



BOAT SHOPPING

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Boating is big business. If you have ever had the opportunity to attend a boat show, you can see the allure, excitement and desire people have for boats. Annual sales for boats, marine products, accessories, and service are over \$40 billion each year in just the United States.

What is it that is so appealing about boats? Regardless whether people are in a row boat or a huge cruise ship, there is something about it, that attracts people. Some people will tell you it is for the recreational pleasure or just spending time with family. But let's be honest, there are many other less expensive ways to spend recreational time with the family. So, what is it about a boat, of any size, that continues to draw people.

Personally, although some would deny it, I believe boats provide a way for people to appreciate one of God's largest components on our earth - water. We all know that water is essential for life, but water is also therapeutic and non-restrictive. Whether gently rocking in a small rowboat while waiting on that elusive fish to bite or hanging over the railing of a large cruise ship enjoying the vastness of the ocean, we experience the tranquility and freedom that water allows. Think about it. When we are on the lake in a boat, there are no traffic lanes, no yield signs, and no traffic signals. We get to set our own course, time and purpose when we are on the water. A boat on the water gives us the serenity, peace, and freedom here on earth that God wired us to desire. Water is a clear example (no pun intended) of God's creation that was made by Him to help us know that true rest in our hearts can only be found through the "living water" that Jesus offers each of us.

There is a parallel between the freedom we seek while enjoying a boat of any size and the freedom that we seek in our daily life. We desire to do our own thing, be our own captain, and set course for destinations that may or may not be physically, emotionally, or spiritually healthy. But we rationalize that the ill-advised course will get us where we think we want to go, regardless of the cost to ourselves and family to get there. We often make choices that are not the wisest, as the smooth waters we were initially sailing upon, soon threaten our relationships, our finances, or our future due to the inevitable storms that come upon the waters of life. And when that happens, our immediate thought is to get a bigger or better boat because, after all, we think we can do it all in our own strength. We look horizontally to find the answers but never find the right boat that will satisfy the desire for the spiritual and emotional peace we seek. The problem is we're looking at all the wrong types of boats in our quest for these things. All the things that disappoint us now are reminders that searching for the peace we really want will never be found in this present world. As a result, this longing for peace and freedom that we seek upon the earthly waters using boats of different sizes, goes on unsatisfied.

There is one boat, however, that will provide us everything that we desire. This boat has a warranty that beats all the other competition. It requires no storage or dry docking. This boat has unlimited passenger capacity and guarantees each passenger safe passage through turbulent waters while getting us to our final "port of call."

I'm sure you know by now, that this is not an actual physical boat but rather a metaphor for the secure passage that God provides us on this earth and throughout eternity, if we are believers in Him and

His Son. But you may be asking yourself how your problems and dissatisfaction in this world can be resolved by a boat provided by God.

Did you realize that God was the first boat designer? Through that first boat, the ark, He gave those He loved everything they needed to contend with this nasty world. Through the ark God provides us so many illustrations of how we need to live and navigate in today's world. We all know the story of Noah. Noah was a righteous man and blameless among the people of his time and he walked with God. However, the people that Noah lived among had become wicked and their "thoughts of the heart" were only evil. These people were corrupt and violence prevailed. Jesus described these people in more detail when He was explaining the events and signs that will take place just before the time that He returns to earth in Matthew 24:36-39.

"But about that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels of heaven, nor the Son, but the Father alone. For the coming of the Son of Man will be just like the days of Noah. For as in those days before the flood they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day that Noah entered the ark and they did not understand until the flood came and took them all away; so will the coming of the Son of Man be." (NASB)

When we look deeper into this passage of scripture, there are several things we need to learn that may help us realize that our search for serenity, peace, and freedom here on earth is not found in the horizontal things or people around us. Have you ever noticed that whether you are on a small or large boat, you often come back to the same spot from where you departed, spending lots of time, energy, and money in the process? This kind of sounds like our lives, doesn't it? We're always looking for an adventure or diversion, but when it's over, we are back to the same dock where we started, ready to try something else to fulfill us. This is not God's design for our lives and we have to understand this truth, before we will change our course. We need to anchor our boat long enough to understand life from God's perspective and then set our minds, our words, and our actions on a new course that has an eternal one-way destination instead of spending our short lives going in circles.

So let's break apart what Jesus said and use Noah, his family, and the ark to help us understand how our thinking and actions may need to change. Hopefully, we will better understand God's perspective on our lives and that our focus should not be on horizontal things or people to give us the true peace and assurances we desire. There are three fundamental lessons to learn from this passage.

Matthew 24:36-39

1. Heaven and Hell Await

"But about that day and hour no one knows. . ." We all know when our birthdate occurred but do we know our death date? The fact is no one on earth knows when they are going to die or when Jesus will return to earth, but unless Jesus raptures his family of faith first, let the record show that we all are going to die physically.

People who don't believe in God think that once we die physically, that's all there is. We are equal to the "road-kill" that we see along the highway, only to disappear forever leaving our loved ones with only a memory of us. God, being the Holy Creator of the universe and everything below it, on it, and above it tells us in His Word something totally different. Mankind was created to be an eternal living being intended to live, work, and praise Him forever. That is still true today. God didn't create us to live only a short period of time on earth and then it's over. Have you ever known an artist who creates a masterful work of art to toss that creation in the garbage can once it is finished? We are wired

by God (because we are made in His image) to love our creations and want to keep them forever. God's desire is the same for His creations.

Because God is a holy God, due to the sin that controls our mind, spirit, and body, we can't be that eternal being that lives in His Presence. The only way to deal with that sin issue, so that we can live with Him forever, is to understand that God loves us so much and wants us to live with Him for eternity, that He provided His Son as an ultimate blood sacrifice. By us understanding what that act of love provided for us, then accepting that gift of love, asking for forgiveness and turning away from the corrupt and sinful life-style we are living, we are then assured that upon our death, our eternity will be spent with the holy Creator who loves us. God's Word tells us we are going to live eternally either in heaven with our Creator or in a literal hell-hole where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth - forever!

2. How Are You Living?

"For as in those days before the flood they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day that Noah entered the ark. . . ."

The days of Noah were corrupt and evil, but Noah remained righteous and blameless before God. The Apostle Paul, in Romans 1:20-32, gives us insight to the people's behavior in Noah's day, deliberately seeking to live a lifestyle that ignored God. When you read that description in Romans, you will be amazed how he also describes our nation today. In the course of each day the people in Noah's day made choices, just like today, that focus only upon themselves and their selfish desires.

Today, there are two types of people on this earth. There are those who recognize that God is the Creator of all things and who have entered into a personal relationship (not a religion) with God's son, Jesus, and there are those who have chosen to ignore the "God of Creation" and live a continually sinful and corrupt life, just as in the days of Noah, pledging their efforts, allegiance, and money to some other form of god.

Before we congratulate ourselves too much, that we are a part of the first group, we need to honestly look at our daily lives to check if "other gods" are in our lives that we don't want to admit exist. We need to ask ourselves if the multitude of choices we make every day are God-honoring or are our choices honoring some other god. Making God-honoring choices is getting more difficult in a world that puts us and our families in a position of complying with other people or organizational agendas that might not be honoring to God. We have to understand, like Noah did, that God is not important to this "world."

We must be cautious to not get caught in a net with people or an agenda that leads us away from God or a seemingly worthwhile goal causing our focus to solely be on money. These pressures can come from so-called friends, schools, organizations, employers, family members, and even spouses. Matthew 6:24 tells us *"No one can serve two masters. Either you will hate the one and love the other, or you will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and money."* God has a purpose for your life. Sadly, many believers let Satan strategically derail them from their God-given talent or purpose simply by placing temporal worldly agendas in the way. If we are not living life filled with peace and the freedom to pursue our purpose, then there is a good chance we have allowed the wrong master to take control.

Remember, despite the ridicule, pressure, and worldly influence from the people, Noah remained steadfast in his devotion to God. Can we say the same thing?

3. God's Given You What You Need

"Until the day that Noah entered the ark and they did not understand until the flood came and took them all away. . . ."

So far, we have discussed that our eternal destination is determined by our choice or lack thereof to believe that God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life. Additionally, we discussed how we live our daily lives - whether they are "God" honoring or "world" honoring.

Throughout recorded history, we can see that when people chose to commit their eternal existence and their daily life-style choices to God, they were blessed with the protection and provisions that a covenant-keeping God provides. By placing God first in their lives, they knew their purpose and lived every day to achieve that God-given purpose.

When we look at Noah's life, he chose to not only believe in God, but honor Him! As a result, God gave Noah and his family only one way to save themselves - a boat called the Ark. Noah and his family focused on God's direction for their lives for approximately eighty years while building the ark. They had the faith to believe in what God said and the resolve to not "cave" to the world's peer pressure to conform. Noah followed God's instructions on how to prepare for the future, even though it made no sense at the time. (Remember, no one had ever seen rain until the time of the flood).

You may be like Noah and his family, not understanding what God is doing in your life. But if you have God as your focus and listen to what He tells you through His Word, through other believers, through God-ordained circumstances, and His Holy Spirit guiding you, what might not make sense now, will become clear and purposeful in time. Once understanding God's provision and how "His Way" was going to save them, when God said, "Go into the Ark, you and your whole family," they entered into the safety God provided, placing themselves in the hands of God to take care of them even though they knew nothing about what was about to happen. Once the judgment of the flood waters came, Noah and his family understood that without God's provision of the Ark, they would have perished.

When we look at our lives, do we honestly know what is going to happen today, tomorrow, or even next month? Do we have the audacity to think that we can control what is going to happen in our future? The sooner we realize that only God controls or allows everything and the sooner we place our trust and faith in Him, we will start receiving the serenity, peace, and freedom we seek. Just like Noah and his family, once they were inside the Ark, they had to relinquish their desire to control the Ark's course because it had no rudder. They had to rely entirely upon God for their direction and destiny. However, once the Lord closed the Ark's door, they were "sealed" inside the safety of the Ark. The turbulent flood waters undoubtedly caused times of concern and anxiety, but the Ark never failed to get them through the storm.

God has given us what we need with our personal Ark. If your immediate thought is, "I don't have a personal Ark," if you are a believer in Jesus, then think again. You probably have read in the bible or heard many times in church, the term "in Christ." The next time you read or hear that term, think about Christ as being "The Ark" and think how Jesus provides us everything we need to be saved just as God provided the Ark to save Noah and his family. Yes, there will also be times of turbulent waters and anxiety in our lives, but because we are in the right boat, our personal Ark, Jesus will get us through those storms. Like Noah, we need to understand and trust, that "in the Ark," our course and destiny, however long on this earth, is secure.

There is one last thing to learn from Noah's ark. Once in the ark, the only way Noah and his family could see what was going on outside, was to "look up." How often do we "look up" for guidance and direction? How often do we look up to have God direct us to our purpose and passion? Just as with any major life decision, good counsel, prayer and listening to God are key. Don't let Satan direct your attention and focus to the wrong boat that will either take you to the wrong ports-of-call or cause you to sail in circles of frustration and hopelessness.

When boat shopping, getting into the right boat requires good counsel and advice. For the best boating experience, remember what God did for Noah through the Ark and realize that He does the same for us through Jesus. God's boat even comes with a trusting captain and guarantee for a fulfilled, purposeful life, ending with an eternal port-of-call. Are you ready to sign up?