

The Incessant Crowds

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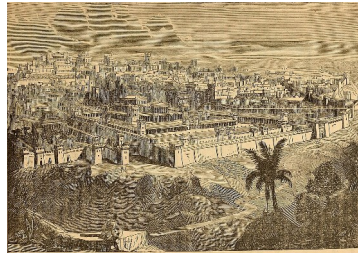
Scriptures:

Matthew 5:1-12

Luke 5

Mark 3:7 – 6:29

John 4:1-42



The crowds were growing, more and more people wanted to see this new prophet, this miracle worker, the one many claimed was the Messiah who had come to deliver them from their oppressors. The dusty roads, the hillsides, the lake shore, wherever He went, they followed. They brought their sick, those whose condition had stumped the physicians, those who were living under the curse of demons who oppressed and, sometimes, possessed their whole being. They all came, filling the landscape, desperate to meet, to see, to touch this ordinary looking man, hungry for His life giving teachings and the miracles that healed so many. Incessant, ever increasing crowds.

In the heat, along the roads and tracks, they walked, following the ways that their forefathers had trudged for centuries, making their way to Jerusalem. For some this was no different from any other year, but for others, this was life changing. They had given up everything to follow Him, their livelihood, their family life, everything that constituted a normal life. They were learning each day that He was the only hope for their nation, for them as individuals, but His teachings touched raw nerves in many of His listeners. And still the crowds followed, like sheep without a shepherd, they flocked to Him.

Wave after wave of crowded days, of miraculous feeding as the Master, the Great Good Shepherd, looked after this flock of ne'er do wells and desperate souls. Hot and tired, the weary men kept following, faithfully going wherever He led them, and always the crowds tagged along.

In every town and village, it seemed as if they all had heard about Jesus, the man from Nazareth who could do such amazing things. Word of this man had spread like wildfire, from the outcasts to the highest ranks, all had heard about Him. Along with the wonder and praise to God for these miracles, suspicion and alarm was growing within the hierarchy of the religious leaders. In amongst the crowd they began taunting and questioning Him, trying to trip Him up, looking for any failure or opposition to their interpretation of the Torah. But He refused to be drawn into their lies and deceit, even rebuking them for their failure, for their warped rules that made a mockery of the true Word of God. Despite this trickery and the accusations, the crowd still followed.

All the while, Jesus was preparing His disciples for the time He knew was approaching, the time when He would no longer be physically with them. Sending them out in pairs to proclaim that the Kingdom of God was at hand, to give them a foretaste of what their lives would be as they faced the crowds without Him.

Listening to the returning disciples' stories helps us realise, albeit only in a small way, how weary Jesus must have felt as He trudged all around the countryside, constantly followed by ever increasing crowds of lost, despairing people. Even the Son of God would feel the weariness in His earthly man's body, as would the disciples, and by His example He was teaching them how to deal with the weariness and the non-stop confusion of noise and clamour.

When the incessant crowds would go home or fall asleep on the hillsides, Jesus would be refreshing and refuelling Himself at His Father's side, spending the night in prayer. Jesus knew that, without this time alone with God, He would not be able to go on, to fulfil His task and bring sinners to repentance and everlasting Life. Without this precious time, He would have nothing left to give.

Our lives are so full of incessant crowds, maybe not the hundreds of people following on Jesus' every word, but the noise and clamour of life in these last days. The crowds of distractions, the incessant barrage of news and information that seeks to drown out the voice of God, the multitude of little things that shout out the lie of their importance. Finding our Father in amongst these crowds has to be our sole aim, seeking refreshment and refuelling from Him must be paramount. If Jesus needed this, then how much more do we.

Prayer: Abba Father, as we ask, seek and knock we know that You will honour Your promises to answer, to fill us to overflowing with Yourself, Your Life and Your Love. Thank You dear, wonderful God, in Jesus name we thank You, Amen