# John 7:25-53 – Crowd Psychology

For years people have been fascinated by crowds. While there is no way to predict what a single person will do, there are ways to predict what crowds of people will do. In fact, that prediction is how political pollsters make their money, looking at data from a small group of people, they predict what the larger group will do.

There are other aspects to crowd psychology. People will do things in a crowd that they would never do on their own. People who would not normally destroy public property will help burn entire neighborhoods because they are in a crowd. People who believe everyone deserves a fair trial will participate in a lynch mob because they are part of the crowd. Often people go along with the crowd because they fear that the crowd will turn on them if they don’t participate at least by shouting the crowd’s preferred message.

To overcome fear takes a lot of self confidence or a lot of confidence in God. You must be so confident that you are correct that you are willing to suffer to defend your position. A neutral or even a friendly crowd can become hostile when a very small percentage of the people begin to act and speak in a hostile manor. If I remember right from my college days, as few as 1% of the crowd agitating for violence can sway the entire crowd.

Groups within a crowd experience different emotions and reactions, often influenced by the most confident voices around them. The same was true of the crowd in Jerusalem as Jesus celebrated the feast of tabernacles. In looking at John 7:25-53, we see six ways that groups within the crowd reacted to Jesus. Some were intrigued by the controversy while others were limited by perspective. Some were attracted by truth, while others were misdirected by Ignorance. Some became puffed up in pride and many were deceived by their own assumptions.

## Intrigued by Controversy John 7:25-31

“**25** At that point some of the people of Jerusalem began to ask, "Isn’t this the man they are trying to kill? **26** Here he is, speaking publicly, and they are not saying a word to him. Have the authorities really concluded that he is the Christ? **27** But we know where this man is from; when the Christ comes, no one will know where he is from." **28** Then Jesus, still teaching in the temple courts, cried out, "Yes, you know me, and you know where I am from. I am not here on my own, but he who sent me is true. You do not know him, **29** but I know him because I am from him and he sent me." **30** At this they tried to seize him, but no one laid a hand on him, because his time had not yet come. **31** Still, many in the crowd put their faith in him. They said, "When the Christ comes, will he do more miraculous signs than this man?"

Imagine a newscast with the following headlines. Neighbors decide to resolve their problems instead of getting violent. Groups with opposing views have a discussion and find out how much they actually have in common. Cute puppies born in a home where the people care for them properly until they can go to a good home. Man who recognizes the cashier’s mistake drives 15 miles to return the 50¢ of extra change she gave him. How refreshing, but, in a very short time, people would stop watching the news.

Humans get bored with things going well, but put in a little controversy and everyone’s ears perk up. This is true today and it was true in the 1st century. When people finally begin to recognize Jesus as the one the leaders are trying to kill, the controversy attracts attention. Some recognize the important point, the reason the leaders were trying to kill Jesus is that He claimed to be the Christ. The only way that they could justify not trying to execute Him is if they recognized He was the Christ.

Some people object that He can’t be the Christ because no one will know where the Christ comes from. This may have been the popular view, but it was definitely not the scriptural view. The Old Testament describes Jesus birth in Bethlehem, his being called out of exile in Egypt and even that his ministry would come from Galilee, but they were more interested in the controversy than the truth.

Jesus points out that they don’t know where He comes from, but also makes it clear He is talking about His eternal origins and not His physical residence. They don’t know that Jesus comes from God because they don’t know God, but Jesus knows God because He was sent by God. This turns the crowd from intrigue to either anger or belief. Some turned to anger because in their minds Jesus’s statements make them look bad, but they were unable to grab Him because His time had not yet come. Others turn toward faith because of what they had seen Him do.

## Limited by Perspective John 7:32-36

**32** The Pharisees heard the crowd whispering such things about him. Then the chief priests and the Pharisees sent temple guards to arrest him. **33** Jesus said, "I am with you for only a short time, and then I go to the one who sent me. **34** You will look for me, but you will not find me; and where I am, you cannot come." **35** The Jews said to one another, "Where does this man intend to go that we cannot find him? Will he go where our people live scattered among the Greeks, and teach the Greeks? **36** What did he mean when he said, ‘You will look for me, but you will not find me,’ and ‘Where I am, you cannot come’?"

The Pharisees hear the murmuring of the crowd and they get worried. Their fear is not because of those who are upset, but because of those who are starting to believe Him. Their attitude was chaos is fine as long as it is useful to us, but we need to end chaos when it threatens our power.

Jesus tells them that they will look for Him and not find Him and will not be able to join Him. They don’t understand that He is speaking of Heaven and assume that Jesus will hide among the Greeks. They could never go among the Greeks, as that would defile them, so by implication, if Jesus was going among the Greeks they could dismiss Him as insignificant. Their perspective was limited by being tied to an earthly understanding and further limited by their prejudice against non-Jewish people. Since their prejudice against non-Jews is so strong, they consider anyone being with non-Jews inaccessible.

The Crowds were intrigued and the leaders were limited by perspective, but, some of the people were Attracted by Truth.

## Attracted by Truth John 7:37-41a

**37** ¶ On the last and greatest day of the Feast, Jesus stood and said in a loud voice, "If anyone is thirsty, let him come to me and drink. **38** Whoever believes in me, as the Scripture has said, streams of living water will flow from within him." **39** By this he meant the Spirit, whom those who believed in him were later to receive. Up to that time the Spirit had not been given, since Jesus had not yet been glorified. **40** On hearing his words, some of the people said, "Surely this man is the Prophet." **41** Others said, "He is the Christ."

As we have seen throughout John, the themes of Jesus feeding our hunger and quenching our thirst continues. This time John is very explicit that the streams of living water that will flow from within us is the Holy Spirit. Jesus words strike a pleasant chord with the people. They heard the truth of what Jesus said and knew that he was more than just a normal man.

Within the crowds, some concluded that He was a prophet. In the Jewish mind a prophet is one who heard directly from God and spoke to the people on behalf of God. The Talmud recognizes 48 men and 7 women as prophets, placing Jesus in this exclusive club was saying he was very special, but not believing his divinity. Others we even more attracted and declared “He is the Christ.” The Greek word Christ is a translation of the Hebrew word Messiah. They both mean “the anointed one.”

Sometimes on our journey to understand truth, we get closer, but don’t fully understand. The people who thought He was a prophet were closer than those who said He was unknown, but had missed the essential truth that He is the messiah and therefor He is God. On our journey to understanding, a danger is getting closer to truth and being satisfied without understanding the full depth. When we study scripture and seek to understand God, we must not be satisfied until we know everything that can possibly be known. When it comes to truth, knowing enough is not enough.

## Misdirected by Ignorance John 7:41b-44

Still others asked, "How can the Christ come from Galilee? **42** Does not the Scripture say that the Christ will come from David’s family and from Bethlehem, the town where David lived?" **43** Thus the people were divided because of Jesus. **44** Some wanted to seize him, but no one laid a hand on him.

While some were attracted by the truth, others in the crowd were repulsed by it. Rather than allow themselves to consider the possibility that Jesus was the messiah, or even a prophet, they searched for ways to prove it wrong. We tend to want to think that we are logical in all our reactions, when in reality, much of what we do and believe is based on emotional response. But to maintain our feeling of being logically driven, we need to find at least one or two ideas to support our views.

In this case, they jump on the idea that Jesus is from Galilee and that the Messiah has to come from Bethlehem. They look at Jesus and say surely He is not from Bethlehem, He doesn’t have the accent, He doesn’t have the Bethlehem look, He looks like a Galilean and lives in Galilee. What they were ignorant of was that Scripture said He would be born in Bethlehem, but did not say He would be a Bethlehemite. In addition, no one bothered to inquire if Jesus had been born in Bethlehem because they were satisfied by their ignorance and didn’t feel a need to learn more.

## Puffed up by Power John 7:45-49

**45** ¶ Finally the temple guards went back to the chief priests and Pharisees, who asked them, "Why didn’t you bring him in?" **46** "No one ever spoke the way this man does," the guards declared. **47** "You mean he has deceived you also?" the Pharisees retorted. **48** "Has any of the rulers or of the Pharisees believed in him? **49** No! But this mob that knows nothing of the law— there is a curse on them."

The guards came back to the Pharisees without Jesus in custody and so the leaders were upset. They accuse the guards of being deceived because they didn’t bring Jesus back. Doesn’t this seem to happen today. Often if you go against the popular opinion, you are accused of being deceived. Both sides use this tactic. If you like the policy of wearing mask you are deceived by those in power and following like a sheep. If you like believe we should return to business as normal and hope for herd immunity you are denying reality and probably value money more than people.

It is easier to condemn someone as deceived or call them a liar than to prove your own view. People in power often seem to think that they are the only ones who cannot be deceived. This is pride. Looking down on “little people” like the guards and saying you should believe us because we are in charge.

## Deceived by Assumptions John 7:50-52

**50** Nicodemus, who had gone to Jesus earlier and who was one of their own number, asked, **51** "Does our law condemn anyone without first hearing him to find out what he is doing?" **52** They replied, "Are you from Galilee, too? Look into it, and you will find that a prophet does not come out of Galilee."

Nicodemus points out that they can’t just condemn someone without a fair trial and is shouted down. They accuse him of being from Galilee. They are accusing him of being an uncouth country hick or hillbilly. They then make the assertion that no prophet comes from Galilee, an accusation that was alluded to by the crowds earlier. They had looked down on Galilee for so long that they assumed nothing was said in scripture about Galilee. They were ALMOST right. They missed one important passage in the Old Testament…Isaiah 9:1-7.

“**1** ¶ Nevertheless, there will be no more gloom for those who were in distress. In the past he humbled the land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali, but in the future he will honor Galilee of the Gentiles, by the way of the sea, along the Jordan— **2** The people walking in darkness have seen a great light; on those living in the land of the shadow of death a light has dawned. **3** You have enlarged the nation and increased their joy; they rejoice before you as people rejoice at the harvest, as men rejoice when dividing the plunder. **4** For as in the day of Midian’s defeat, you have shattered the yoke that burdens them, the bar across their shoulders, the rod of their oppressor. **5** Every warrior’s boot used in battle and every garment rolled in blood will be destined for burning, will be fuel for the fire. **6** For to us a child is born, to us a son is given, and the government will be on his shoulders. And he will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. **7** Of the increase of his government and peace there will be no end. He will reign on David’s throne and over his kingdom, establishing and upholding it with justice and righteousness from that time on and forever. The zeal of the LORD Almighty will accomplish this.” (Isa 9:1-7 NIVUS)

The birth of Jesus leads to the “Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace” and is directly connected to the honor of Galilee of the Gentiles. They assumed they knew the truth, but had not looked.

The ways we react in crowds are often amplifications of the way we react as private individuals. When you hear the gospel message, or any truth of scripture, you may react in one of the ways the crowd reacted. You may be intrigued by the controversy, limited by your own perspective, misdirected by Ignorance, puffed up in pride, deceived by your own assumptions, or hopefully you will choose to be attracted by truth.

God is calling you right now. If you are not a follower of Christ, He is calling you to repent and place Him in charge of your life. If you are a believer, however, He is still calling you. It is likely that He is calling you to share your faith, to learn more about Him, to trust Him in hard circumstances or to serve Him in ways that stretch your faith. How will you respond? Like the angry crowds or like those attracted by truth.

## Closing – John 7:53

**53** Then each went to his own home.” (Joh 7:25-53 NIVUS)

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They were more interested in the controversy than the \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_.

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Their attitude was “chaos is fine as long as it is \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ to us.”

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Scripture said He would be \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ in Bethlehem, but did not say He would be a Bethlehemite.

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The birth of Jesus leads to the “Prince of Peace” and is \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ connected to the honor of Galilee of the Gentiles.

## Then each went to his own home. John 7:53