Exegeting Jesus' Parables

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What is a Parable?

- Dictionary
  - Short, fictitious story that illustrates a moral attitude or religious principle
- Literary
  - A simile expanded into a story
- New Testament
  - A rather broad genre of illustration, including parable (above), allegory, similitude, and sample parable, also proverb and paradox
How Parables Work

- Parables are stories
  - Brief
  - Unified
  - Few actors
  - Direct discourse
  - Serial development
  - Rule of three
  - Repetition
  - Binary opposition
  - End-stress
  - (often) Resolution by reversal
  - (usually) Two-level
How Parables Work

See John W. Sider,  
*Interpreting the Parables*

Parables are analogies:

- Verbal comparison
- Tenor – "heavenly meaning"
- Vehicle – "earthly story"
- Point(s) of resemblance
An Analogy from Shakespeare

"As flies to wanton boys are we to the gods – they kill us for their sport."

- Tenor – relation of gods to humans
- Vehicle – relation of boys to flies
- Point of resemblance – re/ how mistreated
The Analogy Diagramed

Tenor          Vehicle

We: gods = flies: (wanton) boys

With respect to how they mistreat us

Point of Resemblance
An Example from Jesus' Parables

- Wheat & Weeds – Matt 13:24-30, 36-43
- Story: Man sows good seed, his enemy weeds. When discovered, slaves want to remedy situation right away; owner has them wait till harvest.
- Tenor: kingdom of heaven
- Vehicle: story above
- Points of Resemblance: several
Parables in the Gospels

- Christological
- Lost & Found
- Forgiveness & Mercy
- Prayer
- Transformation
- Stewardship
- Invitation & Rejection
Parables in the Gospels

- Second Coming
- Warning & Judgment
- Kingdom
- Illustrative (example) Parables
- Acted Parables
The End

Let's begin to make the parables come alive for our audience!