

NT6215, The Parables of Jesus
Course Procedures and Outline
Spring Semester, 2009 (Session I)

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Purpose of the Course

The purpose of the course is to enter into an in-depth study of the parables of Jesus as presented in the Synoptic Gospels. Our focus will be upon the nature of parables, history and methods of parable interpretation, and the interpretation of several parables. Most of our emphasis will be on the latter, and in the interpretive process attention will be given to the use and message of the parables at various points in the history of the synoptic tradition and their significance for today.

Course Objectives

- To become familiar with the basic teachings of the parables of Jesus.
- To acquire an approach to interpreting the parables of Jesus that reflects integrity and proceeds with an awareness of the interpretive steps being taken.
- To gain confidence in dealing with issues that arise from a careful study of the parables of Jesus.
- To increase one's ability to use scholarly tools and materials in the study of the parables of Jesus and of Scripture generally.
- To improve skills for the interpretation of Scripture.
- To become confident of one's ability to teach a Bible study and/or to preach a sermon based on the parables of Jesus.
- To become aware of how one's reading of the parables of Jesus and the Scriptures as a whole is influenced by confessional and contemporary concerns and values.

Course Procedures

Required Book:

Arland J. Hultgren, *The Parables of Jesus: A Commentary*. Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2000.

Recommended Books:

Frederick H. Borsch, *Many Things in Parables: Extravagant Stories of New Community*. Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1988.

Charles E. Carlston, *The Parables of the Triple Tradition*. Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1975.

C. H. Dodd, *The Parables of the Kingdom*, rev. ed. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1961.

John R. Donahue, *The Gospel in Parable: Metaphor, Narrative, and Theology in the Synoptic Gospels*. Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1988.

William R. Herzog, *Parables as Subversive Speech: Jesus as Pedagogue of the Oppressed*. Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1994.

Joachim Jeremias, *The Parables of Jesus*. 2d rev. ed. Upper Saddle River: Prentice Hall, 1972.

Richard A. Longenecker, (ed.), *The Challenge of Jesus' Parables*. Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 2000.

Bernard Brandon Scott, *Hear Then the Parable: A Commentary on the Parables of Jesus*.

- Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1989.
- Snodgrass, Klyne, *Stories with Intent: A Comprehensive Guide to the Parables of Jesus*. Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 2008.
- Robert H. Stein, *An Introduction to the Parables of Jesus*. Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1981.
- Stiller, Brian C. *Preaching Parables to Postmoderns*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2005.
- Synopsis Quattuor Evangeliorum* (or *Synopsis of the Four Gospels*), ed. Kurt Aland. Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 1985 (or later).

Expectations:

1. The class meets three hours per week. The format for those hours will consist of lectures and discussions on the parables of Jesus and secondary readings. Each student is expected to observe the weekly schedule and read relevant scholarship on the parables being covered in class each week. Participation in all aspects of the course is expected.

2. By Thursday, February 19, each student is expected to have read A. Hultgren, *The Parables of Jesus*, pp. 1-19, and B. Stiller, *Preaching Parables to Postmoderns*, pp. 1-30, and be prepared to discuss this material in class. The latter is on both desk and e-reserve. For e-reserves, go to <http://www.luthersem.edu/library/ereserves.asp> and follow the instructions.

3. By Thursday, February 26, each student is expected to have read Norman A. Huffman, "Atypical Features in the Parables of Jesus," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 97 (1978): 207-220 (on e-reserve), and be prepared to discuss this material in class.

4. Each student is expected to do an exegetical study of a particular parable. The work is to be 8 to 10 pages in length and submitted to the instructor no later than Wednesday, March 25, 2009. A guide for exegesis will be provided. A list of parables recommended for study will be made available.

5. Each student is expected to give thought to one of the following questions (or another) and share his or her thinking with the class: (1) What should go into the making of a study of the parables in a parish setting? (2) What would a good 'lesson plan' for teaching the parables look like? (3) Looking at what parables are not included in the ecumenical, three-year lectionary, are we deprived of anything significant? (4) Insofar as the parables portray rural imagery so often, how can they work well in urban settings? (5) What parables are most crucial for proclamation and/or teaching in our time? Other questions can be posed in consultation with the instructor. Each student will make an oral presentation in class week-by-week. A schedule will be prepared.

6. Those taking the course for graduate (Post-M.Div.) credit must meet the requirements listed above and must also submit a five to ten page paper, giving a summary and critique of one of the following books listed as "Recommended": Borsch, Donahue, Herzog, Jeremias, Longenecker, Scott, Snodgrass, or another book approved by the instructor. This is due by Wednesday, March 25, 2009.

7. M.Div. and M.A. students may take the course either for a letter grade (A, B, C, etc.) or on a Pass/Fail basis. The student who elects a letter grade should indicate this choice in writing no later than Thursday, February 26, 2009.

Course Schedule

February 12, 2009

Organization.

Lectures: Introduction to Parables; Parable Interpretation; Parables in the Gospel of Thomas.

February 19, 2009

Discussion of A. Hultgren, *Parables*, 1-19, and B. Stiller, *Preaching Parables to Postmoderns*, 1-30.

Focus of the Day: "Parables of the Kingdom of God."

Lecture: "The Kingdom of God."

Readings prior to class: A. Hultgren, *Parables*, 1-19; 383-423; B. Stiller, *Preaching Parables to Postmoderns*, 1-30.

Exegetical Studies in Class: Parables on the Growth of the Kingdom

Mark 4:26-29, The Seed Growing Secretly

Matthew 13:31-32, The Mustard Seed

Matthew 13:33, The Leaven

Parables on the Joy of Discovering the Kingdom

Matthew 13:44, The Treasure in the Field

Matthew 13:45-46, The Pearl of Great Price

February 26, 2009

Discussion of N. Huffman, "Atypical Features."

Focus of the Day: "Parables of the Revelation of God."

Lecture: "Hyperbole and Surprise in Parables about God."

Readings prior to class: Huffman article; A. Hultgren, *Parables*, 20-46, 70-91.

Exegetical Studies in Class: Parables of God's Extraordinary Forgiveness

Matthew 18:23-35, The Unforgiving Slave

Matthew 20:1-16, The Workers in the Vineyard

A Parable of God's Extraordinary Love for the Lost

Luke 15:11-32, The Prodigal Son

March 5, 2009

Focus of the Day: "Parables of Exemplary Behavior."

Lecture: "Parables as Examples of Behavior."

Readings prior to class: A. Hultgren, *Parables*, 92-103, 110-128.

Exegetical Studies in Class: Three Parables of Behavior

Luke 10:25-37, The Good Samaritan

Luke 16:19-31, The Rich Man and Lazarus

Luke 18:9-14, The Pharisee and the Tax Collector

March 12, 2009

Focus of the Day: “Parables of Wisdom.”

Lectures: “Wisdom in Old Testament and Jewish Traditions” and “Jesus as Teacher of Wisdom.”

Readings prior to class: A. Hultgren, *Parables*, 137-157, 169-179.

Exegetical Studies in Class: Some Parables of Wisdom

Luke 14:28-33, Building a Tower, The King Going to War

Luke 16:1-8, The Unjust Manager

Matthew 25:1-13, The Ten Maidens

March 19, 2009

Focus of the Day: “Parables of Final Judgment.”

Lecture: “Judgment in the Teaching of Jesus.”

Readings prior to class: A. Hultgren, *Parables*, 292-330.

Exegetical Studies in Class: Some Parables on the Judgment

Matthew 13:24-30, 36-42, The Weeds in the Wheat

Matthew 13:47-50, The Dragnet

Matthew 25:31-46, The Last Judgment

Lesson plans and “new” parables.

Exegetical Studies Due Date: March 25, 2009.

Bibliography on the Parables of Jesus

For a recent bibliography, see the “General Bibliography on the Parables of Jesus” in A. Hultgren, *Parables*, pp. 477-485, and the bibliographies supplied at the end of the treatment of each parable. Since the publication of that volume, the following should be added:

Hedrick, Charles. *Many Things in Parables: Jesus and His Modern Critics*. Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2004.

Olmstead, Wesley G. *Matthew's Trilogy of Parables: The Nation, the Nations and the Reader in Matthew 21:28-22:14*. SNTSMS 127. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2004.

Snodgrass, Klyne, *Stories with Intent: A Comprehensive Guide to the Parables of Jesus*. Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 2008.

Stiller, Brian C. *Preaching Parables to Postmoderns*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2005.

Modern Parables. A DVD series produced by Thomas Purifoy of Compass Cinema and available at www.modernparables.com.