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DEVELOPING AN EFFECTIVE MODEL FOR PREACHING THE
PARABLES OF JESUS AT THE MEDWAY BAPTIST CHURCH
IN MEDWAY, OHIO

A Project
Presented to
the Faculty of
The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Doctor of Ministry

by
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December 2012

APPROVAL SHEET

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PARABLES OF JESUS AT THE MEDWAY BAPTIST CHURCH
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PREFACE

This project could not have been completed without the faithful support of many people. The people of Medway Baptist church continually offered their support and sacrificially allowed me to pursue this project even when it required me to leave for extended periods of time. Many have prayed for me during this process which was absolutely crucial to the success of the project. My wife offered encouragement and supported me during extended times of reflection and study. I am thankful for the opportunity to pursue this degree that the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary has provided and the continual direction of my faculty supervisor during this process. Most of all, I am deeply thankful for God's mercy in my life, and am continually humbled that he would use me to proclaim his word to the church.

Steven L. Lookabaugh

Medway, Ohio

December 2012

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Purpose

The purpose of this project was to improve my preaching of the parabolic literature by proclaiming the eight parables found in Luke 14-16 at Medway Baptist Church in Medway, Ohio.

Goals

The success of this project was based on four measurable goals. The first goal of this project was to understand the unique nature of parabolic literature and discover guidelines in interpreting this special genre. Many genres exist in the Bible and must be interpreted based on certain rules that will lead to an accurate understanding of the biblical text.

The second goal was to properly exegete the parables found in Luke 14-16 by using a historical/grammatical approach, thus leading to an accurately interpreted text. Understanding the uniqueness of genre is significant, but one must still do the work of exegesis. This goal was of primary importance because a lack of proper exegesis will make the sermon a subjective exercise dependent on the preacher's thinking and attitude instead of a subjective reality based on the authorial intent of each passage.

The third goal of this project was to accurately apply the truths of the parables to the lives of the congregation. The challenge for those who preach is to make the

ancient biblical text applicable for modern congregations. Applying the Bible is not always easy, but is a necessary component of good expository preaching. Explaining the meaning of a particular passage is essential, but the application of the biblical truth is equally significant. True application is achieved when people intellectually understand the textual point of the passage and start living out the applicational message of the biblical text in their daily lives.

The fourth goal of this project was to become a more effective and accurate communicator of the parables. This goal implied an improvement of homiletics on the preacher's part. Explanation and application are both important aspects of preaching, but the preacher's method of preaching should also improve over time. Some pastors in ministry focus solely on the message of the biblical text, which is absolutely important, but the method of one's presentation should not be ignored.

Context

Medway Baptist Church is located in Medway, Ohio just a few miles from Dayton. Medway is best described as a suburban community surrounded by farmland. The community is located between the larger cities of Springfield and Dayton, which makes it appealing for people who do not wish to live in the nearby urban areas. Medway has approximately 4000 residents with the adjoining communities of Park Layne and Crystal Lake.¹ Medway Baptist Church has seen slight growth as the weekly attendance has grown from 100 to almost 200, including the Hispanic ministries, over the last three years.

¹Accessed 7 June 2012, <http://www.bestplaces.net/city/ohio/medway>

The church started as a mission in 1957 and later was constituted in 1959. Since that time the church has been in the same location on Gerlaugh Road. Several of the original members are still attending the church; thus, loyalty exists for the current building and the land upon which it resides. The church also has had great loyalty to the Southern Baptist Convention since its mission status in 1957.

Medway Baptist Church is primarily focused on its surrounding community while emphasizing evangelism. The church seeks to be actively involved in the community rather than playing the role of a passive observer. Many members of the church understand the challenges of their postmodern culture and seek to be active in taking part in the process by leading individuals to faith in Christ.

The typology that best describes the church and the community is “cultural right,” because of the traditional values that are strongly held. Tex Sample accurately described Medway in his discussion of those who are culturally right when he writes that culturally right people are territorially rooted people.² Many people of Medway would fit this description because few desire to leave, but usually decide to spend their lives in the small town.

Unfortunately, Sample’s assessment of “hard-living” is also accurate of those who live in Medway.³ Many are alcoholics, poor, and have unhealthy marriages. This latter social problem is evident because many members have been through at least one divorce—which makes it difficult to find men above reproach for leadership ministries.

²Tex Sample, *U.S. Lifestyles and Mainline Churches* (Louisville: Westminster Press, 1990), 58.

³*Ibid.*, 60.

Ministry is complicated because of the overwhelming one parent households, but this situation does provide many opportunities to minister to the community.

A good attribute of Medway Baptist Church is that traditional values are held in high regard. Sample writes, “Basic to the approach to meaning of cultural-right people are traditional values: family, home, neighborhood or community, faith, and flag.”⁴ These values are ones that the church would agree are important. The church is not interested in the latest trends in Christianity or religions that do not hold to an orthodox view of Christianity, but they have a desire to know what God wants them to do through the accurate proclamation of the Bible. The church can be identified as a culturally-right church because of its desire to minister to the community through evangelistic and service ministries.

Medway Baptist Church is best defined as a “pillar church” because of its perceived connection with its geographic community.⁵ The members seek to help those in dire need. The church offers food, clothing, classes, and other help ministries to those in the community. The church also offers various events for the surrounding community that are well attended, such as the annual car show and the wild game dinner. The church feels their role is being carried out best when they are ministering to the needs of others. I have been the pastor of Medway Baptist Church for three years, although my connection with the church goes back seven years to the time when I did my undergraduate internship under a previous pastor. I was raised only a few miles from

⁴Ibid., 70.

⁵Carl S. Dudley and Sally A. Johnson, *Energizing the Congregation: Images that Shape Your Church's Ministry* (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox, 1988), 18.

Medway, so my perspective of the church and the community is based not on a pastor's limited observation as a new member of the community but as one who is an active participant as a native of the area.

The goal of my leadership is to equip Christians to do the ministry that God has called them to fulfill in their specific areas of ministry. Much of the emphasis is to challenge the people of the church to take more responsibility by giving them the confidence, experience, and guidance needed for their particular ministry. The church should not be a place where the pastor is doing all the work and the people are watching him perform their duties, but should be a place where every person is fulfilling the Great Commission of Matthew 28:18-20 and the individual mission that God has given to him or her.

My leadership style is not that of an authoritarian, which is counterproductive at Medway because the church has never responded well to such authoritarian leadership. Every time the church had an authoritative pastor, the church has decreased in size. My focus is on preparing God's people for their mission by discipleship and faithful expository preaching.

Rationale

The pastor's primary responsibility is to serve as a shepherd among God's people until Jesus the Chief Shepherd appears, according to 1 Peter 5:2-4. This responsibility should not be taken lightly but is all-consuming for the man the church calls their pastor, because pastors are Jesus' representative until his return. The text challenges pastors to be an example to God's people under their care, which means he is to live among the people by demonstrating personal holiness as one affected by the

gospel of Jesus. The pastor is also called to powerfully and accurately proclaim the Bible according to 2 Timothy 4:1-2, which relates to the primary goal of this project.

A commitment to expository preaching is an essential component of effective pastoral ministry. Many lay persons have not heard effective expository preaching, but preaching that would be better identified as a running commentary approach in which the preacher reads a verse, explains the verse, and then reads the next verse. This model of preaching is not expository preaching, but rather incomplete preaching as described by D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones.⁶ Pastors need to stand in the pulpit and deliver a clear message from God. The people of God need to hear faithful expository preaching that exhorts them to submit their lives to the authority of the Bible.

This project was necessary because I wanted to preach the parables well. Many books are dedicated to the purpose of helping preachers become better biblical orators, but one of the common struggles in expository preaching is the challenge of identifying and appropriately applying specific biblical genres. Many preachers fall short in their interpretive understanding of the Bible because they may not consider the importance and uniqueness of particular genres before they preach.

Developing a proper method for interpreting the parabolic genre is necessary if one is to reach a proper conclusion when studying a parable. Graeme Goldsworthy writes, “The parables, by their nature as self-contained stories, can easily be separated from their context and end up saying something that seems to fly in the face of the gospel emphasis. If the discipline of redaction criticism has taught us anything it is that the

⁶D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones, *Preaching and Preachers* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1971), 72.

biblical documents in general, and the Gospels in particular, have been carefully crafted to convey a message.”⁷

This project was beneficial because the Bible was more accurately proclaimed, which brought honor to God, and benefitted the congregation as they sought to know God’s will for their lives as they continually desire to glorify him. The content and method of my preaching also improved through this project, which was beneficial both to the preacher and those who listen to him preach on a regular basis.

Definitions and Limitations

This project included some terms that may be ambiguous and need definition or explanation. A working definition of “expository preaching” must be stated so that the end goal of improving such preaching can be attained. Bryan Chapell defines expository preaching as “a message whose structure and thought are derived from a biblical text, that covers the scope of the text, and that explains the features and context of the text in order to disclose the enduring principles for faithful thinking, living, and worship intended by the Spirit, who inspired the text.”⁸ This definition is the standard by which my preaching was judged as success or failure.

Defining a parable was absolutely essential for the completion of this project. A good definition of a parable is “a short, simple story designed to communicate a spiritual truth, religious principle, or moral lesson; a figure of speech in which truth is

⁷Graeme Goldsworthy, *Preaching the Whole Bible as Christian Scripture* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing, 2000), 228.

⁸Bryan Chapell, *Christ-Centered Preaching: Redeeming the Expository Preaching* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2005), 31.

illustrated by a comparison or example drawn from everyday experiences.”⁹ Limitations are inevitable in a project with the scope of this work. I researched and preached only parables, although many other genres exist in Scripture such as narrative, poetry, wisdom, epistles, and prophesy. These genres are as significant as parabolic literature, but I have chosen to focus on parables because of my perceived weakness in preaching this genre accurately. Being able to understand and preach parables is significant because Jesus constantly spoke in parables.

The length of this project was also a limitation because it allowed only so much time to study the nature of genres, develop guidelines for preaching parables, recruit evaluators, study the biblical text, prepare to preach the series, and evaluation. The project took fifteen weeks from the beginning of recruitment to the final evaluation, which allowed for some assessment, but will not be complete in scope. Not all the parables found in the New Testament were preached, but only the eight parables found in Luke 14-16.

Research Methodology

The main goal of this project was to become a better preacher of parabolic literature, and every step of this project is designed for the attainment of that goal. The first step was to prepare eight sermons from Luke 14:7-16:31 that focus on the parabolic teachings of Jesus Christ. The main reason why these passages were selected in sequential order rather than various parables throughout the New Testament is because it reflects my normal process in preaching through books of the Bible. These sermons were

⁹Herbert Lockyer, ed., *Nelson's Illustrated Bible Dictionary* (Grand Rapids: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1986), 798.

text-driven, and sought to honor God by using an expository model.

Once these eight sermons are prepared, I selected eight adults from the congregation to serve as my evaluators. Three criteria exist for selecting volunteers for this project. The first criterion was that the person must feel comfortable enough around me to give honest feedback, because the point of this project is to improve my preaching. The second criterion was that the person must have excellent attendance, because if he or she does not attend regularly, the results will not be particularly helpful. The third criterion was that the person must be honest and willing to participate in this project.

The sermon evaluators received a pre-evaluation form in which they answered multiple questions that revealed their understanding of parables. This form was helpful because it demonstrated to the participants the seriousness of the project they took part in. This questionnaire was focused on the participant's age, spiritual journey, attitude toward the Bible, expectations of preaching, and knowledge of parables.

The next component was an interview of the entire group before the sermon evaluation began. This meeting had several benefits. The first benefit was that participants were informed about the project before it began. The second benefit was that questions could be asked before the project began, which was helpful so that no mistakes were made on further questionnaires. The last benefit was that everyone would feel more comfortable in the group. I want every person to feel comfortable in this process and not intimidated.

Before the sermons were preached, participants received evaluation forms that focused on the sermon's content and presentation. These questions used a five-point Likert scale with an opportunity to comment further. The expectation was for the

evaluations to be done during the sermon or shortly after the sermon is completed. These evaluation forms were done in a timely manner because many of these questions was used when the group met to discuss the sermon.

The sermons will be preached on Sunday mornings and will be evaluated after the morning service. I will lead the discussion by using the evaluation group questionnaire, but will not be limited by it. The participants will have an opportunity to make observations, share words of encouragement, or note any weaknesses in either the sermon message or method. The group gathering is also helpful because it gives the participants an opportunity to state their opinions outside the limited nature of the Likert scale. Last, the focus group gives freedom to the group members to have dialogue with one another concerning the sermon, which will be particularly helpful for the success of the project.

An exit questionnaire and a post-evaluation survey was administered at the end of the sermon series to demonstrate the improvement that was attained. The main goal of this project was to become a better preacher, and the exit questionnaire helped determine the success of this goal. This questionnaire also determined if the participants reached a better understanding of the parables and if their previously held views have changed.

CHAPTER 2
PRINCIPLES FOR INTERPRETING PARABLES

Historical and Cultural Context

Considering the specific historical and cultural context is important as one prepares to preach a parable, because they were not originally spoken to a modern culture but an ancient one. The contemporary interpreter's responsibility and challenge is to observe culturally significant details affecting the meaning of a parable with the goal of discovering the author's intent for teaching them. In other words, Jesus did not originally speak his parables in a modern context but one in antiquity. John Stott writes, "In Scripture he spoke his Word through human words to human beings in precise historical and cultural contexts; he did not speak in culture-free generalities."¹

Because Jesus uttered the parables in a specific historical context then it seems logical for the modern interpreter to seek an understanding consistent with this reality. Certainly, a danger presents itself when one attempts to apply the text without considering these greater historical and cultural details, and simply applies the text through a modern worldview. This temptation is magnified because the modern reader often finds the surroundings of the text familiar and considers the parable directly related to his or her cultural understanding through common points of cultural similarities.

¹John R. W. Stott, *Between Two Worlds: The Art of Preaching in the Twentieth Century* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1982), 145.

Sidney Greidanus responds to this issue when he writes, “This original, historical meaning is important for preachers because it offers the only objective point of control against deriving from the text all kinds of subjective and arbitrary messages.”²

A process that leads one to comprehend a parable as the original audience understood it is laborious but possible because of the vast supply of available materials both ancient and contemporary. Careful analysis of these resources is extremely helpful for the modern interpreter who seeks to understand the historical surroundings of the parables. They are categorized as either primary or secondary materials. Primary resources are those produced in the biblical period while secondary usually refers to those written later often reflecting on the primary material.

Primary background information is helpful because it gives the interpreter a glimpse into the ancient world in which Jesus spoke his parables. Sometimes, the material has a direct correlation with the biblical text but mostly informs of the broader scope of the ancient world. Richard Erickson writes, “Most of the time, however, primary literature from the biblical period . . . provides us with indirect information, a big-picture backdrop to the New Testament.”³ The ultimate goal is to become more acquainted with this unfamiliar world through the study of ancient documents so Jesus’ words become understood as they were in the first century. Simon Kistemaker writes, “Wherever possible, the interpreter ought to make a study of the historical setting of the parable, including a detailed analysis of the religious, social, political, and geographical

²Sidney Greidanus, *Preaching Christ from the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing, 1999), 228.

³Richard J. Erickson, *A Beginner's Guide to New Testament Exegesis*

circumstances revealed in the parable.”⁴

Secondary sources have been written throughout history beginning early in the church’s history to very recent times. The authenticity and truthfulness of some secondary sources may be questioned, but are often very valuable for study. Many of these sources are very helpful for the one who wishes to learn about ancient culture but may not have studied the primary sources. This secondary information is found in various forms to meet the needs of a modern audience. Erickson writes concerning the various content available when he writes, “Secondary literature in this field—in the shape of dictionary and journal articles, statistical tools, grammars, treatises, monographs and commentaries—forms the depository of results, and summaries of results, from centuries of study and reflection on the Bible.”⁵

Having a working knowledge of the biblical world is important, but one should have a plan to study and implement both primary and secondary sources. Most pastors are unlikely to master both the primary and secondary sources, because of time constraints and other limitations, but should have a process and a priority of sources to help them determine the original setting of the parables. Erickson encourages busy pastors by writing, “Set yourself a goal of reading from these ‘original,’ primary documents over the remainder of your active life . . . Resist the false sense of obligation to master it all before your next sermon, but strive to read one or two of these texts each

(Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2005), 96.

⁴Simon J. Kistemaker, *The Parables: Understanding the Stories Jesus Told* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1980), 17.

⁵Erickson, *New Testament Exegesis*, 97.

year, perhaps during Lent or Advent, or for your birthday.”⁶

Possessing a cultural and historical understanding is useful but some limitations exist, such as the tendency for modern culture to assign meaning to the biblical text based on their cultural values. Pastors and theologians will often define an issue as being either cultural and no longer relevant or theological and being a timeless truth, and these decisions can be dangerous when modern culture forces these decisions to be made. The Bible contains many difficult instructions such as women wearing head coverings, qualifications for deacons and elders, women in positions of authority in the church, and charging interest for loaned money. The temptation is to reassign the clear and historical meaning of a text with one that satisfies a changing culture. J. Robertson McQuilkin addresses this problem, “The Bible was given to reveal how God wants people to live, relate, behave. So to mold the teaching of Scripture by contemporary human behavior is exactly the opposite of what is intended by revelation. The Bible was intended to create a culture, not to be molded by it.”⁷

Another limitation when considering the cultural context is the danger of prioritizing secondary sources above the Bible. McQuilkin comments, “If some external source—whether an extra-biblical principle or a person—sets aside the teaching of Scripture, that source has become the authority superior to the Bible itself.”⁸ This situation creates a reversal of roles, because the Bible is the authoritative text not the

⁶Ibid., 97.

⁷J. Robertson McQuilkin, "Limits of Cultural Interpretation," *JETS* 2 (1980): 119.

⁸Ibid., 114.

secondary source. These resources have the capacity of shedding some light on biblical texts but they are not infallible. The Bible is authoritative and one should not neglect the necessity of exegesis and interpretation within the framework of systematic and biblical theology.

Lexical and Syntactical Context

Lexical and syntactical analysis is a necessary component in the interpretive process because the actual words of the text are examined within its linguistic context. The study of each word within its semantic range is significant as well as the word within the specific context of the passage and the wider context of the Bible. Henry Virkler defines lexical and syntactical context in this way, “Lexical-syntactical analysis is the study of the meaning of individual words (lexicology) and the way those words are combined (syntax), in order to determine more accurately the author’s intended meaning.”⁹

Necessity of Lexical and Syntactical Context

Studying the Bible with a lexical and syntactical context in view should not be neglected, but is a necessary component to expository preaching. This analysis is necessary because the primary task for the expositor is to understand what the biblical author intended. Bryan Chapell writes, “Our task as preachers is to discern what the original writers meant by analyzing the background and grammatical features of what

⁹Henry A. Virkler, *Hermeneutics: Principles and Processes of Biblical Interpretation* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1981), 94.

they said.”¹⁰ The Bible is not a mystical book that draws meaning from the subjective opinions of its readers, but has authors who wrote specific words in a particular order within a greater syntactical context. The expositor’s task is to discover the authorial intent by studying individual words within their greater context so that appropriate application may be drawn. Chapell continues, “However, if anything in Scripture can mean whatever our imaginations suggest rather than what Scripture determines, then our opinions become as authoritative as the statements of God and we make the Bible say whatever we want.”¹¹

Careful lexical study of the passage to be preached is necessary because the truth of the Bible is superior to human wisdom. Felt needs or a preacher’s agenda should not be the focus of the sermon but it should be centered on the biblical text. John Calvin was particularly concerned about those who would jettison biblical exegesis when he wrote concerning the difference between Scripture and human wisdom, “Now this power which is peculiar to Scripture is clear from the fact that of human writings, however artfully polished, there is none capable of affecting us at all comparably.”¹² Many preachers feel that the power of preaching is in meeting the perceived felt needs of his congregation, but the actual power according to Calvin is Scripture.

The danger of heresy is possible for those who neglect exegesis and proper context of a passage of Scripture. D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones writes concerning the root of

¹⁰Bryan Chapell, *Christ-Centered Preaching: Redeeming the Expository Sermon* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2005), 77.

¹¹Ibid.

¹²John Calvin, *Calvin: Institutes of the Christian Religion*, ed. John T. McNeill (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press), 82.

heresy, “Heretics are generally people who have got hold of an idea from a particular statement which they have misinterpreted and have then allowed it to run away with them, instead of checking it with other portions of Scripture.”¹³ This possibility alone should motivate the preacher to be more diligent but often times it does not. John Stott believes that a high view of Scripture should motivate the preacher to be serious about studying the text when he writes, “The higher view of the Bible, the more painstaking and conscientious our study of it should be. If this book is indeed the Word of God, then away with slovenly, slipshod exegesis!”¹⁴ Preachers should not preach about the Bible but they should be focused on preaching the Bible, which requires an understanding and dedication to the hard work of lexical and syntactical analysis of specific texts.

Principles for Lexical and Syntactical Context

The goal in lexical analysis is to study the smallest unit of language which is the individual word for the purpose of comprehending a particular text. This type of study is important because the Bible is an ancient collection of writings spanning many years within various cultural contexts. Words have meaning and discovering the specific meaning of a word is important for proper exegesis. Walter Kaiser writes, “Words and idioms are the most basic of all the linguistic building-blocks of meaning. Through the accumulation of words and idioms a writer expresses the distinctive thought he has in

¹³D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones, *Preaching and Preachers* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1971), 205.

¹⁴Stott, *Between Two Worlds*, 182.

mind.”¹⁵

One of the challenges of doing word studies is that often words have a variety of definitions even within the same culture. Words also change meaning as time progresses, so a word used in first century Palestine may have a different application than it does in a twenty-first century Western culture. Virkler writes, “Any word that survives long in a language begins to take on a variety of meanings. Thus it is necessary to identify the various possible meanings of ancient words, and then determine which of the several possible meanings is the one the author intended to convey within a specific context.”¹⁶

Studying the lexical root of individual words can be helpful to the interpreter in an attempt to understand a passage, but choosing which words to study is the challenge. Because the task is so daunting, Thomas Schreiner gives three guidelines for implementing lexical studies. First, he instructs his readers to study words that add theological significance to a passage, even if the word is a common one often defined in systematic theologies. Schreiner explains why lexical study is required, “However, the student needs to know from firsthand analysis of the text what Paul means by grace, righteousness, and hope.”¹⁷ The second guideline is to study those words that contribute to the main idea of a text. Schreiner writes, “Thus, careful observation of a text will help the interpreter note words that recur often and that have potential significance for the

¹⁵Walter C. Kaiser, *Toward and Exegetical Theology: Biblical Exegesis for Preaching and Teaching* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1981), 105.

¹⁶Virkler, *Hermeneutics*, 96.

¹⁷Thomas R. Schreiner, *Interpreting the Pauline Epistles* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1990), 133.

interpretation of a given passage.”¹⁸ The third guideline given by Schreiner is “one should study words with debated meanings that are crucial for the understanding of a given passage.”¹⁹

Once the significant words to be studied at a lexical level are chosen, then one should have a process for studying these words. Differentiation between diachronic and synchronic word studies is significant, because both are significant in the process. Diachronic word analysis can be defined as “viewing language from a historical perspective.”²⁰ Usually it seeks to understand how words have changed meaning over time. Although diachronic word studies are significant in understanding specific words, synchronic analysis may be more important for biblical studies because it isolates study of a word to a particular historical context. Darrell Bock describes the benefit of synchronic studies, “This is perhaps the most crucial phase of lexical analysis since the meaning of a word in its specific context, either temporal or literary, is the major concern of the exegete.”²¹

The next step is to determine the semantic range of the word being studied. One should use both studies in synchronic and diachronic analysis, which would include the primary sources of the Bible but also resources that explain the meaning of the word through history. The semantic range is a list of possible meanings a particular word

¹⁸Ibid., 134.

¹⁹Ibid.

²⁰David Allen Black, *Linguistics for Students of New Testament Greek: A Survey of Basic Concepts and Applications* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1995), 6.

²¹Darrell L. Bock, "New Testament Word Analysis," in *Introducing New Testament Interpretation*, ed. Scot McKnight (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1989), 103.

possesses with both primary and secondary usages. The primary meaning is the one most occurrences of the word refers, while a secondary meaning refers to a minority understanding of a word. Black explains, “Hence, each word may be viewed as having a general or central meaning and a number of secondary or transferred meanings.”²²

Once the semantic range of a word is discovered then one needs to narrow the meaning down to one possibility to comprehend the author’s intent. A word may have a number of possible meanings but the author meant one of those meanings as he wrote, so the challenge for the interpreter is to understand which one the author meant. This task usually is not accomplished by lexical analysis alone but by examining the context. Black writes, “it is far better to determine what the potential senses of a word are, and then use all available contextual clues to select the sense that best fits the context.”²³

Even with a clearly defined process of lexical study and advice concerning the priority of words to be studied a possibility of misinterpretation is highly probable within this field of study. Schreiner writes, “Lexical study is one of the most important elements of the exegetical process. Unfortunately, it is also an area that suffers from great abuse.”²⁴ One of the greatest problems is that pastors will spend an inordinate amount of time devoted to the study of an individual lexical root and study the historical development of the word with a goal of discovering the author’s intent, but often the author may have been unaware of this development. John Walton describes this issue, “Speakers and writers do not usually choose to employ a word based on an understanding of its

²²Black, *Linguistics for Students*, 124.

²³Ibid., 125.

²⁴Schreiner, *Interpreting the Pauline Epistles*, 128.

etymology or subsequent history. Most speakers are entirely unaware of the etymology of the words they are using.”²⁵

The fact that lexical studies isolated from its syntactical context have a high risk for error has been well documented by authors such as D. A. Carson and Grant Osborne. Carson lists sixteen common fallacies within word studies such as the root fallacy, semantic anachronism, unwarranted restriction of the semantic field, and problems related to the Semitic background of the Greek New Testament.²⁶ The best way to avoid such errors is to not isolate lexical studies apart from its immediate and greater literary context. Both lexical and syntactical scholarship should be used together to discover the author’s intent and not isolated from one another. Osborne comments on this common fallacy when he writes, “In one sense ignoring the context is the basic error that encompasses the others and makes them possible. For instance, etymology is misused as formative of meaning when the diachronic history of a term is given priority over the context.”²⁷ Osborne also comments that a word separated from its syntactical context is meaningless, “Thus there is no inherent meaning in a word... Yet in reality words are arbitrary symbols that have meaning only in a context.”²⁸

Because syntactical analysis is necessary as a compliment to lexical studies

²⁵Kevin J. Vanhoozer, ed., *Dictionary for Theological Interpretation of the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2005), 200.

²⁶D. A. Carson, *Exegetical Fallacies* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1996), 27-64.

²⁷Grant R. Osborne, *The Hermeneutical Spiral: A Comprehensive Introduction to Biblical Interpretation* (Grand Rapids: InterVarsity Press, 2006), 93.

²⁸*Ibid.*, 94.

then one should have a process for its implementation. This process involves taking the necessary steps to unveil the author's intended meaning by analyzing words, sentences, and paragraphs. Erickson defines syntactical analysis as, "the process of unpacking the meaning of a sentence by noticing the syntactical signals an author has employed naturally, and often quite unconsciously, in creating it."²⁹

The first step for syntactical analysis is to recognize the natural divisions of the text, such as paragraphs, sentences, clauses, and phrases. This step is important because it helps the interpreter understand the author's intended meaning. Walter Kaiser writes, "The way in which words are put together so as to form phrases, clauses, and sentences will aid us in discovering the author's pattern of meaning."³⁰ These natural divisions will differ according to genre, and a parable is naturally divided by occasion and story. Usually parables are more easily divided than other genres but some debate concerning the division of parables does exist. For example, in the parable of the dishonest manager, some scholars believe the parable ends with verse nine while others agree with an earlier ending.³¹

Through the process of discovering the natural divisions of the text, one has already considered the main idea within the context of the biblical book, but the expository preacher should examine the paragraph or text to be preached in greater detail. The next step is to discover the main idea and supporting points of the text in order to

²⁹Erickson, *New Testament Exegesis*, 70.

³⁰Kaiser, *Toward an Exegetical Theology*, 89.

³¹Kistemaker makes the point that some scholars argue over the conclusion of this parable. Kistemaker, *The Parables*, 187-88.

understand what the author intended to say as he wrote the passage. One author gives wise instruction, “One helpful approach to understanding the basic structure of a passage involves a method for identifying the main statement(s) in each sentence, then identifying the subordinate clause or clauses in each sentence, and determining how much each modifies or qualifies the ideas expressed in the main statement(s).”³²

An essential element of syntactical analysis is to see the relationship between sentences, phrases, and words in the text. This relationship is often obvious by words that connect sentences and ideas to one another. These words often show progression in the author’s thought and the expositor should pay attention to such connective elements in the text. Virkler identifies various types of connective elements in Scripture when he writes, “Connecting words, including conjunctions, prepositions, relative pronouns, etc., often aid in following the author’s progression of thought.”³³

One should also pay attention to both structure and content words in the syntactical process because they are important in understanding the text. Structural words are those basic words that do not seem to carry much lexical diversity but are significant in understanding a passage because their precise placement in a sentence contributes to a right understanding of the text. Black describes structural words, “These are words such as articles, prepositions, and conjunctions, which have little precise lexical meaning, but which have great importance in signaling relationships among meaningful words with

³²William W. Klein, Craig Blomberg, and Robert Hubbard, *Introduction to Biblical Interpretation* (Dallas: Word Publishing, 1993), 206.

³³Virkler, *Hermeneutics*, 98.

which they appear.”³⁴ Content words are those words in a passage that carries great lexical variety but whose meaning is defined by context. In syntactical analysis, relationships between words are important because context often determines a word’s lexical meaning. Black defines and explains content words when he writes, “They include words such as nouns, verbs, adjectives, and adverbs. They can be interchanged with words of the same class without losing structural significance, although the meaning of the sentence changes. Every content class contains thousands of words, which can be substituted for each other in countless ways.”³⁵

Theological Context

The theological context is an important component in the interpretive process, because it confirms what the rest of Scripture teaches concerning the potential theological principles in the parables. This hermeneutical process should not be considered an option but necessary for correct understanding of a particular text. Careful exegesis of a parable is necessary but also possessing a comprehensive view of theology that informs one’s interpretive method of the parable being studied. Chapell writes, “Preachers determine the meaning of a passage by seeing not only how words are used in the context of a book or its passages but also how the passage functions in the entire scope of Scripture.”³⁶

Systematic theology is one useful approach in understanding the theological context of a passage. The process in this theological method is to categorize all the

³⁴Black, *Linguistics for Students of New Testament Greek*, 98.

³⁵*Ibid.*, 98.

³⁶Chapell, *Christ-Centered Preaching*, 79.

teaching of Scripture into main topics or themes. For example, if one desires to learn more about God's glory then he or she should examine all the Scriptures related to God's glory and would construct a theology of God's glory from dozens of passages throughout Scripture that reveal details concerning this theological topic. Millard Erickson writes, "Theology is systematic. . . . Rather than utilizing individual texts in isolation from one another to coalesce the varied teachings in to some type of harmonious or coherent whole."³⁷ This systemized approach leads to a high degree of application because of its ability to answer specific inquires one might have. In other words, the strength of systematic theology is its capacity to answer specific theological questions. Gerhard Hasel writes, "Simply stated, systematic theology tells us 'what the texts mean' for today."³⁸

Another important theological method in the interpretive process is biblical theology. Systematic theology examines all the individual passages that make contributions to a particular theological subject, but biblical theology is more focused on each text in its unique historical context while considering the progressive view of God's revelation throughout Scripture. Carson defines biblical theology as "that branch of theology whose concern it is to study each corpus of the Scripture in its own right, especially with respect to its place in the history of God's unfolding revelation."³⁹

³⁷Millard Erickson, *Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1998), 23.

³⁸Gerhard Hasel, "The Relationship between Biblical Theology and Systematic Theology," *Trinity Journal* 5 (1984): 117.

³⁹D. A. Carson, *Collected Writings on Scripture* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2010), 118.

Biblical theology and systematic theology are both important in interpreting parables. One method should not be utilized at the exclusion of the other because both are significant in the interpretive process and often function as a check and balance system. Systematic theology may seem like a more natural way to do theology because one does not approach a parable devoid of theological beliefs and convictions but rather with certain theological presuppositions that inform his or her understanding of the parables. Sidney Greidanus writes, “A third reason for the necessity of theological interpretation is that a believing interpreter cannot approach the Bible in a neutral, supposedly objective, fashion but will naturally use a method of interpretation that is informed by that faith commitment.”⁴⁰ However, biblical theology requires conscious discipline because a parable should be read in its proper context and difficulties occur when one employs a systematic theology too quickly, while ignoring the contributions of biblical theology. Thomas Schreiner writes, “The ultimate goal of studying the Bible, then, is to form a systematic theology, for applying the Bible to today is where the rubber meets the road. Biblical theology, however, keeps systematic theology from imposing alien thought forms upon the system.”⁴¹

Certain theological principles are important in the interpretive process that should not be neglected. The principle of analogy of faith is significant because it establishes Scripture as the interpretive authority and not any other source. This principle was one of the battles during the reformation when the Pope believed he was the

⁴⁰Sidney Greidanus, *The Modern Preacher and the Ancient Text: Interpreting and Preaching Biblical Literature* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing, 1988), 105.

⁴¹Thomas R. Schreiner, *New Testament Theology: Magnifying God in Christ*

interpreter of Scripture. Stott comments, “The Reformers also spoke much of ‘the analogy of faith,’ by which they meant their belief that Scripture possesses a unity given it by the mind of God, that it must therefore be allowed to interpret itself, one passage throwing light upon another and that the Church has no liberty so to ‘expound one place of Scripture that it be repugnant to another’”⁴²

Another important theological principle is the law of non-contradiction. Because the Bible is infallible and inerrant then it cannot contradict itself, and whenever there appears to be a theological contradiction then an interpretive error has occurred. This problem can even be more pronounced when one is attempting to interpret the parables, because parables are inherently difficult to understand theologically. Systematic theology becomes important in the process, because theological truths in a parable will not contradict a universal, doctrinal truth in Scripture. Wayne Grudem adds, “This principle puts a safeguard on our use of what we think to be logical deductions from Scripture. Our supposedly logical deductions may be erroneous, but Scripture itself cannot be erroneous.”⁴³

Possessing a strong systematic and biblical theology requires much dedication and the temptation exists to avoid the difficult work but often such neglect is dangerous for pulpit ministry. Many will often avoid more difficult passages of Scripture to avoid the hard work of theological analysis. Kaiser addresses the problem of preachers avoiding

(Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2008), 884.

⁴²Stott, *Between Two Worlds*, 128.

⁴³Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994), 34.

theological work, “Meanwhile, the very text which presumably is the focus of attention for congregation and speaker alike, continues to go begging for lack of an interpreter. In the very act which could have unveiled that text for God’s people, it is instead being buried more deeply under more tradition, anecdotes, and faddish practical chatter—all in hopes that divine authority is their source.”⁴⁴

One Main Point

One of the main issues in the interpretive process is concerning how a parable should be interpreted. Theologians have dealt with the hermeneutical issue of how to interpret parables throughout church history. The Alexandrian and Antiochian schools are examples of the early church debating the allegorical vs. literal methods of interpretation. The Alexandrian interpretive method was allegorical in nature while the Antiochene approach was more literal.⁴⁵ In one sense, the debate on how to interpret the parables has never concluded, and theologians still have to deal with many of the same issues. The theological spectrum in how one should interpret parables is vast, but very significant for the modern interpreter and preacher.

The dominant view of the early church was to allegorize the parables and was a popular method throughout the history of the church, although some dissenters occasionally objected particularly within medieval Christianity and the Protestant Reformation. Stein writes concerning parable interpretation, “During this period of the

⁴⁴Kaiser, *Toward an Exegetical Theology*, 133.

⁴⁵Bray discusses the main theological movement of literal vs. allegorical approach within the Alexandrian and Antiochene exegesis from A.D. 325-451. Gerald Bray, *Biblical Interpretation Past and Present* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1996), 104-07.

early church the allegorical method of interpreting the parables came to dominate the scene.”⁴⁶ The early church justified the use of allegory by claiming it had the authority to do so by the rule of faith. R. P. C. Hanson writes, “It has indeed been frequently claimed that the practice of allegorizing the Scriptures is part of the earliest tradition of the Church. Clement of Alexandria and Origen regard it as part of the Church’s rule of faith.”⁴⁷ The problem with this view is that few interpreters in the church reached the same conclusion as their predecessors when interpreting the parables. Augustine in his famous allegorical interpretation of the Good Samaritan creates a point for every detail in the parable. For example, he believes Jericho represents the moon which symbolizes morality, the thieves are the devil, the priest represents the ministry of the Old Testament, the inn is the church, the binding of wounds is the restraint of sin, the Samaritan is Jesus, and the inn keeper is the Apostle Paul.⁴⁸ Augustine does not stop here but rather includes many more allegorical details, however many interpreters disagree with some or all of his method. Gerald Bray comments on later interpreters, “There were many variations on this theme in later centuries. . . . The innkeeper also varied somewhat, to many he was the pope.”⁴⁹

⁴⁶Robert H. Stein, *An Introduction to the Parables of Jesus* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1981), 42.

⁴⁷R. P. C. Hanson, *Allegory and Event: A Study of the Sources and Significance of Origen's Interpretation of Scripture* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2002), 65.

⁴⁸Bray goes into detail concerning every point of comparison in Augustine's allegorical approach in the parable of the Good Samaritan. Gerald Bray, *Biblical Interpretation*, 493-94.

⁴⁹*Ibid.*, 494.

The issue is not whether a parable contains some elements of allegory, because theologians such as Snodgrass think this is a meaningless argument, “Tremendous effort has been expended trying to distinguish parable and allegory, but in the end we must admit that the effort is a complete failure, despite the gallons of ink expended,”⁵⁰ but allegorizing is the problem. Snodgrass comments, “However, the allegorical features of parables do not give license to allegorize. The practice of turning parables into allegories that Jesus never intended must be resisted at every point.”⁵¹ Blomberg has a similar reaction to the practice of allegorizing by the early church, “The days of anachronistic, allegorizing interpretation must remain in the past.”⁵²

The main reason why allegorizing must be abandoned is because it relies heavily on the subjective imagination of the interpreter and often fails to fully comprehend authorial intent. Historical allegorical interpretations were often theologically accurate, but not textually informed. The primary purpose of studying the parables is to understand what Jesus meant when he spoke them. McQuikin writes, “Since the Bible is the authoritative revelation of spiritual truth, the initial goal of biblical study must be to understand the author’s meaning. If the Bible is to have any independent authority, we must determine the author’s meaning.”⁵³

Parables may share some common characteristics with allegories, but there

⁵⁰Klyne R. Snodgrass, *Stories with Intent: A Comprehensive Guide to the Parables of Jesus* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing, 2008), 16.

⁵¹*Ibid.*, 17.

⁵²Craig L. Blomberg, *Interpreting the Parables* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1990), 47.

⁵³McQuikin, *Understanding and Applying the Bible*, 70.

also exists important differences. One of the key differences is allegories have many different points of comparison but a parable is trying to illustrate a single teaching point or truth. A parable is a single, sometimes extended comparison whose goal is to teach an important lesson, usually concerning God's kingdom. Because a parable is an extended simile then it is logical to assume there is a single teaching point. Stein defends a single point interpretation when he writes, "It is now clear that parables are not allegories, as Origen, Augustine, and other thought, because a parable is for the most part an extended simile or metaphor and has, therefore, only one tertium comparationis, whereas an allegory is a chain or series of metaphors."⁵⁴

A simile is a rhetorical device in which comparisons are made between two things that are dissimilar. Parables explain difficult heavenly truths by comparing them to something more understandable. Often Jesus explains kingdom principles by comparing them to everyday life. For example, Jesus compares the cost of following him to a wise man who considers the cost before he begins to build. Virkler writes, "Thus, a parable is something placed alongside something else for the purpose of comparison. The typical parable uses a common event of natural life to emphasize or clarify an important spiritual truth."⁵⁵

Several interpretive guidelines exist in order to discover the authorial intent of the parable. Since each parable has a main point and the interpreter's challenge is to correctly discover the main idea of the parable. Learning the main idea of a parable can be very challenging but is the key to understanding what Jesus meant when he told them

⁵⁴Stein, *An Introduction to the Parables of Jesus*, 54.

to his audience. Jesus used parables as teaching devices that compared one thing to something else. C. H. Dodd writes, “The typical parable, whether it be a simple metaphor, or a more elaborate similitude, or a full-length story, presents one single point of comparison.”⁵⁶ The task for the interpreter is to understand what Jesus was comparing in the parables. The parable of the tower serves as a good illustration of comparison because one who builds a tower goes through a pre-building process of evaluating the cost of completing the tower, and Jesus says that one who wants to follow him should do the same thing. The main point of comparison in this parable is obviously discipleship with building a tower.

One of the goals for discovering the main idea is to understand the parable as the received audience would have understood it. Snodgrass comments, “If we are after the intent of Jesus, we must seek to hear a parable as Jesus’ Palestinian hearers would have heard it. Any interpretation that does not breathe the air of the first century cannot be correct.”⁵⁷ This principle is often demonstrated in Jesus’ usage of reversal which means the story typically does not end in the way its listeners would expect. A well-known reversal is found in the parable of the Good Samaritan, because Jesus’ audience would have expected the priest or the Levite to offer assistance but never a Samaritan because they were often detested among the Jewish people. Osborne comments concerning the powerful nature of parabolic reversals, “The major way by which Jesus

⁵⁵Virkler, *Hermeneutics*, 162-63.

⁵⁶C. H. Dodd, *The Parables of the Kingdom* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1961), 7.

⁵⁷Snodgrass, *Stories with Intent*, 26.

forced decision was to break conventional lines in his parables. Time and again a totally unexpected turn of events startled the hearers and forced them to consider the deeper implications of the parable.”⁵⁸

Jesus’ parables were not given outside of a ministry context, but within a particular ministry situation. One should not separate the parable from the situation Jesus was in when he told the parable. He told his parables while engaged in a particular situation or dealing with a particular error and this situation gives a clue to the main idea of the parable. Snodgrass comments, “Parables are told into a context. Unlike Aesop’s fables, Jesus’ parables are not general stories with universal truths. At least partly they are framed on the reality they seek to show, or they cannot make their point. They are addressed to quite specific contexts in the ministry of Jesus.”⁵⁹ The parable of the Great Banquet is one that should not be understood outside of the immediate context of the Pharisee’s feast on the Sabbath, and the greater theme of Luke’s gospel. Robert Gromacki notes that Luke 13:22-16:33 is focused on Jesus’ conflict with religious leaders and this knowledge certainly would make the parable easier to understand.⁶⁰

One of the greatest clues for discovering the main idea can be found at the end of a parable. Just as the climax of a story often reveals the theme and purpose of the book

⁵⁸Osborne, *The Hermeneutical Spiral*, 299.

⁵⁹ Snodgrass, *Stories with Intent*, 20.

⁶⁰Gromacki argues that Luke 13:22-16:31 is about Jesus' conflict with Pharisees. He argues that all the parables and teachings either had the Pharisees as the offending party such as the parables during the feast in Luke 14, or were about Jesus defending himself against the Pharisees as evidenced in the parables of the lost sheep, coin, and son. Robert G. Gromacki, *New Testament Survey* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1974), 124-25.

so does the climax of a parable often signifies its main idea. Stein writes, “In a similar way a parable focuses its emphasis and point on the end of the story.”⁶¹ A good example of this principle applied is the parable of the prodigal son which causes one not to focus on the son asking for his inheritance and the way he lived his life but rather the emphasis at the end of the story. Stein believes the end of stress of this parable is focused on the dialogue between the father and the elder son.⁶² Usually the point made at the end is often shocking but also becomes memorable to those who heard Jesus’ parables. Snodgrass comments, “With their intent to bring about response and elements like reversal, the crucial matter of parables is usually at the end, which functions something like the punch line of a joke.”⁶³

Discovering the main idea of a parable requires one to study the details of the parable but not to press the details. One should interpret what has been given and not on details lacking in the parable. One may want to know why the priest ignored the man beaten in the parable of the Good Samaritan, but such details are not important to the meaning of the parable. Snodgrass comments, “The more attention one gives to what is not there without evidence that the author intended some conclusion to be drawn the more one is almost certainly wrong.”⁶⁴ So the goal is to pay particular attention to what the author has provided and not what is perceived to be missing from the parable.

⁶¹Robert H. Stein, *A Basic Guide to Interpreting the Bible: Playing by the Rules* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1994), 147.

⁶²Ibid, 148.

⁶³Snodgrass, *Stories with Intent*, 19.

⁶⁴Ibid, 29.

Literal and Figurative Language

Parables should not be confused with biblical narratives because they are not synonymous terms. A biblical narrative is an historical account about actual events that took place at a specific time in the past. The point a narrative is to give the reader details concerning actions of previous generations. An actual event has to occur and be recorded for it to be a narrative. The biggest difference between a biblical narrative and a parable is that a parable probably never occurred while the narrative did. Parables are stories Jesus created to illustrate a point and should not be treated like a narrative. Snodgrass writes, “The parables are fictional descriptions taken from everyday life, but they do not necessarily portray everyday events. . . A few may draw on historical events, but they do not depict true stories.”⁶⁵ Perhaps this argument is seen most clearly in the parable of Lazarus and the rich man, because some want to believe this parable is historical because the poor man is given a name.⁶⁶ However, parables are stories created by Jesus given to people to teach important lessons.

One should not apply the same method of interpretation used in historical narratives because parables are not designed to reveal historical realities. The way one reads a narrative in 1 Samuel concerning Saul’s life is much different than the way one should interpret a parable of Jesus. Historical narratives in the Bible are true events that occurred at a particular time in history, but parables are designed to teach a lesson. They are fictional stories created by the one telling the story. Robert Stein writes, “We must not confuse a life-like parable, which is a fictional creation, with a biblical narrative

⁶⁵Ibid., 18.

⁶⁶Stein, *Luke*, 422.

referring to a historical event.”⁶⁷

Parables tend to have some highly exaggerated or unlikely material in them so debate over literal and figurative language in parables is often discussed. For example, in the parable of the wedding feast, Jesus tells his audience that none of the invited guests came to the wedding. Jesus also said that a merchant sold everything he had so that he could buy a great valued pearl. Both of these situations demonstrate some exaggerated details and would be very difficult to argue for a literal, historically accurate position at this point.

Although exaggerated details are used in Jesus’ fictitious stories, one is not given permission to think that the details are figurative because often these outlandish points in the parable force a response from his listeners. This response is the design of the parable and gives it strength as it is told to others. In the parable of the unforgiving servant, the king forgave him ten thousand talents which is unbelievable because he would never be able to pay this amount off in his lifetime. This wage could never be repaid, but this fact does not mean that it should be taken figuratively because Jesus meant it literally. Jesus is not saying this story literally happened, but he wants his audience to believe that a man owed a king this amount of money and be shocked at the forgiveness given to the servant.

⁶⁷Stein, *A Basic Guide to Interpreting the Bible*, 138.

CHAPTER 3

EXPOSITION OF SELECTED PARABLES

Exposition of Luke 14:1-24

The background takes place at a ruling Pharisee's house for a meal on the Sabbath where Jesus is first confronted with a man with edema.¹ Jesus heals the man of his disease and then turns his attention to the lawyers and Pharisees teaching two parables about banquet etiquette relating to the Kingdom of God.

Historical and Cultural Context

The Pharisees were antagonistic toward Jesus during his ministry so it is important to understand the source of this conflict. They were extremely legalistic concerning the Torah but the struggle was over the issue of precedence in regard to the oral law.² The Pharisees believed tradition was of equal value with Scripture. Emil Schürer states,

After what has been said, it is self-evident, that the Pharisees would declare not

¹Edema is defined as an excessive accumulation of serous fluid in tissue spaces or a body cavity. Joseph Pickett, ed. *The American Heritage Dictionary*, 4th ed. (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 2006), s.v. "Edema."

²Proponents for the New Perspective of Paul would argue that the Pharisees' problem was not legalism, in contrast to what many evangelicals teach concerning this issue. For example, Stendahl states that Paul was not converted on the road to Damascus from Jewish legalism toward orthodox Christianity, but was only called to a prophetic aimed toward the gentiles. Krister Stendahl, *Paul among Jews and Gentiles* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1976), 7-22.

only the written Torah, but also the “oral law” developed by the scribes as binding. This whole multitude of enactments now passed as the correct exposition and further development of the written Torah. Zeal for the one implied zeal for the other. Hence it is expressly said in Josephus, “The Pharisees have imposed upon the people many laws taken from the tradition of the fathers, which are not written in the law of Moses.”³

The problem for the Pharisees was Jesus’ rejection of the oral tradition as non-binding upon himself and his disciples. Jesus did not act in disobedience to any of God’s laws, but he often neglected to keep the unnecessary demands of the oral traditions related to the law. Many examples are found throughout the New Testament, but specifically in John 5:1-17, where Jesus heals a man on the Sabbath who was paralyzed. The text states that Jesus was persecuted when the Jews discovered he was the one who healed on their holy day. F. F. Bruce comments concerning this text,

In John’s record of Jesus’ Jerusalem ministry, as in the Synoptic record of his Galilean ministry, it is his infringement of the traditional interpretation of the Sabbath law that first brings him into serious conflict with the religious authorities. . . .The ‘tradition of the elders’ distinguished thirty-nine categories of work which might not be undertaken on the Sabbath; the thirty-ninth of these was the carrying of a load from one dwelling to another. By this standard the man’s action in carrying his pallet home was a violation of the Sabbath law.⁴

Another particular feature of Luke 14:1-24 is the significance of shame and honor in Palestinian culture, especially as it relates to meals and banquets. Both parables in this text address shame and honor during public feasts. In Luke 14:7-11, Jesus tells a parable about when one is invited to a feast that he should not take the place of honor, and in Luke 14:12-24, Jesus instructs the host of a prospective party to invite the poor but

³Emil Schürer, *A History of the Jewish People in the Time of Jesus Christ*, vol. 2 of *The Internal Condition of Palestine, and of the Jewish People, in the Time of Christ* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 2009), 11.

⁴F. F. Bruce, *The Gospel of John: An Introduction, Exposition, and Notes* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing, 1983), 124-25.

not the rich. His instruction is sensible to a modern western audience, but an ancient Palestinian one would be tentative to accept such advice. Klyne Snodgrass writes, “Meals were and are a means for organizing society. Shame and honor were much more explicit in the ancient world than in our own, and—at least if one was in the race at all—people were more consciously preoccupied with shame and honor than is apparent in modern western societies.”⁵

Lexical and Syntactical Context

The background of Luke 14:1-24 takes place at a ruling Pharisee’s house on the Sabbath after worship. Meals have often been used as connecting events and often allowed a forum for discussion and debate concerning the issues of the day. Philip Ryken believes this occasion with Jesus being invited was consistent with Pharisaical tradition when he comments, “It was typical for pious Jews to sit down to the biggest and best meal of the week after worshipping in the synagogue on the Sabbath. It was typical as well for a local leader to invite a visiting teacher like Jesus to come over for dinner.”⁶

The beginning of the parabolic scene seems to be an intentional trap by the Pharisees, because they desired separation from sinners as demonstrated in their accusation of Jesus in Luke 15:1, yet at the beginning of dinner a man with edema is at the party desiring to be healed. The text says the Pharisees were watching Jesus closely, even before the man with edema approaches him, and throughout the dialogue none of

⁵Klyne Snodgrass, *Stories with Intent: A Comprehensive Guide to the Parables of Jesus* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing, 2008), 307-08.

⁶Philip Ryken, *Luke, The Reformed Expository Commentary*, vol. 2 (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2009), 64.

the Pharisees said anything to either the man or Jesus. Jesus asked the Pharisees a question and then later asked for clarification but they remained silent during the situation. They had three opportunities to say something, but they chose to be quiet and carefully watch Jesus. This repetition of silence is significant in understanding this text, because the Pharisees tried to trap Jesus but in the end Jesus won the argument because they could not respond to him. Robert Stein comments about the Pharisee's silence:

This incident illustrates the rejection of Jesus referred to in the preceding lament (13:34-35). Once again Jesus raised the question "Is it lawful to heal on the Sabbath or not?" (14:3; cf. 6:9; 13:16). When he rephrased the question (14:5), the response, silence, was repeated as well. In 6:11 Jesus' opponents "were furious." In 13:17 they "were humiliated." Here they "had nothing to say" (14:6). Jesus' defense of his Sabbath healings could not be refuted, yet the hostility remained.⁷

The text contains two parables which both take place during the party. The first parable was directed toward those at the party, because Jesus noticed how they were selecting their places of honor. One could only imagine how a houseful of Pharisees with inflated egos lacking kingdom humility would select the seats of honor closest to the host. Malcolm Tolbert describes the scene at the house as "a scramble for the place of honor, those nearest the host."⁸ Luke gives his audience a small insight into this scene but his emphasis is not on the bad behavior of the Pharisees but Jesus' parable in relation to what he observed at this party with the religious elite of the day.

Luke identifies Jesus' instruction in 14:7-11 as a parable, which is intriguing because the story Jesus tells does not seem to contain many of the common distinguishing

⁷Robert Stein, *Luke*, The New American Commentary, vol. 24 (Nashville: Broadman Press, 2003), 386.

⁸Malcolm Tolbert, *Luke-John*, in vol. 9 of *The Broadman Bible Commentary*, ed. Clifton Allen (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1970), 119.

features of a parable. Most parables typically contain a narrative that the speaker uses to illustrate a biblical truth that relates to the current reality. One would expect Jesus in this passage to tell the Pharisees a story about a certain Samaritan man who went to a party and sat in the seat of least honor, but the host moved him to the place of greatest honor. However, Jesus did not tell this type of parable at all, but simply instructed the Pharisees to not seek the place of honor, but to take a lesser seat. Snodgrass states that a parable is usually “an expanded analogy used to convince and persuade,”⁹ but this parable is not an analogy. This passage is a reminder to a modern audience that flexibility is required in genre interpretation. Parables such as this one may be the reason why it is so difficult for theologians to develop a simple and concise definition for a parable. Although this parable contains a unique structure, specifically as it relates to other parables, it is a call toward kingdom humility. Tolbert writes, “At first glance the instructions given by Jesus are no more than rules of etiquette and have been so interpreted. But as Luke says, Jesus’ words are a parable. This puts us on the alert to the fact that the scene moves on two levels. A meal is also a figure for the eschatological feast in the messianic kingdom.”¹⁰ The beauty of this parable is that Jesus is dealing with two issues at the same time. Jesus is directly rebuking the behavior of those who are misbehaving at the party, but he is primarily discussing how it relates to the Kingdom of God. Tolbert is right to conclude that Luke’s usage of parable is significant, but also the last verse gives a clue of the future reality of Jesus’ words, “For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who

⁹Snodgrass, *Stories with Intent*, 9.

¹⁰Tolbert, *Luke-John*, 119.

humbles himself will be exalted.”

Jesus turns his attention to the host after he finishes his parable directed at the guests, and makes a simple statement to him saying that he should not invite the rich and his friends, but the poor. He is not promised an immediate and temporary reward but an eternal reward on the day of the resurrection. The text is not clear if the guests were Pharisees but it does indicate the host was one so apparently he was pleased when Jesus confirms a reward connected with the resurrection of the just. This statement by Jesus also confirms that he was thinking in terms of the kingdom in the preceding parable and in this one.

Jesus implies that a person is not blessed by having a great banquet for his friends, but the real blessing occurs when one invites guests who have no ability to return the favor. The problem was not this man’s affiliation with the people at the party, but the social class of those on the guest list. Jesus also is not saying that a person cannot invite his or her friends to a party, but one should not invite another person with the motivation of being invited to their banquet at a later time. Jesus identifies this attitude as one that will not be rewarded by God in the future. Ryken helps clarify this scenario when he writes, “Thus there is a place in the Christian community for reciprocal hospitality, which the command of Christ does not rule out (e.g. Job 1:13; Acts 2:44-45) . . . Do not invite your friends only, he was saying, but also invite people who are down and out.”¹¹

The parable Jesus proclaimed needs to be understood in light of the Pharisee’s statement in 14:15, because its significance is found in God’s future kingdom after the

¹¹Ryken, *Luke 13-24*, 77.

resurrection. Perhaps the man believed it was related to his party or inviting other poor people to his next banquet, but the implication is found in the future kingdom as it relates in Pharisee's current context. People were living their lives worshiping on the Sabbath, but neglecting the poorest among them. While some people in their communities were starving and destitute these rich people were having a great feast.

Theological Implications

The Pharisees left Jesus' question unanswered in Luke 14:3, but apparently Jesus answered his own question by his immediate healing of the man with edema. However, what does the Bible teach about the Sabbath? These Pharisees apparently believed that one could not heal on the Sabbath, but was this belief based on tradition or their interpretation of Scripture? Philip Ryken answers, "They could not say yes, because according to their own religious principles, it was not lawful to heal anyone on the Sabbath, except perhaps if it was a matter of life or death...If they now gave him the go-ahead to heal on the Sabbath, they would be contradicting everything they stood for."¹²

The obvious starting point is the Ten Commandments in Exodus 20:8-11 in which God instructs his people not to work on the Sabbath because it is a holy day, and serves as a weekly reminder that God created everything in six days and rested on the seventh day. This text does not identify what one can and cannot do on the holy day, but includes only a general admonition to rest. Over time, the Jews added more requirements

¹²Ibid., 65.

to this simple command from God until the Sabbath became very burdensome to observe. Jesus was often asked questions in regard to the Sabbath because there seemed to be some confusion as to what was considered work. R. Albert Mohler writing about the Sabbath confusion that existed during Jesus day states, “The first century context is one of Sabbath confusion and Sabbath corruption, so that instead of seeing the Sabbath as made for man, man was understood to be made for the Sabbath. It became both an imposition and a mere institution. But God alone has the right to define the Sabbath, and He ultimately does so in Christ.”¹³

The appearance of the man with edema brings an interesting theological implication to the forefront of the narrative. The Pharisees use this man in an attempt to trap Jesus, but a theological question arises as to how these Pharisees should have treated him on this occasion. The party was full of Pharisees who were fighting over the most honored seat and eating good food while neglecting the needs of the poor outside the house as evidenced by Jesus’ indictment against them concerning who should be invited to such banquets. Jesus instructed the Pharisees to invite the poor and handicapped to their parties for a heavenly reward. Isaiah 58:6-7 is one of many passages found in the Old Testament instructing how the poor should be treated. This text instructs the hearer to share his or her food with those who are hungry, give shelter to the homeless, and to clothe the naked, which apparently the Pharisees were not doing.

The Main Idea

The occasion of Luke 14:1-24 is in the house of a ruling Pharisee and many

¹³R. Albert Mohler, *Words from the Fire: Hearing the Voice of God in the 10 Commandments* (Chicago: Moody Publishers, 2009), 85.

significant events transpire during this meal. The man with edema seeks healing, the place of honor at the dinner party is discussed, and who should be invited to a party is debated. However, this biblical text seems to possess two levels of understanding and application. On one level, Jesus instructs the Pharisees how to conduct themselves at feasts, but at a far deeper level, Jesus teaches them about the Kingdom of God in relation to God's great feast.

Exposition of Luke 14:25-35

Jesus has many people following him so he takes this opportunity to address the crowds concerning the cost of true discipleship. He makes some radical statements that apparently shock his audience such as the necessity of discipleship can only be accomplished when one hates family and picks up his or her cross. Jesus then explains this principle with a parable about a warring king and a potential builder.

Historical and Cultural Context

This parable assumes discipleship was a common and necessary component of ancient life. Luke 14:25 identifies a large crowd who followed Jesus as he left the Pharisee's banquet, and Jesus chooses this opportunity to discuss the requirements of being his disciple. Discipleship was not a foreign concept in Jesus' day because many prospective disciples would follow teachers in order to become more like them. Michael J. Wilkins writes concerning the importance of discipleship in Jesus' ancient culture, "The scene of disciples following Jesus around during his earthly ministry dominates the Gospel panorama. The vision of discipleship demands our attention, both on a historical

as well as a personal level.”¹⁴

Jesus’ view and practice of discipleship varied from the typical process of the day. Discipleship was clearly evident in this culture as one contemplates all its forms. Common, so-called uneducated men learned trades from their fathers so they would be able to support their families when they became older. This example would be one of the most foundational aspects of discipleship, but the relationship between a rabbi and his students more appropriately reflects Jesus’ relationship to his disciples. Jesus expects radical disciples who understand they do not choose their teacher like most disciples did during this time. Thomas Schreiner writes about the difference between Jesus choosing his disciples and the normal process of disciples choosing their rabbis, “Jesus, however took the initiative in calling others to be his disciples, and he did not ask if they wanted to follow him. He sovereignly and authoritatively called them to do so.”¹⁵

Jesus’ call of discipleship also required absolute commitment which was not necessary in typical discipleship settings of the day. Jesus says in Luke 14:26-27 that one must reject his family and pick up an instrument of death to be his disciple. This type of devotion was not required by the rabbis which signifies the significant nature of having Jesus as teacher. The parable of the tower and the warring king in Luke 14 serves as a warning to prospective disciples to consider the cost before following Jesus. Thomas Schreiner writes, “His disciples did not choose him; He chose them. This is remarkable since it is foreign to the way people became disciples of other teachers in the ancient

¹⁴Joel B. Green, Scot McKnight, and I. Howard Marshall, eds., *Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1992), 182.

¹⁵Thomas R. Schreiner, *New Testament Theology: Magnifying God in Christ*

world.”¹⁶ The commitment required to follow Jesus caused many to fall away and as he looked at these crowds he knew they were not all his disciples, because true disciples of Jesus give up their life to follow him.

Jesus uses two stories to explain the cost of being his disciple. First, he compares discipleship to building a tower. Towers were used to protect one’s fields from predators and land from potential invaders so it is obvious why Jesus states that one should consider the cost before building such a structure, especially in a culture that values honor so highly. Second, Jesus tells a story about a king who must consider the cost of sending his soldiers to war before he begins the war. It would be foolish for a king to send out his soldiers to a mission they were unable to complete, and in the same way one must consider the cost of following Jesus before he or she starts to follow Jesus.

Lexical and Syntactical Context

After his dialogue with the Pharisees on the Sabbath in Luke 14:1-24, Jesus is followed by large crowds. They have seen him perform many miracles and confront the Pharisees concerning the Kingdom of God, so he takes this opportunity to explain the true cost of discipleship. He wants them to understand it takes more than just physically following him to be citizens of his kingdom and true discipleship is very costly.

Jesus makes two shocking statements about being a disciple. First, he instructs those following him that becoming his disciple will require radical obedience, because they must hate their family. Jesus was very specific concerning the family members they

(Grand Rapids: Baker, 2008), 183.

¹⁶James G. Samra, "A Biblical View of Discipleship," *Biblioteca Sacra* 160 (April-June 2003): 231.

would need to reject in order to follow him. Fathers, mothers, brothers, sisters, and even one's children must be hated according to the Lord. Second, Jesus tells the audience they must bear their own cross in order to follow him. These statements are radical because they typically tend to repel potential disciples from following Jesus, and forces modern Christians to seriously look at his words very closely.

A closer look at the context of these difficult sayings seems necessary in order to understand what Jesus meant when he spoke them. What did Jesus mean when he said, "If anyone comes to me and does not hate his own father and mother and wife and children and brothers and sisters, yes, and even his own life, he cannot be my disciple." The debated issue is focused on a single word, and the word is hate. When one looks at the word by itself it certainly means hatred, but is that what Jesus meant when he uttered the word? Certainly, this could create a theological problem because of other passages that speak of loving one's neighbors. Robert Stein believes Jesus is saying compared to one's love for God it would seem like hatred. He writes, "The confusion is due to Jesus' use of a Semitic idiom...Even as God is to be loved supremely, with no other god or thing taking priority over him, so too Jesus takes priority even over family."¹⁷

Jesus makes a statement that one should count the cost before becoming his disciple which includes a willingness to carry a cross. A cross was a torturous device used to dispose of lawbreakers and was synonymous for pain and agony. The question is whether Jesus actually intended for his followers to be committed to die before becoming his disciples. This statement is centered on self-denial and not a literal cross although

¹⁷Stein, *Luke*, 396.

becoming a disciple of Jesus could cost one his or her life and following Jesus has led many people to their deaths. Leon Morris writes, “The follower of Jesus must deny himself Taking up the cross meant the utmost in self-denial.”¹⁸

Theological Implications

The main theological challenge of this text is in regard to Jesus’ usage of discipleship. Is it Jesus intention to imply that salvation is synonymous with discipleship or can a person be saved without being a disciple? This question is a great difficulty to answer for various reasons such as the continual people Jesus turned away from following him, and the seemingly harsh statements in the Lukan account about the one who would follow Jesus supposedly compared to other texts in Scripture, but this argument seems superficial at best.

Some New Testament theologians, especially those belonging to the Jesus Seminar question the authorship of these twin stories in the parable about the tower and the warring king as being unauthentic material because they believe the stories are not shocking enough to be spoken from Jesus. Other theologians would state the parables cannot be about discipleship such as N. T. Wright’s view of this parable in which he believes the text is about a historical reality of Israel’s hopeless war rather than a statement on discipleship.¹⁹ The danger in both of these views is that they attempt to jettison a traditional and clear explanation of a text for an interpretation which puts the

¹⁸Leon Morris, *Luke*, The Tyndale New Testament Commentaries, vol. 3 (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing, 1988), 186.

¹⁹Snodgrass argues against N. T. Wright’s position concerning this text. Snodgrass, *Stories with Intent*, 384-86.

reader at ease.

The passage is not a comprehensive definition and overview of Christian discipleship, but only addresses the cost of following Jesus. The New Testament is not silent about the cost of discipleship, but is consistent with Jesus' words in Luke 14:25-35. All three synoptic gospels include Jesus' statement that one must deny himself, pick up his cross and follow Jesus. This statement does not use the word disciple, but if one wants to follow Jesus, he must deny himself and pick up his cross. In Matthew 7:13-14, Jesus says, "Enter by the narrow gate. For the gate is wide and the way is easy that leads to destruction, and those who enter by it are many. For the gate is narrow and the way is hard that leads to life, and those who find it are few." Jesus is not declaring an easy way to salvation, but a difficult way that is very costly. Because of Jesus' understanding of the difficult nature of salvation, it becomes apparent why he would desire people to count the cost before they follow him. Matthew 10:21-22 addresses the reality that many Christians will suffer and die because of persecution originating from their families, but the promise of salvation is for those who finish faithful to Christ.

The Bible contains many examples of people who left their lives, jobs, and family in order to follow God. Abraham is one who received a specific call from God to leave his family and follow the Lord to an unfamiliar land. Then God made a covenant with Abraham in Genesis 12:1-3 promising him a land and people, but most importantly promised to make him a blessing to all the nations. Paul is also another example of one whom God called to follow him and his life was marked with much suffering for the cause of Christ. God tells Ananias in Acts 9:15-16 regarding Paul, "Go, for he is a chosen instrument of mine to carry my name before the Gentiles and kings and the children of

Israel. For I will show him how much he must suffer for the sake of my name.”

The difficulty of the parable is most prominently evidenced in the application of Jesus’ teaching, especially concerning the identity of those who are saved. This issue is not only historical but important for today’s church to answer, because some people who profess to be Christians have not considered the cost of discipleship and do not follow Jesus’ process of denying their lives and following Jesus. As a possible response to this important issue, many churches hold to two categories of Christians: those who are serious about following Christ (disciples), and everyone else. This seemingly practical and popular view finds no support from Scripture because a supporting text does not exist. Snodgrass responds to C. G. Montefiore who believed in two classes of Christians when he writes, “The church implicitly or explicitly has often tried to establish two levels of Christianity, one for the really committed and one for those more engaged with other aspects of life.”²⁰ The point is if one is not a disciple of Jesus, then he or she is not a Christian. Discipleship is not an option but an expectation for those who inherit eternal life. One author writes, “At the most basic level, the Bible says that Jesus doesn’t have two classes of disciple: those who abandon their lives to his service and those who don’t. The call to discipleship is the same for all.”²¹

The application of this truth is for the local church to reconsider how the gospel is proclaimed. If it is true that God demands discipleship from his people then the church should stop implying that all one must do is trust Jesus as savior and should start

²⁰Ibid., 387.

²¹Colin Marshall and Tony Payne, *The Trellis and the Vine* (Kingsford: Matthias Media, 2009), 42.

emphasizing the necessity of serious discipleship. John MacArthur writes, “The gospel Jesus proclaimed was a call to discipleship, a call to follow Him in submissive obedience, not just a plea to make a decision or pray a prayer...it was in every sense good news, yet it was anything but easy-believism.”²² Certainly, Jesus did not call his church to make believers but in the Great Commission he commanded his people to make disciples. When a church understands their call then everything changes because the church starts to become what God intended it to be. Anthony Robinson gets to the heart of the issue, “In the church as club, the question ‘Why are we here?’ tends to be answered with ‘to meet the needs of our members’ or ‘to be a caring community.’ When the focus is on discipleship, a more likely answer is ‘to be and make disciples of Jesus Christ—to join God in making disciples.’”²³

The Main Idea

This text serves as a warning to those who would lightly consider the call of discipleship. The main idea of the text is to emphasize the importance of considering the possible cost of following Jesus before one begins the process. The practical reality is that many people begin the Christian life without considering what Christianity may cost them, and when discipleship becomes costly they stop following Jesus. In so doing, they become like the builder who does not finish the tower or a foolish king who does not consider whether he can win the fight but goes into battle only later to lose. God has not

²²John F. MacArthur, *The Gospel According to Jesus* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1988), 21.

²³Anthony B. Robinson, "Follow Me: The Renewed Focus on Discipleship," *Christian Century*, 4 September 2007, 24.

called his church to easy believism, but to intentional and serious discipleship.

Exposition of Luke 15:1-10

Luke 15 contains three parables within the same historical context as Jesus is dealing with the grumbling of the Pharisees as they accuse him of welcoming and eating with sinners and tax collectors. These parables are commonly known as the parables of the lost sheep, lost coin, and prodigal son. An item of great value is being recovered by someone in each of these parables, and then a celebration begins. A shepherd finds his lost sheep in the first parable and then celebrates with his friends and neighbors. In the second and shortest of the three parables, a woman loses her coin and uses all her available resources to recover it, and once she finds the coin she calls her friends and neighbors to celebrate her good fortune. The parable of the prodigal son is the longest of this collection of parables as a lost son is found, and just like the other parables a great celebration begins when the father recovers his lost son. These parables have many similarities but the strength of this collection of parables is seen in the progressive importance of each object found, and the differences between each parable.

Historical and Cultural Context

The historical situation in which Jesus finds himself was one that was antagonistic toward tax collectors and especially toward non-Jews. This belief and treatment toward such people was demonstrated in their hostility toward Jesus because he was eating and welcoming sinners. William Hendriksen comments concerning the Jewish view of socializing with such people when he writes, “But here and in 5:30; 7:34 these ‘publicans’ are mentioned in one breath with ‘sinners,’ that is, all other people of bad

reputation, people who did not even try to live in accordance with the standards established by the rabbis. To associate with people of this class was considered contaminating; to eat with them, outrageous.”²⁴

In Jewish culture one had to be especially careful with whom he or she associated. Jews would rarely associate with a non-Jew, and would not even eat food that was touched by a Gentile. D.A. Carson addresses this issue as he discusses the narrative of the woman at the well in Samaria when he comments, “That Jesus and his disciples were willing to purchase food from Samaritans betrays a certain freedom from the self-imposed regulations of the stricter sort of Jews, who would have been unwilling to eat food that had been handled by Samaritans. Some foods, however, especially dry foods, were considered less easily defiled than others.”²⁵ The Midrash even contains warnings against Jews associating with non-Jews. The commentary from Exodus 18 in the Midrash gives this warning, “Similarly we find that at first Yonadav was called Yehonadav. When he did that deed a letter was taken away and he was called Yonadav. Because of this the Sages said, ‘One should not associate with the wicked, even to bring him close to the Torah.’”²⁶

The parables Jesus told had an effect on his hearers because the characters in his stories often caused a reaction because of cultural bias. The parable of the lost sheep has

²⁴William Hendrikson, *Luke*, New Testament Commentary, vol. 3 (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 1978), 744.

²⁵D.A. Carson, *John*, The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing, 1991), 217.

²⁶*The Classic Midrash: Tannaaitic Commentaries on the Bible*, ed. and trans. Reuven Hammer (New York: Paulist Press, 1995), 133.

a shepherd who shows compassion over his lost sheep and even celebrates with his friends after he finds it. A modern audience unfamiliar with the ancient context might not understand the bias that Pharisees and scribes would have toward shepherds. Snodgrass discusses this bias when he writes, “Jesus question, ‘What man of you having one hundred sheep?’ would have caused the Pharisees and scribes, people immensely concerned about cleanness, to imagine themselves involved in a trade they considered unclean. The anomaly would not go unnoticed and was probably an intended rhetorical strategy.”²⁷

The scene of the second parable takes place at a woman’s house as she searches for her lost coin, and two cultural issues naturally arise from this parable. An issue a modern audience must answer that the original one understood clearly is the importance of the coin. Some may assume the woman is in poverty because of her care in locating a single coin, but she represents a typical woman in that day, and the coin is the equivalent of a day’s wage for a typical laborer. Snodgrass comments, “In the first century a drachma was about the equivalent of a denarius, usually one day’s pay for a day worker. The woman is usually viewed as fairly poor, which may be overstated; a day’s wage is not a small amount. She is probably just a typical woman one would find in any Galilean village.”²⁸

Another cultural issue which arises from the text is a description of a typical house in that day, because the woman sweeps the floor and lights a lamp to find the coin that she lost. Jesus spares no detail to describe the actions of the woman as she desperately

²⁷Snodgrass, *Stories with Intent*, 102.

seeks her coin exhausting all her available resources toward the task. A.T. Robertson describes the house when he writes, “The house was probably was probably without windows (only the door for light and hence the lamp lit) and probably also a dirt floor.”²⁹

Lexical and Syntactical Context

The parables of this chapter are presented within a similar historical context as Jesus defends his actions to the Pharisees and scribes as they accuse him of receiving and eating with sinners. Jesus responds to their criticism by telling three parables that in reality exist to serve as an illustration to his hearers so that they may understand why he welcomes sinners and tax collectors. These parables have a similar context and teaching emphasis as Jesus explains to his critics why he welcomes those rejected by Jewish culture. Jesus could have easily told just one parable but he chose to use three to illustrate his motivation in welcoming sinners. In attempting to understand these parables it would be prudent to see them as a collective body of work relating to one another before studying each parable independent of the others, because they are very similar.

One area of similarity is that something of great value is lost in each of the parables. A shepherd loses a sheep in the parable of the lost sheep, a woman loses a coin in the parable of the lost coin, and a father loses his son in the parable of the prodigal son. The value of the lost possession increases in each parable quantitatively because in the shepherd loses one out of one-hundred sheep, the woman loses one out of ten coins and the father loses one out of two sons. The first two parables seem to introduce the third

²⁸Snodgrass, *Stories with Intent*, 113.

²⁹Archibald Thomas Robertson, *Word Pictures in the New Testament*, vol. 2,

parable, because the value of a sheep and a coin is not comparable with losing a child. Snodgrass explains this point when he writes, “Without diminishing the importance of the Lost Sheep and the Lost Coin, these two interrogative parables function almost as a prelude to the longer and more complex parable of the Two Lost Sons. The movement from one hundred sheep to ten coins to two sons supports the climatic nature of the structure.”³⁰

Another similarity in the first two parables is that both the shepherd and the woman celebrate when they find the valuable possession they lost. Not only do they celebrate but their celebration is very similar as they rejoice, call their friends, and make a statement concerning the joy of finding what was lost. Both persons celebrate individually as they find what was lost, but then they call their friends to rejoice corporately which demonstrates the intensity of their happiness in finding the sheep and the coin. Simon Kistemaker comments, “Happiness must be shared to be genuine. The shepherd goes home, calls his friends and neighbors together, and invites them to share his joy because says the shepherd, ‘I have found my lost sheep.’ The tension the shepherd had experienced while searching for the lost sheep has been released and has turned into joy.”³¹

Both the shepherd and the woman had to use all their available means in order to recover their lost property. The shepherd left his sheep in the open country and searched

The Gospel According to Luke (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1930), 207.

³⁰Snodgrass, *Stories with Intent*, 94.

³¹Simon Kistemaker, *The Parables: Understanding the Stories Jesus Told* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1980), 172.

until he found it, and the woman also used all her available means in order to find the coin. The lost sheep and coin were very significant to those who lost them and their joy was deeply connected with finding their lost property. The joy in these parables far exceeds what one would expect in normal life, but this excessiveness is a clue to the point of the parable. One would not think that a woman who found a coin would call her friends and have a grand celebration, but she does. Craig Blomberg comments, “If this were a purely historical narrative, one would expect to hear that the shepherd safeguarded the ninety-nine left behind in the wilderness, and one would not expect him to rejoice quite so extravagantly or to carry the sheep on his shoulders when no reason was given for why it should not walk. All of these features can be sidestepped and are not wholly unnatural, but their cumulative effect suggests an unusual emphasis on the joy of the recovery.”³²

The explanation and application occurs at the end of each of these parables as Jesus explains to his hearers the purpose these stories. The similarity is that both parables contain this same format and the teaching point is nearly the same, but perhaps the power of the second parable is its exclusion of the ninety-nine persons who need know repentance, which probably referred to the Jewish listeners who felt they were righteous persons who did not need to repent. Stein writes, “If the ninety-nine refer to the Pharisees and scribes, then these words must be understood ironically as those who think they are righteous and have no need to repent.”³³ A lack of mentioning them in the second parable

³²Craig Blomberg, *Interpreting the Parables* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1990), 180-81.

³³Stein, *Luke*, 404.

further emphasizes the focus is on those whom Jesus is welcoming and less on the Pharisees and other religious leaders who saw themselves as righteous. Stein argues that one should not focus on who the ninety-nine represent but states, “The basic reality to which this parable points is God’s great joy over the repentance of the lost as they receive life.”³⁴

Theological Implications

The characters of the parables Jesus told reflect the historical reality recorded in Luke 15. The people fit into one of three categories that naturally arise from the historical background of the text, and they can be identified as the Jewish antagonists, sinners, and Jesus. An interesting theological implication is the value God places on each person, because Jesus associated them with a character in his parable. The Jews that questioned Jesus can clearly be identified as the nine coins and the ninety-nine sheep, the sinners Jesus is seeking are the lost sheep and lost coin, and God is represented by the woman and the shepherd. All three groups of people are obviously present in both the parable of the Lost Sheep and Lost Coin. Blomberg agrees with this assessment when he writes, “A controlled allegorical interpretation therefore seems proper: the shepherd and woman stand for God, the lost sheep and coins for the tax collectors and sinners, and the remaining sheep and coins for the scribes and Pharisees.”³⁵

The value Jesus places on the sinners is obvious because the accusation is that he is receiving them. The parables all point to Jesus’ emphasis on their value to him and

³⁴Ibid., 404.

³⁵Blomberg, *Interpreting the Parables*, 181.

ultimately the Kingdom of God. The Jews looked negatively on those who were not Jews and tax collectors but Jesus spent time in his ministry seeking them as he refers to them in these parables as the lost sheep and the lost coin. Jesus is like the shepherd who looks for his sheep or the woman who exhausts all her resources to find the lost coin. The way Jesus looks at people is significantly different than the way the Jews saw them. Snodgrass comments, “What is revealed about the character of God is the value he places on even the least deserving and the care he extends to such people. God is not passive, waiting for people to approach him after they get their lives in order. He is the seeking God who takes the initiative to bring people back, regardless of how ‘lost’ they are.”³⁶

Joy is also a major theme of these parables which should not be overlooked because this emotion is expressed on many levels throughout the text. Joy is first expressed when the precious object is found whether the sheep or the coin. Then that joy is further expressed by the celebration of the friends as the shepherd and the woman both call their friends to celebrate with them. This celebration seems to be an exaggerated detail of Jesus story, but points to the scene in heaven, in which Jesus’ audience is told that just as a shepherd and his friends celebrate a lost sheep, the angels in heaven experience joy over a sinner who repents of his or her sin. Charles Haddon Spurgeon comments on this joy in a sermon on Luke 15:4-7, “Oh, brethren,³⁷ there is enough joy in the heart of Christ over his saved ones to fold all heaven with delight. The streets of Paradise run knee-deep with the heavenly waters of the Savior’s joy. They flow out of the very soul of Christ, and

³⁶ Snodgrass, *Stories with Intent*, 109.

³⁷ Charles Haddon Spurgeon, *Spurgeon’s Sermons on the Parables of Christ* (Grand Rapids: Kregel Publications, 1995), 48.

angels and glorified spirits bathe in the mighty stream.”

The Main Idea

Jesus presents these parables to an audience that was complaining because he was breaking a cultural belief that one should not associate with those who are not Jews or have an unacceptable occupation like a tax collector. Jesus uses two stories to illustrate and defend his actions by comparing these sinners with whom he was associating as precious to God by connecting joy in heaven over their repentance. The Jews would not celebrate their repentance but the heavenly scene is one in which the angels are rejoicing over the lost sheep and lost coin of God. Stein writes, “The parables are connected by the theme. . . Together the three parables form a tightly knit unit with a single, strongly Lukan theme—God’s love for outcasts and sinners.”³⁸

Exposition of Luke 15:11-32

The parable found in Luke 15:11-32 is perhaps one of the most widely known parables in the Bible and is commonly called the parable of the prodigal son. In this story, a son demands his inheritance before his father’s death and to the hearer’s surprise is granted. The son wastes his fortune by spending his money recklessly and finds himself working as one who feeds pigs, and eventually came to his senses and returned to the father he previously abandoned. The story is about more than just one prodigal son, but is about a loving father who has two lost children. Snodgrass summarizes the parable when he writes, “Most grant that the traditional title ‘the parable of the Prodigal Son’ is

³⁸Stein, *Luke*, 400.

not adequate since this ignores the parable's second half . . . At least as Luke presents the parable, it is best labeled 'the parable of the Compassionate Father and His Two Lost Sons,' even though for reasons of brevity it no doubt will still be called the parable of the Prodigal or of the Two Lost Sons."³⁹

Historical and Cultural Context

Honor versus dishonor is a very significant aspect to the historical and cultural context of this parable. Jesus often used his culture's emphasis of respect as a theme of much of his teaching as he told the parables. Normative behavior for this ancient culture has been violated by the son and the father in the parable of the prodigal son in many ways, and should be understood by the modern reader who wishes to understand how the original hearers of this parable would have responded to such a story.

The younger son approaches his father and asks for his inheritance early. For a modern audience this request seems inconsiderate, improper, and insensitive, but the Pharisees and scribes based on their culture would have a much different response. A modern audience might assume the son had a deep financial need, but Jesus' hearers would have understood the son's request in quite a different way. Jewish culture would have considered this request to be very offensive because to ask for an inheritance was to reject one's parents. The wisdom literature in the Old Testament has many admonitions toward children to listen to the wisdom of their parents, and most obviously in the Decalogue, God commands children to honor their parents so that they may live long lives. For a child to ask for their inheritance early was to reject the wisdom and command

³⁹Snodgrass, *Stories with Intent*, 118.

of God in Scripture. Practically, the son was saying to his father that he wished he was dead which greatly offended his father's honor. Kistemaker writes, "By asking for his share, the younger son confessed that he could not get along with his father, that he loathed the daily routine of work, and that he wanted to use the money he thought he was entitled to as he saw fit. The request was a mark of utter disrespect to the father whose death he implicitly desired."⁴⁰

The son obviously wished his father was dead but his action would have separated him from his family, every aspect of his former life, and even his community. Snodgrass comments that a son could go to prison for such an action and further states, "According to Lucian prodigality was a crime that entitled a father to disown his son and, along with neglect of the father, a basis for censure by society."⁴¹ In other words, this action of the son would have brought rejection and isolation by the entire community upon the son. He would no longer be able to return without great shame. The son wished his father was dead, but now the community considered him dead. This social reality is probably why the father comments at the end of the parable that his son was dead but is now alive.

Jesus described the younger son as one who wasted his inheritance and then hired himself out to a citizen in another country to feed pigs. This job certainly was a necessity because he no longer had any wealth, but feeding swine is not a desirable occupation today, but to a Jewish person it would be offensive. Blomberg writes, "Exacerbating the situation is a severe famine, and so the prodigal needs some kind of job in order to feed himself, but apparently all he can find is a man of that country who sends him to his field

⁴⁰Kistemaker, *The Parables*, 178.

to feed pigs, the most unclean of all animals from an orthodox Jewish perspective. These are the depths of degradation.”⁴² The Jews who heard the story could clearly see how far the young man fell from his previous position but not only does he feed the pigs but he wishes he could eat what the swine ate. Young comments, “While the citizen of the land has fodder for the pigs, he does not give food to the young Jewish boy. It is more important to care for the pigs than to feed a son of Abraham. Not only is he reduced to feeding the swine; he would have gladly ‘filled his belly’ with the pig’s fodder.”⁴³

The son who was rejected not only by his family but his town decides to return home as a hired servant because his father treated his workers far better than the owner of the swine. The son’s father runs to meet his son while he was still far away. Modern culture is accustomed to seeing men running for various reasons and the act of running is usually seen as exercise, but Jewish culture believed running was a sign of disgrace for a man, especially one who was distinguished within a community. Stein comments concerning this issue, “For an Oriental father to run to his son in this way is not only extremely unusual but considered undignified.”⁴⁴

Lexical and Syntactical Context

The expectation of this parable is to see one son who left his father’s home, go through times of turmoil, and while at the lowest place in his life come to a realization of

⁴¹Snodgrass, *Stories with Intent*, 126.

⁴²Blomberg, *Preaching the Parables*, 37.

⁴³Young, *The Parables*, 145.

⁴⁴Stein, *Parables of Jesus*, 120.

his own sinfulness. He returns home and is accepted by his father, but he is not the only lost son. The story has two lost sons, but only one leaves the family, wastes his inheritance, and returns. The older son is just as lost but he never went anywhere, but they both have the same forgiving father, and just as he forgave the younger son so he was ready to forgive the older sibling. This parable is not about the prodigal son alone but rather about the love of a father among two sons who both are lost. Brad Young writes, “The plot of the parable revolves around a father and his two sons. The parable, moreover, begins and ends with both of them. Although traditional interpretations have tended to stress the wrongs of the runaway younger son, both elder and younger brothers are equal players in the dramatic scenes of this compelling story of broken family relationships. They both have needs and are lost, but they are lost in different ways.”⁴⁵

The way the younger son rebelled against his father is discussed in the previous section addressing cultural information, but the text states he squandered his possessions in reckless living. The question arises as to how he wasted his inheritance. The question is important because the son went through the process of slowly wasting his possessions every day until he had nothing left. His inheritance was given to him by his father to sustain him during the course of his life and then he was to give that inheritance to his son as his father had given it to him, but in time he lost all of it. In one sense, it really does not matter how he lost his wealth other than to say recklessly because this story is a fictitious story created by Jesus, but curiosity demands it. Blomberg explains, “The younger son leaves everyone behind, takes all his money with him, and sets off for a

⁴⁵Brad Young, *The Parables: Jewish Tradition and Christian Interpretation* (Peabody: Hendrickson Publishers, 1998), 130.

distant country. Jews would immediately recognize that this would be unclean Gentile territory made up of unclean Gentile people. There the young man squanders his wealth in wild or riotous living and loses all.”⁴⁶

The prodigal son is one who had the wrong perspective probably for many years as he lived in his father’s house, and many negative events had to occur for him to repent by confessing that he had sinned against heaven and his father. He had to endure losing his inheritance, living through a severe drought, hiring himself out to a citizen who would not pay him for feeding his pigs, and ultimately by being hungry as the text describes it as perishing with hunger. His repentance was the first step that led him to a realization that following his desires was not better than life with his family within his former community. He even said that being a slave in his father’s house was better than the life he chose to live in the land where he currently resides. He must have understood at this point how blessed he was to be a son to such a father and he desired to go back to that life not as a son but as a servant. Kistemaker comments, “When he came to his senses, he was ready to go home. He knew that he had transgressed God’s commands and that by doing so he had wronged his father. He wanted to make amends. . . All he dared to ask for was to be employed as temporary help. He yearned for reconciliation without seeking restoration. He got up and went home.”⁴⁷

The father’s reaction to both of his sons seems to be inconsistent with the way many of Jesus’ listeners would have expected. When his younger son wishes his father was dead and asks for his inheritance he grants it to him without any chastisement or reaction,

⁴⁶Blomberg, *Preaching the Parables*, 36.

and when his son returns he welcomes him back into the family. The father runs out to meet him while he is still a far way off and gives to him shoes, the best robe, and a ring. The son did not deserve the father's mercy but these objects represent more than the embrace because they demonstrate the extent of the father's forgiveness. The son desired reconciliation but that day he was granted the status of a son once again. He did not become a slave who once was a son, but he was a demonstration of the father's forgiveness as the dead son returned to the family to live again. Stein writes, "Other actions of the father, which although not allegorical display in Jesus' culture the full acceptance of the prodigal by the father, follow. These are the kiss of reconciliation; the placing of the best robe upon him; the giving of a ring; and the placing of sandals upon his feet. All of this indicates the father's full acceptance of the prodigal as his son and the bestowal of authority upon him."⁴⁸

The elder son's reaction demonstrates that he is far from where he should be as both a son and brother. As a son, he should have been joyful for his father in recovering one of his children, and as a brother he should have been happy to see his wayward brother return but he did not respond appropriately. His inheritance is unaffected by his brother's return so money is not the issue to be considered. The reason why he responded this way was because he was just as lost as the son who left the family. Blomberg comments concerning the older son's unacceptable behavior, "Instead of rejoicing at the return of the prodigal, as the father did, the older son complains, gets angry, refuses to go in, and whines about how he was the one who had 'slaved' all his life, about how his faithfulness

⁴⁷Kistemaker, *The Parables*, 180.

had never been rewarded with such a lavish party as the father was throwing for his younger brother.”⁴⁹

Unity exists between the three parables in this biblical chapter and should be understood as a collective whole as Jesus is telling these three parables to explain the reason why he welcomes and eats with tax collectors and sinners. One of the main themes is that heaven rejoices over the repentant sinner who is found. When the sheep is found is the shepherd carries him on his shoulder rejoicing, calls his friends to rejoice with him, and then Jesus says heaven rejoices over a sinner who repents. When the coin is found the woman rejoices, calls her friends to celebrate, and then the text says that angels of God rejoice over a sinner who repents. The power of this last parable is that the older brother is the only person who does not celebrate the lost object being found, and yet this object is the most precious of the three. A son is much more important than a lost sheep or a coin, and Jesus answers the question of his accusers by comparing them to the older son who refuses to go to the party and celebrate with the others. Snodgrass comments, “He confronted them with a compelling picture of the narrowness of their thinking and with the open question about whether the elder son will enter the house and join the celebration. In effect, Jesus invites the Pharisees to adopt God’s attitude, forgive those they disdain as sinners, and join the celebration accompanying his proclamation of the kingdom.”⁵⁰

⁴⁸Stein, *Parables of Jesus*, 120.

⁴⁹Blomberg, *Preaching the Parables*, 37.

⁵⁰Snodgrass, *Stories with Intent*, 136.

Theological Implications

The theological point from this passage is not that God is powerless to draw people to himself, and he is just waiting by a window waiting for his people to come to their senses and place their faith in Jesus. The opposite is true because the father is not waiting for just any person to approach him, but rather he is waiting for his son to return. This parable emphasizes God's desire for his people to repent and the possibility exists for people who know God to become like the prodigal son and go their own way, but the good news is that they will return. Snodgrass emphasizes this point when he writes, "The prodigal son does not belong in the far country and in the alliance he has made."⁵¹

An important theological emphasis is that God is like the compassionate father who desires his people to repent. This theme is one that is continually seen throughout the Old Testament as God called prophets like Hosea and Ezekiel to give the people an opportunity to return to the Lord. Many heavenly scenes exist in the Bible such as Isaiah 6, when Isaiah beholds the glory of God in heaven. Isaiah's response to the presence of God filling the temple is to fall on his face and exclaim that he is a man of unclean lips. The heavenly scene that humbles those who encounter it is the same one that rejoices when a person responds to God's call for repentance. James Boice summarizes the point well when he writes, "It is right that heaven should rejoice over the repentant sinner; and if we would be like our Father in heaven, we should rejoice also. For the prodigal is our brother whether or not we acknowledge it. . . We are never so like God as when we

⁵¹Snodgrass, *Stories with Intent*, 141.

rejoice at the salvation of sinners.”⁵²

This parable has a similar teaching point similar to the Joseph narrative in the book of Genesis. Joseph’s brothers sold him into slavery and they had evil intentions in their hearts when they did it, and many other temptations and bad things happened to Joseph before he advised Pharaoh and established himself in Egypt. Over time, after Jacob died, the brothers feared what Joseph might do to them, but Joseph responded in Genesis 50:20, “As for you, you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good, to bring it about that many people should be kept alive, as they are today.” Many bad things also happened to the younger son that must have seen terrible for him during the time of his struggle but certainly was used by God to bring him to repentance and lead him to return to his family. Thomas Watson writes about how God uses difficulty to bring repentance, “Afflictions work for good, as they are the means of making the heart more upright. In prosperity the heart is apt to be divided. The heart cleaves partly to God, and partly to the world. . . Now God takes away the world, that the heart may cleave more to Him in sincerity.”⁵³

Main Idea

This parable is very similar to the previous parables because one can see all three groups represented, and is simple to develop several ideas from the text, but the goal is to

⁵²James Montgomery Boice, *The Parables of Jesus* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1983), 56.

⁵³Thomas Watson, *All Things for Good* (Carlisle, PA.: Banner of Truth Trust, 1986), 28.

find the main idea from the passage. God is represented as the forgiving father who delights to see his children return back to him, the sinners are represented by the prodigal son who returns to the father, and the Pharisees are clearly seen in the older brother who does not welcome the repentant brother back into the family. The main idea is not focused on people who return to God but about God who receives sinners as they repent. Stein writes, "In seeking the main point of the parable, we see the one possibility that immediately comes to the forefront is that Jesus sought to demonstrate through this parable the greatness of God's love and his willingness to forgive."⁵⁴

Exposition of Luke 16:1-18

Luke 16:1-18 is known as the parable of the unrighteous or unjust steward, but is infamous for causing great difficulties for those who would seek to understand its meaning. Snodgrass identifies sixteen various interpretations beginning with limiting the parable to only seven verses to suggest Jesus is providing comic relief.⁵⁵ Even one author addresses some public consensus concerning Luke when he writes, "Luke, as confused by this story as anyone, tried somewhat unsuccessfully to wrestle the parable into conformity with his moralistic themes of faithful stewardship and almsgiving."⁵⁶ These recent challenges to a traditional understanding of the text and attacks regarding authorial intent are based on perceived problematic issues in the parable.

⁵⁴Stein, *Parables of Jesus*, 122.

⁵⁵Snodgrass, *Stories with Intent*, 406-09.

⁵⁶Ryan S., "Which Master? Whose Steward? Metalepsis and Lordship in the Parable of the Prudent Steward," *Journal for the Study of the New Testament* 30, no. 3 (2008): 263.

Historical and Cultural Context

One of the interesting aspects of this parable is the absence of a righteous character. Many of Jesus' parables have a righteous character portrayed as a person to be emulated. The wise and righteous father towers as the godly example in the parable of the prodigal son and Lazarus is the persecuted but righteous one in the parable of the rich man and Lazarus. The parable of the unrighteous steward includes no righteous person which causes many problems with those who wish to interpret and apply the text. David A. De Silva comments, "The difficulty has caused exegetes as early as Cyril of Alexandria to argue the inappropriateness of finding some meaning in every detail as this would obscure the point of the parable, and causes some exegetes to turn to the very allegorizations which Cyril hoped to avoid."⁵⁷

The rich man, unrighteous steward, and the people who were in debt to the owner are the three main characters, and to a Jewish audience none of them would have been considered righteous persons. The rich man definitely would not have been considered a righteous person based on the context of Luke 14-16 regarding riches and also the Jewish mindset toward those who are wealthy. One writer comments concerning the negative view of the wealthy, "The rich were stereotypically despots, treating their poorer dependents with an arbitrariness consummate with their power."⁵⁸ Based on this understanding of the Jewish view of the wealthy it stands to reason that Jesus' audience did not feel sympathy for the rich man.

⁵⁷David A. De Silva, "The Parable of the Prudent Steward and Its Lucan Context," *Criswell Theological Review* 6, no. 2 (1993): 255.

⁵⁸*Ibid.*, 257.

A legal relationship existed between the rich owner and the manager of his estate. The manager provided security for the rich owner because of his responsibility thus limiting the owner's culpability especially in legal issues that may arise. This type of relationship was beneficial for both the owner and his employee. Simon Kistemaker remarks about this relationship, "He was responsible to his employer, but should he resort to usury, not the master but the manager could be brought to trial. At all times, a rich person stood to gain from the usurious transactions his manager negotiated."⁵⁹

Lexical and Syntactical Context

The manager in the beginning of the parable is identified as one who wastes the rich man's possessions. In other words, he was not functioning as a competent steward of the resources entrusted to him, which fits the context of verses ten and eleven. He is not accused of dishonesty in the beginning of the parable, but mismanagement, because he is told to turn in his record of accounting to the owner. This accounting is not for defensive purposes, but a last act of his position as steward. He apparently delays the process so he can proceed in his plan for the future. He is called a dishonest steward after he makes beneficial agreements with the rich man's debtors. Stein writes, "No interpretation should overlook that the manager is called dishonest not because of wasting his master's possessions (16:1) but because of 'fixing' the accounts (16:5-7)."⁶⁰

The manager is not commended because of his dishonest act but for his shrewdness. Some commentators and translations, such as the KJV translate this word as

⁵⁹Simon J. Kistemaker, *The Parables: Understanding the Stories Jesus Told* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1980), 188.

⁶⁰Stein, *Luke*, 412.

wisdom but it does not refer to such a moral quality. If shrewdness simply meant wisdom then one could assume Jesus was telling his audience to adopt some positive, moralistic trait commanded in Scripture, such as Psalms and Proverbs. However, shrewdness is deemed necessary because of the dire situation in which the manager found himself. Stein writes, “Shrewdness need not refer to a moral quality. Here it refers to the rascalion behavior with which the manager prepared himself for being fired.”⁶¹

The instruction in 16:9 is focused on utilizing unrighteous wealth for the purpose of being received in eternal dwellings. The question arises as to what exactly does unrighteous wealth mean? Snodgrass mentions that a few scholars appeal to an Aramaic understanding of the text and believe Jesus is saying that one should not use money to make friends.⁶² Other scholars believe Jesus is instructing his followers to use money earned in dishonesty for kingdom purposes, but Blomberg clarifies this misconception when he relates the controversy to discoveries at Qumran which confirms that Jesus was using an idiom that referred to all money and not money earned in dishonesty.⁶³ Logically, it would be difficult to use money earned in dishonesty for righteous purposes. Perhaps, A. T. Robertson has the clearest advice concerning this issue when he writes, “Jesus knows the evil power in money, but servants of God have to use it for the kingdom of God. They should use it discreetly and it is proper to make friends by

⁶¹Ibid., 414.

⁶²Snodgrass, *Stories with Intent*, 409.

⁶³Craig L. Blomberg, *Interpreting the Parables* (Downers Grove, IL: Inter Varsity Press, 1990), 246.

the use of it.”⁶⁴

The lord in verse eight has caused many problems for theologians although only two possibilities exist as to the identity of the lord. The lord must either be Jesus or the master to whom the manager is accountable. The problem for some interpreters is the praise the steward receives for his deceptive practices toward the master and it indeed seems odd that the lord of the estate would praise one for such actions, but the dishonest man is praised for his shrewdness not his dishonesty. Praise from the owner may be the reason why some theologians believe the man withheld his commission or perhaps removed illegal usury from the accounts before he was relieved of service. However, attempting to make Jesus the lord in this verse is a difficult task, because of the structure of the parable. Ryan Schellenberg addresses this issue when he writes, “Moreover, if this is not the rich man’s speech, we are left with an almost impossibly awkward transition in vv. 8-9 from Jesus’ direct speech to Jesus’ indirect speech and then back to his direct speech.”⁶⁵

Theological Implications

This parable is often considered one of the more difficult passages to interpret not based on its exegetical challenges but because of its moral and theological implications, particularly as it relates to Jesus’ decision to use a seemingly corrupt individual as a positive example for how one should use his or her wealth in this world. The interpreter’s role is to understand what Jesus was teaching his audience and not try to

⁶⁴Archibald Thomas Robertson, *Word Pictures in the New Testament*, vol. 2, *The Gospel According to Luke* (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1930), 218.

⁶⁵Schellenberg, "Which Master?," 265.

apologize for Jesus' example. Parabolic interpretation must be focused on authorial intent and should not be based on some subjective interpretive approach. Justin Ukpong is an example of one who is not concerned about Jesus' intention when he writes, "My purpose in this essay is not to offer the valid interpretation of this parable. For one thing, the methodology which this volume follows eschews the idea of one universally valid interpretation of the biblical text."⁶⁶

The traditional position of the parable emphasizing the steward's use of money is preferred because it represents the historical view of the church, seeks to understand the main idea of the parable, and contains less exegetical problems than other modern attempts at interpretation. The traditional view values the manager's wisdom concerning his certain future and his actions which fully prepare him for this reality, and Jesus instructs his audience to use earthly wealth for the purpose of preparing for their eschatological future. In defending this view, William Hendrikson writes, "With respect to this interpretation, accepted by most commentators, where is the problem? There is none, unless we ourselves create it."⁶⁷

The traditional view does not seek to justify Jesus' story but to understand the message he was trying to convey to his audience. This view understands the characters Jesus describes in the story are not heroes or persons to be emulated in one's life, but exist to teach an important spiritual instructions concerning wealth. Dave Mathewson defines this position, "Traditionally Luke 16:1-13 has been understood as portraying a

⁶⁶Justin S. Ukpong, "The Parable of the Shrewd Manager (Luke 16:1-13): An Essay in Inculturation Biblical Hermeneutic," *Semeia* 73 (1996): 190.

⁶⁷William Hendrikson, *Luke*, New Testament Commentary, vol. 3 (Grand

steward who cheats his master but who is commended for his wisdom, a quality to be imitated by Christ's disciples in their use of material possessions in light of the coming eschatological kingdom."⁶⁸

The pursuit and use of money is addressed often in Scripture. One could easily argue that money is the overarching theme of Luke 14-16, and the reality is that money is the topic of discussion in the Bible and also in life. What does the Bible actually teach about money? Jesus, in the context of this parable teaches the importance of using money for righteous means, particularly as it relates to the future kingdom of God. Hebrews 13:5 instructs one to be content with what he or she has and not to love money. 2 Timothy 3:1-2 reminds believers that in the last days a common characteristic among people who do not know God will be their love for money. Matthew 6:24 tells the hearer that one cannot serve both God and money, so obviously the theological implication for the Christian is to not love money but to love God. A Christian should invest his or her money in the kingdom of God and this truth is verified when Jesus says in Luke 12:34 that one's treasure is the location of his or her heart.

The Main Idea

Jesus reminds his readers that they should use their resources to prepare for the future. Every person will die and then face judgment, so how one lives life is very important because of the obvious eternal consequences. Each person has a certain

Rapids: Baker Academic, 1978), 770.

⁶⁸Dave L. Mathewson, "The Parable of the Unjust Steward (Luke 16:1-13): A Reexamination of the Traditional View in Light of Recent Challenges," *The Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 38, no.1 (March 1995): 29.

allotment of resources, some have much while others have little, but the principle is still the same. The main idea of the parable is to use one's resources for the purpose of making an impact in the kingdom of heaven. A person is not able to buy their way into heaven, but through sacrificial giving they can impact the greeting they receive when they arrive to their final destination. One's entrance into heaven will be of greater joy when that person fully realizes all God has done with his or her faithfulness through resources used for kingdom giving.

Exposition of Luke 16:19-31

Luke 16:14 indicates that the Pharisees ridiculed Jesus after they heard his parable about the dishonest manager. The reason why they responded to Jesus in this manner was self-serving because they loved money. One who loves money probably would not rejoice in the circumstances or actions of the manager in regard to his employer. Jesus responds to the Pharisees' criticism of his parable by challenging their view of money as being diametrically opposed to God's standard. Luke 16:19-31 is another parable concerning money, but in a sense demonstrates the failure of one who does not heed Jesus' advice of the previous parable. This parable is a warning to the one whose priorities are focused on the pursuit of monetary gain and extravagant living while neglecting the less fortunate who are clearly in great need.

Historical and Cultural Context

The unnamed rich man and Lazarus are the two main characters present prior to the scene in Hades. The death of these two men and obviously their geographical nearness is perhaps the only common characteristics they share. The rich man has an estate, expensive clothes, and eats the best food continuously, while Lazarus lived outside

the rich man's gate, was dressed with sores, and was being tormented by dogs.⁶⁹

Members of the Pharisees are assumed as the audience of this parable because of their response to Jesus' previous parable, which of course would indicate they would look to the rich man as the one in the superior and righteous position. Concerning the audience, David Gowler writes, "So it is clear from this pattern that the parable of the rich man and Lazarus should be read in light of the narrative's characterization of the Pharisees, because no change of audience is mentioned until 17:1."⁷⁰

Certain characteristics of the rich man demonstrate his excessive wealth by his extravagant lifestyle compared to those around him. First, he wore purple robes which indicated his wealth, and he wore these clothes not just for special occasions, but as his typical daily attire. The purple dye used to make such clothes was very rare and expensive. Secondly, a feast was a special occasion in which one would gather with friends and commemorate a special occasion, but this man would feast on his excessive wealth every day. Thirdly, his wealth is further demonstrated by his possession of a gate, which indicates the size of his estate. He did not just have a nice house but the addition of a gate makes a statement concerning his indulgences and possibly views toward others because gates were primarily used as protective devices intended to limit undesired entrance. Leon Morris comments about the gate, "Lazarus lay at the gate of the other, the word denoting a large gate or portico like that of a city of palace. The house was a grand

⁶⁹Stein argues that the dogs were scavengers who tormented the man by licking his sores as opposed to theologians such as Kenneth Bailey who believe the dogs were merciful by licking the sores. Stein, *Luke*, 423.

⁷⁰David B. Gowler, "At His Gate Lay a Poor Man: A Dialogic Reading of Luke 16:19-31," *Perspectives in Religious Studies* 32, no. 3 (Fall 2005): 252.

one.”⁷¹

Lazarus represents the rich man’s counterpart because every area of his life is clearly opposite of one who seems fortunate. The text does not indicate exactly what type of clothes the destitute man wore, but does state the man was a beggar and he was covered with sores. The rich man wore the best clothes imaginable while the man at his front gate was dressed in sores. The rich man lived in large estate while Lazarus lived outside the rich man’s gate. The rich man consumed the best food imaginable while the poor man wished to eat the food that fell from the rich man’s table. This food he desired was not just food that accidently fell from the table but was food that was rejected by the host and his guests. Kistemaker writes, “The guests at a rich man’s table used pieces of bread to dry off the grease on their fingers. These pieces could not be dipped into a meat or gravy dish and were not to be eaten by the guests. It was customary to throw them under the table.”⁷²

Both men inevitably died but only the rich man is described as having a funeral. Verse 22 states that Lazarus died and was carried by angels to Abraham while the rich man’s funeral is described. The funeral was probably impressive while the poor man’s body was treated much like he was treated in this life. The rich man was honored by having a proper burial while the poor man is shown to have dishonor from a humanly perspective because he did not receive a funeral. Ferdinand Regalado writes, “The idea of not receiving a decent burial is a strong Jewish element in this parable. It is a known fact, that for the Jews, ‘care for the dead is a primary moral obligation.’ Moreover, it was

⁷¹Morris, *Luke*, 276.

considered as a curse from God if a dead person was not buried.”⁷³

Lexical and Syntactical Context

The first scene in the parable is the earthly one in which Lazarus and the rich man is clearly separated by a gate. The rich man lives on the seemingly more blessed side of the gate, because he wears the best clothes and eats the best food, and Lazarus’ greatest desire is to just have the rejected food of the daily feast. A clear reversal appears in the after-life scene because once again a chasm separates Lazarus and the rich man, but now Lazarus is on the better side, and the rich man wishes to have just a drop of water from Lazarus’ finger. This reversal demonstrates the importance of the gate in both scenes as being an impenetrable boundary. The rich man was the one who made this boundary impassable on earth, while God controlled the heavenly chasm because even Abraham was unable to do anything concerning the heavenly gate or chasm. Snodgrass writes concerning the gate, “The rich man lives luxuriously and in honor on one side of the gate and Lazarus miserably on the other, a gate that could have been an opening to help Lazarus and that mirrors the chasm between the men after death.”⁷⁴

Lazarus was carried by the angels to Abraham’s bosom after his death, which obviously signifies him as a recipient of God’s mercy, but what exactly does it mean? Knight explains the experience, “Angels are the pallbearers, and they lay Lazarus to rest

⁷²Kistemaker, *The Parables*, 263.

⁷³Ferdinand O. Regalado, "The Jewish Background of the Parable of the Rich Man and Lazarus," *Asia Journal of Theology* 16, no. 2 (2002): 342.

⁷⁴Snodgrass, *Stories with Intent*, 425.

in the most comforting, joyful environment of Jewish destiny, Abraham's bosom."⁷⁵

Certainly, the rich man must have thought he was entering eternity with his fathers who went before him, but a great barrier separated him from persons such as Abraham who is described in this parable. A lifetime of ease and comfort did not prepare him for his eternal destiny as he saw the vast distance between himself and God's redeemed people. Abraham's bosom refers to the rest God promises to his children in the Bible such as in Hebrews 4:1-13. The eternal rest God promises is a great hope to his people because life is exceptionally challenging and this passage is a reminder of the rest God provides. O'Kane explains this principle, "Generally speaking, the explanation given, up to the time of Maldonatus (1583 CE), was that its origins go back to the universal custom of parents taking their children into their arms or upon their knees when fatigued and offering them rest and security in the bosom of a loving parent."⁷⁶

One of the more interesting issues is whether Lazarus, Abraham, and the rich man are in an intermediate state or in a permanent state after the final judgment. Some may argue for the final judgment based on the fact that the rich man is suffering and Lazarus is experiencing rest, but if this event occurs in the future and final judgment already has taken place, then it would be logical to assume there would be no need for a messenger to warn the rich man's brothers concerning their future. Snodgrass writes, "Luke clearly believes in a conscious life after death and in future judgment, making a reference to the intermediate state more likely, but he does not give enough information

⁷⁵George W. Knight, "Luke 16:19-31: The Rich Man and Lazarus," *Review and Expositor* 94, no. 2 (1997): 280.

⁷⁶Martin O'Kane, "The Bosom of Abraham (Luke 16:22): Father Abraham in

for a firm conclusion.”⁷⁷ The biggest obstacle leading to certainty regarding their state of existence is related to the ambiguity of the Bible regarding the moments that occur after death.

The rich man is under the constant agony of death, and his greatest desire is relief from pain, but when temporary relief is denied, he reflects on his family and asks that a messenger might warn them about their impending judgment. He appears to repent because he wants Abraham to send Lazarus back from the place of the dead to warn the rich man’s family. The rich man declares his family will repent if someone comes back from the dead to tell them the truth, but Abraham responds by saying if they will not listen to the word of God, then they will not repent under any circumstance. The problem is the rich man never really repents, because he does not apologize for his treatment of Lazarus, and he does not repent of his actions in life, but his greatest concern is for the welfare of his family. He is still consumed with selfishness because he is not concerned with other people living in extreme poverty but the destiny of his rich family. Regalado comments, “This is a typical characteristic of the rich, whose circle of compassion extends to friends, brothers, relatives, and rich neighbors who are able to repay concern with concern hospitality with hospitality.”⁷⁸

Theological Implications

Jesus gives his audience a description of what happens after death in this

the Visual Imagination," *Biblical Interpretation* 15, nos. 4-5 (2007): 489.

⁷⁷Snodgrass, *Stories with Intent*, 432.

⁷⁸Regalado, *Jewish Background of the Parable of the Rich Man and Lazarus*, 456.

parable, but the question remains as to how many of the details reflect the afterlife accurately. Addressing the issue of what is transferrable from this parable to a realistic expectation of heaven and hell, particularly as it relates to those in hell looking up into heaven, Stein writes, “These details are necessary to make the parable work, but there is no corresponding reality to which they refer.”⁷⁹ Jesus may have used the nearness of heaven and hell based on popular ideas of the day. Knight makes the argument that the Jews believed the resting place of the righteous and dead were close in proximity.⁸⁰

Jesus emphasizes immediate rest or punishment after one’s death, because Lazarus is brought to Abraham while the rich man is taken to a place of suffering. Hebrews 9:27 reminds readers that judgment immediately after death, which obviously occurred in this story. Heaven and hell are represented in this story but the participants are in their intermediate state awaiting final judgment, although in a sense they have already been judged. This parable certainly refutes the idea of purgatory and soul sleep because the rich man is given no opportunity to repent of his sins, and he is obviously aware of his existence because he has a conversation with Abraham. Wayne Grudem explains what happens at death, “Once a believer has died, though his or her physical body remains on earth and is buried, at the moment of death the soul (or spirit) of that believer goes immediately into the presence of God with rejoicing.”⁸¹

The rich man calls Abraham his father, but Lazarus is the one who is

⁷⁹Stein, *Luke*, 424.

⁸⁰Knight, “Luke 16:19-31,” 71.

⁸¹Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994), 816.

comforted by Abraham, which brings into question the legitimacy of his statement. If the rich man was the son of Abraham he should be comforted by Abraham but he is suffering on the other side of the chasm. Certainly, the rich man's assumption was based on their common bloodline, but the Bible declares one is related to Abraham not by a physical relationship, but through proper faith. Abraham's children are those who profess Jesus as Lord. In Galatians 3, Paul is dealing with the issue of justification and he makes the argument that one is justified not by works of the Law but by faith in Jesus. Then he says in verse seven, that those of faith are the sons of Abraham, which indicates that those who can claim to be recipients of the promise are those who respond in faith to Christ.

The most perplexing point of this parable is the fact that Jesus does not define the basis of the judgment. At first glance, it appears that the rich man is in hell because he is rich and the poor man is in heaven because he is poor, because Abraham declares to the rich man that he received good things while he was living and Lazarus received bad things, and now the fortunes are reversed. Jesus certainly is emphasizing the evil of loving money because he is speaking to Pharisees who loved money according to Luke 16:14 and this parable is a response to the Pharisee's reaction to Jesus parable concerning the unrighteous steward. The possession of money is not the problem but the way one uses his or her wealth is the issue. A godly person who is wealthy should use his or her wealth in a particular way and not hoard it in self-serving intentions. Darrell Bock parallels this passage with James concerning dead faith when he writes, "James would call this a dead, useless faith, a belief that has not had an impact upon behavior."⁸²

⁸²Darrell L. Bock, "The Parable of the Rich Man and Lazarus and the Ethics of Jesus," *Southwestern Journal of Theology* 40, no. 1 (Fall 1997): 71.

The Main Idea

The main idea of this parable is closely related to the previous one because it focuses on the use of one's resources in this life. The rich man did nothing with his life but to spend his money in useless and selfish ways. He afforded himself every luxury and lived the kind of life many people dream about, but when he died he discovered the temporal nature of wealth, and suffered for eternity. While he was feasting, a helpless man sat outside the gate starving, but he ignored this poor man's needs. A follower of Jesus Christ must help those in need, but this type of action is not a work that justifies but demonstrates the attitude of one who has been transformed by the power of the gospel. A Christian must act when he or she sees someone in need.

CHAPTER 4

PROJECT METHODOLOGY

The basis of this ministry project, was focused on an eight-week sermon series through Jesus' parables in Luke 14-16 with four self-focused goals or outcomes which will affect the congregation as well: to understand more completely the parabolic genre, to exegete the parables utilizing a historical/grammatical approach, to assign proper application of the parables to the congregation, and to become a more effective communicator. The project consisted of three phases such as the pre-project work that included recruiting individuals that would participate in the project, outlining the parables, and completing the pre-evaluation questionnaire. The project work occurred during the eight weeks the sermons were preached, and then post-project work that dealt with concluding matters.

Recruitment Process

Preparatory work for the project began on November 4, 2011, which took four weeks to complete and had primarily three main tasks to be accomplished before the sermons could be preached. The first task completed was recruiting individuals who would participate, and several criteria were used to determine which persons would be asked to invest their time in the project. The first criterion was to select people that were comfortable enough with me to give helpful and honest feedback, because the evaluators were intended to be an invaluable asset to the project's success. The second criterion was

to find volunteers with excellent attendance because it was necessary to recruit people who were dedicated to the church and willing to participate in the project.

Eight candidates were initially recruited for the project, and all of them agreed to participate. The participants represented a wide spectrum of the church by age and ministry they perform. Three members of the group represented the 30 to 40 year olds, while three were in the 45 to 60 age range, and two were over 70 years old. Three members of the group are adult Sunday school teachers, 1 is a retired pastor, 3 work in service-related ministries, while 1 primarily serves the children of the church. The recruitment process was completed on November 18, 2011.

The Pre-Project Meeting

The first meeting with the group took place on 21 November at my home, which was intended to create a semi-casual atmosphere so the group could become better acquainted with the other participants and feel comfortable to ask any question they might have concerning their participation in the project. The pre-evaluation questionnaire was completed with very little comment because I did not want to influence the responses. The questionnaire was a five-point Likert scale that included fifty-two questions that were generally about parables, but also specific questions concerning the parables in Luke 14-16. The questionnaire raised some general questions among the group concerning parables, which allowed for a time of informal discussion about identifying and interpreting parables. I listened to their questions and statements concerning parables while offering some answers but mostly allowing the group to openly share their presuppositions and beliefs about parables.

I informed those present about the expectations and procedures of the project

such as the necessity of attending every sermon. The success of the project requires full participation and the goals of the project cannot be achieved without their faithful attendance each week. The group was also instructed that complete honesty about the content and presentation of the sermons was necessary for the success of the project, because one of the goals was to become a better preacher. Instruction was given concerning the expectation of meeting before every sermon to receive the sermon evaluation form and at the end of every sermon to meet for about thirty minutes to discuss the sermon by answering the discussion group questions. I also explained to the group that at the end of the sermon series there would be both an exit questionnaire and a post-evaluation survey to be completed to determine the value of the project.

I concluded the meeting with instruction about parables so the group could appreciate the complexity and history of interpreting parables in order that they may better understand my method of interpretation. The first issue I addressed in this lecture was focused on identifying parables. I wanted the participants to understand the possible difficulties in adopting a rigid definition, but also wanted to give them a working definition that would be helpful in the task, so I told them that parables are designed to compare one thing with another. The parables Jesus told often compared a heavenly truth with earthly realities such as the parable of the lost sheep in Luke 15, in which Jesus compares the joy a shepherd experiences over finding a lost sheep with the joy heaven encounters over a repentant sinner.

The second issue discussed was a quick history of parabolic interpretation, because I wanted the group to understand how the church traditionally interpreted parables throughout its history. I explained to them the church historically held to an

allegorical approach in preaching the parables, but this fact does not mean they were correct in their extent of allegorizing the biblical text. I gave the participants Origen's sermon on the Good Samaritan as a classic example of allegorizing the biblical text. I explained the church may have been right in seeing allegorical elements in the parables, but that belief should not give the contemporary biblical interpreter the freedom to allegorize what is beyond the confines of the authorial intent of the parable.

The third issue discussed was about the various methods of interpretation preachers and scholars practice in a modern context. I mentioned allegorical interpretation as a possibility for the modern preacher but also the shortcomings of this interpretive method such as meaning being assigned by the creative mind of the interpreter and not the biblical author so the possibility of misunderstanding authorial intent is a great possibility. Literal approaches were also discussed, but I explained that a possible weakness in this position is the failure of seeing Jesus' stories as fictional accounts to teach a greater spiritual point which requires interpreting the text beyond that which is usually done for a narrative. The one-point view was also discussed as a viable option for those preaching parables. At this point, I described my method of interpreting parables, so those participating in the project could better judge the project. Various questions were answered at the end of this time of instruction until everyone was satisfied with the project and understood the expectations.

Sermon preparation was also being completed during the first two weeks of the project before the first message was preached. Texts were further studied, especially in their relation to one another in order to see their unity within both a narrow and broad biblical context. The main idea and supporting points of each message was also

discovered during this time although extensive outlines were not yet developed. This time also gave me ample opportunity to consider the theological implications of difficult texts such as the dishonest manager and the rich man and Lazarus. All pre-project work was completed by 4 December with the goal of preaching the first sermon on 11 December.

The Project and Description of Sermons Preached

The routine every week had a reliable and consistent format. The group would meet for about fifteen minutes before the service to have prayer, receive the sermon evaluation forms, and answer any questions they might have concerning the series. This procedure seemed to be very helpful for accountability and unity. The participants met every week immediately after the worship service to discuss the sermon by using the discussion group questions as a beginning point. This time of discussion was very helpful because all of the members in the group participated openly and added helpful comments that affected the next week's sermon. The evaluation forms were handed in every week at the conclusion of this time, but their privacy was protected by a unique code that was assigned to each participant at the beginning of the project. The first sermon was preached on 11 December and the last sermon was preached on 5 February.

Week 1 Sermon

The sermon based on Luke 14:1-11 was preached on 11 December and was entitled "Lessons of the Party." In this parable, Jesus is invited to the house of a ruler of the Pharisees, and encounters a man with edema at dinner which introduces a test for him because the Pharisees were watching him closely to see if he would heal the man or not. This text is about tradition and law because the Jesus asks the Pharisees whether it is lawful to heal on the Sabbath or not. The issue was not whether healing on the Sabbath

was lawful but concerning the authority of tradition. The sermon focused on the danger of keeping traditions that interfere with doing what God desires, but the majority of the sermon was focused on the parable of the wedding feast. Jesus introduces this parable because he sees how they are picking their places of honor and he instructs them to take the place of lesser honor when they are at a wedding feast. I focused on the priority of honor in the Near-Eastern culture, and how humility is a desirable trait for Christians to possess.

Week 2 Sermon

The Luke 14:12-24 sermon was entitled “Our Role in Bringing People into the Kingdom of God,” and was based on the text about the parable of the great banquet. I made a connection between this great earthly banquet with the kingdom of God based on Luke 14:15 when the Pharisee said, “Blessed is everyone who will eat bread in the kingdom of God.” The sermon pointed out that Jesus’ intention was not to teach that people should go to banquet’s when invited, but rather he is describing the nature of God’s eternal kingdom. A connection exists between the host’s command for all people to be invited to his party and God’s desire for all nations to be in his kingdom. I also pointed out that the Christian’s job is much like the servant’s role in this parable because servants of the Lord Jesus should evangelize the nations by proclaiming the gospel to them so that they may enter into God’s eternal kingdom.

Week 3 Sermon

This week’s sermon was based on Luke 14:25-35, which includes two parables explaining the same principle concerning discipleship. Jesus’ point is that one should consider the cost before following him to make sure that he or she will be able to endure

to the end. He illustrates this point by comparing the disciple with a tower builder who considers the cost before building and a king who must evaluate whether he can win a battle before he sends out his soldiers. The sermon emphasized that many people begin the Christian life only to go back to their old lifestyle and abandon Jesus. The sermon was a call for the congregation to evaluate their own souls and consider whether they were willing to endure the cost of following Jesus, because being a disciple is very costly as demonstrated by Jesus' statement in Luke 14:26 that one must hate his family and life to be a disciple. I also emphasized in the sermon that God does not have two levels of followers based on their commitment level, but only one group of people called disciples who will inherit eternal life.

Week 4 Sermon

The sermon for week 4 was called "Going from Worthless to Priceless: The Value of Knowing Christ Jesus as Lord," and was based on Luke 15:1-7, which is commonly known as the parable of the lost sheep. In this parable, Jesus is eating with sinners and is being criticized by this practice, so he tells the Pharisees a parable about a shepherd who leaves all his sheep to find the one that is lost, and when he finds it, he experiences great joy and calls all his friends together to rejoice with him. He compares this physical example of the joy a shepherd experiences when he finds a lost sheep with the spiritual reality of heaven's joy over a repentant sinner. The sermon emphasized that just as the sheep in this parable was helpless, so people apart from Jesus are spiritually lost, helpless and have the inability to save themselves on their own. God is similar to the shepherd who seeks his lost sheep, and when he finds the lost person then great rejoicing in heaven begins. The three points of the sermon were the lost condition of a person's

soul, an illustration of Jesus' work, and an illustration of heaven's response.

Week 5 Sermon

This week's sermon was entitled "God's Relentless Pursuit for our Souls and Lives," which focused on God's desire and action in seeking lost people based on Luke 15:8-10. The sermon focused on the methods the woman utilized in finding the precious lost coin to demonstrate that she used all her possible resources for this purpose.

Likewise, God uses his resources to find sinners, because he cares for lost people in the same way the woman cared for her lost coin. I wanted the congregation to understand that God pursues, finds, and rescues sinners from their sin. One of the main theological points of the sermon was that people do not find God but he finds them, and rescues them by Jesus' work on the cross and through the preaching of the gospel.

Week 6 Sermon

The text for the sermon from week 6 was the parable of the prodigal son found in Luke 15:11-32. This parable follows two earlier parables of lost possessions, but is by far the most significant because of the value of a son compared to a coin or a sheep. This sermon focused on the son's actions in light of the Jewish cultural emphasis of dishonor and the unexpected response of the father. The father grants his son's request and although his son is dead to the family, he still looks for him to return. One day, the father saw his son and ran out to him which added further disgrace upon him because men did not run probably because of modesty issues, in order to save his son from disgrace as he approached town. The sermon emphasized that God is like the forgiving father because he offers forgiveness and redemption to those who return to him regardless of how they dishonored God in the past.

Week 7 Sermon

This sermon was called “The City of God versus the City of Man: Investing in Eternity by using Earthly Resources for Eternal Purposes,” and was based on the parable of the dishonest manager in Luke 16:1-13. The main idea of the sermon was to challenge the congregation to use their financial resources for heavenly purposes. The challenge was to affirm that Jesus was not commending the man’s character because he was dishonest in his charge, but the manager’s actions after he was fired and ordered to hand in the financial account. The sermon affirmed that Christians currently live in the kingdom of man, but they should live in such a way that demonstrates the city of God far more valuable to them.

Week 8 Sermon

The parable of the rich man and Lazarus in Luke 16:19-31 was the concluding sermon for the project. Just as the parables in chapter fifteen are connected by the theme of lostness, so chapter 16 is about the way believers in God should use their money. The parable illustrates the extreme resources wasted on frivolous material possessions by the rich man while Lazarus was dying slowly outside of the rich man’s gate. The sermon was divided by the two scenes provided by Jesus in the parable as earth and Hades. Much time was spent showing how many of the rich man’s resources were wasted and how he invested little toward God’s kingdom. I was careful in the sermon to emphasize that the rich man was not in torment because of his lack of spending money on the poor, but rather he spent money according to his desire and priorities. The sermon was a call for Christians to examine their hearts to see if God has his rightful place in their hearts, and how they spend their resources is a good indicator of their deepest priorities.

Exit Questionnaire and Post-Evaluation Survey

The group met for one last meeting on 7 February to complete both the exit questionnaire and the post-evaluation survey. The post-evaluation survey was the same form as the pre-evaluation questionnaire and was given as a tool to measure the success of the project by measuring the progression of each member during the course of the project. This form was the first one to be completed and required approximately ten minutes to complete.

The post-evaluation survey was handed out and completed immediately after the questionnaire was turned in. The goal of the survey was to complement the questionnaire by allowing participants to answer how their thinking and lives have changed during the course of the project in their own words. This form had six open-ended questions that allowed the participants to answer in any way they chose, which added to the depth of the project.

CHAPTER 5

PROJECT EVALUATION

Research Data Evaluation

The pre-evaluation questionnaire, post-evaluation questionnaire, sermon evaluation forms, discussion group questions, and exit questionnaire all present data that should be analyzed. The sermon evaluation forms and discussion group questions provided for weekly input, while both the questionnaires were only submitted once during the project, which provided specific feedback which was necessary for the success of the project. The sermon evaluations and discussion group questions allowed for continual improvement during the project on a weekly basis, but the questionnaires demonstrated the progress made from the first week to the end of the project.

The pre-evaluation questionnaire was designed to provide a baseline, so I could determine what the participants believed about interpreting parables, preaching, and measure their growth during the duration of the project. Most of the participant's responses were highly predictable, such as a high view of expository preaching, and inerrancy of Scripture. They also disagreed as expected with preaching that seeks to meet the perceived emotional desires of the congregation, and interpretation that is strictly allegorical or literal (see Appendix 5).

Some of the responses in the pre-evaluation questionnaire were surprising such as question twelve, "I believe the meaning of a biblical text is dependent on the author."

The response to this question yielded a score of 3.125 on a five-point Likert scale, which indicated no opinion (see Appendix 5). This response created a discrepancy when compared to question thirteen which received a 2.125, “I believe that one must understand the author’s intent before attempting to apply a biblical text (see Appendix 5).” Both of these statements were very similar with the only difference being between application and meaning. The questionnaire also asked a series of questions about specific parables to be preached, and each set of questions asked if they have read the parable, understand the parable, and are able to apply the parable. In almost every series of questions, the score for applying the parable was lower than understanding the parable, which indicated a belief of being able to apply a parable even if they did not understand it.

The primary usefulness of the post-evaluation questionnaire was to demonstrate improvement from the beginning to the end of the project by means of comparison. One of the greatest areas of improvement was the participant’s acquaintance and understanding of the parables. For example, the pre-evaluation score of those who have read the parable of the wedding feast was 2.375, but the post-evaluation result was 1.25, demonstrating significant improvement (see Appendix 5). The participants’ understanding of this parable was also greatly improved from a score of 3.125 to 1.5, and their ability to apply it went from 2.75 to 2.375 (see Appendix 5). Two specific goals of the project were to properly exegete the texts, and to make proper application to the lives of the congregation. These improvements indicate at least a partial fulfillment of these goals indicated by the scores among the participants in relation to their increased ability to understand and apply the parables.

The results of the questionnaire showed slight improvement in many categories, but not to the extent of the previous example, however two statements are worth mentioning. First, question 12 states, “I believe the meaning of a biblical text is dependent on the author.” This score went from 3.125 to 2.625 signifying a .5 variant, which indicated a moderate movement in their thinking toward the importance of authorial intent (see Appendix 5). Secondly, question 17 says, “I recognize the difference between a parable and historical literature.” The statement about recognizing genre interpretation also had a difference of .5, which indicated a change in opinion among the group. Many of the other responses had less than a .5 change from the pre-evaluation to the post-evaluation questionnaire, which demonstrated slight improvement. Such a result was to be expected because before the project began most of the group was in agreement with my theological views, and participation in the project most likely strengthened their theological convictions.

The eighth and ninth question of the pre-evaluation and post-evaluation questionnaire asked the question whether the participants believed that the Bible should always be interpreted literally and the next question asked if the Bible should always be interpreted allegorically. My desire in asking this question was for the group to acknowledge that the genre of the text should determine its interpretation, but these questions were not worded correctly, because it seemed the group believed that the Bible should sometimes be interpreted literally, but never allegorically. If I constructed these questions more effectively I believe a better result would have been achieved.

The sermon evaluation forms were helpful for specific feedback pertaining to each sermon preached. The questions dealt with issues of biblical interpretation, personal

application, and sermon delivery presented in a five-point Likert scale, which allowed me to make necessary adjustments on a weekly basis. These evaluation forms were also helpful for comparison in order to see if improvement was made during the course of the project. Appendix 6 lists the progression of results by question and sermons in numerical order.

My highest priority when I preach is to explain the text clearly and accurately. Two questions asked on the sermon evaluation form addresses this priority. The first was, “The sermon accurately reflected the biblical text preached.” The goal of this question was to make sure my sermon’s main idea and points were shaped by the biblical text. The evaluators scores ranged from 1 to 1.375 with the highest being the parable of the wedding feast in Luke 14:1-11, while the parable of the rich man and Lazarus was the lowest (see Table A2). The second question was, “The sermon fully explained the biblical text,” and received scores from 1.125 to 1.571 (see Table A7). This question was important because I did not want the sermons to begin from Scripture only to later abandon the text, but my desire was for the sermon to fully explain the parable being preached. The responses appear to confirm this important priority in preaching.

The results indicate a weakness in sermon introductions throughout most of the series. The sermon evaluations ranged from 1.25 to 2.0 with the highest weekly averages being 1.571, 1.875, and 2.0 (see Table A3). Certainly averages of 2.0 and below are not necessarily poor, because it represents an answer of “agree,” but certainly it demonstrates a perceived weakness by the evaluators. When I examined the previous week’s evaluations it caused me to consider my method of introducing sermons, and I did work harder the next week toward a more appealing introduction that would be more effective

in communicating the beginning of the sermon to the congregation.

Most of the sermon evaluations do not seem to indicate much improvement from the beginning of the series to the end of the project, although I spent substantial time every week dedicated to the goal of improving my preaching style, structure of sermons, and delivery methodology. I devoted much time to improving those areas I perceived as weaknesses, but when every sermon category is rated between a 1 and 2 it becomes increasingly difficult to judge definitive success. Another reason for a lack of improvement had to do with the small sample size. The sample size of the participants has a direct correlation with the accuracy of the results.

The project evaluators met after every sermon to have an open-ended dialogue using the discussion group questions (see Appendix 3). The input received from these meetings was significant because the format gave the participants an opportunity to explain what they perceived as strengths or weaknesses, and allowed for discussion about certain components of the sermon. This format gave me the opportunity to ask questions and the group a comfortable environment to respond honestly. These questions were designed to be similar to the sermon evaluation form, but asked in such a way that would encourage discussion. The sermon evaluation forms were valuable for data collection and evaluation because they are based on a five-point Likert scale, which shows measurable improvement by an objective number between 1 to 5, but the conversation after the sermon was more subjective, dependent upon open-ended questions so the data is more difficult to analyze.

Although the questions in Appendix 3 were used to guide the discussion; the group would often focus on strengths and weaknesses of the sermon. The areas of interest

were usually issues related to the presentation, introduction, illustrations, and application. One of the questions asked if there were any distractions, and one of the group members mentioned that I looked down at my notes too much, and noticed I took quick glances at the clock located at the rear of the sanctuary. This issue was a continual one for me as I prepared throughout the week to not look at the clock and my notes too much. I received a comment a few weeks later that they did not even notice me looking at my notes. This example is one demonstrating how the data received from the weekly meetings affected future sermons.

A second example of how weekly feedback encouraged progression toward the project's goals was in regard to illustrations. Illustrations used properly have the ability to be powerful tools in explaining difficult spiritual truths in an understandable way to a congregation, but I have struggled with using them at a practical level, because of their possible misuse. During the group times, I purposely asked about my illustrations because of this issue. After every sermon I asked the participants which illustrations were the most effective, and this question would often lead into a helpful discussion. For example, after the sermon on Luke 14-24 one of the group members said that I needed to work on my illustrations while mentioning some shortcomings, such as hurrying through the story, and the appropriateness of the illustrations for the sermon. This feedback forced me to carefully consider my use of illustrations and the following weeks of the project gave me an opportunity to work on my weaknesses with the opportunity to discuss it with the small group at the end of each sermon. I learned to be very selective when telling an illustration by taking the time to tell it well, to be very selective by making certain the illustration conveys the message I wanted to communicate, and by only using illustrations

that were prepared before the sermon was preached.

The exit questionnaire is the last data to be analyzed, and this information is focused on how the project influenced their thinking about the parables. This form contained six questions about how the project changed their perspective of parables. Although most of the goals of the project was focused on improving my preaching, the changed attitudes and understanding of those cooperating in the project demonstrated the effectiveness of the goals of the project, because preaching should affect the lives and hearts of the congregation, and I believe the results of the exit questionnaire reflect such a change.

I believe the group's understanding of parables has changed by the response of question 1 on the questionnaire that asks, "How has your view of parables changed since the beginning of this project?" One respondent wrote, "It helped to understand that there is sometimes more to reading the Bible than just reading it. Understanding what and why God has given us these parables is crucial to understanding God's purpose for our lives." This response is one among several recognizing the importance of identifying the specific genre of Scripture as one seeks to study its meaning. An understanding of the importance of authorial intent is also evident in this response, which was also an emphasis in the preaching of the project.

My desire was not for the congregation to think of the pastor as the only one who is able to understand the Bible and explain it, but rather all Christians are able to comprehend it with confidence that Scripture is God's word. Question 5 addresses this issue, "How has this project changed your confidence in Scripture?" One participant wrote, "The more I read the Scriptures and understand, the more amazed I am. It

strengthens my belief that the Scriptures are divinely inspired.” This response makes a connection between knowledge and belief; in particular a right understanding of the parables leads a Christian to a firmer conviction that the Bible has God for its author.

I did not want the participants to see the project as an academic exercise alone, but wanted it to improve their spiritual relationship with Jesus. This project was an opportunity to grow spiritually, so I asked the question, “How has this project influenced your relationship with Jesus?” One person responded referring back to the parables of lostness in Luke 15, particularly the parable of the lost sheep, “I can put my trust in him, because he sought me. I am the lost sheep.” Another responds this way: “Knowing that Jesus cared so much that he gave us these parables to explain his love for me makes me love him more.”

Purpose and Goals Evaluation

The first goal to understand the unique nature of parabolic literature and discover guidelines in interpreting this special genre was accomplished. The success was achieved most noticeably in the research and writing of chapter 3, which identified the main principles for interpreting parables that would be used for the sermons to be preached during the duration of the project. Preaching the sermons every week helped to reinforce the parabolic guidelines established by chapter three in my sermon preparation. This goal was of primary importance because preaching parables was an essential element of the project.

The second goal was to properly exegete the parables found in Luke 14-16 by using a historical/grammatical approach, thus leading to an accurately interpreted text. This goal was accomplished. The principles outlined in chapter three were the basis for

the exegesis of each sermon with the objective to understand the authorial intent. The work of exegesis was essential for the sermon series because understanding what the text says was foundational for the flow and points of the sermon, especially in discovering the main idea of the text, which in the end became the main idea of the sermon.

The third goal to accurately apply the truths of the parables to the lives of the congregation was achieved with varying degrees of success. Accomplishment of this goal required right application of a passage, which could only occur after the text was understood. I implemented specific, practical application immediately after each portion of the text was explained in most of the sermons I preached in the series, but sometimes I saved the personal application for the end of the sermon, when it interfered with the flow of textual explanation, such as the parable of the lost son. The results from the sermon evaluation forms, discussion group questions, and especially the exit questionnaire confirmed that lasting application did take place during the project.

The fourth goal was to become a more effective and accurate communicator of the parables, which was essentially the purpose of the project as well. This goal was accomplished by the continual help the participant's provided throughout the course of the project. The group helped me identify several weaknesses I had developed over time as a preacher such as depending too much on my notes, looking at the clock on the wall, speaking too quickly, and hurrying through illustrations. The project provided an opportunity to work on these weaknesses and to receive valuable feedback on a weekly basis. Also, I was able to become more effective at preaching parables by studying the unique characteristics of genre interpretation, which allowed me the opportunity to strengthen my beliefs about parables, so I could more confidently preach them.

Project Methodology Evaluation

The project was successful and accomplished what it set out to do, but I would make a few changes if I had to start over again. The people who participated in the project were a tremendous asset, but if given another opportunity, I would recruit in a different way. The group represented people who were chronologically in different stages of life, but I should have recruited people who were in different stages of commitment and maturity to Jesus, because every member of the group had a serious faith commitment to Jesus and to the church. I recruited this way intentionally because I did not want some participants to quit after two or three weeks. The results of the sermon evaluation form probably would have been much lower had I recruited this way, and it would be interesting to see the improvement of a more spiritually diverse group through the course of the project.

A second change I would make was how I introduced the parables to the participant's during the first meeting. I presented the parables adequately during this time, but should have had more detailed discussion leading to a better understanding of the special nature of parables as one of the specific genres of Scripture. During this meeting, parables were defined, early methods of interpreting parables, and my process for interpreting the parables was discussed, but the presentation was not specific enough, and I believe a two to three hour seminar on parabolic interpretation would have been very helpful.

The sermon evaluation form had three weaknesses I would change if starting over. The form was based on a five-point Likert scale with the number one being strong agreement and five being strong disagreement. This scale was confusing to most people

in the group because they usually connect a higher number with a greater correspondence of agreement, and they had to adjust their thinking to the evaluation form. The questions should have also been presented in a more logical order on the form. For example, the first question was about the sermon accurately reflecting the biblical text, but this question should have been at the end of the form, because this question is a reflective one that cannot be answered until after the sermon has been preached. I would have also included more questions concerning specific application of the sermon on the evaluator's life, especially in the areas of worship, the pursuit of personal holiness, and how their view of God has changed.

Theological Reflection

This project has reminded me once again of the nature of the Bible as God's word, and preaching to a local congregation is both a great privilege and fearful responsibility. Every week I was reminded of this fact continually as I studied the text to preach the next sermon. Parables served as a constant reminder of my dependence on God to both understand the parables, and also the ability to preach them. The greatest effect of this project on me was not academic but spiritual as I learned the deep spiritual truths from the parables spoken by the Lord Jesus.

This project also has caused me to reflect on how I prepare to preach a sermon. Authorial intent has always been important in my process of sermon preparation, but my method has changed as a result of the interpretive principles I learned to employ during this time. I seriously consider what the text meant to the audience who first received it, theological implications, and practical application in my sermon preparation. Preaching three times a week is a difficult task requiring a great time commitment, and it becomes

easy to take shortcuts in sermon preparation, but I have been reminded that the congregation needs to hear a well-prepared sermon that reflects a correct understanding of a specific biblical text.

A Christian should not only hear the Bible, but the sermon should cause them to respond in a certain way to the Bible's demands upon them. This project has renewed my commitment to apply the truth of Scripture in specific ways the congregation can understand. Jesus applied divine truth that may have been difficult to understand by telling parables. In Luke 15, the Pharisees and scribes were complaining by the way Jesus was drawing near to sinners, and in response Jesus tells them the parables of the lost sheep, coin, and son to demonstrate why he was gathering near the sinners. Jesus' parables serve as a constant reminder that I should be doing the same thing in my preaching.

Personal Reflection

My involvement in the Doctor of Ministry program has been personally challenging and has changed me in several ways. First, how I spend time has become a major area of change through my studies. I do not think that I am unique in my difficulty with time management, because many pastors have to balance the weight of ministry with their personal life, but this tension forced me to evaluate every area of time consumption and prioritize important activities from those things that are less significant. This process has not been easy but beneficial as I think about the things that I have been able to accomplish during this time.

The cohort group and the seminars taught by the professors have served as a reminder to me that pastoral ministry does not have to be a call to loneliness in one's life.

My cohorts are fellow brothers in Christ who have the same call to pastoral ministry I received and served to be an encouragement to me throughout the process beginning with the first seminar extending through the writing process. The men in my cohort renewed my belief that I should have fellow pastors for fellowship and encouragement to one another. In one sense, pastoral ministry can be lonely, but one does not have to go through it alone.

My studies have reminded me that a call to pastoral ministry is a call to study so I can teach those whom God has entrusted to me. I have always been a reader, but going through the Doctor of Ministry program has helped me to think about the kind of books I should read. I was introduced to many authors I may have never read had it not been for seminars and project, which influenced what I thought about ministry and my preaching. The Great Commission is a call to discipleship, and the ultimate responsibility about what my church thinks about the Bible and the parables is mine. God has called me to disciple the church to think rightly about God and his word, so I take my call to pastoral ministry very seriously, as I am constantly reminded of my unworthiness in the task, and my complete dependence on the mercy and grace of God.

APPENDIX 1

PRE/POST EVALUATION QUESTIONNAIRE

1. I am motivated to begin this project.
1 2 3 4 5
2. I have evaluated sermons in the past.
1 2 3 4 5
3. I believe the Bible contains no errors.
1 2 3 4 5
4. I believe the Bible contains some errors.
1 2 3 4 5
5. I believe the Bible contradicts itself.
1 2 3 4 5
6. I believe that God dictated to man what to write in the Bible.
1 2 3 4 5
7. I believe that God used the personalities of men to write the books of the Bible.
1 2 3 4 5
8. I believe that the Bible should be always be interpreted literally.
1 2 3 4 5
9. I believe the Bible should always be interpreted allegorically.
1 2 3 4 5

10. I believe that the Psalms should be interpreted differently than Romans.
- 1 2 3 4 5
11. I believe the meaning of a biblical text is dependent on the audience.
- 1 2 3 4 5
12. I believe the meaning of a biblical text is dependent on the author.
- 1 2 3 4 5
13. I believe that one must understand the author's intent before attempting to apply a biblical text.
- 1 2 3 4 5
14. I believe that the audience's need changes the meaning and application of a biblical text.
- 1 2 3 4 5
15. I believe that one must understand the text before application can occur.
- 1 2 3 4 5
16. I believe the Bible is too complicated for a lay person to understand.
- 1 2 3 4 5
17. I recognize the difference between a parable and historical literature.
- 1 2 3 4 5
18. I believe that every phrase in the book of Revelation should be interpreted literally.
- 1 2 3 4 5
19. I believe that serious Christians always interpret the Bible literally.
- 1 2 3 4 5
20. I have read the parable of the wedding feast in Luke 14:7-11.
- 1 2 3 4 5

21. I understand the parable of the wedding feast in Luke 14:7-11.
- 1 2 3 4 5
22. I am able to apply the biblical truth of the wedding feast to my life.
- 1 2 3 4 5
23. I have read the parable of the great banquet in Luke 14:12-24.
- 1 2 3 4 5
24. I understand the parable of the great banquet in Luke 14:12-24.
- 1 2 3 4 5
25. I am able to apply the biblical truth of the great banquet to my life.
- 1 2 3 4 5
26. I have read the parable of discipleship in Luke 14:25-35.
- 1 2 3 4 5
27. I understand the parable of discipleship in Luke 14:25-35.
- 1 2 3 4 5
28. I am able to apply the biblical truth of the discipleship parable to my life.
- 1 2 3 4 5
29. I have read the parable of the lost sheep in Luke 15:1-7.
- 1 2 3 4 5
30. I understand the parable of the lost sheep in Luke 15:1-7.
- 1 2 3 4 5
31. I am able to apply the biblical truth of the parable of the lost sheep to my life.
- 1 2 3 4 5

32. I have read the parable of the lost coin in Luke 15:8-10.
- 1 2 3 4 5
33. I understand the parable of the lost coin in Luke 15:8-10.
- 1 2 3 4 5
34. I am able to apply the biblical truth of the parable of the lost coin to my life.
- 1 2 3 4 5
35. I have read the parable of the lost son in Luke 15:11-32.
- 1 2 3 4 5
36. I understand the parable of the lost son in Luke 15:11-32.
- 1 2 3 4 5
37. I am able to apply the biblical truth of the parable of the lost son to my life.
- 1 2 3 4 5
38. I have read the parable of the shrewd manager in Luke 16:1-18.
- 1 2 3 4 5
39. I understand the parable of the shrewd manager in Luke 16:1-18.
- 1 2 3 4 5
40. I am able to apply the biblical truth of the parable of the shrewd manager to my life.
- 1 2 3 4 5
41. I am convinced that expository (verse by verse) preaching is beneficial to the church.
- 1 2 3 4 5
42. I believe that expository (verse by verse) preaching is the best type of preaching.

- | | | | | | |
|-----|---|---|---|---|---|
| | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 43. | I have heard preaching on the parables before. | | | | |
| | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 44. | I believe that preaching must explain a particular biblical text. | | | | |
| | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 45. | I believe that preaching does not need to engage a particular biblical text. | | | | |
| | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 46. | I believe that preaching must apply the text to my life. | | | | |
| | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 47. | I believe that preaching must make me feel good about my life. | | | | |
| | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 48. | I believe that biblical preaching is essential to the worship service. | | | | |
| | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 49. | I believe that the most important aspect of the worship service is the music. | | | | |
| | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 50. | I believe that preaching that rightly interprets the Bible can change the life of the congregation. | | | | |
| | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 51. | I feel that I can contribute to this project. | | | | |
| | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |

APPENDIX 2

SERMON EVALUATION FORM

1. The sermon accurately reflected the biblical text preached.
1 2 3 4 5
2. The sermon had a good introduction that caught my attention.
1 2 3 4 5
3. The illustrations were effective in improving my comprehension of the biblical text.
1 2 3 4 5
4. The illustrations were appropriate for the audience.
1 2 3 4 5
5. The sermon transitioned smoothly to each point.
1 2 3 4 5
6. The sermon fully explained the biblical text.
1 2 3 4 5
7. The main points were clear and understandable.
1 2 3 4 5
8. The sermon was very convicting.
1 2 3 4 5
9. I feel that I have a better understanding of the passage after hearing the message.
1 2 3 4 5

10. The sermon helped me grow closer to God in worship.
- 1 2 3 4 5
11. The sermon deepened my conviction that the Bible is the infallible Word of God.
- 1 2 3 4 5
12. The preacher's demeanor was pleasant.
- 1 2 3 4 5
13. I believe that the preacher was convicted by this message.
- 1 2 3 4 5
14. The preacher had no distracting habits that kept me from experiencing worship.
- 1 2 3 4 5
15. The preacher's voice was strong and clear.
- 1 2 3 4 5
16. The preacher maintained good eye contact.
- 1 2 3 4 5

APPENDIX 3

DISCUSSION GROUP QUESTIONS

1. Did the title of the message seem appropriate for the text and the sermon? Why?
2. Was the main idea of the sermon the same as the main idea of the biblical text?
How are they related?
3. What was memorable about the introduction?
4. Were the supporting points accurate with the biblical text?
5. Did the transitional statements work well, or do they need work?
6. What did you learn about the passage that you did not know before?
7. What areas of your life were you personally convicted about?
8. Which illustrations were the most effective? Why?
9. What distractions were caused by the presentation?
10. Was there anything distracting about the preacher's voice?
11. Do you think that you could teach this passage better after hearing the sermon?
12. What questions did you have about parables that were answered by this sermon?
13. Did the conclusion summarize the sermon and challenge you to respond to the biblical text?
14. In what ways do you agree with the preacher's interpretation of this passage?
15. In what ways do you disagree with the preacher's interpretation of this passage?
16. Did the conclusion summarize the sermon and challenge you to obey the biblical text?
17. What did the preacher do well?

18. What are areas that need to be improved?

APPENDIX 4

EXIT QUESTIONNAIRE

1. How has your view of parables changed since the beginning of this project?
2. Are you more able to explain the parables to others after this project?
3. In what ways does parabolic interpretation seem easier now?
4. How has this project changed your confidence in Scripture?
5. In what ways will this project influence your personal devotions?
6. How has this project influenced your relationship with Jesus?

APPENDIX 5

EVALUATION QUESTIONNAIRE RESPONSES

Table A1. Pre-evaluation and post-evaluation question and average

1= strongly agree 2= agree 3= no opinion 4= disagree 5= strongly disagree

Question	Pre-Evaluation	Post-Evaluation
1. I am motivated to begin this project.	1.375	N/A
2. I have evaluated sermons in the past.	3	N/A
3. I believe the Bible contains no errors.	1.75	1.625
4. I believe the Bible contains some errors.	4.625	4.875
5. I believe the Bible contradicts itself.	4.875	4.75
6. I believe that God dictated to man what to write in the Bible.	2.75	3
7. I believe that God used the personalities of men to write the books of the Bible.	2.125	2
8. I believe that the Bible should always be interpreted literally.	3.5	3.75
9. I believe the Bible should always be interpreted allegorically.	4.125	4.375
10. I believe that the Psalms should be interpreted differently than Romans.	1.5	1.25
11. I believe the meaning of a biblical text is dependent on the audience.	4.25	4.5
12. I believe the meaning of a biblical text is dependent on the author.	3.125	2.625
13. I believe that one must understand the author's intent before attempting to apply a biblical text.	2.125	2.125
14. I believe that the audience's need changes the meaning and application of a biblical text	3.875	4
15. I believe that one must understand the text before application can occur.	1.375	1.25
16. I believe the Bible is too complicated for a lay person to understand.	4	4.375
17. I recognize the difference between a parable and historical literature.	2	1.5

Table A1 Continued

Question	Pre-Evaluation	Post-Evaluation
18. I believe that every phrase in the book of Revelation should be interpreted literally.	4.5	4.375
19. I believe that serious Christians always interpret the Bible literally.	4.25	4.125
20. I have read the parable of the wedding feast in Luke 14:7-11	2.375	1.25
21. I understand the parable of the wedding feast in Luke 14:7-11	3.125	1.5
22. I am able to apply the biblical truth of the wedding feast to my life.	2.75	2.375
23. I have read the parable of the great banquet in Luke 14:12-24	2.25	1.125
24. I understand the parable of the great banquet in Luke 14:12-24	2.875	2
25. I am able to apply the biblical truth of the great banquet to my life.	2.625	1.875
26. I have read the parable of discipleship in Luke 14:25-35	2.125	1.375
27. I understand the parable of discipleship in Luke 14:25-35	2.75	1.75
28. I am able to apply the biblical truth of the discipleship parable to my life.	2.25	1.25
29. I have read the parable of the lost sheep in Luke 15:1-7.	2.25	1.25
30. I understand the parable of the lost sheep in Luke 15:1-7.	2.625	1.5
31. I am able to apply the biblical truth of the parable of the lost sheep to my life.	2.25	1.75
32. I have read the parable of the lost coin in Luke 15:8-10.	2.125	1.375
33. I understand the parable of the lost coin in Luke 15:8-10	2.5	1.625
34. I am able to apply the biblical truth of the parable of the lost coin to my life.	2.5	1.25
35. I have read the parable of the lost son in Luke 15:11-32.	1.625	1.375
36. I understand the parable of the lost son in Luke 15:11-32	2.25	1.625
37. I am able to apply the biblical truth of the parable of the lost son in my life.	2	1.5
38. I have read the parable of the shrewd manager in Luke 16:1-18.	2	1.75
39. I understand the parable of the shrewd manager in Luke 16:1-18.	3.125	2
40. I am able to apply the biblical truth of the parable of the shrewd manager to my life.	3	1.625
41. I am convinced that expository (verse by verse) preaching is beneficial to the church.	1.75	1.5
42. I believe that expository (verse by verse) preaching is the best type of preaching.	1.625	1.5

Table A1 Continued

Question	Pre-Evaluation	Post-Evaluation
43. I have heard preaching on parables before.	1.375	1.25
44. I believe that preaching must explain a particular biblical text.	1.75	1.625
45. I believe that preaching does not need to engage a particular biblical text.	4.5	4.625
46. I believe that preaching must apply the text to my life.	2.625	2.375
47. I believe that preaching must make me feel good about my life.	4.25	4.25
48. I believe that biblical preaching is essential to the worship service.	1.375	1.5
49. I believe that the most important aspect of the worship service is the music.	4.75	4.5
50. I believe that preaching that rightly interprets the Bible can change the life of the congregation.	1.375	1.5
51. I feel that I can contribute to this project.	1.75	N/A

APPENDIX 6

RESPONSES TO THE SERMON EVALUATIONS

Possible Responses: 1= strongly agree

2= agree

3= no opinion

4= disagree

5= strongly disagree

Table A2. The sermon accurately reflected the biblical text preached.

Sermon	Average
The parable of the wedding feast in Luke 14:1-11	1
The parable of the great banquet in Luke 14:12-24	1.25
The parable of the cost of discipleship in Luke 14:25-35	1.25
The parable of the lost sheep in Luke 15:1-7	1.25
The parable of the lost coin in Luke 15:8-10	1.25
The parable of the prodigal son in Luke 15:11-32	1.25
The parable of the dishonest manager in Luke 16:1-18	1.285
The parable of the rich man and Lazarus in Luke 16:19-31	1.375

Table A3. The sermon had a good introduction that caught my attention.

Sermon	Average
The parable of the wedding feast in Luke 14:1-11	1.571
The parable of the great banquet in Luke 14:12-24	1.875
The parable of the cost of discipleship in Luke 14:25-35	1.25
The parable of the lost sheep in Luke 15:1-7	1.375
The parable of the lost coin in Luke 15:8-10	1.375
The parable of the prodigal son in Luke 15:11-32	1.25
The parable of the dishonest manager in Luke 16:1-18	2
The parable of the rich man and Lazarus in Luke 16:19-31	1.5

Table A4. The illustrations were effective in improving my comprehension of the biblical text.

Sermon	Average
The parable of the wedding feast in Luke 14:1-11	1.285
The parable of the great banquet in Luke 14:12-24	1.625
The parable of the cost of discipleship in Luke 14:25-35	1.5
The parable of the lost sheep in Luke 15:1-7	1.375
The parable of the lost coin in Luke 15:8-10	1.25
The parable of the prodigal son in Luke 15:11-32	1.5
The parable of the dishonest manager in Luke 16:1-18	1.428
The parable of the rich man and Lazarus in Luke 16:19-31	1.5

Table A5. The illustrations were appropriate for the audience.

Sermon	Average
The parable of the wedding feast in Luke 14:1-11	1.428
The parable of the great banquet in Luke 14:12-24	1.375
The parable of the cost of discipleship in Luke 14:25-35	1.5
The parable of the lost sheep in Luke 15:1-7	1.5
The parable of the lost coin in Luke 15:8-10	1.375
The parable of the prodigal son in Luke 15:11-32	1.375
The parable of the dishonest manager in Luke 16:1-18	1.714
The parable of the rich man and Lazarus in Luke 16:19-31	1.375

Table A6. The sermon transitioned smoothly to each point.

Sermon	Average
The parable of the wedding feast in Luke 14:1-11	1.428
The parable of the great banquet in Luke 14:12-24	1.625
The parable of the cost of discipleship in Luke 14:25-35	1.5
The parable of the lost sheep in Luke 15:1-7	1.375
The parable of the lost coin in Luke 15:8-10	1.5
The parable of the prodigal son in Luke 15:11-32	1.375
The parable of the dishonest manager in Luke 16:1-18	1.571
The parable of the rich man and Lazarus in Luke 16:19-31	1.25

Table A7. The sermon fully explained the biblical text.

Sermon	Average
The parable of the wedding feast in Luke 14:1-11	1.285
The parable of the great banquet in Luke 14:12-24	1.125
The parable of the cost of discipleship in Luke 14:25-35	1.375
The parable of the lost sheep in Luke 15:1-7	1.25
The parable of the lost coin in Luke 15:8-10	1.375
The parable of the prodigal son in Luke 15:11-32	1.125
The parable of the dishonest manager in Luke 16:1-18	1.571
The parable of the rich man and Lazarus in Luke 16:19-31	1.125

Table A8. The main points were clear and understandable.

Sermon	Average
The parable of the wedding feast in Luke 14:1-11	1.714
The parable of the great banquet in Luke 14:12-24	1.625
The parable of the cost of discipleship in Luke 14:25-35	1.5
The parable of the lost sheep in Luke 15:1-7	1.5
The parable of the lost coin in Luke 15:8-10	1.375
The parable of the prodigal son in Luke 15:11-32	1.625
The parable of the dishonest manager in Luke 16:1-18	1.571
The parable of the rich man and Lazarus in Luke 16:19-31	1.25

Table A9. The sermon was very convicting

Sermon	Average
The parable of the wedding feast in Luke 14:1-11	1.428
The parable of the great banquet in Luke 14:12-24	1.5
The parable of the cost of discipleship in Luke 14:25-35	1.375
The parable of the lost sheep in Luke 15:1-7	1.375
The parable of the lost coin in Luke 15:8-10	1.5
The parable of the prodigal son in Luke 15:11-32	1.25
The parable of the dishonest manager in Luke 16:1-18	1.571
The parable of the rich man and Lazarus in Luke 16:19-31	1.25

Table A10. I feel that I have a better understanding of the passage after hearing the message.

Sermon	Average
The parable of the wedding feast in Luke 14:1-11	1.571
The parable of the great banquet in Luke 14:12-24	1.25
The parable of the cost of discipleship in Luke 14:25-35	1.375
The parable of the lost sheep in Luke 15:1-7	1.25
The parable of the lost coin in Luke 15:8-10	1.375
The parable of the prodigal son in Luke 15:11-32	1.25
The parable of the dishonest manager in Luke 16:1-18	1.571
The parable of the rich man and Lazarus in Luke 16:19-31	1.25

Table A11. The sermon helped me grow closer to God in worship.

Sermon	Average
The parable of the wedding feast in Luke 14:1-11	1.875
The parable of the great banquet in Luke 14:12-24	1.375
The parable of the cost of discipleship in Luke 14:25-35	1.375
The parable of the lost sheep in Luke 15:1-7	1.375
The parable of the lost coin in Luke 15:8-10	1.5
The parable of the prodigal son in Luke 15:11-32	1.375
The parable of the dishonest manager in Luke 16:1-18	1.428
The parable of the rich man and Lazarus in Luke 16:19-31	1.5

Table A12. The sermon deepened my conviction that the Bible is the infallible Word of God.

Sermon	Average
The parable of the wedding feast in Luke 14:1-11	1.571
The parable of the great banquet in Luke 14:12-24	1.75
The parable of the cost of discipleship in Luke 14:25-35	1.5
The parable of the lost sheep in Luke 15:1-7	1.375
The parable of the lost coin in Luke 15:8-10	1.5
The parable of the prodigal son in Luke 15:11-32	1.25
The parable of the dishonest manager in Luke 16:1-18	1.571
The parable of the rich man and Lazarus in Luke 16:19-31	1.375

Table A13. The preacher's demeanor was pleasant.

Sermon	Average
The parable of the wedding feast in Luke 14:1-11	1.428
The parable of the great banquet in Luke 14:12-24	1.625
The parable of the cost of discipleship in Luke 14:25-35	1.5
The parable of the lost sheep in Luke 15:1-7	1.25
The parable of the lost coin in Luke 15:8-10	1.375
The parable of the prodigal son in Luke 15:11-32	1.25
The parable of the dishonest manager in Luke 16:1-18	1.714
The parable of the rich man and Lazarus in Luke 16:19-31	1.5

Table A14. I believe the preacher was convicted by this message

Sermon	Average
The parable of the wedding feast in Luke 14:1-11	1.571
The parable of the great banquet in Luke 14:12-24	1.625
The parable of the cost of discipleship in Luke 14:25-35	1.5
The parable of the lost sheep in Luke 15:1-7	1.625
The parable of the lost coin in Luke 15:8-10	1.375
The parable of the prodigal son in Luke 15:11-32	1.5
The parable of the dishonest manager in Luke 16:1-18	1.285
The parable of the rich man and Lazarus in Luke 16:19-31	1.375

Table A15. The preacher had no distracting habits that kept me from experiencing worship.

Sermon	Average
The parable of the wedding feast in Luke 14:1-11	1.571
The parable of the great banquet in Luke 14:12-24	1.875
The parable of the cost of discipleship in Luke 14:25-35	1.5
The parable of the lost sheep in Luke 15:1-7	1.5
The parable of the lost coin in Luke 15:8-10	1.375
The parable of the prodigal son in Luke 15:11-32	1.375
The parable of the dishonest manager in Luke 16:1-18	1.571
The parable of the rich man and Lazarus in Luke 16:19-31	1.5

Table A16. The preacher's voice was strong and clear.

Sermon	Average
The parable of the wedding feast in Luke 14:1-11	1.142
The parable of the great banquet in Luke 14:12-24	1.25
The parable of the cost of discipleship in Luke 14:25-35	1.375
The parable of the lost sheep in Luke 15:1-7	1.25
The parable of the lost coin in Luke 15:8-10	1.375
The parable of the prodigal son in Luke 15:11-32	1.25
The parable of the dishonest manager in Luke 16:1-18	1.428
The parable of the rich man and Lazarus in Luke 16:19-31	1.375

Table A17. The preacher maintained good eye contact.

Sermon	Average
The parable of the wedding feast in Luke 14:1-11	1.571
The parable of the great banquet in Luke 14:12-24	1.125
The parable of the cost of discipleship in Luke 14:25-35	1.25
The parable of the lost sheep in Luke 15:1-7	1.25
The parable of the lost coin in Luke 15:8-10	1.375
The parable of the prodigal son in Luke 15:11-32	1.25
The parable of the dishonest manager in Luke 16:1-18	1.428
The parable of the rich man and Lazarus in Luke 16:19-31	1.5

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ABSTRACT

DEVELOPING AN EFFECTIVE MODEL FOR PREACHING THE PARABLES OF JESUS AT THE MEDWAY BAPTIST CHURCH IN MEDWAY OHIO

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This project utilizes expository preaching in preaching the parables in Luke 14-16 at Medway Baptist Church. Chapter 1 identifies both the project and the community surrounding Medway Baptist Church. Chapter 2 contains the exposition of four selected parables focusing on context, theological implications and the main idea of each parable. Chapter 3 focuses on the principles for interpreting parables such as historical and cultural context, lexical and syntactical context, the main idea of the parable, and literal versus figurative language. The methodology of the project is found in chapter 4 as it relates to the recruitment process, meetings, and a summary of each chapter. Chapter 5 evaluates the success of the project by the feedback of the participants and reflection of the goals.

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