

The Crowd or the Kingdom

Pastor Chris Baker //05.28.23 // Centralia FBC

We're going to read a long passage this morning. We'll start out in Mark 3. It's on page ___ in the black bibles in the pew rack in front of you. This week and next week are the two largest chunks of Mark's gospel we'll deal with in one sermon during this series. I debated whether or not we should read the whole thing during our sermon time. The more I prayed about it the more I felt convicted that we probably don't read God's Word out loud enough in our lives or in our worship gatherings, so we're going to read the whole thing.

We'll go from Mark 3:7 through 4:34. While you're turning there I want to tell you about the last time I made a fool out of myself. At least, the last time I *know* I made a fool out of myself. My wife and children might have other examples. But I know I went out of my ever-loving mind on October 15, 2022. That's the day we finally did it.

For the first time in 15 years—the first time since the iPhone was invented, the first time in the length of my marriage—Tennessee beat Alabama in football. It was an absolute mess of a game. The final score was 52-49 and the game winning field goal spun sideways and flew like a clay pigeon, but it was good. And the next 10 minutes are a bit of a blur for me, but all I could think was 'we finally did it.'

Now, that's silly. I didn't do *anything*. But I had a very similar emotional response to the players who did. I spilled my water bottle, I scared the dog, my wife posted it all on Facebook. It was traumatic and awesome.

Why, when I know that I had nothing to do with the game, did I feel like "we" did something? It doesn't make sense, but it's pretty common for sports fans. One writer put it this way:

We might not put on a uniform. We might not risk life and limb for the glory of the gridiron, and probably none of us are driving a Bentley. But, we are there for every moment, the wins and the losses, the highs and the lows, as the good and the bad transpire on the field before us. That is what unites fans and players into one nation, united under one flag, all sharing in the joy of victory and the sorrow of defeat.

That is the soul of sports and that is why it is okay to say "we."

- Mike Dussault <https://bleacherreport.com/articles/154199-its-okay-for-fans-to-say-we>

That's poetic, but I'm not sure if I'm convinced. I probably won't stop saying 'we' even though I know I should. On some level, we're looking for a sense of belonging when we make ourselves part of the team. Humans have always done things like that.

There was something like a Jesus fan club, a Jesus bandwagon maybe, in the opening scenes of Mark. Back in chapter 2, He had gotten so popular that the house he was staying in became so crowded they had to lower a paralyzed man down to him from the roof.

Sports are one thing. But when it comes to Jesus, who gets to say 'we' is a much more important question. The crowd was all over the Jesus bandwagon.

In fact, He drew crowds over-and-over again during His earthly ministry. And yet, after His crucifixion there were only a handful of folks who had truly followed Him. You see, we find in today's passage that there is a serious difference between being part of the crowd and being part of the Kingdom.

Are we part of the 'we' that truly matters when it comes to Jesus? As I read this long passage, pay attention to the crowd. Notice how Jesus withdraws from the ones who are just curious, the ones who are just waiting for the next miracle or the next trick. And notice how He draws His people to Himself, to teach them, to equip them, and eventually to deploy them out into the world.

Mark 3, starting in verse 7:

Read

Pray

Being in the Crowd does not equal being in the Kingdom (3:7-19)

You may not immediately feel it, but our passage began in tension. Jerry's passage from last week ended with this serious of conflicts between Jesus and the religious leaders of His day. Actually, conflict is probably not a strong enough word. The first scene in Mark 3 is Jesus healing a man in a synagogue on the Sabbath day. Jesus, very intentionally and publicly, performed this miracle in the sight of the Pharisees. If you've been around church very long, you probably hear that title and identify them as the bad guys in the gospels. That's true in a lot of ways, and we'll even see that in today's text. But remember, in the context they would have been looked on as the good guys. By-and-large they were the best guys.

The word Pharisee comes from a Hebrew word meaning "set apart." They knew the Old Testament Law from memory. Not only that, but they would have known and abided by all the Jewish religious traditions. They were good—at least outwardly.

Their problem was that they expected God to work very differently than He did. They didn't expect a Savior like Jesus. They expected a savior like David—a warrior-king who would overthrow the Romans. And they got so caught up in their way of doing things that not only did they miss Jesus, they were the group most responsible for His murder.

They started plotting it right there in Mark 3:6, *Immediately the Pharisees went out and started plotting with the Herodians against him, how they might kill him.*

Church, this isn't the heart of the passage, but it sets the stage so it bears stating. Men who knew more Bible than most of us in this room will ever know were so lost that they wanted to murder Jesus. We need the help of the Holy Spirit to guard our hearts and guard our intentions because without Him we are absolutely as capable of evil as these men were.

The Pharisees had murder in their heart, and that's the tension that sets our passage in motion this morning.

In Mark 3:7 Jesus got out of the limelight. He left the village where He healed the man on the Sabbath and when back to the outskirts. The problem, though, is that word started to spread. People came from everywhere to see this Rabbi who had miraculous powers of healing.

So even though Jesus appears to be trying to diffuse the situation, the crowd just follows Him out to the Sea of Galilee. But something different happens in verse 13, and here's where we see this divide between those in the crowd and those in the Kingdom start to take shape.

'Jesus went up to the mountain and summoned those he wanted,' according to verse 13. There were thousands of people who were curious about Jesus. But only a few became followers. Only a few are called up the mountain here in Mark 3. Just because you're interested in Jesus, just because you're curious, just because you believe He's real doesn't make you part of the Kingdom.

The difference between the crowd and the Kingdom is that those in the Kingdom have responded to a call. It's actually a series of calls, daily calls to obedience. We saw the beginning of Levi's call in the last chapter. Mark 2:14 Then, passing by, he saw Levi the son of Alphaeus sitting at the tax office, and he said to him, "Follow me," and he got up and followed him.

This is how salvation begins, church. We might have some curiosity about Jesus or about spiritual things on our own. But, the Bible makes clear that our salvation starts with God. He calls us to follow Him. Jesus said Himself over in John 6:44 **No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him, and I will raise him up on the last day.**

What's the difference between the ones who joined Jesus on the mountain and the ones who didn't? Very simply they're the ones Jesus called. He called them, they responded, and He gave them a purpose. They were to preach His good news and do so with His authority. The gifting is different, but the purpose is the same for everyone who God calls. The purpose of being called into Jesus's kingdom is that we can glorify Him.

The church attracts a crowd. We're flying the team colors. We like Jesus. We like Jesus's people. But when it comes time to separate the Kingdom from the crowd, which one are we?

The gospel is the message that Jesus Christ died and rose for our sins so that we may be saved. The Bible teaches that if we repent of our sins and place our trust in Jesus Christ alone we will be saved. That's the first call we answer when we belong to the Kingdom of God. And that's the only entry requirement. A response to a call.

That's the difference between the crowd and the Kingdom. Those in the Kingdom have answered Jesus's call to salvation. Not everyone does.

Mark 10, Jesus encountered a rich young man. He seemed to have it all together. Jesus said to Him, (10:21ff) *'You lack one thing: Go, sell all you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me.'* But he was dismayed by this demand, and he went away grieving, because he had many possessions.

This guy seemed to have it all, but He rejected the call of Jesus. He was trusting in his money more than Jesus. That meant he'd remain part of the crowd.

He's like some of the others we meet in today's text. They learn that:

Religion and Relationship do not equal being in the Kingdom (3:20-35)

In 3:20, Jesus returns to civilization. He tries to have a meal, but the crowd shows up again to such a degree that he can't. Within the crowd, there are two groups of people who actually confront Jesus: His family and the scribes.

The scribes are part of the crowd, but instead of putting their faith in Jesus they put their faith in their own religious preferences. Look at how blind our sin can make us, church. And this should be sobering for all of us today. Verse 22

The scribes who had come down from Jerusalem said, "He is possessed by Beelzebul," and, "He drives out demons by the ruler of the demons."

Beelzebub is a pagan god worshiped by the Philistines. The name means "the lord of flies" and you find it in 2 Kings 1.

Mark has been using miracles to show us Jesus's authority all through his gospel so far. Remember, Mark is writing to show us that Jesus is God and He came to serve and to save. These miracles are one of the ways Jesus demonstrates His divine nature and serves people at the same time. So the result should be God's glory.

And here are the scribes rolling in from Jerusalem on high taking that which should have glorified God and attributing it to Satan. They had faith in their own understanding of how the world worked. They had faith in their understanding of religion, in their own reading of the Old Testament, but when Jesus Himself was performing miracles in front of them, they missed it. And they missed it to their own damnation—according to verse 29.

They rejected Jesus. That's a scary verse for a lot of people. Let me be clear, just because I have no intention of preaching in such a way that unnecessarily troubles you.

Christians cannot commit the sin talked about in verse 29. If you are truly saved, then you are truly secure. When you believe in Jesus Christ for eternal life, then you have eternal life.¹ John 5:11-12: *And this is the testimony: God has given us eternal life, and this life is in his Son. 12 The one who has the Son has life. The one who does not have the Son of God does not have life.*

If you worry that you've committed the unforgivable sin, you haven't. If you're mourning and grieving and anxious about sin, it means that the Holy Spirit is active in your life. Satan wants to steal your hope and joy. He wants you to think you've gone too far to be saved.

This is a warning to those persisting in unbelief. Maybe you know you're guilty. Conviction is a good thing if it leads you to commitment. You are a sinner and if you have not repented and trusted Jesus Christ, you will not be forgiven. If you die in a state of disbelief, your sins will not be forgiven and you will pay the price for them forever in a place of everlasting destruction called hell!

That's what awaited the scribes if they didn't repent. Their religious background didn't move them from the crowd to the Kingdom. And neither did the heritage of Jesus's family.

Verse 21 they think He's out of His mind. Verse 31 they show up after about a 30 mile trip from Nazareth to Capernaum for an intervention. They thought He was crazy. It seems Joseph was probably dead by this point. We know based on the birth narratives in Matthew and Luke that Mary knew Jesus is God. There's no evidence that Mary ever wavered in her faith, but His brothers were a different story.

John 7 tells us they didn't believe, at least not during His earthly life. We know some did after His death, but not at this point.

You see, it's not heritage or family relationship that gets us into the Kingdom. You're not going to be 'in' because of your parents or your grandparents. No, Jesus goes on to clarify this new eternal family for us

The burning question that Mark's layout of these passages leaves us with is how do we know if we're in this Kingdom. It's the good news of the Kingdom that kicked off the public portion of Jesus's ministry back in chapter 1 (v.15) "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near. Repent and believe the good news!"

What happens after we repent and believe? Because it's not just a mental belief, right? Every demon Jesus meets believes in Him. They know who He is before the people do. So what does a believe that saves look like? Jesus said *(w)hoever does the will of God is my brother and sister and mother.*

That's a truth illustrated in parable in chapter 4, where we see:

Faith and Fruit are evidence of being in the Kingdom (4:1-34)

Jesus is before the crowd again in verse 1. There are so many people that He has to get into a boat and use it like a stage to be able to address the crowd—and He addressed them in a parable.

Verse 3: "Listen! Consider the sower who went out to sow. 4 As he sowed, some seed fell along the path, and the birds came and devoured it. 5 Other seed fell on rocky ground where it didn't have much soil, and it grew up quickly, since the soil wasn't deep. 6 When the sun came up, it was scorched, and since it had no root, it withered away. 7 Other seed fell among thorns, and the thorns came up and choked it, and it didn't produce fruit. 8 Still other seed fell on good ground and it grew up, producing fruit that increased thirty, sixty, and a hundred times."

In his Bible Exposition Commentary the late Warren Wiersbe wrote that 'a parable starts off as a picture that is familiar to the listeners. But as you carefully consider the picture, it becomes a mirror in which you see yourself, and many people do not like to see themselves. This explains why some of Jesus's listeners became angry when they heard His parables, and even tried to kill Him. But if we see ourselves as needy sinners and ask for help, then the mirror becomes a window through which we see God and His grace. To understand a parable and benefit from it demands honesty and humility on our part, and many in the crowd lacked both.'

It's in the parables that we see vividly the difference between the crowd and the Kingdom. Those in the Kingdom are the ones who want to hear the truth, who want to look into the mirror and see themselves as needy sinners. That's why Jesus makes it clear that this truth is available to anyone who has ears to listen. We see that phrase in verse 9 and verse 23.

This is a truth available to all, but only grasped by a few. When He's alone with the disciples again, He explains that parable.

Verse 14 The sower sows the word. 15 Some are like the word sown on the path. When they hear, immediately Satan comes and takes away the word sown in them. 16 And others are like seed sown on rocky ground. When they hear the word, immediately they receive it with joy. 17 But they have no root; they are short-lived. When distress or persecution comes because of the word, they immediately fall away. 18 Others are like seed sown among thorns; these are the ones who hear the word, 19 but the worries of this age, the deceitfulness of wealth, and the desires for other things enter in and choke the word, and it becomes unfruitful. 20 And those like seed sown on good ground hear the word, welcome it, and produce fruit thirty, sixty, and a hundred times what was sown."

We've read the better part of two chapters this morning. And with this parable and three shorter ones that follow, Jesus is putting a nice bow on the truths we've just seen in action.

Those in the crowd and those in the Kingdom have each witnessed the same things. They heard from the same sower, and they received the same seed.

The problem lies with the soil of their hearts. The soils represent heart responses to the truth of the gospel.

The first soil rejects the truth altogether. That's not most of us. The first soil heart probably isn't in church this morning. The first soil isn't even part of the crowd, wants nothing to do with Jesus at all.

The second gives a shallow response. It likes Jesus, it likes the idea of the Christian life, but as soon as things get hard the second soil sees whatever seed of faith planted in it choked out.

The third type is crowded soil. The gospel isn't the only seed planted there. Faith tries to grow up among worries, money, anxiety, fear and greed. Faith doesn't grow for very long in that soil. True, saving faith doesn't grow there at all.

Those three soils are part of the crowd. Some were only part of the crowd for a minute. They heard the word and walked away. But the second two soils, they were probably present right up until things went south and Jesus was arrested.

They looked the part. They were fans of Jesus. But they never really grew any type of spiritual fruit.

A heart that belongs to the Kingdom has a faith that bears fruit.

Outwardly, you can look like you're part of the 'we' that matters. But inwardly, you know better—and more importantly so does the Lord. God knows our hearts, folks. Just because we gather in this room every week doesn't make us part of the Kingdom. Giving money to the church, giving time to the church, serving other people—those are all great things. But the crowd can do those things.

We should see the warning in this passage. We need to be constantly cultivating the soil of our hearts so that the seed of faith planted by the call of Christ can blossom into a faith that shapes everything about who we are and what we do.

True faith bears true fruit. When Jesus, like He did with Levi in chapter 2, when He says to you come, follow me, do you leave the world behind to follow Him? When the seed of the gospel was planted in you, did it change everything? Now—I recognize it probably didn't change all your behavior and all your heart attitudes as once. If that's true of you, you're blessed and you're rare.

Just like if you look into a field right now you'll see the first evidence of the corn our farmers planted over the past couple of months starting to bud, you should be able to look at the soil of your heart and see change over time. In a few months, that little corn stalk will stand taller than me. How has the seed of faith changed your life since you met Christ? If you're not changed, you're probably part of the crowd.

True repentance of sin brought on by faith in Jesus Christ does not leave your life unchanged, according to the Bible. That doesn't mean you'll never sin again, but it does mean that you'll make progress in shaping your life around the One who died for you.

And you'll want to look more like Him. You want God to plow up the soil of your heart so that as you lean in toward God, His Word will bear fruit your life.

There are only two groups of people in the world, church. The crowd and the Kingdom.

There are those to whom the secret of the kingdom is revealed and there are those whose destruction is being worked out as they reject the Word.

Eternity pivots on your response to the Word.

My fear in our churches broadly, and probably in ours, too, is that we have a lot of folks in the crowd. We like Jesus stuff. We like Jesus people. We wish our country looked more like Jesus. . .but have we ever truly given Him our heart?

For those of us who have, are you taking Jesus at His Word in this parable? He said the faith He planted in you would produce fruit thirty, sixty, and a hundred times. Church, don't settle for a piddly little strung out faith!

If we seek to grow as God's people, He has promised to provide the means for growth. The application of this passage for our hearts today is either to give our heart to Jesus for the first time or to ask Him to bear even more fruit in us than He already has. Church, let's trust that Jesus will do what He said He will in our hearts and let's bear fruit in our community together for God's glory. Let's pray.