

Jesus as Wisdom Teacher

The eye is the lamp of the body... Jesus uses wisdom teaching to invite his hearers to see differently.

~ Marcus Borg

Jesus invites his hearers to leave conventional wisdom behind in order to live by an alternative wisdom.

Jesus as alternative wisdom teacher



Jesus' wisdom teaching takes two forms.

Aphorisms:

- Great one-liners
- Short, pithy, memorable sayings
- Crystallizations of insight that provoke and invite further insight
- Examples:
 - *"If a blind person leads another blind person, they will both fall into a ditch."*
 - *"Leave the dead to bury the dead."*

Parables:

- Short stories
- Invite the hearer to enter the world of the story and to see differently in light of the story
- Example: story of the Good Samaritan ([Luke 10:25-37](#))

Both **aphorisms** and **parables** are evocative and provocative forms of speech.

Most importantly they are **invitational** forms of speech

- Invitations to see something you might not have otherwise seen
- Invitations to see differently



Jesus spoke his aphorisms and told his parables many, many times.

No great speaker of one-liners tells a great one-liner only once, no great teller of great stories tells a great story only once.

The gospels are plot summaries.

Jesus' invitation to see differently

Seeing is central to the wisdom teaching of Jesus. There are many sayings and healing stories about seeing. **How you see makes all the difference.**

- What does Jesus invite people to see?
- What is this new or different way of seeing like?
- What is the different vision of life to which Jesus points and to which he invites his hearers?

Jesus' alternative

wisdom teaching undermines and subverts the **social boundaries** generated by the conventional wisdom of his day and ours.

Jesus' wisdom teaching points to the world of conventional wisdom as a world of blindness. His aphorisms and parables invite us to see differently.



Conventional wisdom	Jesus' alternative wisdom
God is punitive lawgiver and judge	God is gracious
A person's worth is determined by measuring up to social standards	All persons have infinite worth as a children of God
Sinners and outcasts are to be avoided and rejected	Everyone is welcome around the table and in the kingdom of God
Identity comes from social tradition	Identity comes from centering in the sacred, from relationship with God
Strive to be first	The first shall be last...; those who exalt themselves will be emptied...

Preserve one's own life above all	The path of dying to self and being reborn leads to life abundant
Fruit of striving is reward	Fruit of centering in God is compassion

Source of Jesus' alternative wisdom

- Where did this alternative wisdom of Jesus come from?
- Why does he see the way he sees?
- Why does he speak of conventional wisdom as way of blindness?
- How does he know of alternative wisdom?



Jesus himself must have had an enlightenment experience. **The reason Jesus sees differently is because he knows differently.**

The radical change in perspective which characterizes the wisdom teaching of Jesus comes from a **radically different** experience of reality, the experience of the spirit of God.

*The path Jesus travels, and invites his hearers to travel, is a way **radically centered in God** and not in culture.*