

## **Associated Canadian Theological Schools of Trinity Western University**

### **BNT 637OL Exposition of Jesus' Parables**

Course Instructor: Larry Perkins, Ph.D.  
Course Semester: January-February 2020  
3 credit hours

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Course Duration: January 6 – February 29, 2020

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### **Course Description**

Jesus' parables form a major, distinctive portion of his teaching and express his prophetic role 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 help us understand the mixed evaluation he received. They 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 remains a singular challenge for the contemporary church. If the parables were intended to challenge the first century Jewish audience in Galilee, then how are they relevant today? 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?

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 appropriately, understand their role in Jesus' mission, appropriate the message of Jesus' parables for themselves, and to articulate it effectively to others.

## **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 21<sup>st</sup> century believers.

## **Course Textbooks**

### **Required:**

Parables in the texts of the Gospels of Matthew, Mark, and Luke. Try to use a synopsis of the Gospels where possible 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)

### **Optional/Supplementary Texts:**

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/or 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 will be posted in the Moodle online classroom.

To access the Logos supplementary resources, you will require an ACTS Seminaries FaithLife Logos account which 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 midnight (your time) on the day they are due. I would ask that you submit your assignments in the online Moodle classroom accessible through MyCourses. When you go to the Moodle classroom, you will see assignment folders where you can submit assignments. Once I have marked your assignment, I will put it in your grade book in the Moodle classroom where you can check your grade and review the comments I made on the assignment (you will receive an automatic notification whenever I put a graded assignment in your grade book). Please note that I will typically deduct 5% of an assignment's total possible value for each day that it is late. I will consider extensions in exceptional circumstances such as a medical emergency (when a doctor's note accompanies the request). For the times when I allow a student to rewrite an assignment, I will generally take off 20% of 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 %
1	Jan 6	Pre-reading due		
2	Jan 13-18	Forum Week #1	5%	5%
3	Jan 20-25	Forum Week #2	5%	10%
4	Feb 1	Nature of Parable Paper	30%	40%
5	Feb 3-Feb 8	Forum Week #3	5%	45%
6	Feb 10-15			
7	Feb 17-22	Forum Week #4	5%	50%
8	Feb 29	Reading Report & Response	15%	65%
	Feb 29	Interpreting Kingdom Parables	35%	100%

### Course Pre-Reading Requirement

Due to the condensed nature of this course, please have the following read before the course begins on Jan 6, 2019:

Need pre-reading here: ie. Craig Blomberg, *Interpreting the Parables*, pages 1-70.

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

### **Assignment #1: Online Forum Participation (20 % of the final grade)**

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. You should plan to invest approximately four hours into each forum week. Each forum is worth 5% of your final grade.

Here is when the forum weeks will happen (please note that the forum weeks start on a Monday and end on a Saturday):

- Week 2
- Week 3
- Week 5
- Week 7

Students are expected to contribute to the forum discussions by posting a minimum of four conversational (worth up to 10 points each) and three substantive contributions (worth up to 20 points each) 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:**

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- 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!

### **Assignment #2: 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 that were allegories and what the implications of this would be as applied to a particular parable. 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. **Due Feb 1.**

### **Assignment #3: 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. Each entry would be two paragraphs in length (300 words each). This is 15 % of the final grade. **Due Feb 29.**

### **Assignment #4: 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 to an appropriate 21<sup>st</sup> 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 Feb 29.**

### Course Assignment Summary:

Forums	20%
Written Assignment #1 (The Nature of Parable as Allegory)	30%
Reading Report and Reading Responses	15%
Written Assignment #2 (Interpreting Kingdom Parables)	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 Scale

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.

*Note: This grading rubric is an adaptation of the one used in the MA in Leadership and MA in Educational Leadership programs at TWU.*

## Assignment Grade Appeals

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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.

## **Important Academic Notes from ACTS**

### **Web Support – Student Portal**

All students at TWU have a TWUPass username and password. This is determined at the time of an online application or can be managed through the computing services help desk or the link on the student portal. Your student email account is also available through this student portal and is vital for communication about grades, account statements, lost passwords, sign-up instructions, etc. If you do not know your account or password, there is a link at the login area called "I forgot my password." When you click on that link, you will be walked through the process of retrieving your account information.

### **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](http://www.press.uchicago.edu/books/turabian/turabian_citationguide.html)

### **Research Ethics**

Please note that all research projects involving human participants undertaken by members of the TWU university community (including projects done by ACTS students to satisfy course or degree requirements) **MUST** be approved by the Trinity Western University Research Ethics Board. Those needing additional clarification may contact the ACTS Academic Dean's office. Please allow at least three (3) weeks from the date of submission for a review of the application.

### **Academic Integrity and Avoiding Plagiarism at TWU**

As Christian scholars pursuing higher education, academic integrity is a core value of the entire TWU community. Students are invited into this scholarly culture and required to abide by the principles of sound academic scholarship at TWU. This includes, but is not limited to, avoiding all forms of plagiarism and cheating in scholarly work. TWU has a strict policy on plagiarism (see academic calendar 2008-09, pp. 37-38). Further details on this subject are contained in the ACTS Student Handbook in section 4.12. The handbook is available online on the ACTS webpage ([www.acts.twu.ca](http://www.acts.twu.ca)).

Learning what constitutes plagiarism and avoiding it is the student's responsibility. An excellent resource describing plagiarism and how to avoid it has been prepared by TWU Librarian William Badke and is freely available for download (PPT file) or used as flash (self-running) tutorials of varying lengths from:

<http://acts.twu.ca/library/plagiarism.ppt>

<http://acts.twu.ca/library/Plagiarism.swf> (14 minute flash tutorial)

[http://acts.twu.ca/library/Plagiarism\\_Short.swf](http://acts.twu.ca/library/Plagiarism_Short.swf) (8 minute flash tutorial)

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**Equity of Access**

It is the responsibility of a student with a learning disability to inform the ACTS Director of Student Life of that fact before the beginning of a course so that necessary arrangements may be made to facilitate the student's learning experience. We are unable to accommodate any student who informs the Director of Student Life of a disability after the beginning of class.