



The Parables of Jesus

Study Guide

Craig L. Blomberg, Ph.D.
*Professor of New Testament
Denver Seminary*

INSTITUTE OF
THEOLOGICAL
STUDIES



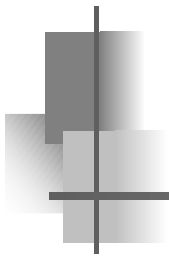


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Lecture Outlines

LECTURES 1-4a: INTERPRETING THE PARABLES: WHERE WE ARE AND HOW WE GOT THERE

Lecture 1



Introduction

- A. The familiarity of the parables
 - 1. Well-known to many even outside the church.
 - 2. Central to Jesus' ministry.
 - 3. Appeal due to narrative form.
- B. The problems which familiarity breeds
 - 1. Historical background may be lost.
 - 2. The shock factor may be missed.
 - 3. The symbolism is not always apparent.
 - 4. Certain parables are more cryptic than others.
 - 5. The challenging demands seem to conflict with other Scriptures.

I. The History of Interpretation

- A. The Patristic Era (ca. A.D. 100-500)—The development of allegorizing
- B. The Middle Ages (ca. A.D. 500-1500)
 - 1. Allegorizing increases and varies.
 - 2. Fourfold level of interpretation develops.
- C. The Reformation and Its Legacy (ca. A.D. 1500-1900)
 - 1. Protests by Luther but Christological approach predominates.
 - 2. More radical break by Calvin but successors don't follow suit.
- D. The Modern Period (ca. A.D. 1900-present)
 - 1. Adolf Jülicher's radical paradigm shift.
 - a. No allegory in the parables

Lecture Outlines

- b. One main point only
 - c. Natural, down-to-earth, and lifelike
2. Response to Jülicher: General endorsement but with modifications.
- a. Main point more concretely anchored in Jesus' historical setting
 - b. Use of the unexpected as key to the central truths
 - c. Limited role of allegory in parables
 - d. The challenge of the non-propositional interpretation



Lecture 2

II. The State of the Question

A. Points of widespread agreement (cf. G. R. Osborne, *The Hermeneutical Spiral*. Downers Grove: IVP, 1992. pp. 245ff.)

1. Note the setting in the Gospel in which the parable appears.
2. Study the structure of the narrative itself.
3. Study the historical background to the details of the story.
4. Determine the central truth or truths.
5. Relate those truths to Jesus' kingdom teaching.
6. Don't base doctrine on parables without corroborating texts in didactic material elsewhere in Scripture.
7. Apply central truths to analogous situation in modern life.
8. Interpret the parable holistically.

B. Points of continuing disagreement

1. How much allegory and where to find it?
2. How many central truths in a given parable?
3. How much is authentic?

C. These issues form basis for rest of lectures

1. Rest of #2-3 on parable and allegory.
2. #4-8 on modern methods of biblical scholarship as they impinge on these three questions.

Lecture Outlines

3. #9-20 on interpreting individual parables one at a time.
4. #21-24 on summary of conclusions—classification and theology, particularly with respect to kingdom of God and person of Christ.



III. Assessing the Debate: Parable vs. Allegory

- A. An extended illustration of the problems with five commonly held principles of interpretation: the Prodigal Son
 1. Did most of church history *overly* allegorize the parable?
 2. Does the passage make only one main point?
 3. Are there *any* allegorical details in this text?
 4. Are there any interpretations in the context of the parable which point to allegorical equations?
 5. Is the story entirely realistic, clear and simple?

Lecture 3

- B. A comparative study of rabbinic parables
 1. Introductory matters—problems of dating, similarities and differences of form and content.
 2. The parable of the banished prince.
 - a. The need for introductory and concluding material to help interpret
 - b. The semi-allegorical nature: some details display symbolism and some don't
 3. Similar conclusions from the parable of the woman who ate unripe figs.
- C. A comparative study of the modern allegory, Golding's *Lord of the Flies*
 1. Summary of plot.
 2. Symbolism conveyed by main characters.
 3. Lifelikeness but only up to a point.
 4. Central theme.

Lecture Outlines

Lecture 4



D. Revising the Rules: A Minority Report

1. The Hebrew *mashal* more significant than the Greek *parabole*.
2. Biblical scholars' misunderstanding of the nature of allegory.
3. Jesus' parables not quite as lifelike as many have imagined.
4. Even interpreters rejecting allegory regularly wind up using it.
5. Problems with older allegorizers not in use of allegory, *per se*, but
 - a. They found too many points of correspondence
 - b. They often interpreted anachronistically
6. Most of Jesus' parables therefore semi-allegorical with multiple points.
 - a. But numerous details in each do not have a "spiritual" counterpart
 - b. Those which do must be assigned referents which a first-century Galilean peasant audience could have discerned

LECTURES 4b-8: MODERN METHODS OF GOSPEL CRITICISM AS THEY IMPINGE ON THE DEBATED ISSUES OF PARABLE INTERPRETATION

I. Form Criticism

Introductory remarks about the method in general

- A. Seeming contradictions in the texts leading to questions about authenticity

Lecture Outlines

1. Tension between the parable and its interpretive framework.
2. Tension between different interpretations of the same parable.
3. Tension between two parts of the story itself.
4. Differences between parables, especially in the Gospel of Thomas.
5. Rarity of detailed allegorical interpretation.



Lecture 5

- B. General observations about form criticism by way of response
1. Issues of allegory, authenticity, and number of points again key.
 2. Advantages of method more as interpretive than as historical tool.
 3. “Laws of transmission” do not compromise Jesus’ *ipsissima vox*.
 4. Broader consideration about nature of oral tradition often crucial.
- C. Major challenges to the reliability of the parabolic tradition in general
1. Were the first Christians **interested** in preserving reliable history?
 - a. Did they expect Jesus to return in their lifetime?
 - b. Did early Christian prophecy intermingle with the words of the historical Jesus?
 2. Were the first Christians **able** to preserve reliable history?
 3. **Did** the first Christians preserve reliable history?
 - a. The problem of canonical parallels
 - b. The problem of parallels in the Gospel of Thomas
- D. Responding to these challenges

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1. A major shift in eschatological expectation in the early church not likely.
 - a. Texts sometimes interpreted as if Jesus promised to return within one generation (Mark 9:1; 13:30; Matt. 10:23) best taken in other ways
 - b. Jesus' ethical teaching suggests an ongoing community of followers
 - c. Psa. 90:4 already used by Jews to explain delay in Day of the Lord

2. Christian prophecy not likely confused with words of earthly Jesus.
 - a. Distinction clear in Rev. 2:1; Acts 11:28, 21:10-11
 - b. 1 Cor. 14:29 implies no distortions would have been accepted
 - c. "Missing" sayings of Jesus argue for clear distinction too

3. Features favorable to careful preservation of oral tradition.
 - a. Short period of time involved
 - b. Use of note-taking privately by some rabbis
 - c. Tendency to abbreviate rather than embellish
 - d. Presence of hostile eye-witnesses
 - e. Center of apostolic leadership as a check
 - f. The "hard sayings" of Jesus
 - g. Distinctions as in 1 Cor. 7:10-12
 - h. Prodigious feats of memorization
 - i. Flexible transmission still preserved fixed limits

Transition: The final question of whether Christians **did** accurately preserve Jesus' words leads us to the next method, i.e., redaction criticism



Lecture Outlines

Lecture 6

II. Redaction Criticism

A. General observations by way of introduction

1. Follows logically and chronologically from form criticism.
2. Like form criticism can be used historically or theologically; latter usually more valid.
3. Involves “thinking horizontally” and “thinking vertically” (Fee & Stuart).

B. Do its valid results substantially challenge the parables’ authenticity?

1. Those, like Jesus Seminar, who start with most divergent of seeming parallels, answer affirmatively.
2. A more careful analysis of the amount of verbal parallelism, however, suggests that the most divergent of seeming parallels are actually stories Jesus reused in more than one context.
3. The remaining clearly paralleled parables actually diverge from each other relatively minimally.

C. What can it teach us theologically?

1. The Wicked Tenants as an extended illustration of thinking horizontally.
 - a. Matthew’s focus on the shift from Israel to the church
 - b. Luke’s stylistic improvements and addition of “perhaps”
 - c. Mark’s possible interest in John the Baptist
2. Three illustrations of thinking vertically.
 - a. Matthew’s three parables of trial, sentence, execution of Israel
 - b. Luke’s Sower in sequence on hearing and doing God’s Word
 - c. A chiasmic parable sequence in Luke’s Central Section



Lecture Outlines

Lecture 7

III. Newer Hermeneutical Methods

Introduction

1. Interdisciplinary developments.
2. A paradigm shift from historical to literary concerns.
3. Crucial implications for the debate over where meaning resides in any act of communication.
4. Focus on abiding value for Christian interpreters of parables.

A. New Hermeneutic

1. The hermeneutical circle or spiral.
2. The power of narrative form to impact audiences.
3. Contemporization as a key strategy for modern use of parables.
4. Finding sufficiently analogous details as the key to legitimate contemporization.
5. The possibility of creating one's own new parables.

B. Structuralism

1. Close attention to interrelationships among main characters, objects.
2. Resulting scheme of classifying parables.
 - a. The genesis of the classification: multiple readings from the perspectives of the different characters
 - b. The results of the classification: triadic (especially monarchic), dyadic and monadic parables (completed on next tape)

Lecture 8

3. Correlation of main characters and main lessons of parables.

C. Poststructuralism



Lecture Outlines

1. Distinguishing use for determining original meaning vs. use for determining contemporary significance or application.
2. The seemingly unlimited possibilities for application, yet governed by principle of “family resemblance”.
3. The Prodigal Son, again, as a good example.
4. Synthesis of conclusions regarding the locus of meaning.



IV. Working Hypotheses for an Exegesis of the Parables

- A. Authenticity of narratives and reliability of interpretive frameworks
- B. Limited allegorical approach, erring on the side of caution if needed
- C. One point per one main character

LECTURES 9-20: PASSAGE-BY-PASSAGE ANALYSIS OF THE PRIMARY PARABLES OF JESUS

Lecture 9

I. Simple Three-Point Parables

- A. The Prodigal Son (Luke 15:11-32)
 1. Focus on the prodigal (vv. 12-20a).
 - a. The son’s audacious request (v. 12a)
 - b. The father’s gracious response (v. 12b)
 - c. The prodigal’s squandering (vv. 13-14)
 - d. Completing the slide (vv. 15-16)
 - e. Coming to his senses (vv. 17-20a)
 2. Focus on the father (vv. 20b-24).
 - a. The father’s initiative (v. 20b)
 - b. The son’s speech (v. 21)
 - c. The party (vv. 22-23)
 - d. The key refrain (v. 24)
 3. Focus on the older brother (vv. 25-32).

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- a. Working as commanded (v. 25a)
- b. Requesting an explanation (vv. 25b-27)
- c. The son's rage and refusal (v. 28a)
- d. The father's second initiative (v. 28b)
- e. The son's complaint (vv. 29-30)
- f. The final reply and refrain repeated (vv. 31-32)



B. The Lost Coin (Luke 15:8-10)

1. The value of the loss (v. 8a).
2. The extent of the search (v. 8b).
3. The joy of recovery (v. 9).
4. Explanatory application (v. 10).

C. The Lost Sheep (Luke 15:3-7; Matt. 18:12-14)

1. The loss (Luke 15:4a).
2. The search (v. 4b).
3. The recovery (vv. 5-6).
4. The application (v. 7).
5. Matthew's distinctives.
6. Significance of both versions for outreach and inreach.

Lecture 10

D. The Two Sons (Matt. 21:28-32)

1. Introduction and context.
2. The structure.
 - a. The setting (v. 28a)
 - b. The prototype of the repentant sinner (vv. 28b-29)
 - c. The prototype of the hypocritical religious leader (v.30)
 - d. The conclusion: question and answer (v.31a)
 - e. The explanation (vv. 31b-32)
3. The three lessons and their summation in one sentence.
4. Contemporary application.

E. The Two Debtors (Luke 7:41-43)

Lecture Outlines

1. Introduction and context (vv. 36-40).
 2. The key components.
 - a. The varying debts
 - b. The identical cancellations
 - c. The varying responses
 3. Jesus' subsequent remarks (vv. 44-50).
 - a. The relatively gentle rebuke of Simon (vv. 44-46)
 - b. The grammar of love (v. 47)
 - c. The woman as a positive model of faith (vv. 48-50)
- F. The Faithful/Unfaithful Servant (Luke 12:42-48; Matt. 24:45-51)
1. The close similarities.
 2. The unique structure.
 3. Matthew's distinctives.
 4. Luke's distinctives.



Lecture 11

- G. The Ten Bridesmaids (Matt. 25:1-13)
1. Competing interpretations.
 - a. Allegorical or non-allegorical?
 - b. Day of the Lord or return of Christ?
 2. Authenticity and Jewish background.
 - a. Realistic details
 - b. Unrealistic details
 3. Redaction criticism.
 - a. Final in series of three parables on timing of Judgment Day
 - b. Middle in series of five parables on preparation for judgment

Lecture Outlines

4. Key lessons.
 - a. Possible delay
 - b. Need for faithfulness
 - c. Inevitability of judgment
5. Key exegetical controversy—does the oil stand for anything?
6. Applications.
 - a. Calming present apocalyptic fervor
 - b. Discipleship as a long haul
 - c. Now is the time of decision



H. The Wheat and Tares (Matt. 13:24-30, 37-43)

1. The enemy's apparent triumph (vv. 24-28a).
 - a. The countersowing
 - b. The darnel
 - c. Similarities between Christians and non-Christians
 - d. Natural allegorical identifications
2. The wheat's surprising survival (vv. 28b-30a).
 - a. The possibility of the wheat being choked out entirely
 - b. The promise that the church will survive
 - c. Encouragement against the Zealot option despite growing hostility
3. The ultimate harvest (v. 30b).
 - a. Harvest as a symbol for judgment
 - b. Harvesters as the angels
 - c. Burning as hellfire
 - d. Gathering and safekeeping of wheat
4. Concluding comments.
 - a. Most elaborate allegory of all Jesus' parables
 - b. Authenticity of interpretation most commonly rejected
 - c. But nothing excessive or anachronistic
 - d. Elements which are not interpreted

Lecture Outlines

- e. Elements of two catalogues of vv. 37-39, 40-43 which don't match
- f. The field as the world and the kingdom
- g. The triadic structure which remains

I. The dragnet (Matt. 13:47-50)

- 1. Wheat and tares in miniature minus preparatory episodes.
- 2. Possible allegorical significance of "kinds" of fish.
- 3. Three resulting lessons.



Lecture 12

J. The Rich Man and Lazarus (Luke 16:19-31)

Introduction: Two unique features: names and afterlife

- 1. The story: Two men in life and death (vv. 19-23).
 - a. The rich man (v. 19)
 - b. The poor man (vv. 20-21)
 - c. The reversal of situations (vv. 22-23)
- 2. The dialogue: Accounting for their destinies (vv. 24-31).
 - a. First interchange (vv. 24-26)
 - i. Rich man's pleas for a little relief
 - ii. Abraham's answers: just desserts and fate irreversible
 - b. Second interchange (vv. 27-31)
 - i. Rich man's pleas for supernatural revelation to brothers
 - ii. Abraham's answers: Scriptures adequate and wouldn't help anyway
- 3. Additional observations.
 - a. Imagery not to be pressed

Lecture Outlines

- b. Shock of emphasis on stewardship not to be glossed over

K. The Children in the Marketplace (Matt. 11:16-19; Luke 7:31-35)

Introduction: unique features of structure

1. The austere side of the gospel call to repentance.
2. The victorious side of the gospel call to festivity.
3. The justification of both these aspects by those who implement them.

Concluding applications



Lecture 13

II. Complex Three-Point Parables

A. The Talents (Matt. 25:14-30) and Pounds (Luke 19:11-27)

1. The Talents.
 - a. The commissioning (vv. 14-15)
 - i. The man going on the journey (v. 14)
 - ii. The entrusting of the talents (v. 15)
 - b. The stewardship (vv. 16-18)
 - i. The two positive models (vv. 16-17)
 - ii. The negative model (v. 18)
 - c. The reckoning (vv. 19-30)
 - i. Identical praise for the first two servants (vv. 19-23)
 - ii. Condemnation of the wicket servant (vv. 24-30)
 - (a) The man's excuse (vv. 24-25)
 - (b) The invalidity of the excuse (vv. 26-27)
 - (c) The judgment (vv. 28-30)

Lecture Outlines

- (i) Don't allegorize different rewards (v. 28)
- (ii) "Has," "has not" means after investing (v. 29)
- (iii) Metaphor for hell (v. 30)



- 2. The distinctives of Luke's parable of the Pounds.
 - a. Combined with story of throne claimant, *a la* Archelaus
 - b. All given same amount but different percentage returns
 - c. Differences of reward but again not to be allegorized

B. The Laborers in the Vineyard (Matt. 20:1-16)

Introductory remarks about context

- 1. The hiring (vv. 1-7).
 - a. Relatively unrealistic but points to allegorical meaning
 - b. Promise of "what is fair" sets up expectation of proportionate payment
- 2. The paying (vv. 8-16).
 - a. Reverse order sets up surprise ending
 - b. Not to be construed as good management-worker relations!

Lecture 14

- c. Complaints understandable but lead to three lessons of story
- 3. Applications.
 - a. Profound theology of grace—we dare not ask for what's fair!
 - b. Key teaching against degrees of reward of eternal duration
 - c. Counter-cultural possibilities for the church in a performance-saturated society

Lecture Outlines

C. The Sower (Mark 4:3-8, 14-20 pars.)

1. Introduction.
 - a. Seemingly 5 characters but reducible to 3
 - b. None of 1st 3 seeds probably true believers
 - c. Climactic focus on final good seed/soil
2. Structure.
 - a. Introduction: focus on the farmer (v. 3)
 - b. Three kinds of inadequate seed/soil (vv. 4-7)
 - i. The seed on the patch (v. 4)
 - ii. The seed in rock soil (vv. 5-6)
 - iii. The seed among the thorns (v. 7)
 - c. The good, fruit-bearing seed (v. 8)
3. Conclusions.
 - a. Focus on process of growth
 - b. Focus on abundance of harvest
 - c. Unifying theme of sowing widely over all

D. The Good Samaritan (Luke 10:29-36)

1. The main episodes.
 - a. The man's demise (v. 30)
 - b. Failure to help by those expected to (vv. 31-32)
 - c. The shocking hero (vv. 33-35)
 - d. The conclusions (vv. 36-37)
2. The unique features.
 - a. Non-monarchic; unifying figure is not powerful but powerless
 - b. Place names—Jerusalem and Jericho
 - c. Pure parable or example story?
 - d. Three points as a solution to the debate
3. Applications.



Lecture Outlines

- a. Avoid deliberate or foolish endangerment
- b. Avoid even more complete apathy, refusing even safe help



Lecture 15

E. The Great Banquet (Luke 14:16-24) and Wedding Feast (Matt. 22:1-14)

1. The Great Banquet.
 - a. The initial invitations: focus on the master/God (vv. 16-17)
 - b. The resulting refusals: focus on the first invited/Pharisees rejecting Jesus (vv. 18-21a)
 - c. The subsequent invitations: focus on the new guests/outcasts in Israel accepting Jesus (vv. 21b-24)
2. The Wedding feast: distinctives.
 - a. King, son and his wedding (v. 1)
 - b. Killings and vengeance (vv. 6-7)
 - c. Man without a wedding garment (vv. 11-14)

F. The Wicked Tenants (Mark 12:1-12 pars.)

1. Preparation for harvest (v. 1).
2. Request for produce (vv. 2-8).
 - a. Possible allegorical role of servants
 - b. Muted allegorical role of son

Lecture 16

3. Response to the parable (vv. 9-12).
 - a. An exercise in harmonization
 - b. A key Messianic prophecy
 - c. An illustration of Mark 4:12

Lecture Outlines

G. The Unforgiving Servant (Matt. 18:23-35)

Introduction: first of two “top-down, straight line” triadic parables

1. Importance of context.
 - a. Matt. 18; on humility and forgiveness
 - b. Verses 15-35: contrasting responses depending on repentance
2. Structure.
 - a. King and first servant (vv. 23-27)
 - b. First and second servants (vv. 28-31)
 - c. King and first servant (vv. 32-35)
3. Conclusions.
 - a. Reminiscent of Matt. 6:12, 14-15
 - b. Matt. 7:21-23 suggests imagery of one never truly saved



H. The Unjust Steward (Luke 16:1-13)

1. Firing by master (vv. 1-2).
2. Manager’s response (vv. 3-7).
 - a. Further unethical though legal behavior?
 - b. Partial redress by reducing profits skimmed from top?
3. Master’s reaction (v. 8); commendation based solely on shrewdness.
4. A series of lessons (vv. 8-13).
 - a. Three points from vv. 8a, 8b, 9, corresponding to main characters
 - b. Three applications from vv. 8b, 9, 10-13
 - i. Shrewdness without injustice (cf. Matt. 19:16)
 - ii. Using material resources for kingdom priorities

Lecture Outlines

- iii. Mammon ultimate competitor with God for human allegiance and key barometer as to trustworthiness with spiritual riches
- 5. The Pharisees' response (vv. 14-15).
 - a. Rationalization because of love of money
 - b. Checkbook ledger key criterion today of Christian spirituality



Lecture 17

III. Two-Point Parables

Introduction: Two kinds of two-point parables

- 1. Contrast between good and bad examples
- 2. Master with one subordinate

A. The Pharisee and Tax –collector (Luke 18:9-14)

- 1. Introduction (v. 10)—two main characters epitomizing piety and unscrupulousness.
- 2. The Pharisee's prayer (vv. 11-12)—little the audience would have found objectionable.
- 3. The tax-collector's prayer (v. 13)—seemingly inadequate repentance.
- 4. Jesus' shocking verdict (v. 14)—latter justified rather than former

Application

B. The Two Builders (Matt. 7:24-27; Luke 6:47-49)

- 1. Two introductory comparisons
 - a. Between Matthew and Luke (the latter “contemporizes”)
 - b. With last parable (grace leads to obedience)
- 2. Two parallel episodes.

Lecture Outlines

- a. Builder on rock/solid foundation—obeying Jesus’ words
- b. Builder on sand/no foundation—hearing without obeying
- 3. Three concluding observations.
 - a. The imagery of the storm applied to Judgment Day and other crises
 - b. The parable’s role in the Sermon on the Mount overall
 - c. Two key approaches to implementing the Sermon’s ethic
 - i. Inaugurated eschatology
 - ii. Reminder of perfection of God’s standards



Lecture 18

- C. The Unprofitable Servant (Luke 17:7-10)
 - 1. An emphasis on grace again but with addition on appropriate attitudes to living.
 - 2. Key rhetorical questions expecting non-controversial answers.
 - 3. Sanctification as not earning us varying rewards.
- D. The Seed Growing Secretly (Mark 4:26-29)
 - 1. Two key foci.
 - a. The period of growth
 - b. The time of harvest
 - 2. Similarity of imagery to other seed parables.
 - a. The parable of the Sower
 - b. The parable of the Wheat and Tares
- E. The Rich Food (Luke 12:16-21)

Lecture Outlines

1. The rich man's accumulation of wealth (vv. 16-19).
 - a. Appealing to wealth-blessing background theology
 - b. All appears to be good stewardship
2. God's intervention into the story (vv. 20-21).
 - a. The man has falsely assumed he will live a long life
 - b. The man has not adequately made room for God in his life
3. Parallel problems today.
 - a. Not taking seriously the possibility of Christ's return or our deaths at any time
 - b. Not taking adequate thought for God, as demonstrated by our hoarding possessions
 - i. Cf. the 23 + % Jewish almsgiving norm
 - ii. Cf. the ca. 3% giving of most American Christians

F. The Barren Fig Tree (Luke 13:6-9)

1. A good summary of the twin themes of these two-pointed parables.
 - a. Continuing possibility for forgiveness upon repentance
 - b. Increasing urgency of bearing fruits befitting repentance
2. Original and contemporary applications.
 - a. To the Jewish leaders and their supporters rejecting Jesus
 - b. To those today who postpone responding to the gospel offer



Lecture Outlines

Lecture 19

Introductory remarks—the uniqueness of the last three two-point parables

G. The Unjust Judge (Luke 18:1-8)

1. Luke's introduction (v. 1).
2. The parable proper (vv. 2-5).
 - a. Description of the two main characters (vv. 2-3)
 - i. The judge who fears neither God nor people (v. 2)
 - ii. The widow who epitomizes powerlessness (v. 3)
 - b. Resolution of the problem (vv. 4-5)
 - i. The expected reaction (v. 4a)
 - ii. The unexpected reaction (vv. 4b-5)
3. Jesus' conclusions (vv. 6-8).
 - a. From the behavior of the judge (vv. 6-8a)
 - b. From the behavior of the widow (v. 8b)

H. The Friend at Midnight (Luke 11:5-8)

1. A context of prayer (vv. 1-4, 9-13).
2. The rhetorical question (vv. 5-7).
3. The conclusion (v. 8).
4. Three possibilities raised by the Greek term *anaideia*.
 - a. Persistent asking (least likely)
 - b. Bold asking (most likely)
 - c. Desire to save face on part of sleeper (probably present too)
5. Two concluding lessons, one per main character.
 - a. God's eagerness to give
 - b. Our boldness in approaching him with requests



Lecture Outlines

- I. The Householder and Thief (Matt. 24:43-44; Luke 12:39-40)
 1. A contrary-to-fact condition equivalent to a story.
 2. The two main points of comparison.
 - a. The householder to the disciple
 - b. The thief to Christ
 3. Concluding implications for attempting to determine Christ's return.



Lecture 20

IV. One-Point Parables

Introductory observations

- A. The Hid Treasure and the Pearl of Great Price (Matt. 13:44-46)
 1. The similarities.
 - a. An individual discovers an object representing the kingdom
 - b. That object is of immense value
 - c. He sells all he has in order to acquire it
 2. The differences.
 - a. Accidental discovery vs. deliberate seeking
 - b. Explicit reference to joy in only one passage
 - c. The problem of hiding the treasure in the field
 3. The central lesson—the kingdom is worth sacrificing whatever it takes to become its subject.
 4. A less likely alternative interpretation—Christ purchases our redemption
 - a. Christ didn't buy kingdom
 - b. Purchase shouldn't be taken literally (cf. rabbinic parallel)

Lecture Outlines

B. The Tower Builder and the Warring King (Luke 14:28-33)

1. The similarities.
 - a. Estimating cost of risky venture with possibility of failure
 - b. Significant negative fallout if failure were to occur
 - c. Illustration of vv. 27, 33
2. The differences.
 - a. Counting money vs. counting soldiers
 - b. Ridicule vs. widespread loss of life
 - c. Leaving tower unfinished vs. suing for peace from enemy
3. The central lesson—count the cost before embarking on discipleship.
4. A less likely alternative interpretation—Christ counted cost of cross.
 - a. He would not have had to estimate money available
 - b. He could not have conceived of surrendering to Satan
 - c. This view does not adequately account for vv. 27, 33

C. The Mustard Seed and the Leaven (Luke 13:18-21 pars.)

Introductory source-critical remarks

1. The similarities.
 - a. Something remarkably small
 - b. Growing to surprisingly large size
 - c. Still not so large as to suggest a Christianizing of the globe
2. The differences.
 - a. Man vs. woman
 - b. One grows on its own; the other affects the growth of something else
3. The central lesson—Kingdom's significant end despite inauspicious beginning



Lecture Outlines

4. A less likely alternative interpretation—leaven as evil
 - a. Leaven is positive in Lev. 7:13-14, 23:17
 - b. Context of parables of growth and of parallelism between other paired parables demands it



LECTURES 21-24: SYNTHESIZING THE TEACHING OF THE PARABLES

Lecture 21

I. Classifying the Parables

A. Kingdom parables vs. other kinds?

1. Those which explicitly mention the kingdom vs. those which don't.
2. Kingdom vs. grace vs. judgment.

B. Thematic categorizations?

1. Coming, grace, men and crisis of kingdom.
2. Kingdom as present, kingdom as demand, God of the parables, final judgment.

C. Classification by Gospel?

1. Matthew's urban, grand world.
2. Luke's rural, ordinary world.
3. Mark's nature parables.

D. Literary analysis

1. Comic vs. tragic.
2. Advent, reversal and action.

E. Common features in form or content

1. Parables of nature/growth.
2. Parables of discovery.
3. Contrast parables.
4. *A fortiori* parables.
5. *Tis ex humon* parables.

Lecture Outlines

6. Servant parables.
7. Parousia parables.

F. Structural classification

1. According to numbers of main characters and their relationships.
2. Recurring triadic pattern matches overall plot of Gospels.



Lecture 22

II. The Kingdom Theology of the Parables

A. Options concerning temporal aspects of kingdom and tension between grace and demand

1. Medieval Catholic—only clerics achieve more stringent demands in this age.
2. Lutheran—present aspect functions as Law to drive us to Savior.
3. Anabaptist—radical separation of church/state in present age.
4. Protestant liberal—church will usher in fullness of kingdom in this age.
5. Existentialist—atemporal, permanent eschatology; new possibilities of authentic human existence.
6. Interim ethic—urgency due to Jesus' (mistaken) notion that he would return within lifetime of disciples.
7. Older dispensationalism—kingdom offer rejected by Jews, relegated wholly to future millennial age.
8. Inaugurated eschatology—already but not yet, present and future aspects.

B. Reign vs. realm; power vs. people

1. Kingdom present primarily as spiritual power; physical, visible, national manifestations largely limited to after Christ's return.
2. Church, however, is Messianic community modeling coming lifestyle as outpost or colony of kingdom of heaven.

Lecture Outlines

Lecture 23



C. Personal transformation vs. social reform

1. Another both/and situation, avoiding extreme post-millennial optimism and old-line dispensational pessimism.
2. Jesus' teaching mediated between Essene quietism and Zealot violence.
 - a. See especially the parable of the unjust judge
 - b. Cf. James' use of the prophets and Job as models
3. But we must go beyond words to actions, particularly with material resources.
 - a. Numerous parables on this topic
 - b. Important apostolic teaching derived from Jesus
 - i. Acts 2, 4-5
 - ii. 2 Cor. 8-9
 - iii. 1 Cor. 16:1-4
 - c. Shocking contemporary statistics about American and American Christian spending
4. Final reminder that this is not works-righteousness.

D. The Kingdom, the Church and Israel

1. Kingdom as a power manifest particularly in church but also in world.
2. Church as God's people with overlap and difference from Israel.
 - a. No NT promises of salvation to Israel apart from faith in Messiah Jesus
 - b. Judgment on "this generation" referring to A.D. 30-70, leaving room for final outpouring of faith

Lecture Outlines

- i. Matt. 23:36 in light of v. 38, 24:2

Lecture 24

- ii. Matt. 23:39
 - iii. Matt. 27:25
 - iv. Rom. 11:25
- c. Consistent “universalizing” in NT of promises regarding Israel and land
- i. The meek shall inherit the earth
 - ii. Worship in spirit and in truth
 - iii. Millennium, new heavens and new earth

III. The Christology of the Parables (see especially P. Payne in *Trinity Journal* 2 n.s. [1981] 3-23).

A. Introduction: Deity not merely Messianic consciousness

B. Key Old Testament metaphors for God applied to Jesus in parables

1. Sower.
2. Harvester.
3. Rock.
4. Shepherd.
5. Bridegroom.
6. Father.
7. Forgiver.
8. Landlord of Vineyard.
9. Lord (*Kyrios*)
10. King.

C. Concluding Remarks

1. Distinctions from similar metaphors applied to humans.
2. Not just what Jesus does but who he is.
3. Our need to respond in initial commitment and lifelong discipleship.





Study Questions

Lecture 1

1. What historical background is necessary to understand the significance of the Samaritan as the exemplary character in the parable of the Good Samaritan and of the Pharisee as the negative model in the parable of the Pharisee and the Tax-Collector?
2. What symbolism seems to be implicit in the Parable of the Wicked Tenants? Can you think of any details which may be symbolic in addition to those explicitly mentioned in the lecture? (Consult Mark 12:1-12)
3. Read the parable of the Rich Man and Lazarus in Luke 16:19-31. Why is this included as an example of “theologically challenging” parables? Can you think of any way to harmonize its teaching with salvation by grace through faith alone?
4. Read Luke 10:25-37 and then react to Augustine’s interpretation of the Good Samaritan. If it was so popular for over a thousand years, why might it be that virtually no one accepts his view today?
5. How did C. H. Dodd and Joachim Jeremias resemble Adolf Jülicher in their approaches to interpreting the parables? How did they differ?

Lecture 2

1. Read the parable of the Great Banquet (Luke 14:16-24). Then answer the following questions:
 - a. What in its setting gives a clue as to its meaning?
 - b. Is this a comic or tragic parable? Why? What is the significance of that identification?
 - c. How might you express its central truth or truths?
 - d. Where today do you find analogous situations to that of this parable?
2. Read the parable of the Ten Bridesmaids (Matt. 25:1-13). Then answer the following questions:
 - a. Do you see any fairly obviously allegorical elements in this passage?
 - b. Are there other details that might or might not be allegorical—i.e., you would want to do some further study in order to be sure?
 - c. Granted you don’t yet necessarily know much about first-century Palestinian wedding customs, but is there anything in the passage which strikes you as unrealistic or untrue to human nature in any culture?



Study Questions

Lecture 3

1. Since the rabbis often taught quite different content or theology than Jesus, how can we assume that their parables will help us understand how to interpret Christ's parables?
2. What principles do the two rabbinic parables discussed suggest for interpreting Jesus' parables?
3. How can *modern* allegories have anything to do with interpreting Jesus' parables of nearly 2000 years ago?
4. What principles emerge from a study of *Lord of the Flies* which might help in interpreting the parables of Jesus?

Lecture 4

1. List five different things that the Hebrew word *mashal* could mean besides "parable."
2. Give three examples of how the parables of Jesus are not quite as lifelike as many have imagined.
3. Give two examples of how interpreters who deny allegory in the parable wind up affirming it nevertheless.
4. Why is this "minority report" NOT a call to return to the procedures of the Patristic and Mediaeval allegorizers?
5. What were some of the stock symbols widely used in metaphorical literature of Christ's time that we should keep in mind when reading his parables?

Lecture 5

1. Explain the probable meaning of each of the following passages if they do *not* teach that Jesus expected to return within the lifetime of his first disciples: Mark 9:1, Mark 13:30, Matt. 10:23?
2. What are two topics the earthly Jesus never addressed which we would have expected the early Christian prophets to speak to, particularly if they were accustomed to intermingling their words with those of the historical Jesus?
3. Why do many scholars think that the first Christians would not have been *able* to preserve reliable history, particularly with respect to the parables?
4. What is the major contribution of Gerhardsson, Riesenfeld, and Riesner to the conservative response to form criticism? of A. B. Lord?



Study Questions

5. Why do many scholars think that the data of the Gospels precludes a verdict that the first Christians *did* in fact carefully preserve the parables?

Lecture 6

1. What is the difference between redaction criticism and form criticism?
2. What does it mean to “think horizontally”? to “think vertically”?
3. What was the primary perspective of the work of the Jesus Seminar on the parables?
4. How can we determine if the distinctives of a given evangelist’s account of a parable are theologically significant or not?
5. Briefly describe Dr. Blomberg’s perspective on the underlying structure of Luke’s Central Section as they involve eleven parables unique to Luke’s Gospel.

Lecture 7

1. Explain what is meant by the “paradigm shift” from historical to literary methods in interpretation. Include reference to the terms “diachronic” and “synchronic” and their meaning.
2. What is the difference between reader-response criticism and deconstructionism as two different branches of poststructuralism?
3. What is the hermeneutical spiral?
4. What is the contemporization of a parable? Why is it valuable?
5. What is a triadic parable? What is a monarchic form of a triadic parable?

Lecture 8

1. What is a dyadic parable? How are they structurally similar to and different from triadic parables?
2. What are the intentional and affective fallacies?
3. Why is poststructuralism ultimately self-defeating when applied to the original meaning of a communication act?
4. What are some incisive contemporary equivalents to the prodigal and his older brother?



Study Questions

5. What answer to the question of the locus of meaning embraces the valid insights of author, text, and reader-centered hermeneutics in an eclectic and comprehensive package?

Lecture 9

1. Explain how virtually all of the details of Luke 15:20b are relatively unrealistic by first-century Jewish standards.
2. What details in the parable of the Prodigal Son should probably not be allegorized and why?
3. What is the more literal meaning of the word translated by the NIV as “pleaded” in Luke 15:28, and what is the significance of its tense in the Greek?
4. How are the conclusions of the parables of the Lost Sheep, Lost Coin, and Lost Sons similar and how are they different? What is the significance of the differences?
5. What are Matthew’s distinctives in his account of the Lost Sheep and what is their primary significance?

Lecture 10

1. Briefly explain the significance of the context of the parable of the Two Sons in Matthew 21.
2. How might the three lessons of this parable be encapsulated in one succinct sentence?
3. What is surprising about Jesus’ behavior in the context immediately preceding the parable of the Two Debtors (Luke 7:41-43)?
4. What is the crucial point to observe about the grammar of Luke 7:47?
5. What are the Lucan and Matthean distinctives in the Faithful/Unfaithful Servant and why are they important?

Lecture 11

1. How can the Ten Bridesmaids be classified as a triadic parable when it has eleven characters?
2. Which elements seem to be realistic and which unrealistic in this parable?
3. If the oil does stand for anything, what, most likely, is its significance?



Study Questions

4. Give several examples of details left uninterpreted in the Wheat and the Tares, which should therefore probably not be allegorized.
5. How can the field be both the world and the kingdom in this parable?

Lecture 12

1. Why is the rich man and Lazarus almost certainly a parable in spite of its unique features which have led some to wonder if it was a true story?
2. Which details about the afterlife should not be pressed as if they were a realistic description of life after death either before or after Christ's resurrection? Why should we be reluctant to press this imagery?
3. The rich man and Abraham were both rich. What distinguished them (a) at the spiritual level, and (b) at the level of stewardship?
4. How can the Children in the Marketplace be seen as triadic and monarchic when there are not three characters or even three groups of characters and when no one is a master figure?
5. In what ways do many Christians exactly invert the first two lessons of this parable? Illustrate from the writings of Paul and from contemporary experience.

Lecture 13

1. How does a complex three-pointed parable differ from a simple three-pointed parable?
2. In the parables of the Talents and Pounds why should the varying rewards given to the faithful servants not be allegorized?
3. In these two parables, why was the action of the "wicked" servant in safeguarding his money, either in a hole in the ground or in a cloth, not considered prudent action? After all the other servants' action involved investing the money in sources that risked netting a loss rather than a gain for their master, didn't they?
4. What happened to Archelaus that makes many scholars think Jesus was alluding to him in the parable of the Pounds?
5. What is the context of the Laborers in the Vineyard and how is it significant?



Study Questions

Lecture 14

1. In light of the Laborers in the Vineyard, why shouldn't we ask God for what is fair?
2. Why do so many people believe in degrees of reward lasting for all eternity if this parable teaches the exact opposite?
3. Why do all of the first three seeds/soils in the parable of the Sower probably not refer to true believers?
4. In what ways does the final, good seed/soil prove to be the climactic and dominant focus of the parable?
5. Why do most recent commentators consider the Good Samaritan a pure parable rather than an example story?
6. What is significant about giving the name of the two cities at either end of the road which the characters in this parable traversed? What is significant about the direction in which all were traveling?

Lecture 15

1. Which actions in the Great Banquet are realistic by first-century Palestinian standards, even though they might not seem so to us? Which are unrealistic, although we might not immediately recognize them as such?
2. Who does the second group of new invitees in Luke 14:23 represent? at the level of original meaning? at the level of later significance?
3. What is the meaning of the addition to the Wedding Feast of the episode about the man without the wedding garment (Matt. 22:1-14)?
4. Why is Matt. 22:6-7 not necessarily a prediction (either before or after the fact) of the destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70?
5. Why are the references to servants and son not as demonstrably allegorical or as clearly central to the Wicked Tenants as most Christians tend to think they are?



Study Questions

Lecture 16

1. How does the reaction of the Jewish leaders to the Wicked Tenants help clarify the enigma of Mark 4:122?
2. How do Matt. 18:15-20 and 23-25 help to qualify vv. 21-23?
3. How does the Sermon on the Mount suggest that the Unforgiving Servant does not teach loss of salvation?
4. Explain the two major options for accounting for how the master could have commended his servant in the Unjust Steward?
5. Paraphrase Luke 16:9 so that it is clear what it means, accounting.

Lecture 17

1. Explain the difference between the two different kinds of structure found among Jesus' six two-point parables. What is the significance of each structure?
2. Describe how Jesus' audience would have been "set up" to expect the Pharisee to be the hero and the tax-collector the "goat" in Luke 18:9-14.
3. What two concepts about salvation in first-century Judaism should we be aware of, in order to properly set the parable of the Pharisee and Tax-collector against its historical background?
4. Explain the significance of the imagery of the storm in the parable of the Two Builders.
5. How should we interpret the Sermon on the Mount overall and how does this shed light on interpreting the parable of the Two Builders in particular?

Lecture 18

1. How does the Unprofitable Servant teach that sanctification as well as salvation is all by grace?
2. What are the two key themes associated with the period of growth and the moment of harvest in the parable of the Seed Growing Secretly?
3. Explain the two strands of Jewish theology on wealth and poverty which may inform an interpretation of the Rich Fool?



Study Questions

4. Explain why most in Jesus' audience would probably have been shocked by the conclusion to the parable of the Rich Fool.
5. How is the context of the Barren Fig Tree significant in its interpretation?

Lecture 19

1. Explain what it means to say that the parables of the Unjust Judge and the Friend at Midnight reflect a *fortiori* logic.
2. Despite their close similarities, what are the primary differences in the teachings of these two parables?
3. What are the two lessons which Jesus derives from the parable of the Unjust Judge and how do they relate to each other?
4. Why are there three possible ways of interpreting *anaideia* in the Friend at Midnight? Why is "boldness" on the part of the asker (as in the NIV) the most likely of these three?
5. In what way is Christ like a thief in the night?

Lecture 20

1. What is the significance of each of the three differences between the Hid Treasure and the Pear of Great Price?
2. What occurs in the rabbinic parable which may underlie Jesus' imagery in these two parables?
3. How would you summarize the impact of all three differences, taken together, between the Tower Builder and the Warring King?
4. What source-critical relationship is usually given to account for the similarities and differences among Matthew's, Mark's and Luke's versions of the Mustard Seed?
5. If the mustard seed isn't literally the smallest seed scientists have ever discovered, how do we explain Jesus' words which seem to claim that it is?



Study Questions

Lecture 21

1. Why is it artificial to divide the parables into kingdom parables vs. other kinds?
2. Why is it not particularly helpful to classify the parables topically?
3. Why is it not particularly helpful to classify the parables by Gospel?
4. What is the difference between a comic and a tragic parable?
5. What is a parable of advent? of reversal? of action?
6. What is an *a fortiori* parable? What is a *tis ex humon* parable? What is significant about these identifications for the interpretation of such parables?

Lecture 22

1. Briefly highlight one or two key strengths and weaknesses of each of the first seven views on the temporal aspect of the kingdom.
2. What is the practical application to the church if a view is accepted which combines inaugurated eschatology with a perspective on the church as God's Messianic community?

Lecture 23

1. How does the parable of the Unjust Judge suggest a balanced interpretation of Jesus' position on the debate between kingdom theology as personal transformation and social reform?
2. How does James 5:7ff. further contribute to this debate?
3. What is the significance of 1 Cor. 16:1-4 for Jesus' call, so stressed in the parables, to help the physically and materially needy of our world?
4. What current patterns of giving and spending stand out in striking contrast to this mandate?
5. Articulate the difference between the kingdom and the church.



Study Questions

Lecture 24

1. What is the New Testament understanding of the future kingdom for Israel?
2. What can we say with certainty about the current state of Israel in relation to this understanding?
3. Why is it significant to say that the parables contain implicit pointers to Jesus' deity rather than just implicit Christology?
4. How does the Old Testament use the metaphor of Shepherd? How does Jesus use it?
5. Where does Jesus call himself the bridegroom? Where does the Old Testament use the term metaphorically? Discuss the connection between these two uses.



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