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THE PARABLE OF THE LEAVEN

THE Parable of the Leaven is a noteworthy illustration of the fact that Premillennialism and Dispensationalism are not equivalent terms. Bengel, an outstanding Premillenarian of the eighteenth century, stated his interpretation with characteristic brevity as follows: "I would refer it to the propagation rather than to the corruption of the Church". This was the view of such eminent Premillenarians as Alford, Gill, Godet, Gresswell, Keach, Lange, Meyer, Olshausen, Stier, and Trench. The alternative view, that the parable speaks of the corruption of the Church, is held by Dispensationalists, who derived it from the Darbyite section of the Plymouth Brethren. It is taught in J. N. Darby's *Synopsis of the Books of the Bible* and in the *Scofield Reference Bible*. We may briefly describe these rival interpretations as the optimistic and the pessimistic.

The late G. Campbell Morgan was an ardent Premillennialist. He was not a Dispensationalist, although probably often regarded as such. He agreed with them on some points and differed on others. Consequently, since we have described the pessimistic interpretation of the parable of the Leaven as definitely "dispensational", it might perhaps be expected that in examining this interpretation, as it is the purpose of this article to do, we would turn to an avowed follower of Darby and Scofield. But since the pessimistic interpretation of this parable was one of the points on which Dr. Morgan agreed with them, and because his repeated and skilful advocacy of it over a period of many years has undoubtedly contributed in no small measure to its present popularity, we feel justified in making the extended defence which appears in his last work, *The Parables and Metaphors of Our Lord* (1943), the basis of our examination of an interpretation the correctness of which the Dispensationalists of to-day assert with such confidence. The main features in Dr. Morgan's argument may be discussed under the following five heads.

I. THE "WHOLE PICTURE" NEEDED

Dr. Morgan accounts for the fact that the optimistic interpretation of the parable has been and still is the usual one in the following words: "When our Lord said 'The Kingdom of heaven is like unto leaven', some stop there in their thinking. If that is done, then we are almost driven to the conclusion that the figure of leaven was used as the type of something good, and therefore that the idea of the parable is that the Kingdom is to be completely victorious in this age. That is the view which is almost universally accepted as the interpretation of the parable." Against this inference, the cogency of which is indicated by its very wide acceptance, Dr. Morgan sets the thesis that "In every parable of Jesus the whole picture is needed to understand His teaching". This is a valid principle. It is safe to assume that no details are given which are wholly meaningless and therefore entirely superfluous. Were they of no value they would not have been added. But this does not mean that all the elements in the picture are of equal value, or that a very special significance, a "deep" and "spiritual" meaning is to be sought in each detail. The determining of the significance and relative value of these details may constitute a serious problem for the interpreter. In the parable of the Mustard Seed, for example, does the detail, "so that the birds of the air come and lodge in the branches thereof" serve simply to illustrate and enforce the central thought of the parable which is the great outward growth of the little seed, by pointing out that it becomes so great a tree as to attract and form a lodging-place for birds? Or, does the mention of the birds add something further to the picture? Are they to be regarded as representing an evil principle? In the parable of the Sower, the fowls of the air perform quite obviously a definitely detrimental and harmful act, that of devouring seed intended for fruit-bearing. Hence, they fitly illustrate the work of the "enemy", the wicked one, in snatching away the seed sown in the hearts of the hearers of the word of the kingdom. Does this justify us in inferring that in the parable of the Mustard Seed, where the presence of the birds cannot be regarded as necessarily harmful or prejudicial, but may even be thought of as beneficial, since birds devour hurtful bugs and insects, we must regard them as a symbol of evil? Dr. Morgan is convinced that figures

always have the same meaning in the parabolic teaching of Jesus. But the principle, even if generally valid, is not without exception and must be used with caution. Thus, the figure of the tree is used in both a good and a bad sense in Scripture. In Nebuchadnezzar's vision of the great tree, the figure is of the colossal pride of the king of Babylon. It represents an evil thing that must be cut down, with only the stump remaining. In the First Psalm the tree is the beautiful figure of that which is good, the righteous man, who is strikingly contrasted with the chaff which the wind driveth away. To assert that a symbol must always have the same meaning is not warranted by the evidence of Scripture. The value of a symbol must be determined first of all by the use which is made of it in the context in which it occurs; and if it is a detail in the picture, it must be placed in proper subordination to the main feature and be interpreted in harmony with it. To allow the details or accessories of the picture to determine its principal teaching would be hazardous to say the least.

Usually, in the case of a parable, there will be little if any difference of opinion as to what is the central feature. In the case of the parable of the Leaven there has been general agreement that it is the leaven. To this Dr. Morgan takes vigorous exception. "What is the central fact? Leaven? No, three measures of meal. What are the facts affecting it? Two, a woman, and leaven." This makes it quite clear why Dr. Morgan is so convinced that to stop reading the parable at the word "leaven" would be such a serious mistake. It would mean stopping before the central fact of the parable was reached. It would be *Hamlet* with Hamlet left out. We should like to ask a simple question; and since we cannot now ask it of Dr. Morgan, who during a ministry of more than half a century showed himself particularly effective in dealing with popular audiences, we must ask it of those who share or are seeking to acquire the same conspicuous effectiveness. Our question would be this: "If the three measures of meal are the essential fact, how would you phrase the parable in order to indicate this clearly?" We venture to say, without fear of contradiction, that they would tell us that the natural way to indicate this would be to say, "The kingdom of heaven is like unto three measures of meal in which a woman hid leaven until the whole was leavened". Such a recasting of the parable would exactly suit the interpretation advocated by Dr. Morgan;

and this indicates very clearly that this interpretation requires such a radical change in its structure. The actual phrasing makes the leaven the central fact, however much the facts which effect it may be emphasised. For it is neither customary nor proper to put the central fact of a statement in an inconspicuous phrase. To do so is to subordinate it.

The reason for this attempt to make the leaven a detail in the parable and not the central fact is not far to seek. We have only to paraphrase the parable in terms of the pessimistic interpretation to see how important such a virtual recasting as Dr. Morgan proposes is for the success of this interpretation. For to paraphrase it as it stands would make it read as follows: "The kingdom of heaven is like *an evil principle* which a woman took and hid in three measures of meal until the whole was leavened." The kingdom of heaven is like an evil principle! It sounds absurd. It sounds blasphemous. No wonder that Dr. Morgan is concerned to prove that the three measures of meal, not the leaven, are the central fact. To say, "The kingdom of heaven is like three measures of meal in which a woman hid leaven", etc. and then to interpret the leaven as *an evil principle*, changes the whole effect of the statement. It ceases to be shocking and blasphemous; and it is entirely in accord with the pessimistic interpretation on which Dr. Morgan and the Dispensationalists insist. But it requires a virtual, which amounts to an actual, recasting of the parable. It insists on making it say what it plainly does not say.

II. LEAVEN ALWAYS SYMBOLISES AN EVIL PRINCIPLE

Dr. Morgan assures us that the popular interpretation of the leaven "contradicts the whole symbolic use of leaven in the Bible", according to which "leaven is always symbolic of that which disintegrates, breaks up, corrupts". This is the foundation stone upon which the pessimistic interpretation of the parable rests. To test the correctness of this thesis, we shall approach the question from a different angle, beginning with the ordinary use of leaven and then proceeding to discuss its symbolic use.

I. Leaven was, so far as we know, commonly and constantly employed by the Israelites from patriarchal to New Testament times in the preparation of their daily bread. Equally probable is it that the making of bread was then, as it is to-day in Palestine, the task of the women of the household. Consequently, we may

regard this parable as one which was chosen with direct reference to the daily life of the Chosen People from the earliest times down to the very day that the parable was uttered. Edersheim remarks on the "*homeliness*" of these illustrations or parables, and suggests that as Jesus uttered this one a woman "may at that moment have been in sight, busy preparing the weekly provision of bread". At all events, this was an act which was familiar to every one of Jesus' auditors. Leavened bread was in daily use among the people. That the leaven made the bread light, palatable, and wholesome, was a fact of common knowledge and experience. So used leaven was a powerful agent exerting a wholesome and beneficent influence. To liken the kingdom of heaven to leaven as so employed would be to use a figure readily understood by everyone who listened to Jesus. It would appeal to the simple, ordinary people who heard Him gladly. And the fact that this parable is one of those in the group which are left unexplained justifies the inference that the meaning was obvious and that any explanation of it was superfluous.

2. The first references in Scripture to the use of unleavened bread bear out this interpretation. In Gen. xviii the haste with which the meal was prepared indicates that the cakes were unleavened. This fact is not expressly stated; but the inference is a natural and proper one. The guests were unexpected. Abraham's hospitality was lavish. The household supply of leavened bread was probably limited, clearly inadequate to the occasion. Hence the cakes were freshly made and unleavened. The same element of haste would seem to account also for Lot's feast (Gen. xix. 3), regarding which it is expressly stated that Lot baked "unleavened cakes". The coming of the two "angels" to Lot was as unexpected as the coming of the three "men" to Abraham had been. This same element of hasty preparation is stressed in the account of the institution of the feast of Unleavened Bread at the Exodus. The statements in Ex. xii. 34, 39 indicate quite clearly that the reason, or at least the main reason, for this feast being distinctively a feast of unleavened bread lay in this very fact, the hasty departure of the Israelites from Egypt. They had no time to prepare leavened bread; so they baked unleavened cakes (*v.* 39; cf. esp. Deut. xvi. 3). The feast of Unleavened Bread was essentially a feast of remembrance. Hence the eating of unleavened bread was its distinctive feature. This explanation does not apply of course

to the Passover for which, while it was to be eaten "in haste", adequate time for preparation had been given (xii. 3), and at which the eating of unleavened bread was an express and strict requirement (v. 8). The factor of haste, or at least of unpreparedness, is apparently also the explanation of the unleavened cakes made by Gideon (Judg. vi. 19), who was not aware until after the feast had been prepared and presented that his guest was the Angel of the Lord (vv. 21f.), as well as of the meal prepared by the "witch" of Endor (1 Sam. xxviii. 24). Especially significant is the fact that the prohibition of the use of leaven was not extended to the feast of Tabernacles which was one of the three annual feasts to be celebrated at the central sanctuary and lasted for seven days; during it leavened bread might be eaten. This supports the view that the prohibition of the use of leaven during the similar period of seven days which followed the celebration of the Passover is to be connected directly with the historical event of Ex. xii. 34, 39 which it commemorated. It is also to be remembered that the wave-loaves which were offered at the feast of Weeks (Pentecost) were leavened (Lev. xxiii. 17). As to this Jamieson remarks: "The loaves used at the Passover were unleavened; those used at Pentecost were leavened—a difference which is thus accounted for, that the one was a memorial of the bread hastily prepared at their departure while the other was a tribute of gratitude to God for their daily bread which was leavened". This seems to be a far more natural explanation than that given by Scofield: "For this reason leaven is present, because there is evil in the church", which leads to the conclusion that, since leaven always means or suggests that which is evil, during every week of the year, except one, the Israelites might with impunity contaminate themselves with an "evil principle". Such an explanation would certainly be thoroughgoing. But it is hard to believe that it can be correct.

3. That leaven was not to be used at the Passover and the feast of Unleavened Bread, or in the sacrifices which were to be placed on the altar of the Lord, is a requirement of the Mosaic Law, which is referred to again and again both in precept and in practice. But the student of the Old Testament will search its pages in vain for any statement to the effect that leaven was excluded under these circumstances because it represented "an evil principle". That leaven symbolised "corruption" is a teaching of the Rabbinical interpreters which appears also in

Classical writers. But this explanation has no direct support in the Old Testament. It is a matter of inference only. The prohibition is plainly stated; the reason for the prohibition is not. Furthermore, the fact of the prohibition will suffice to account for the Rabbinical teaching that leaven represented an evil principle. It clearly did so when its use was prohibited. But it does not follow that it represented an evil principle when its use was permitted. To draw the inference, that the leaven represented an evil principle *per se*, would mean, as has already been pointed out, that, in what we might call their "secular" life and activities, the Israelites might with impunity defile themselves with that which was inherently evil.

4. When we turn to the New Testament, we have two groups of passages to consider: (a) In three places in the Synoptic Gospels we meet the phrase, "the leaven of the Pharisees" or an equivalent expression (Matt. xvi. 5-12; Mark viii. 14-21; Luke xii. 1f.). That Jesus used the word "leaven" in an evil sense is obvious. In Luke He introduces a solemn warning against hypocrisy with the words, "Beware of the leaven of the Pharisees, which is hypocrisy". The longer passages in Matthew and Mark refer to a different incident. The occasion and setting are clearly indicated: "they had forgotten to take bread". When Jesus spoke of "leaven", they naturally thought of "bread" (*artos*). So Jesus at once reminded them of the "loaves" (*artos*) which He had miraculously multiplied on two recent occasions, by which great multitudes had been "filled". Then they realised that He was not referring to their failure to take bread, that He was not thinking of bread at all, but of "the teaching of the scribes and Pharisees". This certainly seems to justify the inference that, when "leaven" is used in an evil sense, it has no reference at all to "bread", when bread means wholesome food. This inference is supported by the use of the word *artos* elsewhere in the Gospels. The "loaves" which Jesus multiplied and the "bread" to which He compared Himself when He said, "I am the bread of life" (John vi. 35) are simply called *artos* as representing the daily food of the people (Matt. vi. 11); and the same word is used in the four narratives (the Synoptics and 1 Cor.) which describe the Last Supper, where unleavened bread (*azumos*) was undoubtedly used. This loose and ambiguous use of the word *artos*, to refer

to both unleavened and leavened bread, is thoroughly in accord with the view that leaven *per se* had no ethical significance. Used in the daily bread, it represented a wholesome principle; and such bread when used in daily life was as "clean" as was the unleavened bread when used on the occasions that required it. Otherwise, if the leaven always symbolised an evil principle, we must either assume that the loaves which Jesus multiplied and the bread to which He likened Himself were unleavened—a highly improbable supposition—or conclude that He like the people constantly contaminated Himself with that which represented an evil principle. This, of course, we cannot for a moment admit.

(b) Paul's use of the figure of the leaven is clearly based on the bad sense of the word. The fact that he uses exactly the same words in 1 Cor. v. 7 and Gal. v. 9 suggests that he is using a familiar saying or truism. It is to be noted, therefore, that while the proverb is introduced in the Corinthian passage in a way which implies that everyone must be familiar with it, the words are not quoted as Scripture nor is the authority of Scripture claimed for them. Yet Paul does proceed to relate this meaning of the leaven to the prohibition of the use of leaven at the Passover; and the expressions, "purge out", "old leaven", "new lump", "leaven of malice and wickedness", "unleavened *bread* of sincerity and truth", indicate clearly that he is connecting this proverbial meaning of leaven with the restriction placed on its use by the Mosaic Law, and that he is thinking of it as representing in this sense an evil principle. This very fact both explains and defines Paul's use of the proverb. Since its use was expressly prohibited at this feast, leaven, if used at that time, would have represented an evil thing. It would have symbolised that spirit of lawlessness which is the mark of the old sinful nature which is to be utterly eliminated lest it corrupt the whole being of the Christian, even as a little leaven leaveneth the whole lump. But this, we repeat, applies only to leaven when unlawfully used. We have no right to assign this meaning to leaven when its use is permitted or even enjoined. To do so would necessarily make the secular use of leaven, its presence in the daily bread of the people, a contamination, which would involve compromise with evil, an attitude which would be found, not only in the pious in Israel but even in our Lord Himself. The only proper conclusion to

be drawn is that leaven *per se* was a perfectly neutral element. When its use was prohibited, it represented an evil principle; when its use was permitted, it represented a wholesome and beneficent principle. Both of these meanings are to be found in Scripture.

III. THE THREE MEASURES OF MEAL

Since "leaven" is the conspicuous word in the parable and the one with which the kingdom is directly compared, if the central fact is not to be found in it but in the rather inconspicuous phrase, "three measures of meal", it would seem to follow necessarily that some special significance or importance must attach to these words. That such is really the case, it is Dr. Morgan's great concern to prove. The expression "three measures of meal" had, he tells us, "a definite meaning and value to those who heard it". In proof of this he appeals to the incident in Gen. xviii where, as we have seen, the use of unleavened cakes is clearly implied, though not expressly stated. He sees in this feast which Abraham prepared, for his three unexpected guests, a meal of fellowship with God. Because of this he connects the three measures of meal with the meal offering required by the Mosaic Law; and he refers to the meal provided by Gideon and to the sacrifice of Hannah, and also to the meal offerings prescribed in Ezek. xlvi. So understood, we have in Gen. xviii the description, not of an ordinary meal, but of a religious rite which required the use of unleavened bread. And from the fact that three measures of meal were used on this occasion the inference is drawn that this gives a definite significance to this exact amount of meal: it is intended for sacramental use. Hence the woman in the parable was guilty of a culpable and inexcusable act when she introduced leaven into meal which in view of the use for which it was intended (the mention of "three measures" indicating that it was holy meal) should have been carefully guarded against the slightest contact with leaven. For support of this interpretation appeal is made to Paul's words regarding the corruption of the church in 1 Cor. v. 6 and Gal. v. 9, and to Jesus' words in Matt. xvi. 6 and Luke xii. 1 as interpreted by Himself, passages which have been already discussed.

1. The expression "three measures of meal" is a very rare one in the Bible. In the New Testament it occurs only in this

parable as recorded by Matthew and Luke; and the word translated "measure" is *saton*, which is the Greek form of the Hebrew *seah*. In the Old Testament *seah* occurs only nine times. Six of these occurrences are in 2 Kings vii, which gives the account of Elisha's amazing prediction of plenty to the starving inhabitants of Samaria. The reference is to the cost of *one seah* of fine flour and of *two seahs* of barley; and it has to do with public sale for domestic use. According to 1 Sam. xxv. 18, Abigail took *five seahs* of parched corn as a present for David and his men. In 1 Kings xviii. 32 we read that, when Elijah prepared his sacrifice on Mount Carmel, he made a trench about the altar "like a house [heap?] of *two seahs* of seed" (translating the Hebrew literally), which he ordered to be filled with water. This was no part of the sacrifice as such. It was done simply to remove all suspicion of trickery on his part, and possibly also with a view to enhancing the effect on the people of the miraculous answer to his prayer by adding to the seeming difficulty of it. These are the only occurrences of the word *seah* in the Old Testament aside from Gen. xviii. In no one of them is a sacramental meaning or use suggested. In most of them the reference is plainly to what we call secular or ordinary life. In only one of them, Gen. xviii, are *three seahs* mentioned. This means that the expression "three measures of meal" occurs only once in the entire Bible, aside from its use in the parable we are discussing.

2. There is no warrant for assigning sacramental significance to the "three measures" in Gen. xviii. This is to be especially noted in view of the importance which this passage acquires in Dr. Morgan's argument. The reason for the number "three" is not stated. It may be connected with the fact that the guests were three in number. At any rate, since *three seahs* make an *ephah*, which is about a bushel, mention of the number of the *seahs* serves to bring out Abraham's extravagant and even excessive hospitality. It is to be noted that when Abraham made his preparations he did not know who his guests were (he saw "three men", v. 1). The sufficient explanation of the fact that the cakes were unleavened is to be found, as we have seen, in the haste with which the meal was prepared. The fact that the patriarch added "butter" (i.e. curd or clabber) and "milk" indicates that the meal was thought of as an ordinary feast of hospitality, not as in any sense a sacrifice. Were any

sacramental significance to be inferred from the fact that the cakes were unleavened, clabber and milk, in both of which fermentation readily takes place, would probably be out of place. As to this we cannot speak too positively, since the incident antedates the Mosaic legislation by centuries. But if importance is attached to the *absence* of leaven, attention should also be given to the *presence* of clabber and milk, neither of which was used in the sacrifices authorised and required under the Mosaic Law. Finally, it is to be noted that Abraham did not take part in this feast. We read that he "stood by them under the tree, and they ate". Sarah was not even present. Consequently, the feast was one of hospitality, but not of fellowship. This, we repeat, is the only mention of "three measures of meal" in the entire Old Testament.

In the case of Gideon and of Hannah we are told that they each brought "an ephah of flour". An *ephah* is, of course, the same as *three seahs*. But this amount did not in either case correspond with the requirements of the Mosaic Law. If these offerings were peace offerings, the meal offering for a kid (Gideon's offering) was "one tenth" of an ephah (Ex. xxix. 40; cf. xii. 5); if a bullock, "three tenths" (Num. xv. 9). Gideon's meal offering (if we regard it as such) was, therefore, ten times that prescribed in the Law; Hannah's was only slightly in excess, since three times three-tenths (i.e. nine tenths) of an ephah would have been the exact amount for three bullocks. In the case of Ezekiel the offerings are somewhat different from those prescribed in the Law. He speaks of the "sixth part of an ephah" (xlv. 13; xlvi. 14). Elsewhere in chaps. xlv and xlvi the meal offering for both the bullock and the ram is "an ephah", while the amount for the lamb is not precisely defined.

Since Dr. Morgan clearly regards the mention of the ephah in the passages just referred to as pertinent, for the reason that an ephah contains *three seahs*, it is to be noted that this fact is apparently responsible for an error on his part which greatly weakens the force of his argument. He speaks of the "three measures (*seahs*)" and the "three tenth parts" of the ephah as if they were equivalent expressions (" . . . 'three tenth parts of an ephah', which is the same thing as 'three measures of meal' in the meal offering"). But such is not the case. Three tenth parts of an ephah are not the same as *three seahs*; they are a little less than *one seah*. And since the Mosaic Law nowhere

mentions either "three seahs" or "an ephah" as the required amount for the meal offering, the attempt to connect Abraham's feast with the peace offering or sacramental meal provided for in the Law is without any warrant in fact. The expression, "three measures of meal", is not only unique in the Old Testament; it clearly has no connection whatsoever with the Old Testament ritual of sacrifice.

Since Dr. Morgan insists that the expression "three measures of meal" conveys a meaning which was perfectly intelligible and obvious to Jesus' hearers, the facts just mentioned are especially important. It is probable that most of these auditors, both in the multitude and of the disciples, were relatively poor. It was the common people who heard Him gladly. His own parents offered at the time of His presentation at the temple the minimum animal sacrifice, "a pair of turtledoves, or two young pigeons". For a lamb the accompanying meal offering was *one* tenth part of an ephah, for a ram *two* tenth parts. It was only for the bullock that it was *three*. Consequently, even if three tenth parts were the same as three measures of meal, which they are not, it is hardly likely that in choosing an illustration, Jesus would have used one which would appeal more to the rich than to the humble and poor. So we must conclude that the evidence for a sacramental significance in the expression "three measures of meal" is very far from obvious, if indeed there is any evidence for it at all. On the other hand if, as Edersheim points out in commenting on the parable, this measure represented the amount of bread prepared at one baking in many households, this would account for the use of the expression, and it would indicate also that the allusion is not to the sacramental significance of leaven, its rigid exclusion from most sacramental rites, but on the contrary to the prominent part which leaven played in the daily life of the people.

IV. THE WOMAN

According to the interpretation which we are examining, the woman is not the essential fact, but one of "the facts which affect the central fact". As to this there is no difference of opinion. Whether the essential fact be the leaven or the three measures of meal, the only question regarding the woman is, How does she affect the central fact? According to Dr. Morgan, the woman represents "authority and management in the

hospitality of a home ". This would seem to favour the domestic interpretation of the parable, since among Israelites, as among all oriental peoples, the special sphere of woman was the home. But, according to Dr. Morgan, the meal is a sacramental meal; and leaven was strictly forbidden in the meal offering. If this were so, then the woman would have been guilty of a most serious offence when she introduced leaven into meal intended not for domestic but for sacramental use. In this case the meaning of the parable is this: " The Kingdom of Heaven is likened to that which happens when something is introduced which makes fellowship on the highest level impossible, because it has a corrupting influence: leaven swells and puffs up." In other words, the leaven represents " degeneration in power, breaking in upon fellowship, and so marring the witness of men and women to the Kingdom of God ". Hence Scofield tells us that " a woman in the bad ethical sense, always symbolizes something out of place *religiously* ". This is a serious charge. Not only does the leaven represent an evil principle; the woman represents an evil agent. We may then compare her to the " enemy " in the parable of the Tares. Yet it is to be noted that this is purely a matter of inference. The woman, so far as the language of the parable is concerned, is a neutral figure. There is not a word of criticism of denunciation of her or of her act to be found in the parable. It might be argued, of course, that " hid " implies secrecy and stealth, and indicates that the act was one which could not bear the light of day, but was instigated by the powers of darkness. But such an interpretation is by no means necessary. The word " hide " is used in both a good and a bad sense in Scripture; and its use can be accounted for here without in any way reflecting on the motive or act of the woman. It suggests that the amount of leaven was so small as compared with the three measures of meal that it was completely hidden or concealed in it, so completely hidden that at first there was nothing to indicate its presence in the meal. Like the grain of mustard seed, the leaven would then speak of the insignificant beginnings of a movement which would have results out of all proportion, seemingly, to the means employed to accomplish it. But according to this interpretation the woman was guilty of a most reprehensible act. She took leaven and put it into holy meal, meal intended for sacramental use. She did this secretly and with evil intent. And her act had the most disastrous consequences. Now if this is the

meaning of the parable, we are entitled to ask those who favour this slanderous interpretation, as it may truly be called, to tell us just how the woman would become guilty of such an act; in other words, to prove both intent and opportunity.

There were two great occasions when, according to the Mosaic Law, unleavened bread was to be used. The first was the Passover and the feast of Unleavened Bread which followed it. We know from the Talmud and from the practice of orthodox Jews even to-day with what scrupulous care the Jews removed the least particle of leaven from their homes at this memorable season of the year. Could the parable refer to such a time as that? Observe the words, "until the whole was leavened". They cannot be taken to mean that the woman mixed just a trace of leaven with the meal, enough to defile it, but not enough to be detected by the religious authorities or by the family and friends who partook of the cakes. No, these words must imply that the cakes were not to be baked until the dough had been thoroughly leavened. In other words, this woman is to be thought of as supplying her household with leavened bread at that very season of the year when the use of leaven was strictly prohibited. Is there anything in the parable to warrant the placing of this interpretation upon it?

The other occasion for the use of unleavened bread would be the offering of a meal offering, either in connection with the offering of an animal sacrifice or by itself. Such an offering was made at the sanctuary and presented to the priest. It was apparently brought either uncooked or in the form of cakes (Lev. ii. 1-16); and the priest either burned the whole of it on the altar or reserved part for himself. For a woman to have mixed leaven with meal intended for the meal offering would have been a grievous offence. But what would be here involved would be the presentation to the priest of leavened bread ("until the whole was leavened"), or of cakes made of leavened bread. Unless the priest was in collusion with her in this flagrant violation of the Law, such an act would be instantly detected and visited with condign punishment. Yet it is to be noted that what has just been said would apply only to that meal offering, or the portion of it, which was intended for the altar (Lev. ii. 11). For according to Lev. vii. 11ff. the peace offering of thanksgiving was to include both unleavened and leavened cakes. It would be natural to infer that the one was intended

for the altar and the officiating priest, the other to be partaken of by the lay offerer and his family. With regard to the eating of firstlings and tithes at the sanctuary (Deut. xiv. 22) nothing is said about the use of unleavened bread; and for the occasions when flesh was to be eaten at home (Deut. xii. 23) the all-important and express prohibition is "eating with the blood", but nothing is said about the use of unleavened bread. Consequently, since the use of leaven was prohibited only at the Passover and the feast of Unleavened Bread, and in such meal offerings as were to be burnt in whole or in part on the altar, the mixing of leaven in meal intended for such use would be a shocking and almost unbelievable violation of the Law of Moses, not to mention the traditions of the elders by which the life of the devout Jew of New Testament times was so rigidly governed. It is hard to believe that such an interpretation of the parable as Dispensationalists commend to us would suggest, not to say commend, itself to any right-thinking Jew who was listening to Jesus' words. He would dismiss it as sacrilegious and blasphemous.

V. UNTIL THE WHOLE WAS LEAVENED

As this concluding detail in the parable of the Leaven is regarded by Dr. Morgan and the Dispensationalists as clinching their argument against the optimistic interpretation, it requires very careful consideration.

1. In arguing against the optimistic interpretation Dr. Morgan asserts that it "contradicts the teaching of all the other parables so far as considered, in every one of which Jesus, referring to the process of the age, always marked limitations". That this parable teaches that the whole world is to be leavened by the gospel of the kingdom is, he tells us, "disproved by the history of the centuries". Furthermore, "Seeing that all the other parables speak of mixture, if this of the leaven is taken as being good, the whole leavened, then there is no mixture at all. This would contradict the teaching of all the other parables". Now it is to be carefully noted that, if this argument is to be used in favour of the one interpretation and against the other, it must be applied to both in exactly the same way. If these words refute the optimistic interpretation because both Scripture and history disprove the claim that the *whole world* is to be leavened by the gospel, then the pessimistic view must stand or fall by the answer it gives to the same question, whether the

whole world will be leavened by the evil principle of apostasy and unbelief. But Dr. Morgan does not so apply it. He describes the leaven as standing for rationalism, hypocrisy, materialism, toleration of evil, mere formalism—evils which, were they to prevail fully, must destroy the Church and its witness. But he makes this significant qualification: "The whole will be leavened. It does not mean that the whole will become leaven, but the influence of leaven hidden in the measures of meal, that illustrate fellowship, will pervade the whole movement." This, it will be observed, is a very important limitation. Evil will "pervade the whole movement"; but the whole movement will not become evil. This limitation, if it is valid, must also be quite as applicable to the interpretation rejected by Dr. Morgan as to the one which he advocates. It would mean that the leaven, regarded as representing the gospel of the kingdom, which has as its aim that God's will shall be done on earth as it is done in heaven, will "pervade the whole movement". The world will not become a completely saved, a perfectly sanctified community. But the gospel leaven will work pervasively and powerfully throughout the entire fabric of human society. That this interpretation finds strong support elsewhere in Scripture will appear shortly. But we question whether Dr. Morgan's interpretation of these words is justified by the language of the parable, by the obvious meaning of its symbolism. The reason for the use of leaven in bread is not that the bread may become, be changed into, leaven, but simply to penetrate the meal completely with this active and wholesome ferment. If this is accomplished, if "the whole" has been leavened, the aim has been fully realised. And it is to be noted that Dr. Morgan in arguing against the optimistic interpretation tells us that the question asked by our Lord, "When the Son of Man cometh, will he find faith on the earth?" demands as answer an emphatic "No!" The argument against the optimistic interpretation in so far as it is derived from these words "until the whole was leavened" loses much if not all of its cogency if it is qualified in any way. If applied without qualification to the pessimistic view, it teaches that the end of the kingdom of heaven on earth is total apostasy!

2. Dispensationalists give us an interpretation of the words, "until the whole was leavened", which seems at first sight to have the virtue of consistency, to be quite devoid of qualification or compromise. They hold that these words imply total apostasy.

But the force of their argument is lost when we ask the question, "Total apostasy of what?" Of the *whole world*? Not at all, of the professing church, of Christendom. The true Church will not become apostate; it will remain faithful until the end. It will be complete at the rapture; and every real Christian will then be caught up to meet the Lord in the air. At that time also the apostasy of the professing church will be complete; and when the rapture takes place there will not be a true believer left on earth. Consequently, if the parable teaches total apostasy, it can refer only to the professing church and can have no reference to the true Church. Yet Scofield tells us definitely that these seven parables "describe the result of the presence of the gospel in the world during the present age. . . . Briefly that result is the mingled tares and wheat, good fish and bad, in the sphere of Christian profession. It is Christendom." Now since the wheat and the good fish clearly represent the true believers within the mass of outward profession which we call the visible church, if the parable of the Leaven teaches complete apostasy, it cannot refer to the "sphere of Christian profession" as do the other two, it can only refer to the false professors, the mere professors, to those who are Christians in name only. Otherwise it would teach the total apostasy of the true Church, which Dispensationalists would not dream of asserting. Consequently, it appears that their interpretation involves an impossible distinction between the true Church and the "professing" church which are "mingled" in this present age and the complete ignoring of the true Church in the parable of the Leaven.

3. Having observed that the Dispensational interpretation of this parable necessitates the exclusion of any references to the true Church from it, it is interesting to notice that the attempt has been made to defend the opposite position, viz. that the true Church only is referred to. Thus Peters, one of the many Pre-millennialists who adopt the optimistic interpretation, argues that the "three measures of meal" represent the true Church and that the meaning of the words until the whole was leavened "is that "previous to the setting up of the Kingdom a *definite number of the elect* must first be obtained", and that they are to be obtained by "gradual appropriation through Divine truth". The difficulty with this in some respects rather attractive interpretation is that it restricts the meaning of the words "kingdom

of heaven " in a way which seems to be definitely precluded by those parables which speak of " mixture ". It gives the word here a narrow sense, while in the other parables it is clearly used in a broad sense. It makes it refer only to the elect, to the wheat and the good fish, and ignore completely the tares and the bad fish. If we must reject the Dispensational interpretation because it arbitrarily excludes the true Church from the scope of the parable, we must reject this one which excludes the " professing " church, and for the same reason. The first four of the parables are so similar that it is difficult or impossible to believe that the words " the kingdom of heaven " have one meaning in two of them and a different, a much more restricted, meaning in the other two.

4. We do not believe that it is necessary for the advocates of the optimistic interpretation to resort to any dubious or recondite explanation of the three measures of meal, in order to bring their interpretation into accord with the other teachings of our Lord, both the parabolic and the literal. The most obvious reference of the words, " until the whole was leavened ", is to the instructions given by our Lord for the world-wide proclamation of the gospel in Matt. xxiv. 14; xxviii. 19ff.; Luke xxiv. 47; Acts i. 8f. That this programme is to be carried out and must be carried out during the present age is indicated with especial clearness by the concluding words of Matt. xxiv. 14, " And then shall the end come." This command to preach the gospel in the whole world has been the great challenge to the Church of Christ for nearly two thousand years. These are her marching orders. The *whole world* is to be leavened in this way with the gospel of the kingdom. This much is clearly implied by the parable. But it is not all that is implied. The fact that the leaven is a powerful ferment seems clearly to mean that the proclamation of the gospel will meet with success, with great success. This also finds clear support, notably in two sayings of Jesus. The first is this: " It is expedient for you that I go away. For if I go not away the Comforter will not come unto you; but if I go, I will send him unto you " (John xvi. 7f.). This can only mean that, for the present work of the Church, Christ's presence through the Spirit is more necessary and efficacious, than His visible presence would be. The other contains the words of the Great Commission: " All power is given unto me in heaven and on earth. Go ye therefore . . . and lo, I

am with you alway, even unto the end of the world " (Matt. xxviii. 18ff.). There is no room for pessimism or defeatism in these words. The Captain of our salvation is an invincible commander. His triumph is sure and assured. The time will surely come, when "the kingdom of this world" will become "the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ" (Rev. xi. 15). The words "until the whole was leavened" may well look forward to this glorious consummation of which so many passages in the Old Testament speak in such glowing words (e.g., Ps. lxxii. 11; Isa. ii. 2). If they do, they need no modification or qualification. They clearly speak of the coming triumph.

In studying the parables and the figurative language with which Scripture abounds it is always important to pay careful attention to the limitations imposed by the figure employed. No single parable or figure teaches or can teach the whole truth or give the complete picture. This fact finds striking illustration, for example, when we compare the dreams recorded in Dan. ii and vii. The fall of the "great image" is described with scarcely a hint of the terrible conflict which the overthrow of the fourth kingdom will involve. That kingdom is, indeed, described as terrible and invincible, but the triumph of the kingdom of the God of heaven is represented as both sudden and gradual: the stone smote the image and demolished it, and the stone became a great mountain and filled the whole earth. The interpretation is given in v. 44, "but it shall break in pieces and consume all these kingdoms, and it shall stand for ever". Not a word is said in chap. ii about the "little horn" and his efforts to wear out the saints of the most High. The differences in detail between the dreams are all the more significant because of the remarkable similarity between them. The dreams are in no sense contradictory; they are mutually supplementary. The parable of the Leaven, like Dan. ii, speaks only of the triumph of the kingdom. The placing of the leaven in the meal and the gradual leavening describe the inception and progress of the kingdom under a different figure. Yet it is not too much to say that the teaching of both is essentially the same. And just as Dan. ii is to be interpreted in connection with Dan. vii, so the parable of the Leaven is to be interpreted by those which precede it. The figures are different, but all speak of the triumph of Christ's kingdom. They are all optimistic in this sense: they teach the final triumph

of the Church of Christ. Some stress the fact of opposition, the presence of mixture, the subtlety and persecuting fury of the enemy, the danger of apostasy; others do not. But all view the triumph as assured.

We have devoted so much time to the study of the parable of the Leaven, because it is so often appealed to in support of a teaching which we hold to be both unscriptural and dangerous. The Christian Church is now in the thick of the fight. She is sore beset by her enemies, by foes without and foes within. Pessimism and defeatism threaten to unnerve her arm, to strike the sword from her hand. Nowhere does this dangerous attitude find fuller expression than in the teaching that *the kingdom of heaven is like unto an evil principle which a woman took and hid in three measures of meal until the whole was leavened*. This changes the parable from a glorious challenge to faith and to strenuous endeavour in an enterprise whose triumph is assured, into a counsel of despair. The terrible "*Sauve qui peut*" of the stricken field takes the place of the "*In hoc signo vinces*" which has inspired the armies of the Lord to fight the good fight of faith, even when the forces of evil seemed invincible. What the Church needs to-day, when the strife is fierce and the warfare long, is to catch anew the sound of the distant triumph song; to recapture that Christian optimism which is guaranteed in the Great Commission. The Church has always believed that it is taught in the parable of the Leaven. We believe the Church will continue to believe this, and that she is fully entitled to do so.

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