

UNDERSTANDING THE PARABLES OF JESUS

I don't remember exactly when my deep interest and passion for theology began, but ever since I became a student of biblical studies in the late 1970's at the University of Northwestern (St. Paul), I have been aware of the many and wide interpretations of the parables of Jesus. The parables appear simplistic and yet complex at the same time, and for many they have been the source of much confusion regarding Christian faith, rather than providing deeper clarity and direction in life. In fact, I have read Christian authors, and heard sermons from the pulpit, in which the author or preacher espoused very non-Christian teachings, yet utilized a distorted interpretation of a parable to "proof-text" their teaching.

What I have learned throughout the years is that the confusion around understanding the parables comes from not possessing a clear and fundamental framework of the historical and literary background of the parables. Teaching through parables was a first-century instructional method — which Jesus was not alone in utilizing, but certainly was the master of its' practice and application. Once we understand the history, design, and practice of the parables as a teaching method, then we begin to understand exactly how to study the parables. If we know how to study the parables, the confusion not only disappears, but through the clarity comes direction, challenge, and



spiritual direction that pierces the heart—just as it did for the original hearers in the first-century.

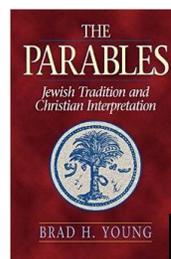
So, based upon that personal discovery in my own life, over the past year I committed many hours to preparing a study in how to understand the parables; sharing the results of that research and application with those we regularly meet with in our [CAFAITH](#) group, as well as through a new offering in the [VISTA Seminar](#) program. The response to these sessions has been very encouraging. Here are just a few of the comments I've received:

- *"As a Bible teacher this workshop was very fruitful, interesting, and even entertaining. Moreover, I believe I will definitely use this new insight in the classes I lead."*



- *"Amazing content and revelations!"*
- *"I knew about His mercy and compassion but my understanding fell short. Thank you for helping me to love the Lord with all of my mind."*

If you would like a copy of my teaching notes from these sessions, simply send me an email at tobyatravis@gmail.com requesting them, and I'll be happy to share the information with you. For your own personal reading and study, I also highly recommend including the book, "[The Parables: Jewish Tradition and Christian Interpretation](#)"



by Brad Young. This is perhaps the best researched and helpful book that I have read in recent years that provides the reader with the background and tools needed for gaining insight into the true meaning and application of parable teaching.

RESIDUAL BLESSING

I had another very encouraging experience recently that I'd like to share with all of you. Our family was at a local mall when a former student approached me, whom I had not seen in several years.

About 5 years ago he had enrolled at [AAI](#) just for his senior year. It is unusual for us to accept transfer students into their senior year, as typically late transfers are running from other problems and end up bringing those problems to our school. In his case, however, the story was quite different. He ended up deeply investing himself and his abilities (both musical and academic) into our school and very quickly became a valuable member of our student body. Although he came from a non-Christian background, he was also one of the most engaged students within my Apologetics class, constantly asking very challenging and deep-thinking questions.

Well, all that to say that he runs up to me in the mall and embraces me - gushing with thanks and appreciation for the Apologetics course all those years ago; talking about how that training had sustained him in his faith throughout University. He shared several experiences of how different professors in college attempted to make statements about Jesus, that simply were not historically true, and he was able to respectfully articulate arguments (based upon evidence) that defended a historical and accurate account of Jesus! This young man is now in his second year of a pre-med program. It is obvious to me that he has already had a significant influence on his peers and his teachers for Christ - and I am confident that he is on his way to having an even broader impact upon his world for Christ.

THANK YOU for being a part of his life and ours, and helping to make it possible for this type of residual blessing to go on and on! ...Oh and by the way... his name is "Christian!"

EMMA UPDATE



Our final round of home visits by the Ecuadorian Adoption Services is scheduled for the first week of June! This means the adoption could be finalized in July! Thanks for your continued prayers!