

THE PARABLE OF THE RICH FOOL:  
HISTORY OF INTERPRETATION AND EXEGESIS

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## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

If any person is just passingly acquainted with the Gospels(Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John) then he or she would readily agree that Jesus was a master in the usage of oral communication forms. His words had a power to move, change and shape peoples lives. Jesus had a way of "turning a phrase" quite unlike any of the other personalities of his day.

In many respects Jesus' teachings-while appearing to resemble that of other teachers(Rabbis)-was often a thing apart. As a teacher Jesus utilized varying oral forms; one of his most often used forms was that of the parable. It was obvious that Jesus was adept at utilizing this literary form, but the question remains as to what purpose. A central question surrounding parable interpretation today is precisely this concern.

The term parable comes from the Greek word Parabole and in Hellenistic Greek it had a meaning that was closely related to the Hebrew word Mashal. This Hebrew word, Mashal often had a wide range of applications; including proverbs, riddles, wise sayings, extended metaphors, and prophetic sayings. Similarly Joachim Jeremias wrote: "This word (parabole) may mean in the common speech. . . without resorting to a formal classification figurative forms of speech of every kind: parable, similitude,

allegory, fable, proverb, apocalyptic revelation, riddle, symbol, pseudonym, fictitious person, example, theme, argument, apology, refutation, <sup>1</sup>jest." A

For some people the most apparent use of the parable form was for analogy. The parables of Jesus could take the form of a simile, in which a comparison is made between two contrasting concepts. The parables of Jesus may take the form of an example story, which points to a certain ethical conclusion. The parables may in turn be understood allegorically, where characters <sup>2</sup>represent some individual or quality. (see Mark 4:1-34) It is clear then that the parables of Jesus imply much more than what is readily apparent.

Parables often have many different functions, these may vary to the degree that the parables represent the intentions of metaphors, similes, or example stories. It is the author's contention that these different literary configurations of the parable may often have several different functions at different stages of transmission. In the pages that follow "The Parable Of The Rich Fool," Luke 12:13-21 will be the focus for demonstrating the variety of functions that a parable may have throughout its history of transmission. We have chosen this parable for its

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1.

Joachim Jeremias, The Parables Of Jesus, (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1972), p. 20.

2.

Lorna Shoemaker, "Another Look at Parables," Concern Magazine, Vol. 25, April 1983, p. 28.



richness in thought and also because it is a parable that is particularly common to the Gospel Of Luke and appears only in a much shorter form in the Gospel of Thomas.

Methodologically this paper will draw upon the major works of parable interpretation such as Adolf Julicher, Jeremias, Dodd, Bultmann, and Via. Secondly we will interpret this parable in light of the historical critical method. Our concern will be to recover what the original parable may have been and meant; and also to interpret the parable as it exists in its oral and written forms. Finally the results of the exegetical analysis will be brought into dialogue with the varying interpretations that are presented within the history of research section. Here in the concluding remarks the significance of the variety of forms and interpretations of the parable and its implication for contemporary parable interpretation will be readily apparent.

THE PARABLE OF THE RICH FOOL:LUKE 12:13-21

13. And someone from the crowd said to him, Teacher(speak) tell my brother to divide the inheritance with me.
14. But he said to him, Man who made me judge or divider over you.
15. And he said to them, take care and guard against all covetousness, for not in the abundance of something, for your life does not consist in your possessions.
16. And he said a parable to them, saying (A man of riches) A rich man's land brought forth good crops.
17. And he thought (discusses with himself) saying what shall I do, since I have nowhere to store my grain.
18. And he said, I will do this. I will pull down my barns and I shall build larger ones and I will gather there in that place all the grain and my goods.
19. And I will say to my soul, Soul, you have much (ample) goods, laid up for many years, Rest, eat, drink, and be merry.
20. But God said to him, Fool (Unlearned) This night your soul is required from you, and the things you have prepared whose will they be.
21. Thus is he who stores up treasures but is not rich toward God.

## CHAPTER II

### INTERPRETATION HISTORY OF PARABLES

The central focus of parable interpretation has been concerning the purpose of the parable form. In the history of parable interpretation there has been no real agreement as to the specific purpose of Jesus' usage of the parable form. Now in Mark 4:10-12, we get a statement supposedly made by Jesus explaining the purpose of Parables (cf: Luke 8:9-10 and Matthew 13:10-15). What Jesus says in essence is that for those on the outside of the Kingdom of God everything is in parables so that they will not understand, but to you (disciples) have been given the secrets of the Kingdom. As a result of these passages and Mark's parable of the Sower the approach to parable interpretation was understood as one of allegorizing.

Adolf Julicher in his landmark work on the parables of Jesus comes to reject outright an allegoric interpretation of the parables. Julicher successfully showed that parables are not allegories. Julicher was of the belief that a parable apparently had one specific point, of which the initial hearers were to grasp. Julicher's approach was to try and free the interpreters of a parable from their tendency to read meaning<sup>1</sup> into every detail of the parable. For Julicher the point of

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<sup>1</sup>. Norman Perrin, "The Modern Interpretation Of The Parables Of Jesus And The Problem Of Hermeneutic," Interpretation, April 1971, Vol. 25, p. 132.

the parable of the Rich Fool was to show how even the wealthiest of men are at every moment solely dependent on the power and mercy of God.<sup>2</sup>

Joachim Jeremias on the other hand was attempting in his books to try and recover the words of the historical Jesus. He was trying to find the setting of the parable within the ministry of Jesus.<sup>3</sup> In attempting to recapture this historical setting Jeremias draws from the history of thought and life in first century Palestine. Jeremias is primarily a form critic. Jeremias believes that by proper analysis of the Sitz-im-Leben he may be able to establish the earliest form of the parable. In the parable of The Rich Fool, Jeremias interprets that as an "eschatalogical parable," a warning parable concerning the endtime.<sup>4</sup>

C. H. Dodd in his work The Parables Of The Kingdom, tended to look at parables as metaphors "drawn from nature or common life, arresting the hearer by its vividness or strangeness and leaving the mind in sufficient doubt about its precise application to tease it into active thought."<sup>5</sup> For Dodd the parable whether simple metaphor or more elaborate similitude or full length story presents one single point of comparison. The basic

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2. Joachim Jeremias, Rediscovering The Parables, (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1966), p. 13.

3. Ibid.

4. Joachim Jeremias, Rediscovering The Parables, p. 130.

5. C.H. Dodd, The Parables Of The Kingdom, (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1961), p. 5.

point for Dodd is that the parables were used to illustrate "the mystery of the Kingdom of God" even whether implicitly or explicitly, all refer to the Kingdom of God.<sup>6</sup>

Rudolf Bultmann's work The History Of The Synoptic Tradition, following Julicher's work makes a distinction between a similitude and a parable. For Bultmann a Parable is a story which does not paint a "typical situation," but presents its hearers with an "interesting particular situation." Bultmann views Luke 12:16-21, The Rich Fool, therefore, as a narrative form which is an insertion credited to the work of the editor of Luke.<sup>7</sup>

Dan Otto Via in his work, The Parables, Their Literary And Existential Dimension represents a whole new strain in the field of parable interpretation. Via tends to view the parables aesthetically without any immediate connection with the historical context. Via sees that there is more to parable interpretation than just one element.<sup>8</sup>

We can see by this cross section of approaches to parable interpretation the difficulty one encounters when attempting to interpret a parable. What we have been trying to show is the vast dichotomy that can exist within the area of parable interpretation. As we look at the "Parable Of The Rich Fool" our concern is whether this dichotomy is apparent. It seems lo-

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6.

Ibid., pp. 7, 20.

7.

Rudolf Bultmann, The History Of The Synoptic Tradition, trans. by John Marsh, (New York: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1963) pp. 174-79.

8.

Dan Otto Via, Jr., The Parables, Their Literary And Existential Dimension, (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1967), pp. 24-25.

gical for us to assume that this dichotomy becomes apparent when one tries to arrive at a normative, single interpretation for such a parable.

### CHAPTER III

#### EXEGESIS OF LUKE 12:13-21

We now turn our attention to interpreting Luke 12:13-21 in light of the exegetical method. It is our contention that to fully understand the parable we must first try to place the parable in its original setting and then draw our contemporary application from that point. While this method relates much to the method Jeremias utilizes, our conclusions may be somewhat different from what he concluded (see Chapter I). It is this writer's contention that this parable can only be properly understood when seen in light of Jesus' conflict with the Pharisees. Equally important is that there is an apparent difference within the written tradition and the oral tradition of the parable.

The biblical translation that serves as the basis for the analysis made in this paper is based upon the author's translation of the Greek text.<sup>1</sup> In this passage there are three textual problems. It is not our intention to deal with all of the textual problems that exist in Luke 12:13-21, but to mainly concentrate on the text problem as found in verse 21. Our attention is drawn chiefly to verse 21 because it is a crucial verse to the inter-

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1. Kurt Aland, et. al. eds., The Greek New Testament, (New York/London: United Bible Societies, 1975 ed.), p. 264.

pretation of the parable of the Rich Fool. According to some texts of Luke 12:13-21, verse 21,"Thus is he who stores up treasures but is not rich toward God," is included while in other texts verse 21 is omitted entirely, and to a very few texts, after verse 21 is added the phrase, "When he said this he cried out, If you have ears to hear, then hear."<sup>2</sup>

When the external evidence is laid out on verse 21, the following texts include verse 21: Codex Alexandrinus (5th Cent.), Codex Vaticanus (4th Cent.), and Codex Sinaiticus (4th/5th Cent.), while those texts which omit verse 21 include Codex Bezae (6th Cent.), and Old Latin (4th/5th Cent.); and those texts which add an addition after verse 21 consists mostly of minuscules.<sup>3</sup> Based solely upon this analysis of text types the evidence is strongly in favor of verse 21 being included since it is contained in the best text types.

However utilizing the text critical rule that the shorter text is the preferred, and the more difficult text is preferred we would have to conclude in favor of the text which omits verse 21. It is usually accepted that the Scribes in writing and/or translating a particular scriptural passage would tend to embellish the passage than take away from it. That is why based upon the rule shorter is better we would have to omit verse 21 at this point. But by examing the text internally for scribal errors we must conclude that the inclusion of verse 21 was an intentional scribal addition. The inclusion of a verse like 21 at the end of

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2.  
Ibid.

3.  
Ibid.



a parable seems to be characteristic and consistent of those parables contained within the special Lukan material of his Gospel (see Luke 10:29-37; Luke 16:1-13; Luke 18:1-8; and Luke 18:9-14 in Throckmorton's Gospel Parallels). Based upon this analysis it is concluded that verse 21 should be included because it is what Luke as a writer intended (but not what may have originally been spoken orally).

Having established a text, now our attention turns to the Linguistic analysis of key terms in the text. The first significant word is διδάσκαλε, which is translated as teacher. Luke uses the term teacher in the sense of a traditional Jewish Rabbi to his students. It was not unusual for a Rabbi to have a number of young men who were his disciples, who went around with him and learned from him.<sup>4</sup> By referring to Jesus as teacher the man apparently understood Jesus as such a Rabbi, who in effect could offer advice in such a matter. The word for teacher is here rendered in the vocative case implying direct address by someone (see verse 13b).

The text also utilizes the Greek term κληρονομία which is used to refer to the part of an individual's possessions to be inherited, it is used to refer to the brother's inheritance rights.<sup>5</sup> Apparently the inheritance principle suggested here

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4. G. Kittel and G. Friedrich eds., Theological Dictionary Of The New Testament, Vol. 2, (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1975-8), pp. 153-4.

5. Ibid. Vol. 3, pp. 769-81.

was typical of Hebrew inheritance law. Under the Patriarchal system property was normally divided among the sons of the man's wives (see Genesis 21:10; 24:36; 25:5). Normally the largest portion was given to the eldest, on whom fell the responsibility of maintaining the women of the family and equal shares of the remainder to the other sons.<sup>6</sup>

In verse 15 πλεονεξίας is used here to refer to greed, a lusting after things, something which is overwhelming. This word translated as covetousness implies that one desires something so badly that it excludes concern for any other matter except that particular something.<sup>7</sup> The text uses this word in the genitive case expressing a possessive sense.

Luke uses the Greek word ψυχή several times to refer to the inner essence of the man, the very life force.<sup>8</sup> It is a reference made to that which gives man his vitality, meaning to his physical existence. Luke also uses in verse 20 the word οφρῶν, used in the vocative case of address to mean fool.<sup>9</sup> The fool here implies more a lack of common sense. The idea here

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6. William Smith, Smith's Bible Dictionary, (New Jersey: Fleming H. Revell Company, 1982), p. 230.

7. Barclay M. Newman, Jr., A Concise Greek-English Dictionary Of The New Testament, (London: United Bible Societies, 1971), p. 144.

8. Kittels, Vol. 9, pp. 637-47.

9. Kittels, Vol. 4, pp. 842-3.

seems to indicate that while he was industrious and planned carefully how to store his grain, he lacked common sense in perceiving what is really important in life.

It is generally agreed that the Gospel of Luke has no direct statement about who wrote it and the author's name is anonymous.<sup>10</sup> Many scholars have tried to make an argument that it was written by Luke, the doctor companion of Paul. This tradition seems to have held a wide degree of influence among the Early Church Fathers.<sup>11</sup> Probably most persuasive of the arguments and one which this author finds some merit in, is the contention that the author of Luke is somehow connected with the "we" passages mentioned in the second part of his work, Acts. In Acts 16:9ff Luke appears as one of the traveling companions of Paul. Some authors want to identify this Luke with the author of Luke-Acts.<sup>12</sup>

As to the date of the Gospel of Luke it can probably be said, it was written during or around 80 A.D., after the destruction of Jerusalem. The support for this argument relates "to the advanced stage of the life of the Church and Christian thought,"<sup>13</sup> as exhibited in Luke. This date is more commonly ac-

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10.

Willi Marxsen, Introduction To The New Testament, trans. G. BUswell, (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1980), p. 161.

11.

Donald G. Miller, "The Gospel According To Luke," The Layman's Bible Commentary, (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1980), p. 161.

12.

Ray Summers, Commentary On Luke, (Texas: Word Books, 1972), p. 8.

13.

Ibid., pp. 11-2.

cepted by scholars today.

As to Luke's audience it seems rather logical to assume that Luke wrote his Gospel not to Jewish readers but to an apparent Gentile audience. This assumption is based upon the very high standard of Greek that Luke utilizes.<sup>14</sup> It is also interesting that this situation occurred in which a man needed a teacher to tell his brother about Jewish inheritance law, most Jews would have known what those laws were in this situation and logically there may have not been a conflict at all. Since Luke obviously felt a need to set the story within the proper perspective for a predominantly non-Jewish audience. Now whether this Gospel was written to Rome or Antioch or any other city is difficult to say.

In the beginning of his Gospel Luke states his purpose (Luke 1:1-4). He addresses his Gospel to Theophilus in order that he may know the certainty concerning the things which he heard. According to Luke's own admission his work was biographical and historical, written apparently for a special person. Whether Theophilus was Jew or Gentile, we do not know.

Regardless of how much weight is placed upon the prologue of Luke it is generally accepted that what Luke sought to do for Theophilus in writing an accurate account of the past events had an evangelizing effect on the Christian reader of the Gospel. So it may be more proper to say that Luke's work is aimed at evangelizing or converting individuals by witnessing the truth of

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14.

Norval Geldenhuys, "Commentary On The Gospel Of Luke," The New International Commentary On The New Testament, (Grand Rapids: Wm B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1979), p. 36.

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Jesus' life.

In the "Parable Of The Rich Fool" we have a text which does not come from Markan material, nor does it come from any "Q" material, but is a special source of material common only to Luke.<sup>16</sup> It is possible to at least draw a profile of Luke which may be helpful in the further interpretation of this parable. Luke apparently by the usage of his highly stylized Greek is educated well and knows the language. Luke is apparently familiar with Jewish laws. Luke may know how to read Hebrew-Aramaic or has some contacts with Hellenistic Judaism. Luke gives prominence to Jesus' concern about the danger of wealth and Jesus' compassion for the poor.

As I said earlier this parable is taken from a special section known only to Luke and as such poses a problem. On the surface it seems obvious that what we have in Luke 12:13-21 is a parable, but on closer examination we find that the problem is not quite so cut and dry. Within this parable form there may be many different styles. For example Frank W. Beare saw this parable as being linked with a pronouncement story (vv 13-15) in which a detached saying of Jesus (v. 15) is provided. Beare also continues by saying the parable itself is self-contained and does not have anything distinctive of the teaching

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15.

William M. Ramsey, The Layman's Guide To The New Testament, (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1973), pp. 86-9.

16.

Burton H. Throckmorton, Jr., ed., Gospel Parallels, A Synopsis Of The First Three Gospels, (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1979), p. 112.

of Jesus and is related to variants found other places in the Near East, for example The Thousand And One Nights.<sup>17</sup> Bultmann also mentions this variant which Bousset found within the tales of A thousand And One Nights. It states that "A certain King, who had collected rich treasures, was summoned by an angel of death at the very moment when he was sitting at a luxurious table, and saying to himself: 'Soul, you have amassed for yourself all the good things of the world, and now you can enjoy them in a long life and good fortune.'<sup>18</sup>"

Bultmann views the parable of the Rich Fool in a different light. In verse 13-4 an apophthegm serves as an introduction to the story of the Rich Fool. Bultmann continues by pointing out that Luke 12:13-14 can possible serve as a starting point for a scholastic dialogue. Bultmann points out that the transition from the apophthegm about inheritance to the story of the Rich Fool is made by the dominical saying in verse 15 (warning<sup>19</sup> against covetousness).

While this parable in Luke 12:13-21 exists within a special section common only to Luke is also found in the Gospel of Thomas, Logion 63 which states "Jesus said: There was a rich man who had much money. "He said: I will use my money that I

17. Francis Wright Beare, The Earliest Records Of Jesus, (New York: Abingdon Press, 1964), p. 168.

18. Rudolf Bultmann, The History Of The Synoptic Tradition, trans. by John Marsh, (New York: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1963), p. 204.

19. Ibid., pp. 23, 54-5, 335.

may sow and reap and plant and fill my storehouses with fruits, so that I lack nothing." This was what he thought in his heart. And that night he died. Whoever has ears, let him hear.<sup>20</sup> In this parable form it is much simpler than that which is found in Luke 12:13-21. It also does not contain the introductory verses found in Luke 12:13-21, nor the verse contained in Luke 12:21.

Let us look at Luke 12:13-21 in detail by examining the form and structure of the parable. At the beginning of chapter 12:1ff we have Jesus teaching to many thousands concerning the Leaven of the Pharisees and who is to be feared. Then in Luke 12:13 we get an introductory statement setting up the occasion in which the Parable will arise. If we were to outline the unit it would look as follows:

- Part I. Luke 12:13-15 Introduction to Parable
  - 13-14 Occasion out of which the Parable arises
  - 14 Jesus' Disclaimer of right to judge
  - 15 Ethical exhortation to crowd in form of wisdom saying-
- Part II. Luke 12:16-20 The Parable Narrative
  - 16 Introduction of Chief/Character/Protagonist
  - 17-19 Problem/Focal Issue
  - 20 Results of his Problem/Climax Antagonist

Part III. Luke 12:21 Interpretative Phrase/Application

In Luke 12:13-21 what we have is not the parable as it may have existed in its original form. In verse 13-15 we get an introduction setting up the occasion for the utterance of the parable which closely resembles an apophthegm in the form of a contro-

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<sup>20</sup>.

Wilhelm Schneemelcher ed., New Testament Apocrypha, Vol. I, (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1963), p. 292.

versey dialogue. In verse 13, the question by the man is put to Jesus concerning inheritance law and then in verse 14 Jesus refuses to indulge the question. Finally in verse 15, the reply to the attack in the form of a ethical exhortation to the listeners.

Now if we look at verses 16-20 we get the parable proper in the form of an example story which points to a certain ethical conclusion. In verse 21 we get an interpretative phrase which seems to be typical of this Lukan special material(see Text Criticism). If we outline this section in terms of our discussion, we get the following:

Part I. Luke 12:13-15 - Apophthegm/Controversy Dialogue

Part II. Luke 12:16-20 - The Parable Proper/Example Story

Part III. Luke 12:21 - Interpretative Phrase/Application

What we have in Luke 12:13-21 is really a redaction that has taken place by Luke. From the inclusion of Luke 12:13-15, Luke obviously according to this author is trying to ground the parable in the historical context of Jesus' controversy with the Pharisees. Given this interpretation verse 21 makes perfectly good sense and serves the function of holding this section together as a meaningful unit. Luke 12:16-20 could perfectly stand within the oral tradition as a logical unit. If this is true then the function of this parable requires the hearer to come or draw his or her own conclusion based upon what was heard. As to Luke 12:16-20 "The Parable Proper," it is difficult to recover out of what situation this parable may have arose. Nor is it possible to ground this parable firmly in the historical Jesus, but it is very likely that Luke 12:16-20 is close to the very oral form in which the parable was uttered.



## EXPOSITION

Verse 13-15: Begins as a dialogue between Jesus and one of the crowd. The request made by this man of Jesus was not unusual given the nature of Jewish Rabbis. Indications seem to point to a possible controversy between Jesus and the man. The younger brother was probably well acquainted as was the older brother with the laws of inheritance, but wants Jesus to publicly say something supporting the law of old (Patriarchal, Mosaic) to help justify their adherence to the law, and thereby discredit what Jesus stood for.

Verse 16-20: "The Parable Proper" in which Jesus illustrates the folly of trusting in the wrong things. The problem is not that the man was stupid in the sense we know it, by all modern standards he was very thrifty and wise but his foolishness occurred in thinking that his material possessions would make him happy and secure. He placed his trust in the wrong things. The man did not maintain a proper sense of values.

Verse 21: Luke in this verse purposefully directs our attention to the conclusion which he wants us to draw. If you are like the rich fool then you are not rich toward God. If you put trust in material things and not God then you are indeed a fool.

It is obvious that we are dealing with two different traditions at work in this parable, one a possible oral tradition and one a written tradition. In the written form Luke, by including verse 13-15 and verse 21 has clearly directed this parable to the conclusion which he intended his readers to

make, that greed for material things is wrong. It is our opinion that this parable as it exists in Luke is an embellishment of an earlier, possible oral form of the parable. Also Luke has changed the purpose of this parable to suit his own ends. Luke 12:13-21 functions as a simile in which the point of comparison is between being rich in material things as opposed to being rich in things of God. Luke tries to show by comparison that it is wrong to place your trust in material goods or for the Pharisees in the law, the only real important thing is to put your trust in God.

On the other hand we have identified Luke 12:16-20 as the "Parable Proper". This is more likely to what Jesus may have said within the oral tradition. This section functions like an example story. The hearers are to draw their own ethical conclusion from the story. In such a form it may not have been strange for the phrase, "If you have ears to hear then hear" to be added and may indeed have been the case. If the purpose of the example story was to encourage each individual to draw their own conclusion, then Luke 12:16-20 could very well be talking about complacency in power. We should never become complacent no matter how good things are going because things can happen so suddenly for which we may not be prepared for.

Luke 12:13-21 is a parable that has been redeveloped and directed towards a particular purpose. Luke seems to see Jesus ministry as standing directly opposed to the established power structure, like the Pharisees. It is his ministry which heralds a new system of values for life, no longer is law, power, and

greed the things to be desired but other more important things like love, concern, and respect. The Pharisee and those similarly situated are at one point of the spectrum trying to keep things the way they are, while Jesus at the other point is trying to change things.

## CHAPTER IV

## CONCLUDING REMARKS

What then can be said about parable interpretation? In the final analysis it becomes obvious that parable interpretation is not simply an attempt to allegorize. A parable is never such a simple matter. Often parables can lead one to a variety of interpretation approaches. The only thing we can say with some degree of certainty, is that parables were and are primarily a teaching device.

Of the major works in parable interpretation discussed within this paper, most of these authors would probably agree that parables were primarily a teaching device. We must note however that these same writers disagree at the point of proper application of the teaching of the parable. While all parables may instruct or teach they do not function the same, nor do they lend themselves to a core or central interpretation.

It seems that how one understands how the teaching of the parable functions, dictates the interpretation of the parable. For example in the parable of the Rich Fool according to C.H. Dodd parables are metaphors which have a single point of comparison. Therefore, if we interpret this parable in light of this concept, the Parable Of The Rich Fool could offer us a comparison of what life in the kingdom of God is like as opposed to this worldly life. Or compare for example, Jeremias who interprets this parable as an eschatological parable con-

cerning the end time. So these are just a few examples of how parable interpretation may be dictated by the function which is applied to the parable.

In our parable of The Rich Fool we also have two stages of development and transmission at work, one an earlier or possible oral stage and one a later, or written stage. Within both of these stages of transmission instruction is going on, but the difference lies in the principle of application which is implied in one as opposed to the other. In the oral stage the parable may have existed as a narrative or example story which would possibly lead one to interpret the parable slightly different than if one were reading the account in Luke's Gospel where the story is pre-conditioned by Luke's introduction and concluding interpretative statement.

In the final analysis how can one go about properly interpreting a parable given the vast dichotomy that has been discussed previously. The first thing one should do in approaching parable interpretation is to remember that they are primarily a teaching device. Secondly one must, like Jeremias try to distinguish between what may be the earliest form of the parable as opposed to its written form. If one is successful in this attempt then the meaning of the parable will in effect be determined by the function of the particular form and setting in which the parable exists. As to the question of which stage of transmission can offer a legitimate or normative message to be internalized is a question to which the interpreter must struggle, over and over again, not only in light of the message of the parable but also with personal values and theological presuppositions that one brings to the text.

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