The Parables of Jesus- Overview:

This class will examine how the parables of Jesus have been interpreted over the centuries since Jesus spoke them and will give basic principles and rules for interpreting them in one's own study. We will start with giving a basic description for what a parable is and what its function is, give an overview for different methods of interpretation, describe what I believe to be the most helpful and biblically sound principles and rules for interpretation, and then study many of the parables using that framework.

Four resources that heavily inform this course are:

- Blomberg, Craig L. *Interpreting the Parables.* 2nd ed. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2012.
- Fee, Gordon D., and Douglas Stuart. *How to Read the Bible for All Its Worth.* 3rd ed. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2003.
- Ryken, Leland, Philip Ryken, and James Wilhoit. *Ryken's Bible Handbook.* Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House, 2005.
- Stein, Robert H. *A Basic Guide to Interpreting the Bible: Playing by the Rules.* 2nd ed. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2011.

Unless otherwise stated, all scripture quotations are taken from the *English Standard Version.*

Parable:

a short, simple story that teaches or explains an idea, especially a moral or religious idea
- Cambridge Dictionary

a usually short fictitious story that illustrates a moral attitude or a religious principle
- Merriam-Webster

Parabolē (παραβολή)

Strong's Definition: a similitude ("parable"), i.e. (symbolic) fictitious narrative (of common life conveying a moral), apothegm or adage:—comparison, figure, parable, proverb.

Thayer's Greek Lexicon:
1. a placing of one thing by the side of another, juxtaposition, as of ships in battle,
2. metaphorically, a comparing, comparison of one thing with another, likeness, similitude

The Greek term is associated with the Hebrew word משל (methal) which is defined by the Letham Research Lexicon of the Hebrew Bible "to compare (consider equal) — to consider or describe as similar, equal, or analogous."

Parables in the Gospels

Robert Stein states that approximately 35% of Jesus's teachings are found in the form of parables.

Stuart and Fee classify them in four types
- True Parables; stories (Good Samaritan, Luke 10:29-37)
- Similitudes (Yeast in the dough, Matthew 13:31-33)
- Metaphor (You are the salt of the earth, Matthew 5:13-16)
- Epigrams ("Are grapes gathered from thornbushes, or figs from thistles?" Matthew 7:16-20)

Finally, Blomberg, Fee and Stuart, and Stein all agree that parables are:
- Comparisons
- Highly accessible to the hearer (easily understood rather than allegorical mysteries)
- Meant to make a definite point or points

Main Function

While some parables, especially shorter ones like similitudes, metaphors and epigrams, were used to illustrate Jesus's teaching with word pictures and serve as vehicles for revealing truth, parables were meant to call forth a response on the part of the hearer. The parables themselves should stand by themselves in this sense: just like a joke, if you have to explain a joke, the joke loses all of its force and power to call forth the response it was intended to call forth. When you have to interpret a joke, it can still be understood and still might be a little bit funny even. It ceases to have the impact it was meant to have.

Conclusion

Ultimately, as Fee and Stuart state, "Jesus was not trying to be obtuse; he fully intended to be understood." Jesus was using his parables to lead people to a better understanding of the message he was bringing, most notably, about the Kingdom of God, what it was like, what it meant to be a part of it, and what it meant to not be part of it.