

McMaster Divinity College  
Fall Semester 2023

MS 3XN3/5/6

STORIES OF THE KINGDOM:

PREACHING THE PARABLES OF JESUS

Wednesdays 2:00 – 3:50 pm

Dr. Michael Knowles

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## 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. Assuming at least basic familiarity with sermon preparation, 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

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## 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, together with 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.

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## Course Schedule

- Sept 13 Proclamation and Covert Meaning: Jesus' Use of Parables and its Background  
*Reading:* Gowler, *What Are They Saying*, 1–103  
*Supplementary:* Longenecker, *Challenge*, 3–75
- Sept 20 From Parables to Preaching: A Crash Course in Sermon Preparation
- Sept 27 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  
The Sower and Seed (Matt 13:1–23//Mark 4:1–20//Luke 8:4–15)  
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)
- Oct 4 Parables of Grace and Mercy  
*Reading:* Longenecker, *Challenge*, 199–216  
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)
- Oct 11 Reading Week (no class)
- Oct 18 Student Sermons: The Reign of God
- Oct 25 Student Sermons: Grace and Mercy
- Nov 1 Parables on Discipleship and Prayer *History of Interpretation Essay due*  
*Reading:* Longenecker, *Challenge*, 240–262; 286–305  
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)
- Nov 8 Parables on Wealth and Social Responsibility  
*Reading:* Longenecker, *Challenge*, 217–239; 263–285  
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)
- Nov 15 Student Sermons: Discipleship and Prayer (Brendan DePhillippeaux)
- Nov 22 Student Sermons: Wealth and Social Responsibility
- Nov 29 Parables of Judgement and Final Judgement  
*Reading:* Longenecker, *Challenge*, 151–195  
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)

Dec 6 Student Sermons: Judgement and Final Judgement

Dec 8 Final date for submission of late assignments

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## Course Requirements

### A. Resources

#### 1. Textbooks (on reserve at Mills Memorial Library)

All required textbooks for this class are available from the Hurlburt Family Bookstore located beside the entrance to the Parker Memorial Chapel of McMaster Divinity College. For advance purchase, you may contact the bookstore manager, Bernice Quek, by phone at 416.620.2934 or 416.668.3434 (mobile); or by email at books@readon.ca. The Hurlburt Family Bookstore also carries other books and merchandise and is open throughout the academic year during posted hours.

Note: Although purchasing the course texts is preferable, both are available online from the Digital Theological Library (see below).

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.

- 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.
- Warren S. Kissinger. *The Parables of Jesus: A History of Interpretation and Bibliography*. Metuchen, NJ; London: Scarecrow, 1979.
- 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*. 2<sup>nd</sup> edition. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2018.
- Brian C. Stiller. *Preaching Parables to Postmoderns*. Fortress Resources for Preaching. Minneapolis: Fortress, 2005.
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## B. Assignments

Written assignments are due at 2:00 p.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, Advanced Degree students will focus on issues that correspond to their respective programmes of research, while Professional Degree students are expected to identify and emphasize themes relevant to their chosen specialization.

### 1. Class Participation

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

## 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
- c. MA/PhD 6,000 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 (All programmes) *Due:* October 4

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 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, Advanced 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	(25%)
	DPT	3,500 words	(35%)
	MA/PhD	5,000 words	(40%)

- b. History of Interpretation (Professional Degree; MA/PhD) *Due:* November 8

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 possible, 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 (25%)  
                  MA/PhD        5,000 words (40%)

4. Sermon Preparation (All programmes)

a. Sermons for peer evaluation

**Due:** October 18 & 25;  
November 15 & 22;  
December 6

Compose and preach two original sermons, each based on a specific parable, to other members of the class (a sign-up sheet is available on the A2L course page).

Length: All programmes: 15 minutes  
Weight: MDiv/MTS        2 × 25%  
                  DPT                    2 × 15%  
                  MA/PhD                2 × 10%

Students must select different parables for each of the assignments outlined above, so that no two essays or sermons cover the same material.

5. Sermon series (DPT only)

*Due:* November 8

Outline a four-week preaching series, based on the parables of Jesus and addressed *either* to non-Christians (thus 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;
- 4) how this approach is most appropriate for the envisaged audience; and
- 5) what kind of response(s) you intend or anticipate.

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.* Include discussion of relevant pastoral, operational, and/or hermeneutical considerations (citing secondary literature as appropriate): how do parables communicate their intended meaning, and what implications does they have for the theory and practice of preaching?

Length: DPT                      3,500 words (35%)

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### 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.

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### D. Academic Honesty



Academic dishonesty is not qualitatively different from other types of dishonesty. It consists of misrepresenting the ownership of written work by deception or by other fraudulent means. In an academic setting this may include any number of forms such as: copying or using unauthorized aids in tests, examinations; plagiarism, i.e., submitting work that is not one's own (regardless of the means of its production) but passing it off as if it is; submitting work for credit in a course for which credit is being or has already been given, unless the previously submitted work was presented as such to the instructor of the second course and has been deemed acceptable for credit by the instructor of that course; aiding and abetting another student's dishonesty; giving false information for the purposes of gaining admission or credit; giving false information for the purposes of obtaining deferred examinations or extension of deadlines; forging or falsifying McMaster University or McMaster Divinity College documents.

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#### E. AODA

In accordance with the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act (AODA), the content of this course is intended to be accessible to all students who are enrolled in the course, including those with disabilities. If a student requires accommodation to participate fully in this course, that student is to contact SAS at McMaster University, who will then work directly with the McMaster Divinity College Registrar to negotiate reasonably appropriate accommodation for the student. The MDC Registrar will communicate with faculty regarding necessary accommodations. Please note that an accommodation is not retroactive and must be requested in advance to allow sufficient time for implementation.

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#### F. Gender Inclusive Language

McMaster Divinity College uses inclusive language for human beings in worship services, student written materials, and all its publications. It is expected that inclusive language will be used in chapel services and all MDC assignments. In reference to biblical texts, the integrity of the original expressions and the names of God should be respected, but you will need to use gender-inclusive language for humans, and you will need to quote from a gender-inclusive version such as, for example, the following: NRSV (1989), NCV (1991), TEV/GNB/GNT (1992), CEV (1995), NLT (1996), NIV (2011), and the CEB (2011).

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## G. Protocols for Live-Streaming/Online Participation

Appropriate etiquette for online participation is set out in the document *Online Classroom Etiquette.pdf* (<https://is.gd/rZmmwH>)

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## H. Cell Phone/Computer Policy

Students should refrain from conducting cell phone conversations while 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.

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## I. Deadlines and Late Submission Penalty

Assignments are due at 2:00 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 8, after which assignments will not be accepted for grading or credit.

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### 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.

<b>Summary of Assignments and Grading</b>			
	Due	Length	Value
Professional Degrees (MDiv/MTS)			
Exegesis Essay	October 4	1,500 words (~6 pp.)	25%
History of Interpretation Essay	November 8	1,500 words (~6 pp.)	25%
Sermons for Peer Evaluation	various	15 minutes max.	2 × 25%
DPT			
Exegesis Essay	October 4	3,500 words (~15 pp.)	35%
Sermons for Peer Evaluation	various	15 minutes max.	2 × 15%
Sermon Series	November 8	3,500 words (~15 pp.)	35%
MA/PhD			
Exegesis Essay	October 4	5,000 words (~20 pp.)	40%
History of Interpretation Essay	November 8	5,000 words (~20 pp.)	40%
Sermons for Peer Evaluation	various	15 minutes max.	2 × 10%

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SERMON EVALUATION FORM

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Date: \_\_\_\_\_ Start time: \_\_\_\_\_ End time: \_\_\_\_\_

Preacher: \_\_\_\_\_ Evaluator: \_\_\_\_\_

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**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)

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**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 \_\_\_\_\_

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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						