSIDE. It is when we say one thing BUT SIMULTANEOUSLY there is another reality, a deeper reality that is actually operating UNDERNEATH THE SURFACE.

The original Greek word from which we get hypocrisy in English is "HUPOKRISIS" and it came to be used for those who acted on a stage - and here Jesus draws out the heart of the problem, which is of course the problem of the heart.

Things are being concealed, just like yeast which is essentially hidden to the eye. So if I were to put two lumps of dough on the table right here and I asked you to tell me which one is leavened and which one is unleavened you would be reduced to simply guessing.

Yeast is internal and invisible and so we come to see a FIRST important dimension of SIN.

The **Pharisees and Teachers of the Law** were **probably the best NT examples of this crucial aspect of SIN:**

- take for example the **SERMON ON THE MOUNT** - here the whole 3 chapter sermon works by way of one big contrast. Q. What is that contrast? Well it is the way that they have been long presented by their religious mentors and role models - the Pharisees OVER AGAINST the way that Jesus comes to bring.

Jesus starts upfront by giving a CV for a true follower of His - and so we have the Beatitudes - Blessed are the poor in spirit, those who mourn over their sin and lostness, blessed are the meek etc. etc. He says that you can recognise them because they are the ones who are the salt and light of this world - that they are about as unmistakable as a city that is on a hill.

Then for the rest of the sermon he starts to take apart all the familiar SAYINGS and DOINGS of the Pharisees. Jesus is taking the wraps off the Pharisees - it is nothing less than an act of UNCOVERING.

At the heart of it all is the issue that the Pharisees Religion was one of EXTERNALS and RULE KEEPING (many of which were merely man-made rules just to make it all the worse).

And Jesus says that what really matters is what is in the heart.

- in [Mark's gospel chapter 7](#) we have **an actual account of where the Pharisees clashed** with Jesus and his disciples over the issue of **ceremonial hand washing** - we read:

"So the Pharisees and teachers of the law asked Jesus, 'Why don't your disciples live according to the tradition of the elders instead of eating their food with "unclean" hands?' He replied, 'Isaiah was right when he prophesied about you hypocrites; as it is written: "These people honour me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me."

It continues: "He went on: 'What comes out of a man is what makes him "unclean." For from **within, out of men's hearts**, come evil thoughts, sexual immorality, theft, murder, adultery, greed, malice, deceit, lewdness, envy, slander, arrogance and folly. **All these evils come from inside and make a man "unclean."** "

Personal Application

So this leaves us a question:

Q. When we think of sin - how do we automatically tend to think?

Q. Do we see a **FRUIT** or do we see a **ROOT**?

Put that another way:

Q. Do we see an **ACTION** or an **ATTITUDE**

- something **EXTERNAL** or something **INTERNAL**

- something of the **HANDS** or something of the **HEART**?

Take a good look at leaven and realise that this is showing us the hidden dimension of SIN.

The OT book of wisdom - Proverbs recognises this and says in Chapter 4 and Verse 23:

"Above all else, guard your heart, for it is the wellspring of life."

Matthew 16 - Nailing it down

Let me just nail this one down by explaining how the sequence works with the Pharisees in the passage that we read earlier on in Matthew 16:

- The starting point - is that they are asking for Jesus to do a SIGN.

Now the only problem with this is that Jesus has already been doing plenty of SIGNS and so it is not that there is a lack of SIGNS.

Jesus realises that there is clearly something deeper going on - he knows that their EYES are not broken but rather that their HEARTS are corrupted.

They have an inner stance that is DIAMETRICALLY OPPOSED to Jesus which is why they are always demanding something bigger, something else. Their hearts are CLOSED.

- Following this stage - of them asking for a SIGN - Jesus himself starts to do the asking and He asks the disciples who they think He is.

Eventually Peter pipes up and says "You are the Christ, the son of the living God."

Evidently Peter's heart is open and responsive to the signs that are being shown and witnessed.

- One last stage in the story (which Mark's gospel adds in for us) and that is where Jesus goes on to open the eyes of a man formerly blind.

This is a unique healing - *not* because it is a blind man regaining his sight - *but* because this healing happens in stages and not immediately.

And what we are meant to see here is that spiritual blindness is often a case of a number of touches.

And isn't that true in our own experience? We gain more and more insight into Christ, into the Scriptures and by degrees our hearts are exposed, expanded and finally changed, made receptive - we see clearly and come to a place of faith.

So **Yeast** OR **Leaven** - shows us that SIN is something **HIDDEN, INTERNAL**, it is a **STANCE**, an **ATTITUDE** - #2:

2] "SIN GOES EVERYWHERE"

Matthew 13 is that chapter where we are treated to a whole series of parables that tell us different things about the Kingdom of Heaven.

There are two very short ones - the one about **the mustard seed** and **the one about the yeast**:

- **the mustard seed** one - takes up the idea that this seed is one of the very smallest and yet in the end it produces something very large. And so similarly the Kingdom of Heaven seems to have rather humble beginnings - but in the end it will be the very reverse - it will be something very massive, something that you will find everywhere.
- the **parable of the yeast** is next - it's only a single verse so I'll read it:
(**Matthew 13 verse 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 through all the dough.'"

The way people made bread (and perhaps you have done this yourself) - they took a lump of leavened dough and they would mix it into the unleavened dough, kneed it in, give it a good bashing around and then they would simply leave it for a while for the yeast to do what yeast does.

Q. What is that? Well it simply works its way right through out the dough.

Then when they wanted to make another loaf they would take a small lump off the leavened dough & start again.

Q. Now why do you think that Jesus was warning his disciples about the yeast (or the leaven) of the Pharisees? Well simply because it would, if left unchallenged or unidentified, spread with serious consequences.

Like an infection

Although the ancients did not know it, we realise today that yeast is something organic, it is a living organism and this explains its native ability to spread so rapidly and comprehensively.

We have all had at some stage a bacterial infection and if it begins to take hold we all head down to the doctors and they give us what they call "a course of anti-biotics" which we have to take over usually a period of a week or so - and Q. What is it that they tell us?

The fact that we need to make sure we take the full course - don't stop halfway through just because we are starting

to feel better.

Q. And why is that? Well the theory is that if you stop short those bacteria that are still surviving are the ones that have developed a level of resistance and so when you stop these ones are the ones that will continue to multiply and so will probably no longer be responsive to the original anti-biotic that you part-used.

If we taken infection seriously BECAUSE we don't want it to get a foothold -

Q. why would we not take SIN seriously as though it will not also get a foothold?

Perhaps it is because SIN seems pretty quiet to us - it does not appear to be raging, we do not feel as though we are inflamed with it.

We'll listen to what John Owen, the puritan theologian says about sin - he says:

"When sin lets us alone we may let sin alone; but as sin is **never less quiet** than when it seems to be **the most quiet**, and **its waters** are for the most **part deep when they are still**, so ought our methods against it be vigorous at all times and in all conditions, even where there is **least suspicion.**"

Sin is like yeast, it is like leaven - it will never stay in a corner quietly, if it does go quiet, it is probably only because some other sin is in the ascendant - and the other sin is merely in remission. Soon enough it will burst forth again with a greater power.

Think of what happened to the Pharisees over time as they let the yeast of unbelief gain a foothold, progressively breaking down their openness to God and instead spreading resistance to Him throughout their lives.

As we've said before:

"When we do sin, sin does us.
When we've done with sin, sin is not done with us."

"Sin is hidden"

"Sin goes everywhere" - #3:

3] "SIN DESTROYS SWEETNESS"

When I was growing up it seemed like my good mother went through various phases - and one of these was her wine-making stage.

We had a small cupboard under the stairs and this became the place where the various demi-Johns - you know those large gallon sized bottles with those thick rubber bungs and weird air-lock apparatus on top.

Well one day the inevitable happened - I don't exactly know quite why it happened - but there was this huge exploding sound and we all rushed to the cupboard to find a rather bad mess with half-fermented wine and pieces of broken glass.

It is a process of fermentation that is happening - the yeast is taking hold of the sugars and converting them to alcohol and to carbon dioxide.

The ancients quickly came to know that the longer they left the leaven in the dough the more it would suck up the sweetness and the dough would get more and more sour until it was completely inedible.

We probably don't factor in this aspect when it comes to resident sin.

We probably don't think that something that might feel at one point gratifying even satisfying - can on the other hand be sucking the all the sweetness out of us.

Now you may think that because you can't immediately hit upon a really terrible secret sin that is progressively destroying you within - that you are altogether pretty safe - but maybe we underestimate the nature and combined effect of the various forces that are at work around us and in us:

Jim Petersen - Living Proof

Jim Petersen, who worked for the Navigators in Brazil writes in his book "Living Proof" the following:

"These three influences—**tradition, philosophy, and society**—seem inevitably to work their way into and become part of the value system of any Christian community to such an extent that it is possible to be a Christian, but live almost entirely within a pagan value system, and not even perceive it.

This possibility began to dawn on me when we moved to Brazil and changed cultures. Culture is hardly perceived as long as we do not leave the only one we really know. A fish doesn't perceive the water in which it swims, and neither are we aware of **our culture, or the influence it exerts on our thoughts and actions**. Often we must step outside of it to understand it—and to understand ourselves!"

Perhaps if we sense we have a pretty joyless existence maybe we should take a pause to consider whether SIN WITHIN IS EATING UP ALL THE SWEETNESS THAT GOD DESIGNED TO LIVE WITHIN US.

CONCLUSION

They say that to be forewarned is to be forearmed - this image of SIN as being like YEAST, like LEAVEN in the way that it operates gives us IMPORTANT FOOD FOR THOUGHT - because if we know the various dynamics of SIN - then we can be wise in how we respond.

As the apostle Paul says in [2 Corinthians 2 verse 11](#) as he concludes a pastoral matter - he says:

" ... in order that Satan might not outwit us. For we are not unaware of his schemes."

So let me give some closure here by giving application IN THE LIGHT of these 3 dynamics of SIN AS LEAVEN that we have seen:

- FIRST - "SIN IS HIDDEN"

When we were children - we all at times played DRESSING UP GAMES.

SIN likes to play dress-up games and knowing this about the "YEAST OF SIN" in our lives MEANS practically that we train ourselves:

- to look WITHIN
- to look BEHIND and BENEATH the baggy clothes (which are its camouflage)

We look for SIN in the MOTIVES, in the LEANINGS, in the INCLINATIONS of our hearts.

We learn to become INTERROGATORS of our own hearts. Where SIN WITHIN is concerned - yes there should

be some sort of "Spanish Inquisition!"

- SECOND - "SIN GOES EVERYWHERE"

If we do *not* act quickly - at SIN's first rising then SIN will spread throughout and put us in a stranglehold.
(We should never think that SIN is just play fighting)

If we are not in the business of killing sin - sin will be killing us by sure & certain degrees.

Q. Does the idea of killing SIN sound foreign?

Romans 8 verses 12-13 "Therefore, brothers and sisters, we have an obligation—but it is not to the flesh, to live according to it. For if you live according to the flesh, you will die; but if by the Spirit you put to death the misdeeds of the body, you will live."

So we are to UNMASK, NAME & SHAME SIN that dresses up within
We are to KILL SIN (it's that older term: MORTIFICATION)

- LASTLY - "SIN DESTROYS SWEETNESS"

I am sure that we can all give testimony to how an INFECTION makes us feel very sluggish - it takes the spring out of our step.

And SIN in similar style - eats away at all that pure JOY OF THE LORD. Remember that verse in Nehemiah 8 which says "For the joy of the LORD is your strength".

You see MORTIFICATION (KILLING) is only one side of the coin. The business of dealing with SIN is very much like a SEESAW - we look away from SIN whilst looking toward JESUS.

The old song goes:

"Turn your eyes upon Jesus look full in his wonderful face and the things of earth will grow strangely dim in the light of his glory and grace."

I'll close with a verse from Colossians chapter 3 - it's that opening verse:

"Set your hearts on things above where Christ is seated at the right hand of God
... set your minds on things above, NOT on earthly things...."

Let us pray...AMEN