

THE CHURCH AS A BOAT

SCRIPTURE - (Mark 4:1-2) And again He began to teach by the sea. And a great multitude was gathered to Him, so that He got into a boat and sat in it on the sea; and the whole multitude was on the land facing the sea. {2} Then He taught them many things by parables,

INTRODUCTION:

- A. Jesus' used word pictures of the church or kingdom of God. The early Christians also adopted symbols and signs for spiritual things. We are all familiar with the sign of the fish and its popularity in the early church.
- B. One of the most interesting symbols used in the first and second centuries was the boat. The earliest believers marked their meeting places with rough scratchings of a boat and sail--a sign that the church gathered in that place. Among the earliest Christian artworks are representations of the church as a boat.
- C. In a letter attributed to Clement, the apostle Peter delivers a sermon on the church and describes it in these terms: For the whole business of the Church is like unto a great ship, bearing through a violent storm, men who are of many places, and who desire to inhabit the city of the good kingdom. Let, therefore, God be your shipmaster; and let the pilot be likened to Christ . . . Let those sailing expect every tribulation, as traveling over a great and troubled sea, the world.
- D. The symbol of the boat persisted long into the Christian era. The central part of Medieval churches--where the congregation sat to worship-- came to be called the *nave*. The word comes from the Latin *navis*, meaning "ship"--reflecting the popularity and power of the boat symbol a thousand years after Christ.
- E. A boat is a wonderful picture of the church sailing through dangerous times.

I. THE BOAT IN THE GOSPEL OF MARK

- A. In Mark, Jesus and his disciples spend a great deal of time in a boat.
 1. He teaches the crowd from the boat in 4:1 ff.
 2. He and the disciples then cross the Sea of Galilee and weather a storm which he has to calm by a powerful command (4:35-41).
 3. The boat lands at Gerasa and Jesus heals a demon-possessed man (5:1 ff).
 4. Jesus and the twelve recross the Sea and to Capernaum, where Jesus heals and begins preaching throughout Galilee (5:21-22).
 5. In the fifth incident, Jesus and his disciples try to get away by boat for some much-needed rest. (6:30-34).
 6. Putting the disciples in the boat, he sends them off while he dismisses the crowds. Jesus walks to them on the water (6:45ff).
 7. At the end of Mark 6, Jesus and the disciples land at Gennesaret where, once again, Jesus is involved in a teaching and healing ministry with the crowds (6:53-55).
 8. In Mark 8, Jesus travels to Dalmanutha by boat where he is immediately embroiled in a controversy with the Pharisees.
 9. Finally, leaving the Pharisees behind, Jesus and the twelve sail to Bethsaida. On the journey, Jesus takes the opportunity to teach his disciples.

- B. All of the occasions when Jesus is in the boat with his disciples occur in one section of Mark's gospel.
1. The boat is important to Mark's story from 4:1 - 8:21.
 - a. Before this, Jesus might call disciples from a boat (chap 1) but he does not appear in a boat with his disciples.
 - b. After this, the boat is never mentioned again.
 2. The boat becomes important in the story just when Mark begins to focus more narrowly on the twelve.
 - a. Up until this point in the gospel they have been in the background, overshadowed by Pharisees and the crowds.
 - b. But now, Jesus has identified them as the "good soil" who will "produce a crop" of faith (4:20), and Mark starts to talk about them more.
 - c. The rest of Mark will tell about Jesus shaping the twelve to become his disciples.

II. **THE FUNCTION OF THE BOAT IN MARK** - There are numerous statements made by Mark about life in the boat which we can compare to life in the church.

A. The boat is a place **reserved for disciples**.

1. The only people in the boat with Jesus in Mark are those who have committed to following him. Never are members of the crowd or the Pharisees allowed in the boat.
2. The boat can be used to escape the crowds or to keep the crowds at a distance. But, when use in this way, the boat establishes a boundary between those who are "on the outside" and those who have cast their lot with Jesus.
3. Sounds like the church, doesn't it? This is a community intended for disciples and disciples only.
4. The curious, the needy, the lost can be ministered to by the church, but must never be confused for the church.
5. A commitment is required to get into the boat.

B. The boat is a **teaching platform**.

1. Jesus stands in the boat and teaches both the crowds and his own disciples.
2. In a similar manner, the church is a teaching platform from which Jesus continues to instruct the world and his disciples.

C. The boat is a place to **experience the power and presence of Jesus**

1. It was in the boat the disciples watched Jesus calm the storm and walk on water.
2. What an incredible parallel with the church! Matthew 18:20 For where two or three are gathered together in My name, I am there in the midst of them."
3. For in this community the presence of Christ is necessary if we are to find power for living..

D. The boat **thrusts disciples into ministry**.

1. Being in the boat may *distinguish* the disciples from the world, but it does not *isolate* them from the world. Just the opposite. So it is with the church.
2. The church was never intended to isolate us from the world.
3. The church must get out of the boat and begin to minister to the world.

III. THE LESSONS OF THE BOAT IN MARK

- A. The fact that only committed disciples are present with Jesus in Mark's boat offers a rebuke to the churches where membership is increasingly defined in terms of attendance and regularity of financial contributions.
1. Jesus invites everyone into his "boat" the church, but He makes it clear that you get in only by meeting his requirements
 2. Commitment, evidenced by sacrifice and submission to the Lordship of Christ, was necessary to get into the boat with Jesus. (Heb 5:8-9) though He was a Son, yet He learned obedience by the things which He suffered. {9} And having been perfected, He became the author of eternal salvation to all who obey Him,
 3. We see a boat associated with salvation - (1 Pet 3:18-21) For Christ also suffered once for sins, the just for the unjust, that He might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh but made alive by the Spirit, {19} by whom also He went and preached to the spirits in prison, {20} who formerly were disobedient, when once the Divine longsuffering waited in the days of Noah, while the ark was being prepared, in which a few, that is, eight souls, were saved through water. {21} There is also an antitype which now saves us; baptism (not the removal of the filth of the flesh, but the answer of a good conscience toward God), through the resurrection of Jesus Christ,
 - a. Wanting to get in the church of "your" choice makes about as much sense as someone in Noah's day saying they would take the boat of their choice.
 - b. Christ's church will follow the scriptures in pattern
- B. The teaching function of the boat - calling the crowds to faith and the twelve to deeper discipleship points to the need of biblical teaching in the church of our day.
1. Many churches find themselves shying away from teaching in favor of
 - a. a more therapeutic model-support rather than instruction,
 - b. counseling more than preaching,
 - c. relationship over revelation.
 2. A firm belief in and a clear call to obey God's word, can open a church up to charges of being judgmental and intolerant.
- C. It is easy for us to leave Jesus out of church and out of its business when His presence was so necessary to the work and welfare of those in Mark's boat.
1. We must recognize Jesus in the church - (Mat 18:20) "For where two or three are gathered together in My name, I am there in the midst of them."
 2. Jesus must be the source of our power - (John 15:4-5) "Abide in Me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in Me. {5} "I am the vine, you are the branches. He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit; for without Me you can do nothing.
- D. The church like Mark's boat is a means of allowing us to minister?
1. The modern church functions more often as a fortress rather than a boat.
 2. We must recognize that the church is intended to be a tool for ministry to the world.

CONCLUSION:

- A. Considering the church as a "boat" are you in the boat or out of the boat?
- B. If you are in the "boat" are you doing your part to see that the "boat" is sea-worthy to weather the winds of culture and withstand the waves which threaten us?

Who's In Your Boat?

All passages from Mark 4

v35-41 – The disciples, who are a ragtag team of unlikely men, are aboard a boat with their rabbi Jesus. A fearsome storm comes upon them as they sail to the other side of Galilee. We know that this storm was deadly, as even the experienced seamen among them were terrified for their lives! Yet Jesus was fast asleep at the end of the boat...

The disciples come to wake him, and in a panic start to question him, saying, 'Don't you care about us, that we might drown?!' But Jesus rebuked the wind and waves, as well as the disciples with him because they had not the faith in him that they should have. Having known Christ and witnessed his authority in the past, they had every reason to be confident in their rabbi who could save them, yet at this moment, they relied only upon what they could immediately see. (Although we can understand and share in this response, it is the wrong one! 1 Pet 5:7)

Unlike the disciples, we have a different kind of faith. Ours is not by sight, but by the Word written for us, the accounts of the disciples and eyewitnesses to the work of Christ. But for all of us, from the time of the gospels until now, the hearts of men and responses to the message are consistent across the different generations.

v1-8 and 14-20 speak of Jesus' teaching before the voyage. The parable of the sower shows us the state of our hearts in their different forms and the consequences of each. Each soil has its own problem, but the 3rd and 4th soils describe the most essential Christian walk! The seed sown amongst thorns – the worries of this life that choke out faith – is something we constantly encounter and are challenged with. This soil is to rely only on what is seen, to look around at the storm, and live fearfully, forgetting who God is and what He can do. And the seed thrown amongst good soil is prosperous and fruitful because is a soil ready to internalise the Word of God, practice and focus on it. Faith is the difference with this soil, and the heart of this person is always looking to God, even amidst disasters!

v21-23 – Our relationship with the Lord is personal, but our faith is very much public and visible to others. Like a lamp on a stand, our faith shines. And how we respond to life during chaos is critical to our faith. It shows us where our faith truly lies. On this night of the storm, Jesus shows himself to be the safest place. He does not necessarily remove us from all dangers, but he is the creator of all things, and he has authority, and he is the one to have in your boat. If we are living life 'safely' on the seashore, yet not with Jesus, this is false security. It is better to be on the choppy waves with Him who can rescue you. This is how we shine: John 1:3, Rev 4:11, 1 Cor 8:6, Col 1:16, Heb 1:3, 2 Thess 2:7-8.

Reflection questions: What is your view of God when life gets stormy? Do you question his care for you? How long is it before you turn to Him? How does your light shine, especially in chaos? And who is in your boat?

Psa 73:25-26, Matt 18:20