

**THE PARABLES OF JESUS**  
**BIBL 6254, FALL SEMESTER 2012**  
**NORTH PARK THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY**

**Instructor—Klyne Snodgrass**

Tuesdays 6:30-9:45 p.m.

August 28–December 14

At no point are the vitality, relevance and usefulness of the teaching of Jesus so clear as in his parables. While the parable form is not unique to Jesus, he was certainly a master at using parables as bearers of his message. As the accompanying bibliography indicates (and it is only an introductory bibliography), the attempts to classify, understand, and explain the parables have been numerous. Jesus' parables have been called both "works of art" and "weapons of warfare," and indeed they are both. Often it is said that the parables are not merely illustrations of Jesus' preaching; they *are* the preaching. This sounds good, but is only partly true at best. The parables stand *as referents or signposts to something else*. One sees *through* the parables; i.e., one sees another reality through the reality the parables hold up. They do not exist for themselves, and therefore, must be interpreted. They are not "self-interpreting"—no literary form is. The parables deal with a variety of subjects in a variety of ways. An understanding of the parables is essential if one is to understand the teaching of Jesus.

This course will function as an advanced seminar and will allow for significant student involvement. Each student will be responsible for the presentation of and leading the discussion of a particular parable.

Questions and dialogue about the course can be posted on Moodle on "The Agora."

**PREREQUISITE:** BIBL 5150 or its equivalent.

**OBJECTIVES:**

1. To develop a hermeneutic for interpreting the parables.
2. To become familiar with the *location* and content of the parables of Jesus.
3. To understand the message of the parables and how it *correlates* with Jesus' broader teaching on the kingdom, ethics, prayer, and his own identity.
4. To be confronted personally by the message of the parables so that their impact leads to better awareness and appropriation of the teaching of Jesus, i.e., to a reshaping of one's own identity. The spiritual formation component—the impact these stories have in shaping us as disciples of Christ—is a central concern of the course.
5. To understand the complexity of the form of the parables and the variety of parables in Scripture and in writings of the ancient world.
6. To develop a basis for teaching or preaching the parables.
7. To become familiar with secondary literature on New Testament parables and the various approaches to interpreting them.

**REQUIRED TEXT:**

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

**Recommended** (for various reasons):

Arland Hultgren, *The Parables of Jesus*

Craig Blomberg, *Interpreting the Parables*  
Robert H. Stein, *An Introduction to the Parables of Jesus*  
Joachim Jeremias, *The Parables of Jesus* (or if you have not had Greek, *Rediscovering the Parables*)  
Peter Rhea Jones, *Studying the Parables of Jesus*

### **PROCEDURE:**

This class will assume knowledge of basic Gospels studies. After a brief review of general material on parables, the focus of the class will be on the analysis of individual parables. Student presentations will be an emphasis in this course. The goal is for students to do research and write at an advanced level. Each person will be assigned one parable (or group of parables) and will lead the discussion of that parable (or group) in class. (See assignment nine below.) Attention will be given throughout the course to the way that parables and stories function and to the task of preaching the parables. Care should be taken when referring to people to use inclusive language in class and in papers. **Caps and phones will be in the off position. Nothing directly from the course (printed material, voice or video recordings, etc.) may be posted on any electronic outlet.**

### **ASSIGNMENTS:**

1. Attendance at all sessions.
2. Read the New Testament accounts of all the parables at least once and the parables in the Gospel of Thomas. (See the appendix on pp. 576-577.) Be sure that you are familiar with the *location* and content of the various parables.
3. Read my article "From Allegorizing to Allegorizing: A History of the Interpretation of the Parables of Jesus," in *The Challenge of Jesus' Parables*, ed. Richard N. Longenecker (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000), 3-29. **Due** Sept 4.
4. Compare the **form** of the following parables and write a brief description of your findings: The parables of the Leaven, the Prodigal Son, the Rich Fool, the Sheep and the Goats, the Wheat and the Tares. How are these parables different **in form**? Are they alike in any way? What allows one to call all of them parables? **Due:** Sept 4.
5. Read *Stories with Intent in sequence* with the class schedule.
6. Read at least 150 pages from the bibliography on parables (**exclusive** of the research assignment on one parable). The following merit attention for understanding modern research on the parables:
  - J. Jeremias, *The Parables of Jesus*, 11-114
  - C. H. Dodd, *The Parables of the Kingdom*
  - Madeleine Boucher, *The Mysterious Parable*
  - John W. Sider, *Interpreting the Parables: A Hermeneutical Guide to Their Meaning*
  - Mark Goodacre, *Thomas and the Gospels*

**Provide a two page reflection paper on this reading.** I would encourage you to read various approaches and types of literature (dictionary and journal articles, books on parables, commentaries, and sermons. **Due: Oct 2.**

7. Do a five page paper comparing the approaches of five different authors to a specific parable other than the one done for assignment nine. Suggestions of authors to compare can be provided by the instructor, but if they treat your parable, use three of

the following: Winterhalter and Fisk, Bailey, Capon, Hedrick, Scott, and Schottroff.

**Due Oct 23.**

8. Read my article “*Anaideia* and the Friend at Midnight (Luke 11:8),” *JBL* 116 (1997): 505-513 and Herman C. Waetjen’s response “The Subversion of ‘World’ by the Parable of the Friend at Midnight,” *JBL* 120 (2001) 703-721. Prepare a one page suggestion of how you would respond to Waetjen. **Due Nov 6.**

**A READING REPORT WILL BE REQUIRED AT THE END OF THE TERM.**

9. Prepare a detailed analysis of one parable chosen in consultation with the instructor. Be ready to present the necessary material on your parable and the history of its interpretation and to lead the discussion of that parable as scheduled. The actual presentation of your material is limited to twenty minutes. Include as well a one page reflection on the significance of this parable for your own spiritual growth. If you have had Greek, you will be expected to translate the text, identify verb forms, and use Greek in your investigation of the text as relevant. (Attach Greek worksheets at the end of your paper.) If there is a Synoptic parallel you **must** mark photocopied sheets from a synopsis to show similarities and differences. Due dates for the analysis will be the class period in which that parable will be discussed. You will be expected to use at least ten sources from the better books on parables, the better, comprehensive commentaries, and periodical literature, especially material published since 2006. Lexica and concordances do not count. **However, for the parable you are assigned you may not use *Stories with Intent* until your paper has been completed.** Also use at least two sources on preaching your parable and show how you would preach on your parable. Choose from the following parables:

**The Unforgiving Servant**

**The Lost Sheep/Lost Coin**

**The Lost Two Sons and the Compassionate Father**

**The Growing Seed**

**The Wheat and the Tares**

**The Mustard Seed and the Leaven**

**The Treasure and the Pearl**

**The Barren Fig Tree**

**The Two Sons**

**The Wicked Tenants**

**The Banquet in Luke**

**The Wedding Feast in Matthew**

**The Good Samaritan**

**The Workers in the Vineyard**

**The Tower Builder and Warring King**

**The Unjust Judge**

**The Pharisee and Tax Collector**

**The Unjust Steward**

**The Rich Man and Lazarus**

**The Faithful/Unfaithful Servant**

**The Ten Virgins**

**The Talents in Matthew**

**The Pounds in Luke**

## **The Sheep and the Goats**

### **SUMMARY OF REQUIREMENTS:**

Read the gospel parables, the Thomasine parables, any distributed materials, *Stories with Intent*, and an additional 150 pages (**not** counting reading done for the analysis) and two of my articles.

Two page reflection on work selected

One page response to Waetjen

Analysis of one parable and one page reflection on its significance for your spiritual formation.

### **OPTIONAL ASSIGNMENTS:**

1. Write an original parable (one point added to final average).
2. Extra credit (two points to one's final average): Prepare a sermon on the parable(s) analyzed in your paper.

### **GRADING:**

30% Reading, short papers, and class participation

40% Analysis of one parable

30% Final exam (take home)

**PROPOSED SCHEDULE** (with the understanding that time may prevent the treatment of some parables and the awareness that all arrangements of the parables are to some degree arbitrary): This schedule will be finalized and made specific after class begins and students select the parable(s) on which they wish to work.

<b>Aug 28</b>	<b>Introduction to the Parables</b> with particular focus on the question of allegory
<b>Sept 4</b>	<b>Parables in the OT, Judaism, and the Greco-Roman World</b>
<b>Sept 11</b>	<b>The Purpose of the Parables</b> —Mark 4 and parallels
<b>Sept 18</b>	<b>The Unforgiving Servant, the Two Debtors, and the Lost Sheep and Lost Coin</b>
<b>Sept 25</b>	<b>The Two Lost Sons and the Compassionate Father</b>
<b>Oct 2</b>	<b>Parables of the Present Kingdom: The Growing Seed</b>
<b>Oct 9</b>	<b>Parables of the Present Kingdom continued: The Wheat and the Tares, the Mustard Seed and the Leaven, the Treasure and the Pearl</b>
<b>Oct 16</b>	<b>Parables of Israel: The Barren Fig Tree, the Banquet in Luke, and the Two Sons</b>
<b>Oct 23</b>	<b>FALL BREAK—NO CLASS</b>
<b>Oct 30</b>	<b>Parables of Israel continued: the Wicked Tenants, the Wedding Feast in Matthew</b>
<b>Nov 6</b>	<b>Parables Specifically Concerning Discipleship: the Two Builders</b>
	<b>Parables Specifically Concerning Discipleship continued: the Good Samaritan, the Workers in the Vineyard, and the Tower Builder and Warring King</b>
	<b>Parables about Money: The Rich Fool, The Unjust Steward, and the Rich Man and Lazarus</b>

- Nov 13**      **Parables about God and Prayer: the Friend at Midnight, the Unjust Judge, the Pharisee and Tax Collector**
- Nov 20**      **Parables of Future Eschatology: Eschatology and Jesus—a framework, the Net (and the Wheat and the Tares revisited), the Faithful/Unfaithful Servant**
- Nov 27**      **Parables of Future Eschatology continued: the Ten Virgins, the Talents in Matthew**
- Dec 4**        **Parables of Future Eschatology continued: the Pounds in Luke, and the Sheep and the Goats.**
- Dec 11**      **Applying, Teaching, and Preaching the Parables**  
**Take home final exam**