

THE BELLEVILLE MESSENGER

April 7

2024

What An Empty Seat Says

You have probably noticed that most of us often sit in the same spot every time we come together for services, and some of us have even occupied the same seat during every service for years. Therefore, it usually becomes quite noticeable to many when you are not here in attendance, and many soon begin to ponder about what your empty seat says.

You see, when you are absent from services, your seat speaks for you. For instance, some seats are empty due to sickness. Sadly, there are times that we all, like Epaphroditus, will become sick (Philippians 2:25-27), and during those times ones seat will be empty due to physical illness.

Some empty seats speak lukewarmness about those who usually occupy them. Sadly, there are some who are like those Laodiceans of old, and they are neither cold or hot, but rather they are lukewarm in their service to the Lord (Revelation 3:14-16). Think about that. Does your seat ever speak this of you? Are you absent more than you are present because of lukewarmness? Do you just occupy your seat every once in a while in an attempt to keep the brethren from breathing down your neck? Again, I ask, is your seat often empty do to you being lukewarm in your service to the Lord?

Some empty seats speak worldliness. Sadly, there are some seats that are empty because those who usually occupy them are

tangled up in the cares of this world, the deceitfulness of riches, and the desires for other things (Mark 4:18-19). Is your seat often empty due to you being like Demas, who loved this present world (2 Timothy 4:10)? Is your seat empty because you chose to go to the ball game, the golf course, the lake, the shopping mall, or to hang out with family and friends instead of attending services? Is your seat empty because you are always working every chance you get in an attempt to fatten your pocket book? Think about that, beware of worldliness my beloved brethren (1 John 2:15-17), and don't let your seat become abandoned due to worldliness.

Some empty seats speak apostasy (i.e. abandonment of ones faith). Sadly, there are some empty seats because those who used to occupy them have turned away from the Lord and have departed from the faith (1 Timothy 4:1). However, brethren, may we all beware of apostasy (Hebrews 3:12), and may we never forsake the assembling of ourselves together, as is the manner of some (Hebrews 10:25), always remembering, it would have been better not to have known the way of righteousness, than having known it, to turn away from it (2 Peter 20-22). Therefore, when an empty seat is speaking apostasy, let's seek out that one who is missing (Luke 15:4), and let's seek to bring back the erring one (James 5:19-20).

Also, there are some seats that speak death. You see, there are some seats that are empty because those who used to occupy them have kept their appointment with physical death (Hebrews 9:27). Now, although those who have passed on will never fill their seat again, the memory of them will always live on, and we will ponder them in our heart (Luke 2:19). So, always remember brethren, when a fellow brother or sister in Christ dies, we do not sorrow as others who have no hope (1 Thessalonians 4:13), but rather we rejoice in their hope (Titus 1:2), knowing that blessed are the dead who die in the Lord (Revelation 14:13).

My beloved brethren, these are just a few things that an empty seat says. So, once more, remember, when you're not here, your seat speaks for you!

✍ Brad Phillips

Don't Be A Hypocrite

The word “hypocrite” comes from a Greek word meaning “to answer” “then, play-acting, as the actors spoke in dialogue.” Vine says, “It was a custom for Greek and Roman actors to speak in large masks with mechanical devices for augmenting the force of the voice;” so hypocrisy is “putting on a show” of something we are not. It is a particularly ugly word, for even the hypocrites do not like hypocrites, although many seek shelter behind them– blaming them for their own lack of faithfulness.

Hypocrisy is defined in the New Testament by such phrases as “outwardly appear righteous...but within...iniquity;” “honor with lips...heart far from.” (Matt. 23:28; Mark 7:6) Even more pointed are the examples of hypocrisy in the New Testament; for in them we may see ourselves, and make application we might otherwise ignore.

In Luke 12:54ff, Jesus upbraided the people who could fathom weather signs (predicting showers or heat) yet the obvious signs of divinity in their midst they could not or would not see. Do you know people today who are quick to see everything except that which they do not want to see? Jesus called such people “hypocrites.”

Jesus shamed the people who pretended great concern for the Sabbath, objecting to His healing a woman on this day; but saw nothing wrong with caring for their stock on the Sabbath. (Luke 13:11-17) Do we freely criticize others with rules we would not think of applying to ourselves? Jesus said this is hypocrisy. Blinded by a beam, we search for the other fellow's speck.

Even Peter “dissembled” (Gal. 2:11-21) and this is from the same root word as “hypocrisy.” He would not associate with gentile Christians in Antioch, pretending loyalty to the Law of Moses; when in reality he feared the scorn of prominent Judaizers. Other Jews, including Barnabas, were led astray by this dissimulation; even today many weak people may be adversely affected by well-known people who sacrifice conviction for popular approval. Hypocrisy is devilish. And even if no other parties are involved, hypocrisy does something to the hypocrite that is devilish.

Folk “depart from the faith, giving heed to seducing spirits, and doctrines of devils; Speaking lies in hypocrisy; having their conscience

seared with a hot iron.” (1 Tim. 4:1-2) The “lies” one tells in hypocrisy (by word and deed) have a poisonous effect upon the “actor”– so that he comes to believe his own false face, and his former moral conscience is so seared that it no longer can be pricked. Now he sees only the make-believe mask he has painted for himself– with angelic smile and shining halo– and it is difficult (if not impossible, 2 Peter 2:18ff) to renew him again to repentance. He has become a victim of his own lies, and may go to hell proclaiming his righteousness.

Now let us not confuse weakness, spiritual immaturity, or lack of knowledge with hypocrisy. There are no absolutely perfect Christians in the world– all are subject to error in faith and practice. But all can and must be honest with themselves, with others, and with God.

✍ Robert Turner

Mark Your Calendar

Our Gospel Meeting Is: April 14-19

Preacher: Don Wright

Sunday: Regular Service Times

Monday-Friday: 7pm

Belleville church of Christ

5635 S County Rd 200E - Belleville, IN - (317) 539-5258

www.bellevillechurch.net

Schedule of Services

Sunday Bible Study	9:30 a.m.
Sunday Morning Worship	10:30 a.m.
Sunday Evening Worship	4:00 p.m.
Wednesday Bible Study	7:00 p.m.

Evangelist

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