

# **BIBLICAL INSIGHTS #122: JESUS AND THE CROWDS**

**By John Temples**

One of the most thrilling and vivid accounts of the ministry of Jesus is found in Mark 2:1-12:

“And again He entered Capernaum after some days, and it was heard that He was in the house. Immediately many gathered together, so that there was no longer room to receive them, not even near the door. And He preached the word to them. Then they came to Him, bringing a paralytic who was carried by four men. And when they could not come near Him because of the crowd, they uncovered the roof where He was. So when they had broken through, they let down the bed on which the paralytic was lying. When Jesus saw their faith, He said to the paralytic, ‘Son, your sins are forgiven you.’ And some of the scribes were sitting there and reasoning in their hearts, ‘Why does this Man speak blasphemies like this? Who can forgive sins but God alone?’ But immediately, when Jesus perceived in His spirit that they reasoned thus within themselves, He said to them, ‘Why do you reason about these things in your hearts? Which is easier, to say to the paralytic, ‘Your sins are forgiven you,’ or to say, ‘Arise, take up your bed and walk’? But that you may know that the Son of Man has power on earth to forgive sins” — He said to the paralytic, “I say to you, arise, take up your bed, and go to your house.” Immediately he arose, took up the bed, and went out in the presence of them all, so that all were amazed and glorified God, saying, ‘We never saw anything like this!’”

We love this. We marvel at the ingenuity, the boldness, and the love of these men for a friend that led them to tear a hole in a roof and let their companion down to Jesus to be healed. They did not let the presence of a large number of people deter them.

There’s an incidental detail in this account that furnishes a valuable lesson for us. I call your attention to the first part of verse 4: “...they could not come near Him

because of the crowd.” Brother Burton Coffman says this in his commentary: “[This] is another example of the kind of statement frequently found in the New Testament, in which extensive meaning and application beyond the context are evident. *How many are there in every place who cannot come near the Lord because of the crowd?* When one truly decides to seek and follow the Lord, he may very well rest assured that a vast crowd of his fellow mortals will be positioned squarely across the avenue of approach.”

True! You can mark it down: When a person decides to come to the Lord, he will find a whole host of people (not to mention Satan and his angels) standing in his way and hindering him from drawing near to Christ. Who are these people? Here are some:

*Religious leaders and theologians.* Everywhere Jesus went, He was dogged by these kinds of people. Luke 5:17 says, “Now it happened on a certain day, as He was teaching, that there were Pharisees and teachers of the law sitting by, who had come out of every town of Galilee, Judea, and Jerusalem.” These religious leaders were not there to hear or honor Jesus; they were there to oppose Him and discourage others from listening to Him. Later, Jesus accused them of “shutting up the kingdom of heaven against men” (Matthew 23:13). He said in Luke 11:52, “Woe to you lawyers! For you have taken away the key of knowledge. You did not enter in yourselves, and those who were entering in you hindered.”

The same thing was true in Old Testament times. Malachi issued a blistering indictment against elite priests who were abusing their power. He said, “For the lips of a priest should keep knowledge, and people should seek the law from his mouth; for he is the messenger of the Lord of hosts. But you have departed from the way; you have caused many to stumble at the law” (Malachi 2:7-8).

We still have religious leaders opposing Jesus and hindering truth-seeking disciples today:

- Denominational preachers who preach false doctrines that divide and confuse people.
- Charlatans and shysters who bilk people out of their hard-earned money.

- Theologians who try to justify their ThD degrees by coming up with incomprehensible psycho-babble or bizarre and blasphemous statements like “God is dead.”

*Christians who live unholy lives and cozy up to the world, causing others to stumble.* Paul spoke of them in 1 Corinthians 8:9-12: “But beware lest somehow this liberty of yours become a stumbling block to those who are weak. For if anyone sees you who have knowledge eating in an idol's temple, will not the conscience of him who is weak be emboldened to eat those things offered to idols? And because of your knowledge shall the weak brother perish, for whom Christ died? But when you thus sin against the brethren, and wound their weak conscience, you sin against Christ.” Seeing fellow Christians who won't live right is surely discouraging, and discouragement makes you lose hope. It becomes harder for you to get back up and move on. Your soul starts to give up. But each of us will give account to God (2 Corinthians 5:10), so do not let another Christian sway you from the path of righteousness.

*Satan.* Yes, don't forget he is also in the crowd blocking your access to Christ. Peter warned, “Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil walks about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour. Resist him, steadfast in the faith, knowing that the same sufferings are experienced by your brotherhood in the world” (1 Peter 5:8-9). But we are promised that if we resist the devil, he will flee from us (James 4:7).

*Apostate Christians who have left the church but continue to try to poison the steadfastness of the still-faithful.* Jesus said, “It is impossible that no offenses should come, but woe to him through whom they do come! It would be better for him if a millstone were hung around his neck, and he were thrown into the sea, than that he should offend one of these little ones” (Luke 17:1-2). One who sows discord among brethren is hated by the Lord (Proverbs 6:16-19). Peter said of Christians who had left the faith that they are worse off than before they obeyed the gospel (2 Peter 2:20). But before they became Christians, they were lost, without God, and having no hope in the world (Ephesians 2:12). What could possibly be worse than that? One simple answer is that one apostate Christian can do more damage to the cause of Christ, and discourage more people from coming to Him, than a dozen atheists.

*Well-meaning friends and family members who try to keep you from obeying the Lord because of social ties and relationships.* Many a one has been discouraged or prevented from obeying Christ because of statements like this from a loved one: “If you are baptized for forgiveness of sins, you will be saying your unbaptized parents were lost.” Or, “You shouldn’t associate with those church-of-Christ people--they are a sect.” Paul was very wise when, after obeying the gospel, said, “I did not immediately confer with flesh and blood” (Galatians 1:16).

These are just a few “members of the crowd” who will try to keep you from coming to Jesus. Don’t let them stand in your way. And once you become a Christian, don’t let them turn you away. --John Temples

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### **POSTSCRIPT: THOUGHTS ABOUT FOLLOWING A CROWD**

Occasionally a crowd of people are going in the right direction, but more often than not, they aren’t. Consider the following sayings:

“Following the crowd will cause you to be mediocre, living a life of self-betrayal, and resigned to an average life. If you do what the majority do, you will get what the majority get.” (Unknown)

“Those who follow a crowd usually get lost in it.” (Anonymous)

“Following the crowd is cool if you want to go where the crowd is going. Never fear being the odd one out in order to achieve your own goals.” (Rolsey)

“If you follow the crowd and do just enough to get by, no one will blame you. But no one will remember you, either.” (Unknown)

“The one who follows the crowd will usually get no further than the crowd. The one who walks alone is likely to find himself in places no one has ever been before.” (Albert Einstein)

“Don’t follow the crowd, let the crowd follow you.” (Margaret Thatcher)

“Do not go where the path may lead, go instead where there is no path and leave a trail.” (Ralph Waldo Emerson)

“Only dead fish go with the flow.” (Anonymous)

“If everybody else was jumping off a cliff, would you do it too?” (Your mother)

Final thoughts: Even God knew the undependability of a crowd. Once when the Israelites, with Gideon as their leader, were about to be under attack by Midianites, God told Gideon, “The people who are with you are too many for Me to give the Midianites into their hands, lest Israel claim glory for itself against Me, saying, 'My own hand has saved me.' Now therefore, proclaim in the hearing of the people, saying, 'Whoever is fearful and afraid, let him turn and depart at once from Mount Gilead.' And twenty-two thousand of the people returned, and ten thousand remained. But the Lord said to Gideon, ‘The people are still too many; bring them down to the water, and I will test them for you there. Then it will be, that of whom I say to you, 'This one shall go with you,' the same shall go with you; and of whomever I say to you, 'This one shall not go with you,' the same shall not go.’ So he brought the people down to the water. And the Lord said to Gideon, ‘Everyone who laps from the water with his tongue, as a dog laps, you shall set apart by himself; likewise everyone who gets down on his knees to drink.’ And the number of those who lapped, putting their hand to their mouth, was three hundred men; but all the rest of the people got down on their knees to drink water. Then the Lord said to Gideon, ‘By the three hundred men who lapped I will save you, and deliver the Midianites into your hand. Let all the other people go, every man to his place.’ So the people took provisions and their trumpets in their hands. And he sent away all the rest of Israel, every man to his tent, and retained those three hundred men” (Judges 7:2-8).

Exodus 23:2 says, “You shall not follow a crowd to do evil; nor shall you testify in a dispute so as to turn aside after many to pervert justice.”

Finally, remember that many of the same crowd who hailed Jesus as the Messiah on Sunday were crying “Crucify Him” on Friday. --John Temples

