

McMaster Divinity College
Spring Semester 2022

STORIES OF THE KINGDOM:

PREACHING THE PARABLES OF JESUS

MS 3XN3 Professional Degree

MS 5XN5 DPT

Synchronous (online) sessions

Tuesdays 10:00 a.m. – noon

May 3 – June 14

Dr. Michael Knowles

knowlesm@mcmaster.ca



Course Description

For two thousand years, the parables of Jesus have captured the imagination of his disciples, enticing us with their vision of God's reign and beguiling us with their combination of outward simplicity and provocative inner complexity. For Christian preachers, teachers, and evangelists, as well as for their audiences, the parables reveal the mind of Christ; for postmodern hearers in particular, Jesus' parables present his teaching in an accessible and narrative form, engaging us and inviting our response. This course will offer an intensive literary and theological exploration of the parables as resources for the teaching and preaching ministry of the Christian church. Together we will seek to discover their meaning both for Jesus' day and for today, listening to the voice of Jesus in the gospels and to each other's voices as class members present and discuss their own sermons.

Specializations: Biblical Studies Christian Worldview Pastoral Studies

Course Objectives

KNOWING:

- ▶ To provide an overview of parables as a literary genre.
- ▶ To examine individual parables within their respective social, historical, theological, and literary contexts.
- ▶ To explore appropriate methods and contexts for preaching the parables of Jesus, and their impact on style and presentation.

BEING:

- ▶ To reflect on spiritual and ministerial identity in relation to the parables of Jesus and their presentation of God's reign.
- ▶ To help students identify their preferred style or styles of preaching, and gain confidence in public presentation.
- ▶ To be formed as a community of learning, discipleship, and mutual accountability.

DOING:

- ▶ To develop evaluative skills through peer evaluation.
- ▶ To offer practice in scriptural exegesis (using the Greek text as appropriate).
- ▶ To develop facility in the composition and delivery of sermons.

Course Schedule

- May 3 Proclamation and Covert Meaning: Jesus' Use of Parables and its Background
Reading: Gowler, *What Are They Saying*, 1–103
Supplementary: Longenecker, *Challenge*, 3–75
- May 10 From Parables to Preaching: A Crash Course in Sermon Preparation
- May 17 Parables of God's Present Reign *Exegesis Essay due*
Reading: Longenecker, *Challenge*, 79–147
Supplementary: Knowles, *Of Seeds and the People of God*, 40–85
Parables: Sower and Seed (Matt 13:1–9, 18–23//Mark 4:1–9, 13–20 //Luke 8:4–8, 11–15)
 The Growing Seed (Mark 4:26–29)
 The Mustard Seed (Matt 13:31–32//Mark 4:30–32//Luke 13:18–19)
 The Wheat and the Weeds (Matt 13:24–30, 36–43)
 The Leaven (Matt 13:33//Luke 13:20–21)
 Treasure in a Field (Matt 13:44)
 The Pearl (Matt 13:45–46)
 The Fishnet (Matt 13:47–50)
- May 24 Parables of Grace and Mercy
Reading: Longenecker, *Challenge*, 199–216
Parables: The Prodigal (Luke 15:11–32)

The Two Debtors (Luke 7:41–43)
The Lost Sheep (Luke 15:1–7)
The Lost Coin (Luke 15:8–10)

Student Sermons (I)

May 31 Parables on Discipleship and Prayer *History of Interpretation Essay due*
Reading: Longenecker, *Challenge*, 240–262; 286–305
Parables: The Two Builders (Matt 7:24–27//Luke 6:47–49)
 The Tower Builder and the Warring King (Luke 14:28–33)
 The Unworthy Servant (Luke 17:7–10)
 The Labourers in the Vineyard (Matt 20:1–16)
 The Friend at Midnight (Luke 11:5–8)
 The Widow and the Judge (Luke 18:1–8)
 The Pharisee and the Tax Collector (Luke 18:9–14)

Student Sermons (II)

June 7 Parables on Wealth and Social Responsibility
Reading: Longenecker, *Challenge*, 217–239; 263–285
Parables: The Ungenerous Debtor (Matt 18:21–35)
 The Rich Fool (Luke 12:13–21)
 The Wedding Guests (Luke 14:7–14)
 The Compassionate Samaritan (Luke 10:25–37)
 The Crafty Manager (Luke 16:1–13)
 Lazarus at the Gate (Luke 16:19–31)

Student Sermons (III)

June 14 Parables of Judgement and Final Judgement
Reading: Longenecker, *Challenge*, 151–195
Parables: The Two Sons (Matt 21:28–32)
 The Wicked Tenants (Matt 21:33–46//Mark 12:1–12//Luke 20:9–19)
 The Wedding Banquet (Matt 22:1–14//Luke 14:15–24)
 The Barren Fig Tree (Luke 13:6–9)
 Wise and Foolish Bridesmaids (Matt 25:1–13)
 The Talents/Pounds (Matt 25:14–30//?Luke 19:11–27//Mark
 13:33–37)

The Sheep and Goats (Matt 25:31–46)

Student Sermons (IV)

June 28

Sermon Series due

Course Requirements

A. Resources

1. Textbooks (on reserve at Mills Memorial Library)

All required textbooks are available from MDC's book service, READ On Books, located in the Hurlburt Family Bookstore at McMaster Divinity College, located in Cullen Hall. For advance purchase, you may contact READ On Bookstore, 5 International Blvd, Etobicoke, Ontario M9W 6H3. Orders can be placed by phone (416 620.2934), text (416 668.3434), or email (books@readon.ca), with payment by e-transfer, credit card, or cheque; shipping is free for students. Other book services may also carry the texts.

David B. Gowler, *What Are They Saying About the Parables?* New York: Paulist, 2000.

(Also available via DTL)

Richard N. Longenecker, ed. *The Challenge of Jesus' Parables*. McMaster New Testament Studies. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000.

2. Additional resources

All registered students have access to the online Digital Theological Library collection: <https://libguides.thedtl.org/home>. Please keep the password that you have been assigned confidential.

a. Available via DTL

Craig L. Blomberg. *Preaching the Parables: From Responsible Interpretation to Powerful Preaching*. Grand Rapids: Baker, 2004.

David Buttrick. *Speaking Parables: A Homiletic Guide*. Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2000.

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

Michael P. Knowles. *Of Seeds and the People of God: Preaching as Parable, Crucifixion, and Testimony*. Eugene, Oregon: Cascade, 2015.

Richard Lischer. *Reading the Parables*. Interpretation. Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2014.

Klyne Snodgrass. *Stories with Intent: A Comprehensive Guide to the Parables of Jesus*. 2nd edition. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2018.

b. Available in print (on reserve at Mills Memorial Library)

Kissinger, Warren S. *The Parables of Jesus: A History of Interpretation and Bibliography*. Metuchen, NJ; London: Scarecrow, 1979.

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

The course bibliography is available on the Avenue to Learn course site

B. Assignments

Written assignments are due at 10:00 a.m. on the due date, and are to be submitted via the Avenue to Learn course website. In order to avoid late penalties, students are responsible for ensuring that assignments have been successfully uploaded.

Requirements for course assignments differ according to degree programme and specialization. In completing both oral and written assignments, DPT students will focus on issues that correspond to their respective programmes of research, while MDiv/MTS students are expected to identify and emphasize themes relevant to their chosen specialization.

1. Class Participation

All students (including Auditors) are required to view the online modules and to participate fully in synchronous class sessions, including presentation of two sermons for peer evaluation. Due to the nature of the class schedule and the fact that students are responsible for evaluating each other's sermons, enrolment in this course implies agreement to full participation as a requirement for academic credit.

2. Assigned Readings

Students enrolled for credit are required to complete the assigned readings for each module. The remainder of the minimum reading requirements may be selected from the course bibliography (available on the Avenue to Learn course site) and/or background materials for written assignments.

- a. MDiv/MTS 1,500 pages
- b. DPT 4,000 pages

Bibliographies appended to written assignments should indicate the approximate number of pages read in each source listed, as well as a cumulative total.

3. Essays

a. Exegesis

Due: May 17

This essay will outline the literary and theological dynamics of a specific parable (in its various Synoptic and extra-canonical forms, as applicable). Identify relevant biblical, social, and/or historical referents, and discuss the significance of the parable in question for teaching and preaching in the context of Christian ministry today. Be sure to identify the specific ministry situation that you intend to address. In the course of their exegesis, research degree students will also provide an original translation of their chosen parable, accompanied by an explanation of the translation itself.

Length:	MDiv/MTS	1,000 words	(20%)
	DPT	2,500 words	(20%)

b. History of Interpretation

Due: May 31

This essay will examine the history of interpretation of a specific parable, either within a limited historical period or from the early church to the present day. As far as you are able, try to account for particular interpretations within their respective theological and historical settings.

In the appended bibliography for each paper, indicate the extent of your reading in each of the resources that you cite.

Specializations:

Biblical Studies

Essays in this category will account both for contemporary exegetical debate (in Greek where possible) and for interpretation of the parable in the context of the particular gospel(s) within which they appear.

Christian Worldview

Attention to Christian worldview will identify distinctive aspects of the worldview(s) of Jesus of Nazareth and the evangelists, in relation to the assumptions of first century Judaism, the Greco-Roman world, subsequent interpretative contexts, and/or postmodern thought.

Pastoral Studies

An emphasis on pastoral concern will articulate the implications of Jesus' parables and the world that they describe for Christian identity, discipleship, ethics, ministry, and/or congregational leadership.

Length:	MDiv/MTS	1,000 words	(20%)
	DPT	2,500 words	(20%)

4. Sermon Preparation

a. Sermons for peer evaluation

Due: May 24/31; June 7/14

Compose and preach two sermons, each based on a specific parable, to other members of the class (a sign-up sheet will be distributed on the first day of class).

Length:	All programmes:	15 minutes
Weight:	MDiv/MTS	2 × 15%
	DPT	2 × 10%

b. Sermon series

Due: June 28

Outline a four-week preaching series, based on the parables of Jesus, addressed *either* to non-Christians (and thus is intentionally missional/ evangelistic) *or* to a congregation that consists entirely of new converts. The series should focus on a specific topic (the reign of God; grace and mercy; social responsibility; final judgement, etc.). Explain:

- 1) what these parables say about Christian faith and discipleship;
- 2) why it is important to understand this aspect of Jesus' teaching;
- 3) how you plan to preach on the basis of this material; and
- 4) what kind of practical response(s) you envisage.

In your explanation, be sure to discuss *how* parables work as well as *what* they communicate about the ways of God and *why* you have chosen to present the parables in this manner. *Do not include the sermons themselves.*

Research degree students will incorporate a discussion of pastoral, operational, and/or hermeneutical considerations (citing relevant secondary literature where appropriate): how do parables communicate their intended meaning, and what implications does they have for the theory and practice of preaching?

Length:	MDiv/MTS	2,000 words	(30%)
	DPT	5,000 words	(40%)

Students must select different parables for each of the assignments outlined above, so that no two essays or sermons cover the same material, and the sermons in the multi-week preaching series concern different parables again.

5. Auditing

Although exempt from written assignments, auditors are required to prepare two sermons for presentation and peer evaluation.

C. Style

Stylistic considerations (including but not limited to questions of formatting, footnotes, and bibliographic references) must conform to the McMaster Divinity College Style Guidelines for Essays and Theses: <https://mcmasterdivinity.ca/resources-forms/mdc-style-guide>. To assist with composition and completion of assignments, students are encouraged to make use of [grammarly.com](https://www.grammarly.com) (<https://www.grammarly.com>), along with the academic support services provided by McMaster's Student Success Centre (<https://studentsuccess.mcmaster.ca/academic-support>). Failure to observe appropriate form will result in grade reductions. See also "CRITERIA FOR GRADING OF WRITTEN ASSIGNMENTS," below.

D. Academic Honesty

Academic dishonesty is a serious offence that may take any number of forms, including plagiarism, the submission of work that is not one's own or for which previous credit has been obtained, and/or unauthorized collaboration with other students. Academic dishonesty can result in severe consequences, e.g., failure of the assignment, failure of the course, a notation on one's academic transcript, and/or suspension or expulsion from the College. Students are responsible for understanding what constitutes academic dishonesty. Please refer to the Divinity College Statement on Academic Honesty: <http://www.mcmasterdivinity.ca/programs/rules-regulations>

E. Gender Inclusive Language

McMaster Divinity College uses inclusive language for human beings in worship services, student written materials, and all of its publications. In reference to biblical texts, the integrity of the original expressions and the names of God should be respected. The NRSV and TNIV are examples of the use of inclusive language for human beings. Inclusive language is to be used in all MDC assignments.

F. Cell Phone/Computer Policy

Students must refrain from conducting cell phone conversations while the class is in session. Should you need to maintain contact with family members and/or your church or ministry, please turn off the ringer so as to avoid disturbing others; upon receipt of an urgent call, you may discretely excuse yourself from the classroom. The same policy applies to all computer-generated sound schemes, pagers, or other electronic annunciation systems.

G. Deadlines and Late Submission Penalty

Assignments are due at 1:00 p.m. on the due date, after which they will be considered late and penalized accordingly. The penalty for late submission of assignments is 1% per calendar day (without limit). The final date for submission

of late work is December 10, after which date assignments cannot be accepted for grading or credit.

Disclaimer:

This syllabus is the property of the instructor and is prepared with currently available information. The instructor reserves the right to make revisions up to and including the first day of class.

Summary of Assignments and Grading			
	Due	Length	Value
Professional Degrees (MDiv/MTS)			
Exegesis Essay	May 17	1,000 words (\approx 4 pp.)	20%
History of Interpretation Essay	May 31	1,000 words (\approx 4 pp.)	20%
Sermons	May 24/31 June 7/14	15 minutes max.	2 \times 15%
Sermon Series	June 28	2,000 words (\approx 8 pp.)	30%
DPT			
Exegesis Essay	May 17	2,500 words (\approx 10 pp.)	20%
History of Interpretation Essay	May 31	2,500 words (\approx 10 pp.)	20%
Sermon for Peer Evaluation	May 24/31 June 7/14	15 minutes max.	2 \times 10%
Sermon Series	June 28	5,000 words (\approx 20 pp.)	40%

SERMON EVALUATION FORM

Date: Start time: End time:

Preacher: Evaluator:

Text:

Thesis: The main point this sermon makes is...

Purpose: As a result of this sermon, the hearers should...

Outline: What are the main points of this sermon? (List on reverse side)

Structure: Was the sermon clearly structured and developed? Easy to follow?

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10_____

Exegesis: How clearly did the sermon interpret and present the parable?

3 6 9 12 15 18 21 24 27 30_____

Contextualization: How well did the sermon relate to contemporary culture/the audience?

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10_____

Illustration: How creative/effective were the illustrations in relation to the text and theme?

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10_____

Application: How concrete, specific, and relevant to this audience was the application?

2 4 6 8 10 12 14 16 18 20_____

Delivery: How effectively did the speaker use voice and body movements?

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10_____

Summary: How effective was the sermon in accomplishing its intended purpose?

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10_____

Additional comments and observations:

TOTAL _____
100

CRITERIA FOR GRADING OF ASSIGNMENTS

Grade Range	Content		Argument		Presentation	
90–100 A+ 85–89 A 80–84 A–	Mastery of subject matter; creativity and individualized integration of insights and their relationships; exceeds required elements		Clear, logical structure; with comprehensive introduction, persuasive argumentation, and innovative conclusions		Detailed adherence to relevant style for formatting of text, notes, and bibliography; no errors of grammar or syntax; elegant presentation	
77–79 B+ 73–76 B 70–72 B–	Average to above-average grasp of relevant concepts; completion of all required elements		Coherent structure and consistent argumentation; well-stated introduction and conclusion		General adherence to relevant style and format; few errors of grammar or syntax	
67–69 C+ 63–66 C 60–62 C–	Basic understanding of theoretical foundations; minimal completion of required elements		Rudimentary structure; minimal or incomplete introductory and concluding statements		Significant errors of grammar, syntax, or style	
57–59 D+ 53–56 D 50–52 D–	Low level of comprehension; required elements incomplete or missing		Lack of coherence or structure in argumentation; no introduction or conclusion		Abundant grammatical, syntactical, and stylistic errors	
0–49% F	Inability to grasp basic concepts; required elements missing		Incomprehensible or illogical structure and argumentation		Failure to follow stylistic guidelines; incomprehensible syntax	
Comments						

STORIES OF THE KINGDOM: PREACHING THE PARABLES OF JESUS		
	Name	Parable/Text
May 24		
10:30		
11:00		
11:30		
May 31		
10:30		
11:00		
11:30		
June 7		
10:30		
11:00		
11:30		
June 14		
10:30		
11:00		
11:30		

The Sower and Seed (Matt 13:1–9, 18–23//Mark 4:1–9, 13–20 //Luke 8:4–8, 11–15)

The Mustard Seed (Matt 13:31–32//Mark 4:30–32//Luke 13:18–19)

The Wicked Tenants (Matt 21:33–46//Mark 12:1–12//Luke 20:9–19)

The Talents/Pounds (Matt 25:14–30//?Luke 19:11–27//Mark 13:33–37)

The Two Builders (Matt 7:24–27//Luke 6:47–49)

The Leaven (Matt 13:33//Luke 13:20–21)

The Wedding Banquet (Matt 22:1–14//Luke 14:15–24)

The Growing Seed (Mark 4:26–29)

The Wheat and the Weeds (Matt 13:24–30, 36–43)

Treasure in a Field (Matt 13:44)

The Pearl (Matt 13:45–46)

The Fishnet (Matt 13:47–50)

The Ungenerous Debtor (Matt 18:21–35)

The Labourers in the Vineyard (Matt 20:1–16)

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The Friend at Midnight (Luke 11:5–8)

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The Barren Fig Tree (Luke 13:6–9)

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