



It's Not Me It's You
Part 2 – Following Jesus, Not the Crowd
Pastor Ted Cunningham

Today, we are turning our attention to toxic crowds. We're talking about *Following Jesus, Not the Crowd*. Every parent in here relates to telling their children about the crowd. "I don't want you getting mixed up with the wrong crowd because if you get mixed up with the wrong crowd, you're going to end up somewhere you shouldn't be." And I think we get this.

I was thinking about crowds, and the first crowd I always think about is that Black Friday crowd where we're not proud of things we say and things we do just to save \$50.00 or \$100.00 on a television. We don't even need another television and we're waiting in line, fighting the crowd to get it.

Over the past couple of years, we had these images. We moved from televisions to toilet paper. That says where we are as a nation; that's how bad it got. And then last night... Do we have any Tennessee fans in the room? Do we really? Are you legitimate Tennessee fans or are you just for anybody against Alabama? I woke up to this news because I was busy watching 18 innings of a baseball game.

Anyway, they say 100,000 fans went down to the field. Let me tell you what didn't happen after they beat Alabama... What was the score? 52 to 49. They ripped the goal post out and threw it in the river. I'm like well, that's Tennessee. Who comes up with this. I gotta tell you that nobody... not one single person in Tennessee woke up yesterday and said, "When we beat Alabama, we're all going to storm the field. We're going to rip out the goal post and we are going to throw it in the river. Who's with me?" Nobody was doing that! Why? Because that's how crowds work. Crowds do not strategize. Crowds do not have a plan. That's when you find yourself in a crowd, you're caught up in it, and you're doing and saying things you wouldn't normally do, as in the Garth Brooks concert two weeks ago.

Can we all admit we said and did things we're not proud of? The first night, which the crowd was half the size of Friday, Saturday, Sunday. The Thursday night crowd got up... and there were a few thousand of us in this crowd up on the upper field, up above the grass and we're moving toward the parking lot. When you are in a crowd, you have no control. I'm not determining the pace of this crowd. You're not even really walking anymore. I'm just kind of moving with this crowd. And then one lady... Like five people in front of us see the drone show and she is in the middle of this crowd, and she decides to stop. She plants her feet. "We're going to watch the drone show." "No, we're not! Keep moving!" She just kind of gets picked up and now she's sideways.

Crowds don't strategize and crowds are in charge. When you find yourself in a crowd, you're going wherever they are going.

Okay, so here's where we go today with following Jesus, not the crowd. That's what it has felt like the last couple of years... even in the church. We have different crowds in this church. Some of you have felt the tension. You're being pulled between two crowds. One is wanting to take you this way and they're like, "Do what we're doing, support who we support, go this way..." And then this other crowd is saying, "No, go this way, go this way." You're like, "I don't want to be with either one of these groups; I want to be with Jesus. I want to follow the Lord." Here are the two words that have just been coming back over and over again the last few weeks:

Conviction and Compassion. When I say crowd, I'm talking big C church and little c church. There is a crowd today that is full of conviction with very little compassion. And there is a crowd full of compassion with very little conviction. I'm here to tell you as your pastor that I don't want to be a part of either crowd. I want to be a follower of Jesus who is full of conviction and compassion.

I have friends in here and at this church that I love. We have a great time together. We fish together. We share the same core values and conviction straight from this book (Bible). We voted (I'm assuming) for the same person, but I'm not going with you. Younger people, I hope you lean in today. You're like, *good, we're going to get after my grandparents; they need it.* No, young people, today, you're being taught to just be full of love, love, love, love, compassion, compassion, compassion. Just be kind and loving to every person, and low on convictions. Can I encourage you? Love, show kindness, and know what you believe and stand firmly in it, full of conviction. Those are you grandparents applauding right now. You didn't applaud when I was talking to them.

The Bible has a lot to say about crowds and how the crowds gathered around Jesus. You see it all throughout the New Testament. They gathered around Jesus, and they all wanted something from him. We, as parents, will say this as we talk about our kids not following the right crowd. We'll say, "Well, he did that, she did that, he said that, she said that because they fell in with the wrong crowd." So, parents are consumed with this not letting our kids fall in to the wrong crowd, but as a pastor, I am equally concerned about our parents falling into the wrong crowd. And that we would turn to Jesus today and see his conviction and compassion. Jesus said, "I am the way, the truth, and the life, and no one comes to the Father, except through me." He is the truth. He didn't shy away from speaking it. And at the same time, he was full of compassion.

Can I just ask, follower of Jesus, why is it so hard for us to do that today? Why does it seem to be so challenging? Some of you right now are going, "Ted, when I tell the person what's what and what they need to know, that is me being compassionate." I know you think so, but the person on the other end is running. I don't want parents or children to fall into the wrong crowd.

Let's look at Jesus and how he moved through a crowd. If you have your Bibles, turn to Matthew 9 and then just kind of stay there. We'll get there in just a second. **28 When Jesus had finished saying these things, the crowds were amazed at his teaching...** Crowds of people in awe after Jesus spoke. Why? **29 because he taught as one who had authority...** He is truth, he spoke truth, and he lived truth. It was who he is and who he was as he walked among them. **...and not as their teachers of the law.** Those who would speak one thing and live another. Those who would proclaim truth but then kind of skirt around it. So, the crowds would gather to hear Jesus teach. They would also gather, and he would

have compassion on them. **35 Jesus went through all the towns and villages, teaching in their synagogues, proclaiming the good news of the kingdom and healing every disease and sickness. 36 When he saw the crowds, he had compassion on them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd.** – Matthew 9: 35-36

In Matthew 15, we read, **30 Great crowds came to him, bringing the lame, the blind, the crippled, the mute and many others, and laid them at his feet; and he healed them. 31 The people were amazed when they saw the mute speaking, the crippled made well, the lame walking and the blind seeing. And they praised the God of Israel.**

What does it mean to follow in the footsteps of Jesus, between all of this and what we are going to see in Matthew 9 today?

Following in the footsteps of Jesus means we have compassion on the crowds, but we are not influenced or distracted by them. That we look and we don't go with them. We look and don't follow after whatever they are teaching that might be additional to, added to what we know and what we believe. We stay on course following Jesus.

In Matthew 9, we get this beautiful picture of Jesus dealing with a noisy, loud, mocking crowd. We're going to read it in Matthew 9. Mark gives more detail to this in Mark 5. He gives more detail, he explains the woman with the issue of blood in more detail. Jairus with more detail.

But this is where we pick up in Matthew 9. **18 While he was saying this, a synagogue leader (Jairus)...** I think it's important for us to note here that not all religious leaders in that day were against Jesus. I think sometimes we read the scripture and we just think they were all out to get him, they all were after him. Yes, many were, but here's one coming with a daughter who is dying and he wants Jesus to do what Jesus does. And he has the faith, and he finds Jesus and he asks Jesus, "Come and heal my daughter." The synagogue Leader, Jairus **...came and knelt before him and said, "My daughter has just died. But come and put your hand on her, and she will live."** He knew who Jesus was and what Jesus could do. **19 Jesus got up and went with him, and so did his disciples.**

20 Just then a woman who had been subject to bleeding for twelve years came up behind him and touched the edge of his cloak. If you've been in church for some time, you know this story. It's in all the movies about the life of Jesus. **21 She said to herself, "If I only touch his cloak, I will be healed."** **22 Jesus turned and saw her. "Take heart, daughter,"** Daughter there is a term of endearment. **...he said, "your faith has healed you." And the woman was healed at that moment.**

23 When Jesus entered the synagogue leader's house and saw the noisy crowd and people playing pipes... In that day, there were professional mourners. So, they've got family, friends, professional mourners. Mourning in that day was very loud, so it's a noisy crowd and people playing pipes. **24 he said, "Go away. The girl is not dead but asleep."** The crowd did not understand what Jesus meant. They did not know who Jesus was fully, they did not know what he was there to do. **...But they laughed at him. 25 After the crowd had been put outside...** If you read it elsewhere, it says, "...after Jesus put the crowd outside..." What a lesson for us today for all of us who have a desire to do kingdom work.

There are times we need to put the crowd outside. The crowd that wants to influence us and distract us. We are not influenced and distracted by the crowd as we seek to follow Jesus. The crowd is put outside. **...he went in and took the girl by the hand, and she got up. 26 News of this spread through all that region.**

My friend, Gary Thomas, who wrote the book *When to Walk Away: Finding Freedom from Toxic People* says, *“Jesus didn’t argue with this crowd. He also didn’t stand there and take it. He had the crowd put outside and then he did his work.”*

He said this in his book, and I think it’s powerful. *“In the course of Kingdom work, whether you’re serving God in an office, at a soccer field, or in a school, being abused is inevitable.”*

As followers of Jesus, we’ve said this a lot at this church. When Jesus said, “When the world hates you, don’t be shocked; they hated me first,” that’s not Jesus giving all of us a challenge to see how annoying we can be to get people to hate us. That’s not what that’s about. Jesus is saying, “When you stand for me, you should expect similar attacks like I get and like I got.” Being abused inevitable.

“It seems to me that for every Christian who is bent on seeking first the Kingdom of God, there is a corresponding number of Christians bent on telling those seeking first the Kingdom of God that they are seeking the Kingdom in the wrong way.” It can be distracting.

“We can’t avoid this pushback without leaving this planet.” In other words, so long as you're here or until the Lord returns, this pushback will exist. *“But we can learn to walk away when the time is right and as God leads. We can put those people outside and carry on with our work.”*

Today, the challenge is for every young person, all the way up to our senior adults, that we would look to these noisy crowds that are all around us – some leaning this way and some leaning that way – all saying, “Go with me, go with me.” We say, “No, we’re not going with the crowd; we’re going with Jesus. We want to be full of conviction and compassion. We’re going to follow him.”

Let me tell you that as soon as you choose not to go with the crowd – I don’t think we say this enough – the crowd will turn on you, and they will hate you for not going with them. They will hate you for not supporting their values. They will hate you for not supporting what they are saying and what they are doing and who they are supporting. They will hate you for it. Go with Jesus. They are going to disagree with the way you do things but stick with Christ.

Amy and I were talking this morning at great length. I said, “There is a lot that needs to be said and there are times I feel like a chicken for not saying it.”

Amy goes, “I don’t feel like you’re a chicken; I feel like you are exercising discernment.”

I said, “Well, I feel like there is fine line between discernment and acting like a chicken.”

She goes, "There is." So, I'm asking today for this church family that you would show me some grace that I'm trying to find that line, that we all would come together under the name of Jesus and serve Him only. And make Christ the priority of this church.

Greg Laurie, a pastor in California, says, this mob mentality, or this herd mentality that we are talking about today actually keeps lost people from coming to know Jesus. They get wrapped up in it – a crowd pulling them this way away from Christ. They just get wrapped up in it and they don't even know they are wrapped up in it.

He says this, *"To a large degree, a vast majority of people do not reject Christ because they have looked into it or because they have some honest questions about the Bible or Christianity. They reject Christ because they let others do their thinking for them."*

That's herd mentality. That's mob mentality. "This is what you should do, and this is how you should do it. Accept me, accept my lifestyle and if you don't, you can't love me." No, no, I can love you and completely disagree with you. Don't let other people do your thinking for you. *"They mock us because others mock. And they become willing victims of someone else's prejudice."*

Following Jesus means that, at times, we go against the crowd, even when the crowd is our people. This has been the tension for me, and this is why so many of my friends are walking away, not from the crowd but from the church altogether. Pastor friends who are saying... If you Google search market ministry jobs for pastors, it's viral. They are just looking for what else they can do. It's because of what we're talking about, the crowds that are starting to form within the church and we're forgetting... We're not here today to form different crowds; we're here to be the church under our leader Christ Jesus. Sometimes, when you decide to follow Christ and you choose to be full of conviction and compassion and when the crowd I hang with wants me to have compassion and no conviction on a core value, I'm not going with them. When this crowd over here says, "You better believe this, you better do this, and in this angry tone..." If you don't break away from the crowd, you're going to be that guy like we all were at the Garth Brooks concert, just kind of getting moved along with the crowd. Break away, even when it's your people.

We're going to go where angels dare to trod. Last Sunday night, the Lord used this man. How many of you saw the 60 Minutes interview between Bart Barber and Anderson Cooper? Not one person. You all mobbed each other to get a television at Walmart, I'm here as your pastor to tell you to watch more television. This is CNN's Anderson Cooper interviewing the President of the Southern Baptist Convention. It's a 13-minute interview. I want to encourage all of you to go watch it. Please do not email me.

This is Bart Barber, President of the Southern Baptist Convention. If you are new to our church, we are not a Southern Baptist Church. We are a non-denominational church. Tim Hawkins says all non-denominational church is just a Baptist church with a fancy website. But we are non-denominational. We do have so many dear friends who lead Southern Baptist churches. Bart is the president. In this interview right here, he is representing 47,000 plus Southern Baptist Churches. I haven't fact checked this number, but I hear it often, but like 18 million US Citizens consider themselves Southern Baptist.

So, he is speaking for the Southern Baptists. I need to tell you something. He is a rancher in Texas. He has like 15 head of cattle. You will see in the interview. He's walking through the field with Anderson Cooper. It's so much fun to watch. He pastors First Baptist Church, Farmersville, Texas. This morning, they will have about 325 people at their church. After this interview, maybe less. I was so in awe of him. I watched it with my family, who watched it after I watched it. We put it on our television. I sat down with my two young adult children, and I said, "Do you guys want to know what a modern day prophet is? It's right there. There is a reason God called this man in this size church to lead them right now. This is a man who spoke with conviction and compassion He threw Anderson Cooper off. Anderson Cooper came in with a hard-hitting question and didn't get the answers he was looking for, so he started riffling through his papers. It wasn't to show him up. What I loved is I could tell... And I was praying during the interview for the Lord to do a work on Anderson Cooper's heart. I had moments where I thought Anderson Cooper walked away going, *If I met more Christians like Bart Barber, I might become one. But a lot of the Christians I interview...*

Let me tell you, he wasn't asked softball questions. He gave a clear, clear message of the gospel. He was strong on abortion and gay marriage. He was clear on that. Some of you are going to watch the interview and he's going to say a couple things that really rile you up, but I want you to watch it from the prospective of conviction and compassion.

We turned it off and we were sitting there with my kids. I asked what they thought. We were all just like, "That is God's man." Because there are some older generations that might look my kids and hear us talking and go, "Are they moving toward liberal?" No. My kids are strong on what they believe. They share my beliefs. But they are of a generation that I know God is going to use. Just brace yourself because I'm 48. We've got to bring in one of these young people to preach and be the next senior pastor, and a lot of us need to learn and grow in so many ways. I asked my kids what they thought and they were like, "That man was speaking on behalf of the Lord. And the Lord is pleased with what he did." I was thinking, *with some of the questions alone, I would be done. I'd be like, "I'm going to use discernment now, Anderson, when really I'm chickening out. That's a tough question."* Bart Barber answered it.

I'm so grateful my family got to experience that because I don't know about y'all, but I want my kids to be full of conviction and compassion. That's what I want. I want them to love people, serve people, be generous with people. I want them to know what they believe from the Bible and not sway from it. When people are like, "Well you're not being loving when you stand on that book," They'll go, "No, I will be. I love you and I care for you." Bart did it with tears in his eyes. He was strong on what we believe. I was so proud of him.

Mom and Dad, if you want your kids to have conviction and compassion – this echoes what Stephanie said – then you be full of conviction and compassion. You stand strong on truth.

One more Baptist preacher I need to share with you today. There are a lot of Baptists in the message today. We may do a potluck afterward. You've never heard of this pastor. And I think we are coming into a season in the church – just my opinion – where God is going to use a lot of pastors you've never heard of. When I thought about Bart Barber, I was like, *Why, God, do you not have some pastor of*

10,000 or 20,000 people doing this interview? Because with 10,000 to 20,000 people, I'm just going to be honest with you, it's a struggle that we are seeing today in the church. Sometimes when things grow to a certain point and there is so much authority power going on, you can't say certain things you need to say because you don't want to lose this. And God brought a pastor of a church of 325 people in to do that interview.

You've never heard of Pastor Daniel Hedrick, Associate Pastor at Northside Drive Baptist Church in Atlanta, Georgia. He came across this photograph in 2016 during a trip to a museum in Berlin that was built on the sight of a former Nazi headquarters. It shows a crowd of workers all lifting their arms in the infamous Hitler salute at a Nazi rally after one of Hitler's speeches.

These are his words. *"All lifted their arms except this one lone guy. I hope you see him. Not only is his hand not lifted, his arms are crossed. This dissenter in the crowd has his arm crossed on his chest and on his face is what I imagine a look of utter disdain. The man August Landmesser, had been expelled from the Nazi party for his marriage to a Jewish woman named Irma Eckler. Eckler would later be murdered in a Nazi concentration camp and Landmesser died in Croatia after being drafted into a penal battalion. We can only speculate as to the reasons for refusing to salute, but the most obvious reason is that he had come oppose his former public political party because the Nazis did not recognize his marriage to a Jew. Landmesser's refusal to salute perhaps lasted for a second or two, but the courage of his non-conformity has eternal echoes."*

Then Pastor Hedrick makes three observations about a crowd that I will close with. Just please let this sink in. Let the Holy Spirit call you by name whatever crowd you may identify with. And it may not be one of the two I'm talking about today. It may be another crowd.

He says, *"On the day Jesus was crucified, the crowds mocked him and cried out, "Crucify, Crucify Him. I wonder, were these the same crowds which were astounded at his teaching or seeking his healing touch? The crowds in the gospels are fickle."*

That's another thing about a crowd; they will change on you." You get swept up in the crowd and what they are passionate about today, they may not be passionate about it tomorrow but your stuck in it. You find yourself just going along with it.

"A very large crowd greeting Jesus with a shout of Hosanna as he entered Jerusalem. Was this the same crowd who later shouted, "Crucify Him," five days later?"

The second thing he says about the crowd: *"It's consumed with a daily outrage but has a short attention span. The cycle of controversy is a deliberate strategy to distract us from principled reflection on reality. There is much to be angry about and rightly so, follower of Jesus. There is much to be angry about, but the point is that nobody can keep up with the pace of those setting the anger agenda. There is insufficient time to even process the facts, much less what you and I can do about those facts. This generates a sense of helplessness and despair that works against our spiritual formation in Christ."*

“The crowd can also overcome a lifetime of convictions and beliefs. Christians are not called to traffic in crowd thinking or herd mentality. They are called to follow a lowly Savior named Jesus.” Whom we claim as Lord and Savior in this church. *“And following Jesus requires faithfulness and this is antithetical to the ethos of a crowd.*

I just want to encourage each one of you, as you leave here today, we here at this church will follow Jesus, not the crowd. Guess what? We’re talking about some crowds today. What crowds are going to pop up tomorrow? What crowd will there be next year and the year after that? That’s why we don’t go with the fickle outrage of a crowd. We go with Jesus. And when you choose to go with Jesus, don’t be shocked when the crowd turns on you. Take your stand, be full of conviction and compassion with the crowd as Jesus was full of truth, conviction, and compassion.

Father, in the name of Jesus, I pray for all of us that get online right after this service and start seeing the crowd hit our inbox or our algorithm, hit our posts, our feeds, that we would go with Jesus today, and that we would be the one that says, “No, that’s not the direction I’m going. This is the direction I take.” That each follower of Jesus in here today would be full of conviction and compassion.

For the one who has never placed faith in Jesus that today would be the day of their salvation. That they would confess with their mouth Jesus is Lord, believe in their heart that he has been raised from the dead, that they would be saved. Everyone who calls upon the name of the Lord shall be saved.

We pray all of this in the authority of the name of Jesus. Everyone agreed and said... Amen.