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DATE: August 15, 2026
SERIES: Come In From the Crowd
MESSAGE: Come In From the Crowd
PASSAGE: Matthew 11:28
SPEAKER: Ryan Harmon

Well, as you can see from that bumper, from the Atlas that you have in your hands, this evening, this weekend, we're announcing our discipleship theme that's gonna take us through the year. In just a few moments, we want to take a minute and explain what we mean by that. What does it mean to say "come in from the crowd?"

Before that though, just want to take a moment here since we're turning into a new ministry year, and give you an update on where we ended the year in terms of our fiscal year-end giving goal. So you might remember that throughout the summer, we talked about this—our fiscal year ends on July 31, and our goal for the summer was \$1.6 million. That was our budgeted amount in order to kind of meet our budgetary needs. Now, the way that all ended up, after everything was crunched, all those numbers were crunched, everything was counted, is right up here on the screen.

Ah, so, you know, if we say 1.596203, something like that—here's the way we receive that number. With an abundance of gratitude, believing that God absolutely generously supplied for our need. As you know, when you're setting a number, it's an estimate. It's an estimate of where you think you need to be. And I say when we're within \$4,000, that is a great outcome, and we are so thankful for that. So thankful, first of all, to God. But of course, also, here's what we believe. We believe that he works in the heart of his people, that he stirs up generosity and then his people need to respond. And so our ultimate gratitude is to him, but we also want to say, it is so, oh, it's such a point of joy, to be a part of a body, of a congregation, that pours forth generosity year after year. So we are so excited about that and we are celebrating that as we move into this new ministry year.

Now, money. It's something that we do not mind talking about because we thoroughly believe, we fully believe that money doesn't just represent dollars and budgets. Money ultimately represents ministry. Money is a resource. Our building is a resource. The refresh that we're doing in our building is a resource. If you haven't been up in the A-Wing or in the North Entry, I'd encourage you to try to find your way up there. There's a lot going on, and very soon there's going to be an update



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that's happening out here in the E-Wing in the foyer, and all of us are going to feel it.

But all of this is a resource that fuels, that is intended to go towards, the accomplishment of ministry. And ministry is about people, isn't it? That's the mission. It's people. It's the work that God is doing in the hearts of people.

So now as we turn back to our theme, this theme of "come in from the crowd." Crowds are made up of people, right? That's what it's all about. Now, maybe when you hear that phrase, "come in from the crowd," maybe that is a very attractive phrase to you because possibly you're like me and you don't care for crowds very much. And you think to yourself, you know what, if I'm in a crowd—that's right, get me out of it. I'll come in from the crowd. I don't care for crowds very much. They're typically noisy and chaotic. Often, often they have a distinct smell. Depends on the crowd you're in, but they have a distinct smell, and so they are an annoying thing to me.

I tend to generally try to avoid crowds, but I will make an exception. If there is something that I desperately want to experience or see, if there is something that I love, I will happily put up with the annoyance of a crowd. I will go out of my way to be in the chaos of a crowd if it means that I could have an experience that possibly is a once in a lifetime experience.

Now, as I read the gospels, I think that's clearly what a lot of people in Israel and Galilee felt at that time when it came to Jesus. Jesus constantly drew crowds. Multitudes, thousands of people. Chaotic scenes over and over. At one point, John tells us that the crowd was crawling on top of one another. They press in on Jesus. Occasionally, he would try to slip away because the crowd would become so overwhelming Jesus because of who he was, the ministry he did, what he proclaimed. He attracted, they attracted, massive crowds that were chaotic, and were very crowded. That's what it was.

Now, what was his response as you considered Jesus' life in the gospels? His first response towards the crowd was always compassion. Remember, at one point he looked at them and he's filled with compassion. He said they're like sheep without a shepherd. He had compassion upon them. But he also, always, issued a charge and a challenge to the crowd. He wouldn't let them remain where they were. They had to make a decision about him.

Jesus had compassion for the crowd, but he also understood that being in the crowd was the first step in being around Jesus. He constantly wanted to challenge them to go further. He constantly wanted to press them for more. And the question they all had to face is whether he, his challenge, would be one that they would receive. Would they receive the very challenge of Jesus.



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Now, even today, Jesus challenges us. As we are in the mindset of a crowd, the anonymity of a crowd, he challenges us not to remain there. He calls us to something more. He calls us to come in from the crowd. That's what we want to talk about. If you have your Bibles, open them with me to Matthew chapter 11, gonna be in verses 28 to 30. Going to focus quite a bit of time on Matthew 11:28.

As you turn there, I do want to talk a little bit about this weekend. If you're visiting with us, you might not be aware that this is part of our rhythm at Lincoln Berean Church. We just finished a summer series. In September, we're once again gonna walk expositionally, verse by verse, through the book of Romans. We'll pick that up and that will take us to Thanksgiving. But here in the month of August, as our ministry year launches, as school starts back up, as students come back to campus and all the rhythms of fall start to get established, every year we find that that is a good time to stop, to pause, and to ask a question, to ask you to consider: *is God calling you to something different this year? What does he put on your heart? What is he asking you to take an active step towards in this coming year?* And as we continue, tonight and in the weeks to come, we want you to consider that question.

Now, as we begin, let me read these verses to you. Matthew 11, verses 28 to 30. Jesus says:

*28 Come to me, all who are weary and heavy-laden, and I will give you rest.
29 Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. 30 For my yoke is easy and my burden is light.*

Very familiar verses, very dear to many of us. I want to focus mainly on the invitation that Jesus offered in verse 28, but because we're not going to spend time in the entire chapter, I do want to give you a little context. Matthew 10, all that happens in Matthew 10, is mostly focused on Jesus in private conversation, private teaching with his disciples. But then, as we turn to Matthew 11, his ministry once again goes public, his teaching goes public. Matthew 11, verse 7, tells us that Jesus began to teach the crowds, began to teach the crowds.

Now that word "crowds" is an interesting word. It's one that occurs often in Matthew's gospel. In his gospel, it occurs more often than in any other gospel, 49 different times, that word "crowd" or "crowds" occurs. It's such a theme, and prevalent theme and presence, the crowd is in Matthew, that a number of scholars believe that when we encounter the crowd in Matthew, we almost need to think of the crowd as a unique character, a unique group of people. You can see that they make decisions at times as a group.



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Now, we're familiar with other groups that were around Jesus. We're familiar with the Pharisees and the way they were always up against Jesus. We're familiar with the twelve, Jesus' leadership team, that core group of disciples that was always with him. But I think we're less aware, we pay less attention to, what the crowd is doing. We pay less attention to the significance of the crowd.

So now who exactly was in the crowd? And the answer is: people just like you and just like me. Everyday people. Of course, there were other people there as well, but it was everyday people. Farmers and day workers and fishers and homemakers, all sorts of people. Kids were there. The old were there. And all of them were united by one thing: they had an absolutely burning curiosity about who Jesus was. They were absolutely intrigued by him, and so they were willing to step out of their village, move with him from village to village, just to be near him, to put up with thousands and thousands of people.

Now, in that crowd, there were people who were curious, and their intent behind their curiosity wasn't positive. The religious leaders were this way. They were very curious, of course, but their curiosity was more cynical. It was a skeptical curiosity. They were people that listened to every single thing that Jesus said, absolutely dissecting his words, but not because they were so eager to hear what he had to say. Not because they wanted to repent. Not because they wanted to listen and obey. Not for any of those reasons. They listened intently because they wanted to pick his words apart. They wanted to hold his words against him. They were curious, but they were curious so that they could pounce.

You might know people like this. People with whom you get in an argument, it doesn't even feel like you're having a conversation. They are just waiting for the one word or the phrase upon which they can ambush you. They can take you down. That's the religious leaders.

But the vast majority of the crowd, I think, were just general people, people that had an eager and honest curiosity about Jesus. They saw in him someone that was absolutely unique. They had never seen anything like him. When he taught, he taught with an authority that they had never seen before. His actions, his love, his power in his actions, in his demonstrations of the Spirit, in his miracles, they bore the trait, the characteristics, of the kingdom of God. They couldn't help but be around him. They were absolutely intrigued. Completely taken with who he was.

Now one mark of the crowd is this genuine curiosity, but also there is a neutrality to the crowd. Often what we see in the book of Matthew is they're interested, but they aren't sure they're fully in. They're not ready to fully commit to him, but they're not ready to leave him. They want to be near him. They want to be around him. But they aren't sure yet whether they are all in. And so Jesus, filled with compassion, would always issue a challenge to them. A challenge not merely to



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remain a part of the crowd, but a challenge to come in from the crowd. A challenge to make a decision about who he was and how they would view him, whether they not, they ultimately or not, would submit to him, submit to his teaching, commit fully to him.

Now his call throughout the gospels came in all sorts of ways, and there certainly were times where Jesus, because he knew the people that were listening or that were listening to him, there were times where Jesus would come with a strong word, a strong challenge, even a word of rebuke. He challenged the rich young ruler in a very dramatic way, and Jesus knew the hearts of people. So he knew when they needed to be called out for their lack of commitment. Maybe they were just giving him lip service. He wanted to help their intentions to be laid bare, to be very clear. He would do that at times.

But most of the time, what we see from him is a gentle word of invitation. Calling people to come to himself. Inviting them to come in and find, in him and with him, that which their soul deeply longed for.

Now of all the invitations that Jesus offered, I think I can say that my favorite is the one that we just read, Matthew 11:28. Just absolutely enamored with it. I'll tell you why in a moment, but listen again, and as we read it, listen to this invitation, verse 28. But I also want to encourage you, just keep these words before your mind. Consider them, chew on them, as we consider together Jesus' invitation. So again, Jesus says, to the crowd: Come to me, all who are weary and heavy-laden, and I will give you rest.

There's a reason this passion is so dear—this verse, this passage, is so dear to me. And it's because on a number of different occasions, God has used it to minister to me. He's using it right now, to be perfectly honest, this week as I've wrestled with this text. God has met me and challenged me once again with this call of Jesus. But the part or the time in my life where this was most profound to me, most impressionable to me, was during my senior year of college. Was at a Christian school, but it was during that time that I pored over these words, over and over again, because for a number of different reasons, my life as a Christian was anything but restful. I will give you rest, he said. And I remember thinking, I don't feel that. I don't feel that.

Now here's what I was experiencing. I was experiencing that as I got older, I was coming up towards my senior year, coming up towards graduation, major life decisions. I began to believe the lie that even though I was saved by grace—I knew that absolutely, saved by grace—it was now on me to make everything turn out right. It was on me. My responsibility now. I got to make all the right decisions. I have to fulfill all the responsibilities in my own strength. I have to make those who are around me happy. I have to make sure they're doing okay. I'm the one that has



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to live up to my goals, and not only my goals, but all the goals that I believed people had for me. I'm the one that has to make it all turn out right. I'm the one that has to be successful. My responsibility to become everything that I thought I had to be and everything that everyone wanted me to be.

And please understand, I was not taught this. No one was teaching me this. This is just my inclination. I knew I was saved by grace, but I absolutely believed, I felt, as if all right living was now up to me. And because of that, life became an absolute pressure cooker. And I couldn't handle it. I couldn't handle it. I hit my wall. So I looked to these words, and if you had asked me at that time how I was doing, I don't think I would have quoted Jesus' words exactly, but I think it's completely accurate to say, I was weary and I was heavy-laden. Absolutely exhausted. And it was in that context that Jesus' words would echo in my heart and in my mind. And he would say, I will give you rest. And I remember thinking, why is what he says so out of step with what I'm experiencing?

Now during that time, I will tell you, his words seemed almost too good to be true. They seemed almost like a fairy tale to me, and maybe to you, they feel that way right now. Maybe in your own life, you are walking through things that are so wearisome, so burdensome, that you hear Jesus' words, and you think that can't possibly be true. And if that is you, let me remind you what I needed to be reminded of.

See, Jesus said some pretty inspiring things. But Jesus did not come to be an inspirational speaker. Jesus said some things that were very motivating, but he did not come to give pep talks. That is not why he came. Jesus came to lay down his life and to call us to submit to him, that we might be with him and live in peace and rest. Jesus said amazing things, but he was not a motivational speaker. He said things that you might be tempted to put on your wall. They're beautiful, but their power is that they are true. They're absolutely true. And what Jesus is offering here in this invitation is that life can look absolutely different, can look absolutely different.

So I'm going to read it again, and then let's try to hear it. Let's try to walk through some of what it means. Again, Jesus says, and we want to hear him, taking him at his word. What he's saying here is true, not just pretty. It's true. He says: come to me. Come to me, all you who are weary and heavy-laden, and I will give you rest.

So what can we notice about this invitation? The first thing might seem rather obvious to you now that we've talked about it, but I got to tell you, I hadn't really thought about it before. This invitation went out to those who were already around Jesus. This is an invitation given to the crowd. These were people that maybe had followed him from multiple cities. These were people who had committed to follow after him, but to do so at a distance. And to them, he issued a



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call, a challenge. He looked at those that were around him, and he called them to come to him. Come to me, he said. It's an invitation, absolutely, but it's an invitation that carries the force of a command. It actually reads that way. Come to me.

Now, while we are apt to hear commands as if they are severe, we can't forget who is issuing the command. This is Jesus. This is the one who just a few verses later told us about his heart. He said, I am gentle and humble in heart. These are words that are direct, yes, but they're not severe. They're not harsh. These are words that are an urgent call to seize the opportunity of a lifetime. Come to me, he said to the crowd. He calls us to come. It's an invitation to come forward out of the crowd and to become disciples of his—the people who have the privilege of sitting there right there at his feet, people who would not miss a word of what he said because of distance. People who would constantly be with him, learning to be like him. The call was to leave the anonymity and the neutrality of the crowd.

Please hear me: it was good that they were curious. It was good that they were there, but he called them to come in. He called them to draw nearer to him, to accept the invitation to have the privilege to sit right at his feet, right up next to him, and be constantly with him, learning from him. That's the call. That's the incredibly generous invitation.

I mentioned that I don't like crowds, but I would, on occasion, go to things and endure the annoyance of the crowd. If it was worth it, that felt worth it to me. When I was living in Missouri in 1996, my dad surprised my younger brother and I with some tickets that he got through the company that he worked for, to the Olympics in Atlanta. Incredible opportunity. We got in the car, made that long trek down to that very hot, very humid, very stinky, very filled city. The entire world right there. We had the opportunity to go to the arena and watch the Dream Team, too. Shaq and Charles Barkley and that whole crew. Opportunity of a lifetime. Such a cool experience, so thankful for it. We were all the way up in the nosebleeds, but we did not care, because that was a unique opportunity.

But imagine what it would be like if in that moment, somehow someone with the authority would get on the microphone and say, listen, anyone who wants can come down, they can draw near, they can sit on the front row. You can come forward. You're welcome down here. You can interact with us. You can be right here. That would be an outrageous opportunity. That's what Jesus was offering. That's what he was offering. That was his call. Draw near. Draw near, come in from the crowd, come to me.

We can't help but also notice the people to whom he said this. Jesus was very honest about who they were and what they were experiencing. It should be a comfort to us. He said, come to me, all who are weary and heavy-laden. The weary and the heavy-laden, maybe that resonates with you? Maybe right now you feel



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weary and heavy-laden? Who were these people? Who were the weary and heavy-laden? Why were they weary? I think many of them were weary just because of the general weariness of life. We know when we consider Jesus' ministry, he was working with the down and out. He was working with the sick, with the lepers. He was helping those who were poor. He was working with people that didn't have a lot going for them. And the general pressure of life, I'm sure, was pressing in on them. To them, he just named where they were. You're weary. They're heavy-laden, and maybe that's you. That has been me on a number of different occasions in my life.

But I think also he was talking to people who were weary and were burdened. They were heavy-laden because of the incredible burden that the religion of the Pharisees had placed on them. They couldn't keep up. They weren't good enough. They didn't measure up. They were spiritual zeros, spiritual nothings, nothing going for them. They were constantly reminded about it, constantly kept out. Not good enough, didn't have it all together, keenly aware that they didn't have it all together. Maybe they pretended, or they acted as though they had it all together, but you and I both know that is a very exhausting way to live. These are weary people. Heavy-laden people.

And I actually think that that it was their awareness of their weariness and their heavy-laden spiritual nothingness that they had going for them, that led them maybe to believe that the crowd, a distance from Jesus, was exactly the place they were supposed to be. Someone like that doesn't draw near the Pharisees. Jesus constantly embraced those that the Pharisees would have told to leave, to run, to go the other direction.

Perhaps it's possible that those in the crowd thought, you know what, I'm right where I should be. I don't deserve to draw near to Jesus. I got nothing going for me. And to them, looking directly at them, Jesus said, come to me, you're weary, you're heavy-laden. Come to me. Come to me, draw near. Come, take up the privilege of being with me. Come, learn from me, take my yoke upon you. That means learn from me. Find rest for your souls. That's the promise.

To the weary, to the burden, to the down and out, to the overlooked he offered the greatest invitation possible: the opportunity to be with him. And along with being with him came an incredible promise. They would finally, for the first time in their life, experience the thing that we all deeply long for: they would experience rest. That's the promise. Come to me, all you who are weary and heavy-laden, and I will give you rest. And rest is what the weary crave, but they can never find. It's what the heavy-laden long after they seek after it, but they never arrive.

Biblically rest is peace. It's satisfaction. It's the gospel understanding that there's nothing that we can do to please God, but because of his grace, the pressure is



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off. Come to me, he said. Come to me and you will experience—I will give you rest. And we need to pay very close attention to that language. The rest that Jesus offers is not something that can be seized. It's not something that can be earned. It's not something that we can work really hard for, we can take for ourselves. It can only be given and received. And he's the only one able to give it.

Because his rest is the only rest there is. He says, come to me. Come to me. This rest clings, it hinges, on us coming to him, and learning from him, being with him. Walking with him. That's what it is to be yoked together with him, just to walk with him in life. Let his very capable shoulders do the heavy lifting. Be yoked together with him. Is it any wonder that he drew such crowds?

Still today, there are, there are, I won't name any specific supplements, but there are supplements that offer these kind of promises. And people buy them up. They run to the store to get these things. You want to feel peace.? You don't want to feel so anxious, you don't want to feel so heavy and weary? You really want to experience rest? If you just take three of these...And people lap it up because people long for this. It can only be found in Jesus.

So now today, just as then, this call remains—come to me, all who are weary, all who are heavy laden, all who are absolutely worn out, I'm going to give you rest. An invitation, a call to come in from the crowd. That's the way we're capturing that idea—to draw near to Jesus, to go to him, to learn from him and experience the life and the rest that only he can provide.

If you could ask me, if you could ask any one of our staff, ask any one of our elders, what is our driving passion at this church? Our mission statement is something we're all familiar with. We want to be people—we are a church—who wants to glorify God by seeking to present every person complete in Christ. And that word complete—it's a place we'll never arrive, but it is something that we grow in—it means to mature, to grow up into Christ. It's our passion.

It's our passion in this year. The way we're capturing that is we are absolutely passionate, we are dead set on, helping more and more people draw nearer and nearer to Jesus because he is the only one that is able to offer life and rest that every human being longs for. To call more and more people to come in from the crowd, to draw near to the only one that can give them the life they so deeply long for. That is what we are all about. It's what every single ministry that we have here at Lincoln Berean is aimed at. It's aimed at helping people, more and more people, draw near to Jesus. It's what we're all about. That's what we're going to be unwavering on.

One of the things I'm amazed about, when you consider Jesus, as he offers this call, it's just how gentle and humble he was about it. You know, when he offers this



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call, this invitation, he doesn't do what we in the world are so prone to do. Here's what he didn't do. He didn't coerce. He didn't guilt people into making a decision. He didn't manipulate, he didn't trick. He didn't force a thing. He didn't do any of those things. Here's what he did: he put out an open invitation. He said, here is the offer, open to all. Come to me. And anyone who comes, as you encounter me, you will experience rest. As you come and live with me and walk with me, you'll experience the life that you were made for. But you got to make a choice. Come. He bids us come.

This year, this is going to be our relentless call. To reject the anonymity of the crowd, the isolation of the crowd, and to encourage each one of us who call Lincoln Berean Church home, and also our friends and neighbors, to do everything within our power to invite them into this life with Jesus, of being near to him. So everything that we do.

The Atlas that you received this evening—I hope you grabbed one. If you didn't, I would encourage you to grab one. Talks about everything that's transpired over the past year and also some of the things that we are dreaming about, we're praying about, that we're looking forward to as we move forward. But right there in the heart of the Atlas, there is a description of this call, this invitation from Jesus. There's also a way for you to walk through some questions and consider what is Jesus calling me to. Is there an active step that he's calling me to take to draw nearer to him—to seek to be with him, to learn from him, to walk through life with him? We can't make that decision for anybody, but we can offer an open invitation. We're praying you join us in it.

I do want to talk about a couple just specific possible applications. A number of times in the book of Romans, a number of times this summer, we just don't want to miss the opportunity to call people to place their faith in Jesus Christ. And if you are still someone who is on the fence, you just aren't sure, I just want to encourage you, the first step in coming to him is placing your faith in him. Trust him. Trust that his work on the cross paid the debt for your sin, and now life with God that is unending is absolutely available to you through faith because of his grace. And if that is you, I would encourage you, take the first critical step, place your faith in him. And if you do, even right now, then you begin right now a life that will never end with God.

The first step could be that some of you are saying, I am just so weary, it's the only thing on my mind. And it might be that stepping out and reaching out and considering, praying about whether taking advantage of, different care ministries—care ministries that are intended to meet us right in our brokenness and point us to Jesus—would be the next step for you this year.



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Maybe you've been wrestling with an addiction for a long time. We have a lot of people who have courageously stepped forward, but I know in our world, I know that there are so many more who are wrestling. Maybe this year is the year where you say, I'm just—I'm done with it. You take a step, you reach out to Celebrate Recovery, to Pure Desire. You seek after Jesus and the healing that he can bring, and the community that is drawn around you to help you walk after him, seek after him, right where you are.

Maybe. Maybe you're saying, I don't know that I need to receive anything. What I really long to do this year is give. Maybe the best thing that you can do is find a way to serve. Be a table leader, be a small group leader, step into a Life Group, to help others, to help them draw nearer to Jesus. Maybe that's exactly what Jesus is calling you to.

I have a friend who says this. He says the Christian life ultimately comes down to two steps. Doesn't that sound nice? Just two steps. Step one: go to Jesus. Step two: repeat step one. That it, isn't it? To go to him, to respond to the call, to come to him, to draw near to him, to go to the only one who can provide rest. It's our vision. It's our driving passion. It's our deep hope and prayer that this would be a year that is marked by that singular purpose to help people come in from the crowd and draw near to Jesus Christ, the one who offers them life. Our prayer is that you will join us as we pursue that goal.

Our Father, we thank you. We thank you that you sent your Son, that he died upon the cross, that he rose again, that he ascended into heaven, and he now sits at your right hand. We thank you that you sent your empowering Spirit, that we might now walk in step with you.

Lord, we acknowledge that when we are left to ourselves, when we try to go it alone, we end up weary and heavy laden, and we end up longing for rest and never finding it because it can only be found in you. So Lord, we pray that you'll give us a vision of a way that we can draw near to you, Jesus, this year, that we might find you, that we might go deeper with you this year, that we might step into the fully satisfying life that only you can offer. We pray these things in your name. Amen.

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