

# The Out Crowd

Mark 3:7-19    May 21, 2025

Crowds do strange things. Studies show that more than 1/3 of people will purposefully choose an answer they *know* to be wrong if other people in the crowd already chose that answer.<sup>1</sup>

This is part of a phenomenon called deindividuation. In these cases, individuals in a crowd are so caught up in what is happening, they will follow the group around them, abandoning self-control and self-awareness, even when it may lead to behaviors that bring harm to themselves or others.<sup>2</sup>

Our text is all about the crowd. We see a *massive* throng, maybe tens of thousands of people in size,<sup>3</sup> acting badly. But among this sea of people a different, distinct group stands out: Disciples.

In some ways, these two groups look the same. After all, the disciples *followed* Jesus, but the crowd *followed* Him, too. And Jesus seems happy to talk to and work with *both* groups. So, what is the difference? And does it matter if we're in one group or the other? Let's take a look.

**Mark 3:7-8 - <sup>7</sup> Jesus departed with his disciples to the sea, and a large crowd followed from Galilee, and a large crowd followed from Judea, <sup>8</sup> Jerusalem, Idumea, beyond the Jordan, and around Tyre and Sidon. The large crowd came to him because they heard about everything he was doing.**

Matthew explains Jesus left the synagogue because He knew the Pharisees were plotting to kill Him.<sup>4</sup> But, it wasn't time for Him to die, so He took things down to the shore.

This was the time when Jesus was most popular, with the largest crowds coming to see Him.<sup>5</sup> These were huge numbers. He didn't just empty a village or two - people were coming from every point of the compass and from *distant* regions.

The walk from Jerusalem to Capernaum was *100 miles!*<sup>6</sup> Idumea was even farther. There were people coming from the Transjordan, others coming from way up in the North West of Lebanon.

Mark says they *followed* Jesus. Were they disciples? Jesus *did* say, "Follow Me." Yet, there was a big difference in the why and the how of the *crowd's* following compared to the disciples' following.

The why is given in verse 8. They came to Him because they heard about everything He was *doing*. It wasn't the *message* they were interested in, it was the *miracles*. The *doings*, not the *sayings*.

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<sup>1</sup> [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Asch\\_conformity\\_experiments](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Asch_conformity_experiments)

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.verywellmind.com/deindividuation-7546896>

<sup>3</sup> Ray Stedman *The Servant Who Rules - Mark 1-8*

<sup>4</sup> Matthew 12:15

<sup>5</sup> Stedman

<sup>6</sup> Ralph Earle *Mark: The Gospel Of Action*

But Jesus said back in chapter 1 that the reason He came was *not* primarily to heal physical ailments, but to preach the Good News of the Kingdom. But this crowd didn't care about that.

There are other examples in the Gospels where these crowds make it clear that they are not actually listening to Jesus - they just want supernatural manifestations from Him. In John 6, a crowd wants miracles from Jesus while He wants to give them some of the greatest truths ever revealed - about the Bread of Life, the resurrection of the dead, and eternal life. But they say, "How about instead You give us *literal* bread every day?"<sup>7</sup>

These crowds thought of Jesus as a magical miracle worker, not as the Messiah. They misunderstood Who He was. We need to be careful not to make similar mistakes.

**Mark 3:9-10 - <sup>9</sup>Then he told his disciples to have a small boat ready for him, so that the crowd wouldn't crush him. <sup>10</sup>Since he had healed many, all who had diseases were pressing toward him to touch him.**

Their *why* was wrong and their *how* was wrong. The phrase "pressing toward Him" literally means falling on Him.<sup>8</sup> They were *chasing* Him<sup>9</sup> to grab on like people do when a money truck crashes on a freeway. There's pushing and shoving.<sup>10</sup>

One of the words Mark uses is the same one you would use for pressing grapes to extract the juices.<sup>11</sup> Christ's power was a commodity to them - a sort of "while supplies last" situation. They did not fall down in worship before Him, they fell *on* Him with their demands. They wanted to lay hold of His power, but we don't see any of them allowing God to lay hold of *their* lives.

The Lord wants to *hold* your life in His hand. Psalm 139 says, "Your hand will lead me; Your right hand will hold on to me." His holding means He is the Master and Decider for us. He is the One in charge of your life. He doesn't exist for my wants and desires, but instead I am to surrender my past, present, and future to *His* will and design.

And here we see a contrast between the crowd and the disciples. The crowd sees Jesus as a *device* to get things they want. The disciples are able to receive *direction* from the Lord.

He told them they need to keep a little boat ready for His use. This wasn't just a one-time thing, it was all the time when they were in this area.<sup>12</sup> There were times He needed transportation, or times like this where He needed it for safety. But they had to keep it ready.

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<sup>7</sup> John 6:22-41

<sup>8</sup> Earle

<sup>9</sup> William Lane *The Gospel Of Mark*

<sup>10</sup> James Brooks *The New American Commentary: Mark*

<sup>11</sup> Lloyd Ogilvie *Life Without Limits: The Message Of Mark's Gospel*

<sup>12</sup> Bob Utley *The Gospel According To Peter: Mark And I & II Peter*

This may have been more of an ask than we realize. The boat probably belonged to one of the fishermen, but you'd have to maintain and administrate it. Leaving it docked might have meant fees. It meant they couldn't lease the boat to other fishermen to gain some passive income.

This illustrates an aspect of real discipleship. There are times when the Lord comes to us and says, "I want you to give this *boat* of yours toward the ministry of the Gospel. I want you to personally, financially, sacrificially contribute toward the work of the Kingdom."

"But I don't own a boat." Neither did Matthew. The point is, the crowd comes demanding things *from* Jesus but brings no worship, no gift, no contribution to His ministry. They want *from* Him. The disciples give their lives *to* Him, and that included generosity with their resources.

**Mark 3:11-12 - <sup>11</sup>Whenever the unclean spirits saw him, they fell down before him and cried out, "You are the Son of God!" <sup>12</sup>And he would strongly warn them not to make him known.**

Ironically, the demons offer more honor to Jesus than the people in the crowd. They fall down before Jesus while the humans fall over each other, trying to be first in line.

**Mark 3:13 - <sup>13</sup>Jesus went up the mountain and summoned those he wanted, and they came to him.**

Now the focus changes from the crowd to the real disciples - specifically the group known as "The Twelve." There were other people who believed Jesus and followed Him as disciples, but these Twelve were specially set apart and commissioned by the Lord.

Luke tells us that before this announcement, Jesus spent all night in prayer.<sup>13</sup> But the crowds were still there. Try to imagine it! Jesus is trying to have this incredibly important time with the Father about the selection of these guys who would be instrumental in the founding of the church and 10,000 people are hanging around trying to get His attention and get Him to do stuff for them!

Mark tells us that Jesus summoned those He *wanted*. Not the top earners of the group. Not whoever had the highest GPA. Not the most well-connected elites. God's callings are not about our achievements or abilities, they're about His loving grace and kindness toward individuals.

And notice: The crowds came after hearing about Jesus' miracles. The disciples here come after being *summoned*. They waited and listened to Him and answered His call.

**Mark 3:14-15 - <sup>14</sup>He appointed twelve, whom he also named apostles, to be with him, to send them out to preach, <sup>15</sup>and to have authority to drive out demons.**

The *crowds* came because they wanted power from Jesus - according to their own desires and designs. Ultimately, they became disappointed in Him. The *disciples* believed His Word and what's

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<sup>13</sup> Luke 6:12

the result? He gives them power! *Not* according to *their* desires or designs or their self-interest, but for the work of the Kingdom. For reaching the world. For saving souls and setting captives free.

He appointed them to do the things that *He* had been doing. Preaching, exorcising, going out with the Good News. They may have said, "So, if we're going to be like You, does that mean that *we'll* be crushed? That *we'll* be hounded? That the Pharisees will be angrily confronting us, too?" Of course, we know the answer is yes. The world is going to treat disciples the way they treated Jesus. But what Jesus was giving was so much better than what the world would try to take away.

First, He gave them a new identity: An appointment and a new name. Now, we are not apostles, but God has appointed *you* for some work and gives you a new name. Christian. Salt. In eternity, we're told we'll receive another new name specially chosen by Jesus for us, written on a white stone.<sup>14</sup>

The second thing He gave was communion with Him. He summoned these twelve to be *with* Him. He did not sit in first class while they stayed in coach. He was with them day in and day out.

This is such an important difference between the crowd and the disciples. The crowd didn't care about being *with* Jesus. They just wanted *from* Him. But discipleship and relationship with God is about being *with* the Lord. *That's* what qualified the Twelve to bear witness of Jesus and participate in His work, by the way - being *with* Jesus.<sup>15</sup>

We've been enjoying a worship song that has a wonderfully tender chorus. The opening lines are, "You are our daily bread, You are our daily bread, and we will seek Your face before we seek Your hand." A reminder that the point is being *with* Jesus. Communion before supplication.

Third, Jesus gave these guys a message to proclaim as He sent them out. *Wait* - how can we be *with* Him *and* be sent out from Him? The Lord is always with us. He dwells in our hearts. Emmanuel will never leave or forsake us. He goes *with* us as He sends us to speak *His* message.

Finally, He gave them the power of God to operate through their lives so people could be rescued and saved. To prove that Christ *is* the Messiah and He *is* the Way, the Truth, and the Life.

**Mark 3:16-19 - <sup>16</sup>He appointed the Twelve: To Simon, he gave the name Peter; <sup>17</sup>and to James the son of Zebedee, and to his brother John, he gave the name "Boanerges" (that is, "Sons of Thunder"); <sup>18</sup>Andrew; Philip and Bartholomew; Matthew and Thomas; James the son of Alphaeus, and Thaddaeus; Simon the Zealot, <sup>19</sup>and Judas Iscariot, who also betrayed him.**

The Twelve is an interesting group. We really don't know as much about them as you'd expect since they are so distinct as a group. There were two sets of brothers, maybe three.<sup>16</sup> Seven of them are

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<sup>14</sup> Revelation 2:17

<sup>15</sup> Lane

<sup>16</sup> *ibid.*

never named again in Mark.<sup>17</sup> Frankly, we know almost *nothing* about half of them.<sup>18</sup> As an example, we don't even know Bartholomew's name! Scholars agree that *that* is not a first name - it's a surname. Bar means "son of," so we're being told he was the son of Talmai.<sup>19</sup> Iscariot was not Judas' dad's name. It was probably the town he was from. If so, that makes him the only non-Galilean in the group.<sup>20</sup> Sort of interesting given the false following we just witnessed from all these crowds from Judea and Idumea and elsewhere who also did not really follow Jesus.

One other fun piece of trivia: As far as scholars can tell, the Greek word Jesus used to nickname Peter had *never* been used as a name before.<sup>21</sup> I wonder how Simon felt about that.

Why don't we know more about the Twelve? For one thing, it's not really about them, it's about *you!* *Your* discipleship. God's tender conforming of *your* life. What He has called *you* to do. We can take what we *do* know about the disciples and use *their* examples as a litmus for our own discipleship.

It's like the letters to the seven churches in Revelation. It doesn't matter that we don't actually live in first century Smyrna. The point is we can see the examples and evaluate ourselves to determine if any of those letters currently describe or apply to our circumstances and to adjust where necessary.

So, think about the Twelve. Which sort of disciple are we tonight? Hopefully none of us are like Judas - a man who *never* actually believed - he was a thief and a counterfeit even though he ran with the group and *looked* a lot like a believer.

Or are we like Thomas the Twin, a bit cynical, unwilling to believe without first seeing? Or are we like James and John, lashing out at people who treat us poorly? Are we like Philip, always trying to bring people to Jesus? Are we Simon the Zealot, full of passions and opinions, but willing to be conformed into the image of Jesus, setting aside our old, revolutionary ways when the Lord asks?

There are a lot of ways we can see their examples and measure our own discipleship as we follow Jesus. As we join His group, He doesn't demand deindividuation like we see happening in crowds. It's not that you no longer exist as an individual - you do. Look at the tenderness of Jesus renaming these guys and having a relationship based on closeness and kindness. But disciples listen and learn and conform to Christ's image. His words become our words. His reactions become our reactions. Our future is put in His hands. *That's* the difference between the crowd and the disciples. The crowd wanted Jesus for *now*. Disciples want Jesus forever, for everything. That's what we want. Let's follow Him like that. Listening to Him, giving ourselves to Him, staying with Him not because we just want Him do things for us, but because we understand Who He is and what He's offering now and forever.

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<sup>17</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>18</sup> Frank Gaebelin, D. A. Carson, Walter Wessel, and Walter Liefeld *The Expositor's Bible Commentary, Volume 8: Matthew, Mark, Luke*

<sup>19</sup> Lane

<sup>20</sup> R.T. France *The Gospel Of Mark*

<sup>21</sup> Ben Witherington *The Gospel Of Mark: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary*