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ASSOCIATED CANADIAN THEOLOGICAL SCHOOLS OF TRINITY WESTERN UNIVERSITY

Graduate Course Syllabus

Course Number: BNT 637OL

Course Name: Exposition of Jesus' Parables (3
credit hours)

Semester and Year: Sum 22

Instructor: Larry Perkins, Ph.D.

Contact Information: perkins@twu.ca

Course Instruction: May 2 - June 25, 2022

Course Description

Jesus' parables form a major, distinctive portion of his teaching in the Gospel narratives and express his prophetic role and mission as Messiah. His parables give us our most direct contact with his voice and theological worldview, and the response of his contemporaries to these stories helps us understand the mixed evaluation he received. The parables define his relationship with Yahweh, his role in forming the new people of the Kingdom, the decision that every person has to make regarding his claims, and how he intends people to live as part of his Kingdom. In other words, Jesus' theology emerges especially in his parables.

It is also the case that the interpretation of Jesus' parables presents a singular hermeneutical challenge for the contemporary church. If Jesus intended his parables to challenge the first century Jewish audience in Galilee, then how are they relevant today? Can we depend upon the Gospel narratives both to present the stories accurately as Jesus spoke them and to portray the contexts in which he presented them? Given their setting within the Gospel narratives of Mark, Matthew and Luke, how should we discern the early church's appropriation of these stories? Are they moral tales, spiritual illustrations, prophetic analogs, or theological allegories – or all or none of the above? How do Jesus' parables relate to the parables we find in later, rabbinic writings? Is Jesus following an already established teaching tradition in Judaism, or is he innovative, creating a new teaching medium that was formative for later rabbinic Judaism? To what degree are the parables intended to be commentary on Israel's spiritual condition? What claims is Jesus making by using parables given their occurrence in the Jewish scriptures?

In the course, we will consider the parables as they occur in the triple tradition, in two of the Gospels, and those that are unique to a single Gospel. We will also inquire as to why John's Gospel lacks parables, at least in the form we find them in the other three Gospels.

The intent in all of this is to enable Christian leaders to interpret Gospel parables contextually, understand their role in Jesus' mission, appropriate the message of Jesus' parables for themselves, and to articulate this message effectively to others.

Course Objectives

By successfully completing this course, each student should be able to:

1. Explain the general history of the interpretation of parables within the Christian tradition, particularly as this relates to the issue of allegory, possible Jewish precedents, and the reason why Jesus employed this genre;
2. Interpret parables as they occur in the narrative contexts of the Synoptic Gospels and discern key elements of Jesus' theology expressed within them;
3. Explain the relationship between parables, prophecy and apocalyptic as they occur within the canonical context;
4. Articulate a method for reading and interpreting parables today in a way that remains faithful to Jesus' intent, the context of the Gospel narratives, and the needs of 21st century believers.

Required Texts and Materials

Required:

Read all parables in the texts of the Gospels of Matthew, Mark, and Luke, using a Gospel synopsis so that you can compare how the parables occur in respective contexts.

Craig Blomberg, *Interpreting the Parables*. Downers Grove, Ill: InterVarsity Press, 1990. (334 pages)

Madeline Boucher. *The Mysterious Parable*. CBQMS 6. Washington, D.C.: The Catholic Biblical Association of America, 1977. (101 pages)

Richard N. Longenecker (ed.), *The Challenge of Jesus' Parables*. Grand Rapids, Mi.: Eerdmans, 2000. (324 pages)

Larry J. Perkins. *A Brief Interaction with Jesus' Parables*. Pdf on the course Moodle site. 2019. (140 pages)

Klyne Snodgrass, *Stories with Intent. A Comprehensive Guide to the Parables of Jesus*. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2008. (Extensive bibliography is provided in this volume.) (846 pages)

Recommended/Optional Resources:

Boucher, Madeline. *The Parables*. New Testament Message 7. Wilmington, DEL: Michael Glazier, Inc. 1986.

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

Funk, Robert. *Language, Hermeneutic, and Word of God*. New York, NY: Harper and Row, 1966 ("The Parable as Metaphor" 133-162)

Jeremias, Joachim. *The Parables of Jesus*. Rev.ed. London: SCM Press Ltd., 1972.

Johnston, Harvey & Harvey McArthur. *They Also Taught in Parables*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervans

Kistemaker, Simon J. *The Parables of Jesus*. Eugene, OR.: Wipf and Stock, 1998.

Perrin, Norman. *Jesus and the Language of the Kingdom. Symbol and Metaphor in New Testament Interpretation*. Philadelphia, PA: Fortress Press, 1976 (89-193).

Stern, David. *Parables in Midrash: Narrative and Exegesis in Rabbinic Literature*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1991 (188-206).

Thiessen, Gerd & Annette Merz. *The Historical Jesus. A Comprehensive Guide*. Minneapolis, MI: Fortress Press, 1998 (316-346).

Wright, N.T. *The New Testament and the People of God*. Minneapolis, MI: Fortress Press, 1992 (74-77, 433-434).

Wright, N.T. *Jesus and the Victory of God*. Minneapolis, MI: Fortress Press, 1996 (174-182; 226-244; 489-519; 563-576; 631-645).

See articles in:

Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels

Dictionary of New Testament Backgrounds

See commentaries on passages in various Gospels.

See additional resources in Logos Bible Software:

Jackson, Jeffrey Glen. *Synopsis of Matthew, Mark and Luke*. Bellingham, WA: Logos Bible Software, 2009.

Eusebius of Caesarea. *Eusebian Canons*. Bellingham, WA: Logos Bible Software, 2009.

Robertson, A. T. *A Harmony of the Gospels*. Bellingham, WA: Logos Bible Software, 2009.

Burton, Ernest DeWitt. *A Harmony of the Synoptic Gospels for Historical and Critical Study*. New York; Chicago; Boston: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1917.

Sharman, Henry Burton. *Records of the Life of Jesus Book I: The Record of Mt--Mk--Lk, Book II: The Record of John*. Bellingham, WA: Logos Bible Software, 2009.

Course Instructional Content

You are required to watch, listen to, and read the course instructional content and interact about the content in the online forums. The full instructional script along with links to the videos and audio podcasts is posted in the Moodle online classroom.

To access the Logos supplementary resources, you will require an ACTS Seminaries FaithLife Logos account that is accessible for diploma and degree students through the ACTS' office. If you are a degree or diploma student, please contact the ACTS office for access. If you are not enrolled in a diploma or degree program, or for help with technical issues with respect to this course, including audio or video content and the Moodle platform, please contact T Anderson, ACTS World Campus Program Coordinator (tanderson@mbseminary.ca) for assistance.

Course Outline by Week

- Session One: Setting the Scene: Matters of Context and Interpretation for Jesus' Parables Then and Now
- Session Two: Jesus' Parables: Assumptions and Principles of Interpretation
- Session Three: Principles for Interpreting Jesus' Parables
- Session Four: Prophetic Parables Reflecting Israel's Spiritual Situation
- Session Five: Parables Defining Jesus' Role and Mission and the Nature of the Kingdom of God
- Session Six: Parables of Discipleship: Entering the Kingdom
- Session Seven: Parables of Discipleship: Life in the Kingdom
- Session Eight: Parables, Jesus, Theology and Ethics

Course Assignments

Assignments are due by 5pm (your time) on the day they are due. I would ask that you submit your assignments in the online Moodle classroom. When you go to there, you will see assignment folders where you can submit assignments. Once I have marked your assignment, I will return your assignment with comments and evaluation by email with your grade. Please note that I may deduct 5% of an assignment's total possible value for each day that it is late. I will consider extensions in exceptional circumstances. For the rare occasions when I allow a student to rewrite an assignment, I reserve the right to deduct from the assignment's value before assigning a grade to the rewritten assignment.

Here is an overview of all the assignments followed by a detailed description of them:

Week	Due Date	Assignments	% Final Grade	Cumulative %
	April 29, 11-12am (Pacific Time)	On line Zoom meeting for Course organization		
1	May 2-7 (Sess. 1)	Pre-reading		
2	May 9-14 (Sess. 2)	Forum Week #1	5%	5%

3	May 16-21 (Sess. 3)	Forum Week #2	5%	10%
4	May 23-28 (Sess. 4)	Nature of Parable Paper	30%	40%
5	May 30—June 4 (Sess. 5)	Forum Week #3	5%	45%
6	June 6-11 (Sess. 6)			
7	June 13-18 (Sess. 7)	Forum Week #4	5%	50%
8	June 20-25 (Sess. 8)	Reading Report & Response	15%	65%
		Interpreting Kingdom Parables	35%	100%

Overview of Assignments

Due Date	Assignments	Percentage of Final Grade	Cumulative Percentage
End of Week 1			
Week 2	<p>Forum Participation</p> <p>Question 1: <i>C. Evans in his essay "Parables in Early Judaism" (Longenecker, 51-78) notes (pages 65-66) the sparse amount of comparative parable materials that appears in Jewish documents dated 50 BCE to 50 CE. But then, he documents the many Rabbinic parables in the Mishnah and Talmud that emerge as written documents in the late second century CE. Discuss the extent to which Jesus' use of parables may be a distinctive characteristic of his teaching in contrast to his contemporaries. Should we consider the parables in the Mishnah and Talmud as evidence that Rabbis in Jesus' day also used parables? Why/why not? If Jesus' usage is somewhat distinctive, then why did he adopt parables as a central feature to his discourse?</i></p> <p>Question 2: If Jesus' use of parables is somewhat distinctive for him and his mission, what does it reveal about his understanding of his mission? In other words, what does Jesus' use of parables teach us about him as Son of God and Messiah?</p>	5%	
End of Week 2 (May 14)			
Week 3	<p>Forum Participation</p> <p>Question 1: The written Gospels testify to Jesus' use of parables among people in Galilee and Jerusalem c. 27-30 CE. Discuss the extent to</p>	5%	

	<p>which this initial Jewish context for Jesus' use of parables should form the interpretive grid for our understanding of his parables today. What evidence do we have in the written Gospels for the way the early church interpreted Jesus' parables differently after Jesus' ascension? To what extent should we take our cue for interpreting the parables from contexts of the written Gospels?</p> <p>Question 2: People often want to bend the meaning of parables to suit their own theological or ethical agendas. Should the contextual sense for individual parables presented by the narrative contexts in the Gospels serve as arbiters of meaning? Why? Why not? What difference does it make for the gospel message and our understanding of Jesus today?</p>		
End of Week 3 (May 21)			
End of Week 4 (May 28)			
Week 5	<p>Forum Participation</p> <p>Question 1: Snodgrass proposes that some parables specifically interact with Israelite history (cf. pages 255-326). What is the general theme of such parables? Do these parables resemble the parables that we find in the Old Testament (i.e., those in visions, those in the prophets, Nathan's parable in 2 Samuel 12, etc.)? How do we apply the message of these parables to our context today?</p> <p>Question 2: Believers today read parables through the grid of Paul's theology or as moral tales. However, if centre piece of Jesus' message was "the good news about the Kingdom of God," how does this reality shape our interpretation of his parables? Can and should we use the parables of Jesus recover a more balanced understanding of the "good news," especially as it relates to Jesus' message about the Kingdom of God?</p>	5%	
End of Week 5 (June 4)			
End of Week 6 (June 11)			
Week 7	Forum Participation	5%	

	<p>Question 1: It is difficult to know when a section of Jesus' teaching is a parable or not. For example, the story of Lazarus and the Rich Person (Luke 16:19-31) or Jesus' discourse about the judgment over which he will preside at his Second Coming (Matthew 25:31-46) have parable-like characteristics, but are not identified as parables per se. So do we have warrant to treat such segments of Jesus' teaching as parables? What is your conclusion about these two segments – are they parables or not and what are the implications of your conclusion for their interpretation?</p> <p>Question 2: Both of these segments in Jesus' teaching deal with life in the age to come and how our actions in this age determine our destiny. How can this focus in Jesus' teaching become more central to our presentation of the good news? How should this teaching be shaping kingdom communities (i.e., church communities) today?</p>		
End of Week 7 (Jun. 18)			
End of Week 8 (Jun. 25)			

Assignments

1. Course Pre-Reading Requirement

Due to the condensed nature of this course, please have the following read before the course begins on May 2, 2022:

Craig Blomberg. *Interpreting the Parables*. Downers Grove, Ill: InterVarsity Press, 1990. Entire volume.

Madeline Boucher. *The Mysterious Parable*. CBQMS 6. Washington, D.C.: The Catholic Biblical Association of America, 1977. Entire volume.

You will be expected to integrate ideas from textbook readings into the forum discussions and other assignments.

2. Online Forum Participation (20% of the final grade, 5% each)

This course has four online forum weeks where you will have an opportunity to interact with others in the class around key questions, assignments and/or additional lecture material. These discussions are designed to foster creative discussion and growth in theological understanding and acumen. You should plan to invest approximately four hours into each forum week. Each forum is worth 5% of your final grade.

Students are expected to contribute to the forum discussions by posting a minimum of three conversational and two substantive contributions per forum week. Please make sure that you spread out your contributions over at least three days during the designated forum weeks so that you engage in the forum conversations at different points.

By conversational contributions, I mean simply joining the flow of discussion with shorter responses (e.g. questions, affirmations, quick thoughts about what someone has said).

By substantive responses, I mean responses that show a deep processing of relevant ideas (this usually takes 200-300 words). We have a tremendous opportunity to build upon one another's knowledge, insights, and experience. Our goal is to collaborate in the forum. At times, we will respectfully challenge each other. We anticipate that this will be a rich time of dialogue. To create a safe environment for this to take place, we must build a supportive subculture that encourages one another. Disagreeing and challenging can be stimulating if done in an edifying manner.

Substantive participation may include (among other things):

- Providing and developing a new thought, idea, or perspective.
- Citing an experience or example of what we are learning and showing how it applies.
- Adding a new twist on a perspective.
- Critically reflecting on an idea/concept.
- Questioning or challenging a principle/perspective and giving reasons for your questioning.
- Integrating Scripture and other sources in a meaningful way

What Substantive Participation is NOT:

- Very basic comments such as "I agree" or "I disagree."
- Restating what someone has said (*unless there is a direct purpose in doing so*).
- Disrespectfully disagreeing.
- Pat answers that are not thought-provoking.

Below are examples of how to stimulate your own and others' thinking:

- What would happen if...
- Other times it may be helpful to...
- It is my understanding...what is your experience with this?
- You might approach this from...
- Is it possible that...
- Would you consider...
- Maybe...
- Possibly...
- Sometimes...
- I'm wondering if...
- Do you think...

Have fun!

Note: You can use any of your forum posts in other papers for this course. I would also encourage you to view the posts of others as resources that you can cite in your papers. Everyone brings a wealth of insights into the class!

3. Essay Assignment: The Nature of Parable as Allegory (30% of the Final Grade)

We know that within the history of the interpretation of parables various questions about their character as allegory loom large. In a 2500 word paper (about ten pages, exclusive of title page, outline, and bibliography) explain the issues and reach your own conclusion, suitably argued and supported by appropriate data, about whether Jesus’ parables were allegories, what clues in respective parables support this or not, and what the implications of this would be as applied to a particular parable (you can choose which one to illustrate your argument). You should present a definition of the terms “parable” and “allegory.” You should consider whether all parables have allegorical potential or whether only certain ones have this character. If the allegorical character is limited, to what kinds of parables is it limited and why might this be? The paper will have a title page and employ footnote and bibliographical format as necessary. You should interact with the texts listed in the ‘Course Textbooks’. It is worth 30% of the final grade. It is due at the end of week 4. You should use the publications by Boucher, Snodgrass, and Blomberg as key resources in your research. The paper is **due May 28, 2022 at 5pm.**

4. Assignment: Reading Report and Reading Responses (15% of the final grade)

The student will sign the reading report (available in the Moodle classroom) indicating how much of the assigned reading they complete in the eight week. In addition, the student will define one key idea that they learned from each text. The entry for each text will be two paragraphs in length (300 words each). This is 15 % of the final grade. **Due June 25 at 5pm.**

5. Essay Assignment: Interpreting Kingdom Parables (35%)

In a 3000 word paper (about fourteen pages exclusive of title page, outline and bibliography) each student will select and interpret a parable (of the kingdom) that occurs in the “triple tradition.” This includes defining, articulating and defending an interpretation of that parable that is consistent with the Gospel narrative contexts, that explains variations that occur in the parable as it is reiterated in various Gospel narratives, that defines the contribution of this parable to our understanding of Jesus’ theology, and articulates an application of this parable and its message appropriately to a 21st century context (last 2 pages). The paper will conform to normal formatting, including footnotes and bibliography. The bibliography will contain **a reference to the best internet website on Interpreting Jesus’ Parables you can locate**, with a paragraph that describes why this website in your opinion is the best. It is worth 35% of the final grade. **Due June 25 at 5pm.**

Course Assignment Summary:

Forums	20%
Written Assignment #1 (The Nature of Parable as Allegory) (May 28)	30%
Reading Report and Reading Responses (June 25)	15%
Written Assignment #2 (Interpreting Kingdom Parables) (June 25)	35%
Total	100%

Course Evaluation

Near the conclusion of this course, you will be asked to complete a course evaluation. Because feedback is very important, the course evaluation is a required part of the course and is tied to the submission of your last assignment. The course evaluation will be integrated into the Moodle classroom in Week 8.

Grading System

Letter Grade	Percentage	Description	Grade Point	Meaning in Graduate Work
A+	97-100	Superior	4.30	Exceptionally well-reasoned, compelling development of position. Outstanding incorporation of personal vision as well as of references and resources. Strikingly appropriate examples. Extraordinary insight, critical analytical and evaluative ability, and creativity. Superlative style and language usage. Makes an original contribution and is potentially publishable.
A	93-96.99	Excellent	4.00	Well-argued and convincing development of position. Insightful incorporation of personal vision as well as of references and resources. Notably appropriate examples. Excellent insight, critical analytic and evaluative ability, and creativity. Impressive style and language use.
A-	90-92.99	Very Good	3.70	Thorough and plausible development of position. Skilful incorporation of personal vision as well as of references and resources. Very good examples. Very good insight, analytic and evaluative ability, and creativity. Commendable and fluent style and language usage.
B+	87-89.99	Proficient	3.30	Proficient development of position. Appropriate incorporation of personal vision as well as of references and resources. Relevant examples. Good quality insight, analytic and evaluative ability, and creativity. Clear and correct style and language usage.
B	83-86.99	Good	3.00	Competent development of position, but possibly with some gaps and/or limitations. Good incorporation of personal vision as well as of references and resources. Good examples. Reasonable insight, analytic and evaluative ability. Little creativity. Generally good style and language usage, but possibly with some minor flaws.
B-	80-82.99	Average	2.70	Average development of position, but with obvious gaps and/or limitations. Satisfactory incorporation of personal vision as well as of references and resources. Satisfactory examples. Reasonable insight, analytic and evaluative ability. Little creativity. Generally satisfactory style and language usage, but possibly with some minor flaws.
C+	77-79.99	Adequate	2.30	Adequate development of position with significant gaps and/or limitations. Some incorporation of personal vision as well as references and resources. Adequate use of examples. Very little creativity. Considerable number of issues related to coherence and style.
C	73-76.99	Acceptable	2.00	Limited development of position with a noticeable lack of consistency with personal vision or references. Limited integration with external sources. Acceptable analytic and evaluative ability. Numerous weaknesses in terms of clarity, coherence, and grammar.

C-	70-72.99	Needs Work	1.70	Passable but unimpressive development of position. Position not completely consistent with personal vision <i>or</i> references and resources not taken fully into account <i>or</i> examples are basic or not completely convincing <i>or</i> barely acceptable insight and analytic and evaluative ability. Adequate style and language usage, but with weaknesses in some respects (e.g., clarity, coherence, grammar). Overall quality shows noticeable deficiencies.
F	Below 70	Below Standard	0.00	Unacceptable work at graduate level. Shows lack of understanding and/or competence in several of the criteria described above. This grade is a failing grade at the graduate level.

Grade Appeals

Students can appeal their grade to the course instructor by stating in writing their reasons for contesting the grade. Deadline for such appeals is one week after the student has receipt of grade. Formal course grade appeals can be made with the ACTS Office.

Course Policies

ADD/DROP POLICY

All ACTS World Campus courses are open for registration until the first day of class. Once the class has begun, students wishing to drop the class must complete a course drop form (<https://www.actsseminaries.com/assets/acts-add-drop-change-of-registration.pdf>) and submit it to the Registrar's Office using the TWU HelpDesk feature (twu.ca/help). Tuition (excluding fees) refund rates are as follows:

Weeks 1-2 - 100%
 Week 3 - 60%
 Week 4 - 50%
 Week 5 - 40%
 Weeks 6-8 - 0%

ACADEMIC INTEGRITY AND AVOIDING PLAGIARISM AT TWU

One of the core values of Trinity Western University is the integration of academic excellence with high standards of personal, moral, and spiritual integrity. The University considers it a serious offence when an individual attempts to gain unearned academic credit. It is the student's responsibility to be informed about what constitutes academic misconduct. For details on this, and on identifying and avoiding plagiarism go to the [University Homepage > Academics > Academic Calendar](#) (p. 47).

<https://prezi.com/od62fxnkbmxh/plagiarism-how-to-get-it-out-of-your-life/> (Prezi presentation)

<http://bit.ly/1p00KX3> (Google Slide presentation offering more comprehensive information)

STUDENTS WITH A DISABILITY

Students with a disability who need assistance are encouraged to contact the Equity of Access Office upon admission to TWU to discuss their specific needs. All disabilities must be recently documented by an appropriately certified professional and include the educational impact of the disability along with recommended accommodations. Within the first two weeks of the semester, students must meet with their professors to agree on accommodations appropriate to each class. Students should follow the steps detailed by the Equity of Access Office on their website at: <http://www.twu.ca/student-life/student-success/disabilities-and-equity-access>.

HOSPITALITY IN THE CLASSROOM

TWU is committed to an ethic of inclusion centred on the principles of Christian hospitality, reciprocity and reconciliation. We seek to cultivate generous learning spaces that are based on respect for differences and are open to diverse views, opinions, and identities that are thoughtfully expressed in a collegial manner. We welcome and value all voices, including those from under- represented groups or those who have been marginalized.

The following policies are optional but recommended, to allow you to efficiently respond to student challenges to the syllabus. *Click on these fields and press delete if you do not wish to use them:*

CAMPUS CLOSURE AND CLASS CANCELLATION POLICY

In the event of extreme weather conditions or other emergency situations go to the <https://www.twu.ca/campus-notification>.

COURSE GRADE APPEALS

Students can appeal their grade to the course instructor by stating in writing their reasons for contesting the grade. Deadline for such appeals is one week after the student has receipt of grade. Formal course grade appeals can be made with the ACTS Office.

PAPER FORMATTING

The preferred manner for citations is the Turabian Notes (Bibliography) format. For information and accuracy you may wish to reference the following style guide: Kate L. Turabian, *A Manual for Writers of Research Papers, Theses and Dissertations*, 9th ed. Students may find the following website helpful: http://www.press.uchicago.edu/books/turabian/turabian_citationguide.html

LAND ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

We acknowledge that Trinity Western University, Langley campus is located on the traditional ancestral unceded territory of the Stó:lō people.