

The Hidden Advance of the Kingdom

“The Kingdom of Heaven is like yeast which a woman took and hid inside a large amount of flour until it worked all through the dough.”
Matthew 13:33

In Matthew 13, Jesus told a series of parables which described powerfully the way the Church would grow and advance in the time God had ordained. These parables have rightly been called “parables of the Kingdom,” for Jesus introduced all but one of these parables with the phrase “the Kingdom of heaven is like...” The Kingdom of heaven is simply God’s sovereign rule, His kingly right to govern. The advance of the Kingdom is the advance in human hearts of glad submission to that rule of God. I say “glad submission” for joy in obedience is intrinsic to the Kingdom of God (note the *joy* with which the man sold all he had to buy the field in vs. 44). Demons submit to God (see Luke 10:17, “Lord, even the demons submit to us in your name.”), but they do so with rage and in frustration. Unregenerate people obey God too, even evil kings and rulers, for Jesus is the King of *all* kings and Lord of *all* lords; but they do so without even knowing they are obeying His secret purposes. There is certainly no hint of gladness in their submission to God. The Kingdom of Heaven is found wherever hearts are regenerated in Christ by the Holy Spirit to love God with all their being. This Kingdom is advancing irresistibly throughout the world, and its advance is truly THE story of history, though it will never receive mention in the *New York Times* or from the mouth of Tom Brokaw.

Of these parables, it is this simple single line which describes this secret advance the best. Jesus says that the woman took the yeast and *hid* it inside the flour. After waiting awhile, the dough began to rise. There is a secret chemical reaction that occurs with yeast which allows it to

multiply and to give off a gas which causes the bread to rise. The progress of the yeast is hidden and secret, but the effect is unmistakable. Also, the picture is clear that the entire lump of dough is leavened by just a tiny amount of yeast. The yeast multiplies itself until the whole lump is leavened.

This abiding principle of spiritual growth is the essence of the advance of the Kingdom of heaven, both on an individual scale and on a universal scale. Within the heart of a single individual, the Word of God enters and the glad submission to the King begins to spread to every area of that person's life. As the Word is believed and obeyed gladly, that person matures to Christ-likeness. This spiritual advance is secret and hidden, although the outward effects can be seen by all with eyes to see. The same is true of all of human history. Christianity entered the world with a tiny group of committed believers in an upstairs room in Jerusalem. Gradually it spread and advanced throughout the whole Roman world. When human history is finished, every nation on earth will have been leavened by the testimony of the gospel. Yet this advance has been secret and hidden as well. Only the spiritually mature can see history properly.

God is calling all Christians to this same pattern of growth. As we hear God's Word, let us submit to it gladly, no matter what the cost. Soon Scripture will leaven everything we do. As we carry the message of Christ's redemption to our respective contexts, we will also see God cause his Kingdom to advance in the lives of others. A multiplication of hearts in glad submission to the reign of Jesus Christ is our goal... and it begins with us right now.