

Today I want to talk about “the mentality of the mob”, and how disciples of Jesus, are set apart **from** the mob...

- The mob acts without thinking.
- The mob **reacts** to a situation, often based on fear – while disciples of Christ, are led by God’s Spirit of wisdom.
- The mob surges as an amorphous mass, driven by a loss of inhibition, and steered by immediate self-interest, where as disciples of Christ are often on their own, and they **have** no self-interest...
- The mob are the crucifiers... And disciples of Jesus take up their cross daily, to follow their Lord...

As Christians, you and I, are set apart from the mob – get used to it.

Today’s reading, begins with Paul in Ephesus. There’s been an amazing movement of the Spirit in Ephesus (and we’re actually going to be talking about that more **next** week, because I’ve actually taken this reading out of order)... So, next week we’re going to see what’s happened, but here’s a little taste:

To become a Christian, you **must** be born again (Right???)... And this “being born again” – for it to be real, **must** include repentance. And as I described it last week, repentance is not just a change of mind:

- It’s a change of management – **I** used to be Lord – now **Jesus** is Lord.
- it’s a change of allegiance (I **once** used to be a slave to sin – now I am a slave to Christ)

- It's a change of the heart (my heart used to be hardened against God – but now my heart is clay for His hands to mould)
- **And** repentance, has a very practical aspect to it – Repentance **must** include, a change of behaviour . As we repent:
 - we turn **away** from sin
 - we turn **away** from our old life
 - we turn **away** from our old values
 - we turn **away** from your old vices...
 - we turn **away** from our old hopes and dreams and ambitions...

We nail all these things to the cross, and with God's help, we make a concerted effort with Him, to live a changed and renewed life – a life of holiness. This is what the Bible calls "Living by the Spirit", and it's something that we're commanded to do.

And wow, the fruit of repentance we're going to hear about next week, when Paul preached the Gospel in Ephesus... The fear of God fell upon them, and many of them (who now **believed** in Jesus), came, confessing their sins,,,, And they built themselves, a great big bonfire... Their prized possessions – everything they now realised was an abomination to God – they brought all these things to fuel that fire... And when they added up the value of what they'd burned that day, it was the equivalent of more than \$10 000 000 in our currency...

That's repentance.

And when there is a real movement of the Holy Spirit in a community – when the word of God prevails, it's not just evidenced by the number of cars parked out the front of

churches on a Sunday morning – the business houses will notice it in their trade:

- The pubs will sell less grog;
- The Newsagency will sell less dirty magazines (or maybe these days internet downloads will decrease);
- Accountancy firms will profit less from intricate tax minimisation schemes;
- The consumption of luxury goods will decrease;
- Credit card bills will be smaller;
- The Pokies will be quiet;
- Superannuation plans will be **far** less grand
- New-age shops will close down, as will the Adult shops and brothels...

- But **some** trade will **increase**:
 - Those who have nothing to eat, will have food bought for them
 - Those who can't afford to heat their home, will be bought gas
 - Those who are sick, will be bought medicine

When the word of the Lord prevails in a town, the trade of that town will not stay the same... And if your consumption and spending habits are pretty much the same as your next-door-neighbour... maybe it's time for you and the Lord to have a nice long chat about what repentance means for you and your spending habits...

One bible commentator recounts how the founder of the Methodists – John Wesley was dragged through the streets of Wolverhampton by his hair; how he went among the miners of Cornwall, and how riots started because, when he preached, Cornish smugglers went out of business. In Newcastle, when Wesley got up to preach, a gang came with sticks and stones,

*intending to kill him, and a woman stood between Wesley and the gang...*ⁱ

When the word of the Lord prevails, not everybody's going to be happy, and when the word of the Lord prevailed in Ephesus, the business owners were very concerned – with good reason. Their trade was going down – their **profits** were at **risk** – there's big business in sin.

The Sydney Gay and Lesbian Mardi Gras, is estimated to generate \$30 000 000 for the NSW economy... It's worth too much for them to ever want to lose it... Imagine if the word of the Lord was to prevail there, and the people of Sydney were to rise up and say, "Not in our streets, you won't" ... Imagine the backlash from those who currently get a goodly share of that \$30 000 000...

And in V24, we meet **Demetrius, a silversmith, who made silver shrines of Artemis** . And Demetrius was a 'big-wheel' in the pagan religious trinket business, and I guess it was a bit like our souvenir trade as well, but they were making shrines for pagan gods... And a lot of **other** craftsmen depended on him for **their** livelihood.

And Demetrius calls these craftsmen together, because he could see the implications of the Gospel... "Everywhere he goes, this Paul fella is telling people that these good quality, hand-made gods, **aren't** real gods... And people aren't buying them any more. And we used to make a lot of money out of this but now it's drying up... You mark my words, there is a danger that our trade will fall into disrepute... And not only that, but **also** **the temple of the great**

goddess Artemis may be counted as nothing, and ... she may even be deposed from her magnificence, she whom all Asia and the world worship."

What a mouth-full he was really worried.

Ephesus, was home to the temple of the goddess, Artemis... And it drew lots of visitors. And of course, they'd all want to take religious trinkets home with them, wouldn't they? Everybody wanted to take home a multi-breasted statue of Artemis, or a replica of the shrine, and the craftsmen made big bucks out of it... The economy of Ephesus was very much dependant upon the continued magnificence of Artemis...

And so Demetrius and his lackies, stir up a mob against these Christians, in fear that their economy's economy was going to suffer.

And I'm really struck here, by the difference between the mob, and the way the Christians behaved: Right at the beginning of the reading, we hear Paul planning his itinerary. And he resolved in the Spirit where he was going to go and what he was going to do, and who he was going to send where. He was going to go to Macedonia and Achai and then to Jerusalem, and eventually he was going to get to Rome. But he didn't just make up his mind – he resolved in the Spirit. Now, I don't know exactly how he did that, but you can be sure it included prayer, and guidance from The Lord.

But then there's the mob... They were enraged, and then they started crying out, "Great is Artemis of the Ephesians!"...

The city was filled with confusion... And they grabbed a couple of Christians, and dragged them into the theatre...

There's a picture of the theatre there, by the way. Not sure if they filled it (it could hold nearly 25 000 people), so the mob could've been pretty big.

But most of them didn't even know why they were there – and that's how a mob works. ³² ... some cried out one thing, some another, ... the assembly was in confusion, and most of them did not [even] know why they ... were there.

Typical mob mentality – driven by fear – many people just following along with the hype, caught up in the moment.... afraid of what will happen to their society if this new way was allowed to exist.... You know, that's what Christianity was called – it was called "the Way". Christianity is not just a belief – it's "the Way". Everything changes – it's a whole new way :- the way of Christ – the way to life – the way of peace – the way of the Lord – the way of salvation – the way of truth – the way of righteousness....

You look it up in your bible: the way; the way; the way.... And the mob were filled with fear, over the way....

But not the Christians – they weren't afraid. In fact, they had to restrain Paul from going **in** to the mob. And when Alexander stood up to give a defence, ³⁴ ... they recognized that he was a Jew, for about two hours they all cried out with one voice, "Great is Artemis of the Ephesians!"

Finally, the town clerk did disperse them – “If you’ve got problems with these fellas, you’d better take it up with the proper authorities”..... But really, **he also** was motivated by fear – He was afraid the Romans would charge them all with rioting, and once the troops moved in, then it **would** get ugly.

The mob mentality, is not the way for disciples of Jesus.... And yet even within Christian circles, the mob mentality can very easily control us.

The **biggest** churches will always have the biggest natural attraction, because we have a natural tendency to “run with the mob”... That’s where everybody else is, that’s where I’ll go.

*I know when we moved to Dalby, there were some really big, alive churches, that we could’ve gone to. (they seemed to have it all together). We could’ve slipped right into the Presbyterian, or the Baptist... , because that’s where the crowds were. And we could’ve been **one** of the crowd. And we could’ve had church ‘done’ to us, and in the big group, we would’ve been largely anonymous, and unaccountable... In essence, we would’ve become consumers, as part of the mob.*

And that’s what a lot of us look for in a church – a place where we can be consumers, as part of a mob.

But you know what, a church isn’t a mob – a church is a body. And so we learned really early on, to not just to follow the crowds, but to genuinely follow the Lord – To be obedient to God, “Lord, where do **you** want us to worship? In which congregation, do you want us to be part of your body?”

And I guess what we've always looked for in a church is:

- A people who love the Lord
- A people who love each other (now that means a church where you can't be anonymous)
- A place where the pure spiritual word of God is preached – biblical preaching – not preaching from philosophy or psychology – not even preaching that has at its heart, a man-made theological system you then have to try and make the bible fit – just pure, Biblical preaching, letting the Spirit of God to speak through His word, to our hearts
- We look for a praying church.
- We look for a place where we can serve
- And for a people who we can grow with, **in** the Lord
- **And**, a church who will send us out on mission, because disciples are not consumers as part of a mob– disciples are on mission as part of a body. Disciples work with **other** disciples, to **make** disciples.

The last thing we should be looking for, is the popular crowds, or the hype of the mob we get caught up with,,, because a mob won't hold you accountable, and the mob isn't really that concerned about your personal spiritual development, or your individual service – just as long as you're coming along as part of the mob...

Don't ever get caught up in hype. Don't get drug along by the mob. As disciples of Jesus, we're encouraged, to exercise "sober judgment"... Always pray, "Lord, this is what the mob's doing, what do you want me to do?" "This is where the mob is heading, where do you want me to head?" "This is what the mob are learning, what does your word teach me?"....

Don't just follow along with the latest Christian fad... A lot of them are driven by very successful marketing... You follow the Lord, and be guided by His Word, prayer, wisdom, and sober judgment....

Now, young people, I want to speak specifically to you for a moment, about "the mob" and "peer pressure".

One of the most powerful cravings any of us can have, and especially for the youth, is the longing to be liked, and to be **alike**. So much for individuality – we all know, that to be part of the crowd, means you **don't** stand out from the crowd – you certainly don't stand **apart** from the crowd – you just become one **of** the crowd...

But as a disciple of Jesus, there will often be times when you **have** to stand apart from the culture of the mob.

One of the biggest challenges for disciples of Jesus – no matter what their age – is to be **in** the world, but not **of** the world. We **have** to be in the world – not just to exist – but to be a light in that world. Not just to persevere until we get to go to heaven – but to invite the world to come to Jesus as Lord...

Disciples of Jesus, may be **amongst** the mob, but we don't **follow** the mob – we are set apart from the mob...

The mob may seem very exciting, and at times you may feel the Christian way is very boring... but in the end, it's all upside down.

I'm just going to finish off with this nice little story that the bible reading finished on:

A short while later, Paul leaves Ephesus, he goes through a bunch of places, and spends 5 days at Troas. Now, you reckon I preach long – what about Paul. In the upper room, he preached on and on and on – way past midnight... And a young man named Eutychus, sitting on the window sill, nodded off, and as Paul talked on and on, fell backwards out the window, hit the ground – dead....

Why's this story here? I don't know – well, I guess one reason is, because it happened.

But for me, it's a reminder of the power of God to raise the dead. Eutychus went home that night, alive... I doubt he would've ever slept through a sermon ever again...

The way of Jesus – the way of discipleship, isn't boring – it's the way to life.

You know how this church in Ephesus we talked about, had this amazing movement of the Spirit, and as people repented, even the economy of the town was being changed because of their repentance,,,,, Well, I want to read to you, a letter that Jesus sent them... Wouldn't it be amazing, for Jesus to send your church a letter In the revelation that the Apostle John had on the Island of Patmos, Jesus said to him, "Here's 7 letters I want you to send to 7 churches"... and one of those churches (in fact, the very first one on the list), was the church at Ephesus, and here it is:.....

Revelation 2:1-7 (ESV) **2** "To the angel of the church in Ephesus write: 'The words of him who holds the seven stars in his right hand, who walks among the seven golden lampstands.

² " 'I know your works, your toil and your patient endurance, and how you cannot bear with those who are evil, but have tested those who call themselves apostles and are not, and found them to be false. ³ I know you are enduring patiently and bearing up for my name's sake, and you have not grown weary. ⁴ But I have this against you, that you have abandoned the love you had at first. ⁵ Remember therefore from where you have fallen; repent, and do the works you did at first. If not, I will come to you and remove your lampstand from its place, unless you repent. ⁶ Yet this you have: you hate the works of the Nicolaitans, which I also hate. ⁷ He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To the one who conquers I will grant to eat of the tree of life, which is in the paradise of God.'

Can you see this? They're still being commended, for not running with the mob. They're not blindly following false apostles. They hate the work of the Nicolaitans (the Nicolaitans believed it was OK for Christians to participate to some extent, in idolatry...) They're enduring patiently, and bearing up for the name of Jesus. They haven't grown weary.... They're not running with the mob, but they **had lost** something... What was it?

They'd lost their first love. Jesus said, "**But I have this against you, that you have abandoned the love you had at first.** ⁵ **Remember therefore from where you have fallen; repent, and do the works you did at first. If not, I will come to you and remove your lampstand from its place, unless you repent....**

When Jesus talks about removing the lamp from its lampstand, it's symbolism, which means their church will cease to exist – it will die. You've **abandoned the love you had at first**. Remember the way you used to love, and love like that again. Remember the way you used to repent, and repent like that again. .. If you don't, I will cause your church to die.

We don't just "not run with the mob" because that's a law we have to keep... The way we live, is because of the love we have. Do you get this? Jesus loves us, so we love Him.

- Disciples of Jesus set themselves apart from the mob, because we love Jesus, and we want to honour him.
- We are set apart from the mob, because we love each other, and we need to help each other to follow Jesus – not the mob.
- We are set apart from the mob, because we **love** the mob, and we show to the mob, "don't follow the mob mentality"... Follow the way.

A church who are against everything that is wrong, will still die, if it's a church that doesn't love.... Don't follow the mob. Live a life of repentance. But do it out of love.

Questions?

ⁱ Parson David, A Commentary on Acts . Oxford E-books. 2014 (Google)