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Parables

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Richard N. Longenecker (ed), *The Challenge of Jesus' Parables* (McMaster New Testament Studies; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000) Pp. xii+324

In this fourth volume, the McMaster series offers the parables of Jesus' studies, presented in the Synoptics Gospel, better to understand Jesus and His ministries in a larger view. This book is a compilation of thirteen essays. To what should we liken Longenecker's volume? It resembles a weekend church seminar featuring thirteen learned New Testament scholars explaining the parables to you. As far as the title, four challenges are tackled: The first challenge is to understand Jesus' original purpose; the second challenge is to grasp the gospel writer's intent; the third challenge is to learn the parables meaning, and the fourth challenge is to wrestle with an appropriate response to the parable ones understood.

Longenecker has divided the parables into four working categories to organize the essays. He asserts that Jesus had no predefined set of categories imposed on His parables, but such divisions prove helpful, if not artificial, for study.

The beginning of the book, some essays explain the historical understanding of how to interpret parables and their cultural settings. All the remaining sections go into some depth exploring individual parables and sets of parables to meet the four challenges presented earlier.

Part one contains three essays, "History of the Interpretation of the Parables of Jesus, from Allegorizing to Allegorizing," by Klyne R. Snodgrass (pp.3-29); In chapter two, "The Genre of the Parables" by Robert H. Stein (pp. 30-50). In Chapter Three, "Parables in Early Judaism" by Craig A Evans (pp.51-75). Klyne R. Snodgrass gives his knowledge of the cultural history of Jesus' parables. Robert H. Stein introduces the importance of understanding the genre "Parable" as they appear in the Synoptic gospel. On the other hand, Craig A Evans speaks about the early text of Judaism, which dealt with "matters having to do with the origins, forms, and functions of the early Jewish parables" (51).

Part two contains three essays, "Parables of the Kingdom," chapter five, "Mark Parable of the Kingdom, by Moana D. Hooker, (Mark 4:1-3, pp.79-101). The second essay is by Donald A. Hagner "Matthew's Parables of the Kingdom (Matthew 13:1-52, pp.102-124). The third essay, chapter six, is by Richard N. Longenecker, "Parables of the Kingdom" (Luke 8:4-15;13:18-21, pp. 125-147).

Part three contains two essays, "Parables of Warning and Preparedness," chapter seven, "Produced fruit worthy of Repentance": Parables of Judgement against the Jewish Religious Leaders and the Nation (Matt 21:28-22:14; Luke 13:6-9, pp. 151-176); chapter eight, "On being Ready" by Richard T. France (Matthew 25:1-46, pp. 177-195).

Part four contains five essays, "Parables of the Christian Life" Chapter Nine, "Parables on God's Love and Forgiveness, by Stephen C. Barton (Luke 15-1-32, pp. 199-216); Chapter ten, "Parables on Poverty and Riches" by Stephen I. Wright (Luke 11:5-13; 16:1-13; 16:19-31, pp.217-239); Chapter Eleven, "Parables on Prayer" by Walter L. Liefeld (Luke 11:15-13; 18:1-14, pp.240-262); Chapter twelve, "Strange Neighbors and Risky Care, by Sylvia C. Keesmaat (Matt 18:21-35; Luke 14:7-14; Luke 10:25-37, pp. 263-285); Chapter Thirteen,

“Everyone Who Hears These Words of Mine”: Parables on Discipleship, by Michael P. Knowles (Matt 7:24-24//Luke 6:47-49; Luke 14:28-33; Luke 17:7-10; Matt 20:1-16, pp. 286-305).

In one excellent essay, Longenecker explored whether today’s preachers can generate new inventive parables and plot lines similar to what Jesus did. His conclusion is highly instructive. He observed that a preacher could be a creative writer but can not produce new Scripture and must always be willing to exposit what Jesus has previously presented. Moreover, Longenecker stated that expanding a story beyond its biblical text might be a valid literary task, “but it is no longer a study of Jesus’ parable” (146).

The second-best essay in the book was by Richard France, “On Being Ready (Matthew 25:1-46).” France notes that to interpret a parable correctly, one must not assume an entire allegorical stance or a whole symbolic overlay. The only “good” attributes living purposely illustrated are credited as belonging to God, such as His willingness to give to those in need when they plead their case; all the other attributes are outside the story’s scope and beyond the bounds of the discussion. He wrote, “where an unattractive human trait is used to illustrate the character of God, we need not assume a simple allegorical equivalence.”

In conclusion, the book does not reference a consensus of contemporary scholarly opinion for any given parable. However, I have never read any other parable book, so unable to compare and give contrast what book to recommend. This book is excellent for calibrating one’s approach to reading, interpreting, and preaching parables.

Work Cite

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