

## One Among the Crowd

John 12:12-43

You could be on a crowded bus.  
 You could be sitting in a packed stadium.  
 You could be walking through a busy shopping center.  
 You could be working for a large corporation.  
 You could be flying on a jumbo jet.  
 You could be living in a bustling town.  
 You could be in a theater watching an orchestra.

Each of these different scenarios has two things in common.

The first commonality is the people, not that they are the same people in each scenario, just that there are people around you.

The second commonality is what they believe about Jesus and how they would respond to Him.

Views about Jesus range from the belief that He is God in the flesh who came to die in order to atone for man's sin (the view I hold and teach) to those who hold He was a great teacher but not deity, and even to those who believe He didn't exist at all. Based on these and many other opinions people have formed their own views of Jesus. We will consider from our text various responses to Jesus. We will find them in John 12:12-43, all of which center around the time of Jesus' triumphal entry, the day we celebrate as Palm Sunday.

There is probably no other person in history that has inspired people more than Jesus – how He lived, in what He taught, even in how He died and in His resurrection.

But there is probably no other person in history who has created more controversy than Jesus – how He lived, in what He taught, even in how He died and even in His resurrection.

In his introductory remarks for the book *Man, Myth, Messiah: Answering History's Greatest Question*, Dr. Gary Habermas of Liberty University writes

“From popular culture to New Testament circles in particular, the topic of the historical Jesus is arguably the most prominent subject at the present time. It has been that way for at least two or three decades as well. Since at least the 1980's, scholars have been engaged in what has been dubbed “The Third Quest for the Historical Jesus,” beginning with the initial German movement back in the nineteenth century.”

With conclusive evidence for the historicity of Jesus, skeptics still argue His existence or at least if they concede that point they doubt the authenticity of His miracles or His resurrection. By doubting those it isn't a far leap then to question of His deity.

While leaders of other world religions seem to garner some semblance of respect, it is evident when many non-Christians write about Jesus that He is open game to malign or impugn Him in any way they deem necessary to discredit both Him and those who follow Him.

They misquote Him.  
 They misunderstand Him.  
 They misrepresent Him.  
 They mistreat Him.  
 They miss the point of Him.

Evidence for the historical Jesus is irrefutable, even among many serious secular historians. Setting aside the fact of His existence, the question then remains – who is He?

That question was posed to the disciples shortly after the account of the feeding of the 5,000. The fed crowds had drifted off to their homes and sitting in what business analysts might say is a debriefing session with His disciples Jesus posed an open ended question. We find it in Matthew 16:13. “Who do men say that I am?” What's the word on the street? What do they think about Me?

The responses were typical.  
 John the Baptist  
 Elijah

Jeremiah

One of the other prophets

I imagine Jesus leaning in a bit, maybe stroking His beard as if to ponder just for a moment while listening to the opinions others had about Him.

Maybe He let those words linger just long enough before He offered a follow up question. I'm going to embellish it a bit because I think there was some insinuation in what He asked next.

"All those opinions aside, you have been with Me these many months, heard Me teach, and seen miracles performed. What conclusion have you come to? Who do you say that I am?"

Peter's response is found in verse 16. "You are the Christ (which means Messiah), the Son of the Living God."

But even with that some still choose not to believe.

In his essay "Why I Am Not a Christian," Bertrand Russell writes "Historically it is quite doubtful whether Christ ever existed at all, and if He did we do not know anything about him."

While many of our founding fathers either were ardent followers of Christianity or held it in high regard, even Thomas Paine who held Christianity in contempt believed in the historicity of Jesus. He wrote "He [Jesus Christ] was a virtuous and an amiable man. The morality that he preached and practiced was of the most benevolent kind; and though similar systems of morality had been preached by Confucius, and by some of the Greek philosophers, many years before; by the Quakers since; and by many good men in all ages, it has not been exceeded by any."

F.F. Bruce who served as professor of biblical criticism and exegesis at the University of Manchester said "Some writers may toy with the fancy of a 'Christ-myth,' but they do not do so on the ground of historical evidence. The historicity of Christ is as axiomatic for an unbiased historian as

the historicity of Julius Caesar. It is not historians who propagate the 'Christ-myth' theories."

Otto Betz wrote in *What Do You Know About Jesus* stated "No serious scholar has ventured to postulate the non-historicity of Jesus."

So if Jesus is real, what do we know about Him and from what we know, how do we respond? As we come to our passage in John 12 following the events we will consider, Jesus could have again asked the disciples "who do men say that I am?"

From our text it's clear that opinions about Him had not changed even though they had seen the credible and authoritative evidence of His claims to be the Son of God. And if we were to ask that question today, we would get the same responses that we note here.

"Jesus is not only a real person, He is the promised Messiah" writes Dr. Rice Broocks in *Man, Myth, Messiah*.

I 8 responses in our text.

## I. THERE IS CELEBRATION – vs. 12-15

This was the week of the Passover celebration. All of Israel and even others from beyond its borders have ascended up to Jerusalem for this annual feast. The city was teeming with people. In the preceding verses we find that Jesus had been staying about two miles from Jerusalem in the town of Bethany at the home of Mary, Martha, and Lazarus. When the word began to circulate that Jesus was heading to Jerusalem a large crowd began to assemble and follow Him. I'm sure more people joined them as they walked to Jerusalem. There were probably thousands who were with Him.

Word reached Jerusalem that Jesus was coming and thousands more left the city to go out to meet Him and to welcome His arrival. They were already in a festive mood with the Passover celebration, but the

news of Jesus coming heightened their joy. Just as God had delivered Israel from Egyptian bondage, so they believed Jesus to be the promised Messiah who would deliver them from Roman bondage. Based on the miracles they had witnessed firsthand or heard from others, they believed He could do it. It was always believed that it would be done at the Passover, just like the first Passover in Egypt. There were a couple of things these revelers got right.

The first thing they got right was that Jesus deserved their adoration. He is worthy of all praise.

#### A. They Expressed Adoration For Him

They grabbed palm branches and began waving them and casting them on the ground before Jesus as He rode on. Palm branches were a symbol of victory.

They shouted Hosanna, a term that means save, we pray or save us now. It came to mean a shout of praise. They acknowledge Jesus as the promised deliverer, but they misunderstood what He came to deliver them from. They thought it was deliverance from the oppression of the tyrannical rule by Rome. So yes, He did come to free them from oppression, but not physical or political oppression. He came to free them from bondage to sin, to remove them bondage to the kingdom of darkness to His kingdom, the kingdom of light.

Galatians 4:4-7

Colossians 1:13-14 “For He has rescued us from the dominion of darkness and brought us into the kingdom of the Son He loves, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.”

I Peter 2:9 “But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His wonderful light.”

He absolutely deserved their adoration but they

misunderstood His reason for coming.

The second thing they got right but again was misunderstood by them was they correctly affirmed His identity.

#### B. They Correctly Affirmed His Identity

They understood and affirmed two things about His identity even though they then misinterpreted His reason for coming.

1. They affirmed that He was sent from heaven. They believed that God had sent Him. In his nighttime rendezvous with Jesus, Nicodemus had affirmed as much.

John 3:2 “He [Nicodemus] came to Jesus at night and said, ‘Rabbi, we know you are a teacher who has come from God. For no one could perform the miraculous signs You are doing if God were not with Him.’”

They knew Jesus came from God.

1. They affirmed that He was a Sovereign to be honored.

They acknowledge Him as the King of Israel. He had the right as royalty to take the throne.

They believed He was going to claim the Davidic throne as rightful king and throw off Roman oppression. But what should have been a sign of His intent was missed by the masses. Instead of approaching the city in a way that reflected military prowess riding a stately looking horse or riding in a chariot as the conquering king, He came riding on a donkey, a sign of humility.

There were many who celebrated, receiving with joy the living Word of God.

It reminds me of the parable Jesus told about the sower who went out sowing seed. Some of the seed landed on rocky ground, which didn't have much

soil so when the plant grew it quickly withered by the hot sun because the soil was shallow. Jesus explained it by saying that it is the same with those who receive the Word of God with great joy and enthusiasm, but the Word has no root and that joy only lasts a short time. When trouble or persecution comes along they quickly fall away.

In less than a week many of these celebrators will quickly turn and call for Jesus' to be crucified. Many celebrated, but for the wrong reason.

Then we see that there was confusion.

## II. THERE WAS CONFUSION – v. 16

His 12 disciples had spent over three years with Him and still they were confused about Him. They didn't understand even though Jesus told them at different times who He was and His purpose for coming.

Throughout the gospels we see evidence of their confusion.

Peter confessed Christ as the Son of God, yet we see times their faith was extremely weak like when they were tossed around on the sea during a violent storm.

Then there was the time just days earlier when Jesus announced He was going to Jerusalem where He would be put to death so they decided to go with Him to die with Him.

Our passage says that it wasn't until after the crucifixion and the resurrection that they connected all the dots and put it together through the aid of the Holy Spirit that it all made sense to them. Before the crucifixion they were confused. After the crucifixion they moved to confirmation and conviction. On the eve of His crucifixion Jesus informed them that the Holy Spirit would be sent to teach them and remind them of what Jesus had taught them. (John 14:26)

If the disciples were confused about Jesus even up to the time of the crucifixion how much less would a non-Christian understand? We should expect that they would be confused about His identity. Okay, a non-Christian may believe in the historical Jesus who was a great teacher and a very moral man, but beyond that we shouldn't expect them to know about Him being God in the flesh even though the evidence from our perspective as we read and understand the Bible to be true.

I Corinthians 1:18 "For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God."

Let's continue to pray for those who are confused about the identity of Jesus that they may by the work of God's Spirit come to a confirmation and conviction about Him.

Among the group following Jesus that day there were some who were curious.

## III. THERE WAS CURIOSITY – vs. 17-18

I think I would make an effort to go see someone who had raised someone else from the dead and I wouldn't be alone. That's not something you see or hear about every day. So it's no wonder that in the crowd were those who saw or heard about that miracle and wanted to see Jesus.

Maybe they just wanted a look, like Zacchaeus. He was content to climb a tree just to get a glimpse of Jesus as He walked by, never intending to have a personal encounter with Him. But that encounter changed his life forever.

That's what happened to Josh McDowell. While in High School he realized something was missing in his life so he began a pursuit to fill it. You might say he was a modern day Solomon. He tried everything under the sun. A lot of people around him were into religion, so he started going to church all the time. He gave it 150%, but always left feeling

worse. He said all he got out of church was 75 cents each Sunday. He would put a dollar in the offering and take out 75 cents for a shake. His dad used to tell him if something didn't work, chuck it." So he did.

He then thought education might have the answers so he enrolled in the university and began a quest for knowledge. He says you can find out a lot of things about the universe in the university but you won't find truth and meaning. He would buttonhole professors who got to the point of shutting their blinds or turning off the lights if they saw him coming. Intellectualism was a dead end. So he tried partying every weekend, all weekend. That only left him sick with a bad hangover Monday morning. He tried notoriety on campus and ran for various student offices and was elected. In that role he could make big decisions and spend the university's money. That quickly wore off.

During this quest he met a small group of students and a couple faculty members. He noticed something different about them. They seemed to have it together with a quality he admired and so desperately wanted. They had conviction. He liked hanging around people with conviction even if it wasn't his own. He noticed how their conviction spilled over into loving each other and loving those outside their group. So he began to make friends with them. One day sitting around a table the topic turned to God. He commented that Christianity was for "weaklings, not intellectuals." But deep down he was too proud to admit that he wanted what they had. He asked them what had changed their lives. One of the young women said it was Jesus Christ. McDowell says he shot back that he didn't want to hear that garbage because he was fed up with religion. She responded that she wasn't talking about religion but about Jesus Christ.

His new friends issued a challenge that he, as a pre-law student, examine the intellectual claims of Jesus Christ as God's Son. They pressed him until he agreed and so he began a quest not to prove that

Jesus was God's Son but to disprove the credibility of the claims of Jesus and the hoax of Christianity. He left the university and traveled throughout the U.S. and Europe. Eventually over time his pursuit led him to place his trust in Jesus Christ as Savior.

The evidence was seen in how he began to view people especially his own father who at one time he had vowed to kill because of how he treated his mother. There was seething hatred for his dad who would beat her with a hose in the barn and leave her in the manure. When guests would come over he would find his dad drunk, take him out behind the barn and tie him up with the rope loose around his neck hoping in struggling to get free he would choke to death. Then he would tell the guests his Dad was away. One day he came home from High school with his mom sobbing saying she couldn't take it anymore and was holding on until after he graduated. Two weeks after graduation she died from a broken heart. He hated his dad, but after he found Christ there was a love for him that wasn't there before.

About six months after he was saved he was in an accident that sent him home for recovery. His father came to visit and asked Josh how he could love him for all the terrible things he had done. Josh told him that up to six months earlier he had nothing but hate for him, but because he was forgiven of his sin through trusting Christ his hatred had been replaced by love. After an hour of talking, his father said if Jesus could do in his life what he had seen in his son, he wanted that and they prayed for him to trust Christ.

We don't know if any of those who came to see Jesus out of curiosity that day ever trusted Christ, but when someone begins a journey to find Christ out of curiosity, their encounter with Jesus, if they will be honest with themselves in their search, will have a life changing impact that is eternal.

We see another group filtering through the crowd.

They had a different response to Jesus.

#### IV. THERE WAS CONTEMPT – v. 19

Who knows the real reason for the contempt of the religious leaders? Our text says they argued among themselves blaming each other.

Maybe it was out of jealousy because of Jesus' popularity. Here was an unschooled self-proclaimed teacher who had amassed a huge following of people fawning over Him.

Maybe it was because Jesus condemned them for their religious hypocrisy.

Maybe it was because He always seemed to get out of the traps they tried to set with questions about the law.

Maybe they felt He showed them up by healing on the Sabbath or claiming to forgive sin.

It certainly was because He claimed to be God.

For all those and many others they colluded with each other on how to get rid of Jesus, hoping to arrest Him after the Passover so they wouldn't incite a riot.

In their contempt they exaggerated that the whole world was following Jesus.

You may know people who respond to Jesus with contempt. At one time that's how Josh McDowell responded to Jesus. Contempt for Jesus was certainly how the Apostle Paul responded before his Damascus road conversion.

Another group showed up at the Passover celebration that is often overlooked. We read about them in the next section.

#### V. THERE WAS CRAVING – vs. 20-28

In the middle of this Jewish celebration an unlikely group emerged from the crowd, they were Greeks, but not Greeks from Greece. They were Gentiles. Commentators agree that these Gentiles were God-

fearing. They had a sincere desire to know God. We read about them in both the Gospels and in Acts. They had become disenchanted with their pagan deities and sought the One True God, the God of Israel.

We see here both their praise and their petition. They came to worship God, that was their praise. Their petition was to ask to see Jesus. Now it isn't clear why they wanted to see Jesus, so we can only speculate.

If you are of the mind to underline in your Bible, that's a good sentence to underline.

“We would like to see Jesus.”

I hope it's your desire to see Jesus, to pursue knowing Him.

We don't know why they singled out Philip. It could be they recognized him as one of Jesus' disciples. John records that Philip was from Bethsaida, which was near Gentile territory, so maybe they thought Philip was a neighbor. Jesus may have been in a part of the Temple where Gentiles were forbidden to enter. Regardless of why they chose Philip the request was simple. They wanted to see Jesus.

Philip went to get Andrew. He may have remembered Jesus' earlier teaching that they were only to go to the people of Israel so maybe he was unclear if this would break protocol. Together they went to Jesus. Notice in Jesus' response His purpose and then plea.

Jesus says the time has come for Him to be glorified. He is speaking of His death and resurrection when He talks about being glorified. In His death and resurrection He would be glorified by the Father for His obedience.

Jesus then used an agricultural picture to illustrate His point. For a harvest to take place the kernel had to die. It's “death” meant that more kernels of wheat would be produced, otherwise it would

remain only a single seed.

He then likened it to the self-sacrifice that is required in order to come to Christ. It is a general invitation to follow Him. His purpose was to come to seek and save those who were lost. In order for us to be saved He had to go to the cross and die. Perhaps the very thought of the cross issued His plea. Verse 27 says His heart was troubled. It's a word that means to be stirred up or agitated (think of the wash cycle on your washer). It can mean to be upset, or distressed. The perfect tense suggests that this was a continuous struggle for Jesus.

John MacArthur writes "He recoiled in revulsion from the implications of bearing divine judgment for sin. He felt all the pain associated with bearing the curse of sin."

Hebrews 5:7-8 "During the days of Jesus' life on earth, He offered up prayers and petitions with loud cries and tears to the One who could save Him from death, and He was heard because of His reverent submission. Although He was a Son, He learned obedience from what He suffered."

But even though it was a plea, one that He will agonize over in the garden of Gethsemane, Jesus concluded with a statement that indicates His willingness to submit to the Father's will. "Glorify Your name."

The affirmation of His obedience was heard in the voice that came from heaven. God affirmed and encouraged His Son.

#### VI. THERE WAS A COMMOTION – vs. 29-33

Here the crowd had a disagreement and Christ made a disclosure.

The disagreement was about what they heard. Some thought it sounded like thunder. We see it in the Old Testament, like when God spoke to Moses on the mountain. Those who heard it said it sounded like thunder.

Others thought it was the voice of an angel.

John MacArthur notes "The crowds inability to understand God's voice illustrates the hard-heartedness that was typical of the people, who had likewise failed to hear the voice of God's Word (Mark 4:15) and His Son (John 8:43). The issue is not that God is silent, but that fallen, sinful people are deaf."

I Corinthians 2:14 "The man without the Spirit does not accept the things that come from the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to Him, and He cannot understand them, because they are spiritually discerned."

If you know God, you will discern His voice. You get to know God and you get to hear His voice the more time you spend in His Word. We are better able to discern His voice among the din of the world clamoring for our attention. His Word becomes a lamp to our feet and a light to our path.

Jesus indicated that it was time for judgment to come, judgment for sin would occur when He would bear sin on the cross. It was at the cross that sin and the devil were defeated in one final blow. His death would draw people from all nations to Himself, so it's significant that some Gentiles are present. Salvation is available regardless of country or class or gender.

This response brought a challenge.

#### VII. THERE WAS A CHALLENGE – vs. 34-41

The people had been taught that the Messiah was going to live forever. How could Jesus say that if He was the Messiah He would die? It didn't make sense. They had a Messianic misunderstanding.

We know from Scripture that without His death, there is no forgiveness of sin. It is in this passage that we see the last invitation Jesus gives for them

to believe. All the miracles He had performed, all His teaching made them responsible for their sins. There was nothing else He could do to convince them otherwise. After that it says He went and hid Himself.

*Some people won't believe, because they choose not to believe.* Regardless of the overwhelming evidence that Jesus is who He claims to be, they have hardened their heart because they choose not to follow Christ.

Their hearts are calloused.

Their eyes are blind.

Their ears are dull.

This leads us to one final response.

#### VIII. THERE WAS CAUTIOUSNESS – vs. 42-43

In the group of those gathered around Jesus were some rulers who believed in Him yet weren't willing to openly confess they were trusting in Him because they feared what the religious leaders would do. They feared getting expelled from the synagogue. They were secret followers. They feared man's opinion. Some might say that they weren't saved. Others would argue they were. Only the Lord knows the heart. Outward confession is not a work by which you are saved, but it is an evidence of it.

How open are we about our faith or do we consider the opinions of others more important?

Regardless of who you talk to everyone, and I mean everyone will have an opinion about Jesus. They will each have some response to Him.

At the end of the day even though the evidence is overwhelming to the historicity of Jesus and the validity of His being Messiah, why do people still hold to their erroneous opinions?

Pride

Pessimism

Popularity/Position

Unwillingness

Unbelief

Sin

Guilt

Contempt

The question for you today is what's your response to Him?

Do you see Him as just another man who said some pretty good things that you can take or leave or do you see Him as the Son of God, the King, the Messiah who came to save you from your sins? Have you allowed Him to ride into your heart and claim it as His throne?

He is the One who came to seek and save the lost.