

THE BOAT ROCKER

MATTHEW 11:2-6

Years ago a United States Navy submarine cruising off the coast of Massachusetts was rammed by a ship. The sub sank immediately trapping the entire crew in an iron grave. All attempts at rescue proved futile. Toward the end of the operation one of the divers placed his ear next to the submarine's iron hull. He heard a tapping noise from the inside. It was Morse Code. Slowly the message formed, "Is... there... any... hope?"

And this is the plight of the whole human race... The world we live in is a *sunken sub*. People live their lives in the iron hull of emptiness. There's scant air to breathe, and no means of escape. Thinking folks look for the hatch - a way to the surface - a way to rise from the bottom - but to no avail. We're trapped in a *sunken sub called sin*. Put your ear to the hull, and you'll hear the tapping, "Is there any hope?"

I'm sure you've noticed, *Life is hard!* If life were all fastballs we'd bat a thousand. But just about the time you settle in on the velocity - life throws you a curve, or tosses a change-up. You're whiffing again. Circumstances leave us confused...

The best team doesn't always win.
The cheater gets the highest grade.
Unethical businessmen receive the promotion.
Good people end up sick.
Little babies are born deformed.
Innocent women are abused.
Churches are burglarized and pastors are beaten.

Life is hard, and each generation faces the same old enemies... Injustice mocks us... Sickness shames and degrades us... Acts of nature torture us... Evil preys upon us... Sin stunts what could have been... All the while, death sits back smugly, knowing it'll get the *last laugh*. Life never seems to behave itself. We can't tame it. It won't stay on its leash. Every generation has been *tempted to tap*, "Is There Any Hope?"

Yet, for one brief moment, long, long ago, the situation was different. A ray of light shined into the deepest ocean. God sent a diver down from heaven. This heavenly frogman found the hatch to this hopeless world and popped it open. He shined a light to those trapped in the darkened hull. This diver *swam into our world to show us the way out!* For one brief moment *hope* opened the *hatch* and people could see salvation bubbling up on the surface. And this hope's name was "Jesus."

A man named "John" first saw the light. He sensed in Jesus the opportunity to escape the hull of sin. He baptized the diver in the river. Jesus came to earth on a rescue mission. John was appointed by God to assist in the effort. John came out of the wilderness blazing the trail - preparing the way. He *pointed out sin*, then *pointed men to the Savior*.

But when John was tossed into prison he became puzzled. He knew Jesus was sent to free us from our age-old enemies. He came to upset the apple cart - rock the boat - make waves - open the hatch! Jesus came to offer to man a real alternative to life in the iron hull. But if Jesus gave hope... why was His sidekick, John, in prison?

John was jailed in the Dead Sea Fortress of Marchaerus - the Jewish Alcatraz - a dungeon just as confining as the iron hull of a sunken world. How can John be sure Jesus is truly the deliverer if he himself was left trapped in a prison of despair? John's faith had a serious wobble. He needs an anchor to tie off on, so John sends messengers to question Jesus...

We read of *John's inquiry* and *Jesus' reply* in Matt 11:2, "And when John had heard in prison about the works of Christ, he sent two of his disciples and said to Him, "Are You the Coming One, or do we look for another?" "Jesus answered and said to them, "Go and tell John the things which you hear and see: the blind see and the lame walk; the lepers are cleansed and the deaf hear; the dead are raised up and the poor have the gospel preached to them. And blessed is he who is not offended because of Me."

And as Jesus said it, I'm sure He chuckled. I hear His tone of voice as *light, laughable*. He spoke as you would when you point out the obvious. In essence, Jesus answers John's messengers, "Look around! Pay attention to what's happening... Every day blind eyes see. Paraplegics walk. Leprous spots vanish. What was rotten flesh is as new as a baby's behind. Corpses are raised to life and funerals turn into parties. Poor people have plenty. *What do you think? Does this look like business as usual?*"

In the Gospels we read about Jesus entering the Temple, and turning over tables - but Jesus spent His entire ministry turning over tables! Jesus rocked the boat and shook things up! Iron chains that had never been broken... Jesus snapped in two! Big bullies - like leprosy, and demons, and paralysis, and death - vicious gang members who'd ruled the hood for millenniums were tucking tale and running at the sight of Jesus.

I wish we had time to review the previous three chapters - or about the previous twelve months of Jesus' life. For in the annals of history there has never been a year as exciting - and as surprising - as the year 30 AD...

Normally, lepers were colonized. Leprosy was *the AIDS of the ancient world*. No one dared let a leper get near them, let alone touch them! Except Jesus! He laid hands on the lepers. His love and acceptance healed the *heart of the leper*, even before His power healed the *disease of leprosy*. Demons are scary and spooky. They have a knack for embodiment. They like to homestead in humans, and once they enter, they're hard to evict. Yet all Jesus had to do was give the order, and the demon obeyed.

Jesus also drove out fevers. In 30 AD, the sale of Tylenol took a nose-dive... Jesus made a *blind* man see, and caused a *mute* man to talk... The *fire inspectors* were about to fine Jesus for not complying with handicap regulations when He made a cripple man walk. And to top it off Jesus performed an even greater miracle - He forgave the man of his sins.

Recall the showdown at Jairus' house. The leader of the synagogue had a little girl who'd died. Crime tape covered the room. The coroner was on the scene. CSI was investigating the work of a serial killer named "*Death*." But Jesus pushed the crowd aside, walked into the room, and stared death in the face. Then He turned to the little girl, and said, "*Honey, arise*." Suddenly the cold, clammy corpse became a warm, bubbly, talkative, energetic Middle School girl again. I'm sure she started texting immediately. Jesus robbed the mortician of his fees. He turned a wake into a party!

30 AD... Man, what a year it was! And when we look closely at Jesus' year of miracles we see three groups of people begin to emerge... First were **His disciples** - those who genuinely wanted to follow Jesus. But there were two other groups to surface that year - those who **marveled**, and those who **murmured** - **the multitudes** and **the aristocrats**. *The multitudes* saw the miracles of Jesus and *stood in awe of Him*. *The priests* saw the miracles of Jesus and were *scared to death of Him*.

After Jesus had cast out yet another demon, Matthew 9:33 states, "And the multitudes marveled, saying, 'It was never seen like this in Israel!' but the Pharisees said, 'He casts out demons by the ruler of the demons.'" One group marveled at His miracles. They had much to gain from such power... The other group grew jealous. They had much to lose if Jesus had His way... The year 30 AD, and His miracles, drew a line in the sand. Two camps stood out... **the manipulators** and **the intimidators**.

From here on, **The multitudes in awe of Jesus** tried to **manipulate** Him. On one occasion the multitudes desired to make Jesus a king. They wanted to use Him to overthrow the Romans. Their intention was to mold Jesus after their own political designs, and force Him to play their game. This is why Jesus went out of His way to avoid any publicity that would stir up a crowd. He was leery of their motive. He refused to be manipulated.

And from here on, **The priests scared of Jesus** tried to **intimidate** Him. This group argued with Jesus over religion. They wanted to trip Him up doctrinally, so they could brand Him a heretic and dismiss His authority. They concocted vicious rumors and set theological traps to trick Jesus. In the end these were the people who prosecuted Jesus before Pilate.

It's interesting, at first **the multitudes** seemed to be admirers of Jesus. They came out to greet Him on Palm Sunday and hail Him their Messiah. Ironically, they cheered Jesus, as the priests plotted His assassination. But in the end both groups cried out for His blood, and demanded that Jesus be crucified. Both camps of people turned out to be Jesus' enemies.

And we need to understand that 2000 years later these two groups are still around. People react to Jesus the same way today they did in 30 AD. **Some people stand in awe of His power.** They start out as admirers, and show Him great respect, but ultimately they want to *manipulate* the Master for their own ends. They try to use Jesus to fulfill their own agenda. **Other people are scared to death of His power** and their goal is either to intimidate the voices who speak for Him, or avoid Him the best they can.

Think back to 30 AD and the **multitude** that sat on the grassy slopes of Galilee. It was late in the day and everyone was hungry. These folks saw Jesus take just five loaves and two fish and cater thousands. *What power!* But here's how a selfish mind twists... Rather than recognize that His power belongs to Him to accomplish His purposes and do with as He pleases, selfishness begins to plot how Jesus can be used for its own ends. How can we parlay this power into political or economic muscle?

And this is no different than what people today do to Jesus. To a *manipulator* Jesus is nothing more than a power source to be exploited. You can follow Jesus, but for the wrong reasons. It always amazes me why people gravitate toward preachers who are obviously taking advantage of them. Preachers who say, *"Listen to what God says through me, mail in your offering to me... and I guarantee God will send you a husband - or make you millions - or heal your sickness!"* Don't people see that's just a racket! The preacher is just padding his pockets. Why do folks let themselves be exploited in the name of God? Here's why – *because they're no different. They're also trying to exploit God!* Their worship is a bribe. They serve to be served. They scratch God's back, so He'll return the scratch... They're trying to manipulate Jesus so He'll bless and fulfill their agenda... *And Jesus doesn't play those games!*

To the *manipulator* Jesus is someone *to be exploited*, but to the **intimidator** Jesus is someone *to be feared*. He's a threat to their authority. The powerful priests in Jerusalem were making a handsome living off religion. They controlled the Temple Tax, and made money off sacrifices. So when Jesus cleansed the Temple He cut into their profits, and put an end to their charade. Jesus was a danger to their power and the lifestyle it financed. That's why the priests hated Jesus and conspired to kill Him. He was a threat to their power-grab, and needed to be eliminated.

And not much has changed today. For power-hungry people Jesus is still a source of indigestion. He's an obstacle. For folks who aspire to be on top, Jesus gets in the way. You can climb over everyone else, but Jesus. For people who style themselves as the captain of their own ship – and like to call their own shots – *Jesus is a problem*. He's an uninvited intrusion. There's only one Lord. Either it's Jesus or it's you – *but it can't be both*.

For many people today, Jesus cramps their style and nags their conscience. He's a burr under their saddle. Jesus comes along with His absolutes and His insistence on *"truth,"* and He makes us uncomfortable. People will pretend to be a Christian as long as it's *"cool."* But when Jesus initiates changes, or makes hard demands they're quick to draw their distance. Their idea of worship is a tip of the hat on holidays, not the laying down of one's life. Jesus rocks the boat just a little too much!

When Zach went away to college he got use to living on his own. He came and went as He pleased. Set his own hours. Had his own priorities. That's what college is about, *but when he came home we had a talk...* If he wanted the benefits of living under our roof he had to abide by our rules. He had to live under our authority. We were happy to have him as a member of the family, but Kathy and I weren't interested in a roommate.

And neither is Jesus! Jesus is Lord! On Heaven's 1040 Form, Jesus is listed as the Universe's **head of household**. Jesus calls the shots. And He will never allow anyone to *use Him OR excuse Him...*

That means wherever Jesus moves in He takes charge and makes changes. *All for the better, mind you*, but don't think for a second, He's just going to drift into the woodwork, and keep a low profile, and mind His manners, and take out the garbage when He's told, and only speak when He's spoken to, and do His chores for mom and dad... That's not Jesus! The Lord of Glory will be neither *blackmailed* or *blackballed*.

It's ironic, but in the end both groups – *the multitudes* and *the priests* – proved to be supporters of the status quo. Neither wanted real change. *Manipulators* and *intimidators* both prefer for Jesus to leave life alone! I'm sure the multitudes wanted Jesus to add some good stuff to their lives. The priests thanked God for the life they had. But neither group wanted Jesus to take over their life, and reshape it, and redirect its course!

It always surprises me, that when the rubber meets the road, most people are content with things just as they are. We get accustomed to the rut. We'd rather hold on to the familiar, even if it makes us miserable. Most folks will resist change, even if it's a change for the better.

Once we had a homeless man coming to the church. One night the mercury dipped dangerously low. I was concerned for Doug. I went to his shanty shack to pick him up and bring him to my house. But he refused. He chose a frozen hut over a warm house, because he didn't want to give up his vices. At my house he wouldn't be able to smoke or drink. Sinful lifestyles end up a prison. They keep us trapped in the hull.

There're people today who've accepted the emptiness and pain of a life trapped in sin. It's the only life they've known. It's all they think there is... Along the way people accumulate toys and diversions that break up the monotony - that muffle the inward rumblings of their empty soul. Folks stay so busy with amusements they don't have to ponder the meaning of life. People can get so use to the sunken hull of the submarine, that even though they're dying on the inside, they've created an artificial life in the iron hull, and for the short while it lasts, they're naïve but happy campers. It's a brave, relentless few that keep tapping, "[Is There Any Hope?](#)"

Understand, without *acknowledging it* or *admitting it* most humans are staunch supporters of the status quo. They're leery of The Boat Rocker! Many so-called Christians are devoted to Jesus, but only on their own terms. They'll follow Jesus as long as its convenient or advantageous. They don't mind being a Christian as long as they remain in control. But that's not the way Christianity works - when Jesus climbs on board He rocks the boat. He takes charge. Jesus sets up a whole new status quo.

In 1961 the Museum of Modern Art in New York City hosted an exhibit showcasing the artistic talents of the famed French painter, Henri Matisse. But one of the paintings, entitled "*The Sailboat*," hung upside down for 47 days before anyone saw the mistake. Imagine, a masterpiece on exhibit, hung upside down, and none of New York's art connoisseurs noticed.

Yet this was the state of the world for thousands of years before Jesus came. Life was upside down and no one noticed. Yet Jesus saw the evil, and injustice, and prejudice, and pain - and flipped the pictures topsy-turvy. *Jesus pointed to the sinner who beat his chest and was sorry for his sin*, and said his prayer would be heard over the self-righteous hypocrite who thought God owed him... *Jesus counted the widow's mite as more valuable to God*, than the rich man's tip... *Jesus raised a dead boy* and returned him to his mother... *The priests painted God as harsh and petty and vindictive*. Jesus saw Him as a Father rushing to welcome his wayward son home. Jesus turned what was upside down, right side up. Don't look for Jesus to prop up the status quo. [He rocks the boat and makes a better world.](#)

And this is what Jesus is about today! When He enters a life He turns it on its ear. He takes *hopeless, hapless, helpless* lives and flips them around. The risen Christ doles out new love, new desires, new direction, new perspective. He puts a smile on your face - a bounce in your step - a laugh on your lips - a joy in your heart. Jesus establishes new ties, and embellishes you with new gifts. He forgives. He heals. He restores dignity. Jesus opens spiritual eyes and ears as well as physical ones. He fills up our emptiness, and causes love to overflow to others. Jesus brings us out of *death and darkness* into His marvelous *life and light!*

My point is, Jesus doesn't care much for the status quo! Jesus is a boat rocker! He knows this world is an iron hull stuck on the bottom and we desperately need fresh air. Jesus wants to *help you out*, and *pull you up!* Here's good news – [Jesus loves you so much He invites you to come to Him just](#)

as you are, but He loves you so much He doesn't let you stay that way. The *status quo* has got to go. Jesus wants to flip your life right-side up.

Understand, both *the multitudes* and *the priests* got tired of The Boat Rocker, so they united to throw Him overboard, and left Him to drown. *This proves that neutrality toward Jesus is never an option.* In the end, Jesus always forces us to choose sides. When it became apparent to those who *stood in awe of His power* they couldn't *control Him*, they decided to *kill Him*... When it became apparent to those who were *scared of his power* that He wouldn't *back down* they too tried to *put Him down*... Both groups combined to crucify Jesus!

While Jesus was alive they were never able to *nail Him down*. He was too wild, too heavenly, too unpredictable, too dangerous for their tastes. So they *nailed Him* to a cross... Jesus never wore the crown of political clout they ordered for Him, so they thrust on His head a crown of thorns. Jesus was a free spirit, like a bird soaring through the sky, but the Jews didn't like Him flying over their heads. He was a reminder of what they had chosen not to be. They couldn't capture the bird, so they shot Him down. It's been said, "*Each of us is born with a body, a mind, a soul, and a handful of nails. And when a man dies he's never found with nails left clutched in his hands, or stuffed in his pockets.*" When we resist the *gentle ways* and *loving changes* Jesus desires to work in our lives we're pounding in another nail. Are we *followers of Jesus* or *defenders of the status quo*?

I'm sure when they laid Jesus in the tomb and rolled the stone over the mouth of the grave, they said to themselves, "*That's it, we've finally put Jesus in His place!*" That stone was the same as "*throwing away the key.*" Everyone assumed they would never have to worry about Jesus upsetting the apple cart again. "*Now we can get back to business as usual!*" But Jesus wasn't finished shaking up the status quo.

In His lifetime Jesus boxed a few rounds with death, and illness, and paralysis, and blindness - and He wasn't finished with the fight. When Jesus rose from the dead He not only rocked the boat - He capsized it! Jesus knocked out death. After His resurrection, the world was never the same. Death had been declawed. A new hope was born - a new power was unleashed. Jesus began to populate eternity. The risen Lord came out of an *empty tomb* to fill our *empty hearts*! And Jesus keeps rocking the boat. In China... in the Islamic world... in Latin America... at home... Jesus is alive! He's changing lives, and shaping culture, and building His kingdom.

In a recent book, Ravi Zacharias gives some compelling evidence... Toward the middle of 20th century, after communists destroyed all the Christian libraries in China, Chairman Mao made the following statement, "*Christianity has been permanently removed from China, never to return.*" How ironic that on Easter Sunday 2009, a leading newspaper in Hong Kong published a picture of Tiananmen Square. The famous banner of Mao was replaced with the face of Jesus. And the caption read, "*Christ is Risen!*" Before communists took over in China there were less than a million Protestant Christians. Now after 60 years of communism there's 50 million. Today, young people in Islamic lands risk their life to attend Bible Study. Zacharias writes, "*I've talked to CEOs... in Islamic nations who testify of seeing Jesus in visions and dreams and wonder what it all means.*"

Recently, Christians in Conception, Chile began to oppose the sex trade in their city. The town's largest brothel is now a church. A rehabilitation center for sex workers has been opened. There's been great progress. So much so, the prostitutes are suing the Christians for lost wages.

After visiting Africa, a British atheist, Matthew Parris made a confession: "*As an atheist, I truly believe Africa needs God. I've become convinced of the enormous contribution Christian evangelism makes in Africa... I used to avoid this truth... But Christians black and white... heal the sick, teach people to read and write, only the severest kind of secularist could see a mission hospital or school and say the world would be better without it.*" Here's the point, all over the world today, the Boat Rocker is still at it! Wherever Jesus goes He shakes up the status quo. He makes life better.

Jesus still turns lives topsy-turvy. He blazes new trails and teaches new ways! Three days after they killed Him *The Boat Rocker* was back on deck! The Risen Lord Jesus will never be *manipulated* or *intimidated*... or even *annihilated*. You can't *manage Him* - or *mar Him* - or *murder Him*. Jesus is not a man you can *tone down* - or *tie up* - or *turn off*... You'll save wasted years if you realize Jesus won't let you to get comfortable without Him. Did you hear of the little girl who was thrilled about Easter? For weeks it was all she could talk about. She couldn't wait to go to church. Finally, her dad asked if she knew the meaning of the special day. She said, "*I sure do!*" He asked again, "*Well, Honey what does Easter mean?*" She raise her arms, then she cupped her hands around her mouth - and with the loudest voice she could muster, she yelled, "*Surprise!*" That's it!

What does Easter mean? It means surprise death... surprise sin... surprise sickness... surprise depression... surprise wicked world... surprise status quo... Jesus has trumped you all! Jesus now gets the last laugh! Easter means... Surprise all you people who want to control Jesus... *you can't!* Surprise those of you who want Jesus to back down... *He won't!* Surprise, all who are trapped on the bottom and want out... *Hope is alive!*

Remember there were three groups of people around in Jesus' day. There were the **multitudes** and **aristocrats**, and both crucified Jesus. But there was a third group that emerged from that year of miracles. They were called **disciples**. They also *stood in awe of Jesus*, and in many ways they were *fearful of Jesus*. But the difference was in their response... Rather than *manipulate* or *intimidate*, their motive was to *dedicate*.

And there are also disciples today. People who follow Jesus with a pure motive. Rather than *use* Him for their own ends, or *excuse* Him from any governing role in their life – they love Jesus and bow their will before Him. A disciple wants to live his life *with Jesus*, and *for Jesus*.

Jesus told John in Matthew 11:6, "**Blessed is he who is not offended because of Me.**" In other words, happy is the person who doesn't mind letting Jesus call the shots. Happy is the person who's not ashamed to admit he's on the bottom of the ocean and needs help to rise to the surface. Are you trapped in the iron hull? Is life so *hard* you need some *help*? Happy is the person who welcomes Jesus - and invites change. Don't be afraid to let Jesus overturn a few apple carts in your life. He knows what He's doing! Today, why not invite The Boat Rocker to captain your ship?

Perhaps you're *not a Christian*, but you *want to be*. Maybe you *are a Christian*, but haven't been what you *ought to be*. Together let's pray a prayer. Let's ask The Boat Rocker to shake things up in our life. Let's ask Him to come on board and be our captain...