

"THE BEST SEATS IN THE HOUSE"

A Sermon By

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She requested that when Jesus came to His Kingdom that He would grant that her two boys...her two sons...could have the two seats closest to Him. She wanted the best seats for her boys. And neither she, nor her two boys, realized that they, as apostles of Jesus, already had honorable places. Then Jesus quietly shocked them with his announcement, saying...

"You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great ones are tyrants over them. It will not be so among you; but whosoever wishes to be GREAT among you must be your servant." (Matthew 20: 26)

OUR DESIRE...A LONGING FOR GOD

What is this desire to have the best seat in the house. I've heard people that I respect say that our desire to have the best seat in the house is a longing for God. Think about it. We look for the best seats everywhere else, but as Augustine long ago said,

"We are made for God...and our hearts are restless until they find their rest in God"

The name of Bill Bright is familiar to some of you for he was at one time the founder of Campus Crusade and in recent years I believe he has spent time in the former Soviet Union showing a Jesus of Nazareth film to millions. One of his best known works is a little tract called, The Four Spiritual Laws. In this tract he has a drawing of a throne. On the throne is self. He asks us to remove self from the throne and put Christ on the throne. Could it be that the best seat in the house really belongs to Christ? Do we ever find ourselves too often trying to sit in God's seat?

A recent movie about Wyatt Earp has Wyatt going into a gambling establishment. The place is almost empty. No one is inside. He inquires why no one is coming into the place. He discovers that the dealer of this gambling establishment is so mean and so nasty that he's running everyone off. Wyatt goes over and stands next to the dealer. The dealer then turns to him and curses him and abuses him and asks, "What do you want?" And Wyatt Earp responds,

"I believe you are in my seat....."

That is what Jesus Christ is saying to each of us today. "Friend...I believe you are sitting in my seat". You ask, where is our seat then? Could it be that the great place of honor we are looking for is right there...at the feet of Jesus. At the foot of the cross?

Some of you from North Carolina may recall that Dean Smith, the former head coach of basketball at the University of North Carolina once wrote a book, entitled, The Best Seat In the House. You and I might think that Dean Smith meant that the coach's seat was the best seat in the house because it put him in charge of the game, that it gave him control. Most of us say to ourselves, "If only I could just sit in 'so and so's seat' for just one day", but in reality the coach's seat is the best seat in the house for Dean Smith because it is there that he has the opportunity to make other persons into star players and the better he does his job the more attention is paid to the players he develops. The coach's seat allows him to develop such players as...Michael Jordan.

Recently someone asked a dedicated Christian woman, "What is the secret of your being able to influence so many people?" She responded, saying...

"When you have contentment in your life others are attracted to you. The secret of contentment is to put Christ in the center everywhere you go. When you are promoted and when you are demoted. Remember Joseph....he was always in the center of God's will, even when he was abused by others. He did not let his position or lack of position in life keep him from being in the proper place. Because he kept GOD in the center, he always had the best seat in the house!"

I like that. In other words, get the center right and the circumference will take care of itself.

SEARCHING FOR THE BEST PLACE

We are each in search of the way to find the best place, the best seat for us.

Where can we find guidance? I think that when we read the Gospels we discover that the disciples found the best seat in the house by choosing to accept the challenge of Jesus to invest their lives in others.

Remember that moving scene where Jesus came into the marketplace at the docks on Galilee's shore. There He found some commercial fishermen. He asked them to allow Him to use one of their boats as a bit of a teaching platform. And after He finished teaching and talking to the people, He gave them an invitation,

"Follow Me....and I will make you fishers of men".

He was asking them to give up their seats in their little fishing boats for something better, something bigger, and something far more lasting...to invest their lives in others. It's there in Luke's Gospel, chapter 5, verses 1 - 13.

Neil Scarlett's pastor stood by his hospital bed. Neil was a big, red-headed man who took charge as soon as he walked into any room. But he was not in charge that day. He was there, in a hospital bed, facing bypass heart surgery. He knew that his chances were somewhere between slim and none. His pastor had taken the conversation to deeper levels and had asked Neil Scarlett if he was "ready to meet the Lord".

"Yes, I'm as ready as I can be....if I had my life to live over, I would not change a thing. I'm a farmer. Every piece of land that has come into my possession, I have tried to make better. When my wife and I started out, we had no land. We both worked and saved until we could buy forty acres and an old house. We improved the house and the fences and upgraded the fertility of the land. Soon we found the opportunity to buy a place next to it.

God has been good to us...very good to us! We're proud of what we've done....the finest dairy in the state...we've developed over a thousand acres. NO, I would not change one thing. All I ever wanted was a little more land...I've always been content to buy just what touched mine...."

Then he began to laugh and his pastor-friend, asked...."Wjy are you laughing, Neil?" And he replied,

"You know...I guess God has used you to get through to me today. God knows that there is some unfinished business. I do not own that farm. God does! God has been good to me to allow me to develop it, but I know now that my place it not as the owner, but as the trustee. God is the owener.

Let's pray, preacher.....I need to move over and let God take His rightful place as the owner and I need to take my place as His servant.....yes, as HIS servant."

Neil and his pastor had a warm and wonderful prayer together. The surgery was successful on both Neil's physical heart and also on his spiritual heart. He had found his rightful place.....he had discovered while he was still alive that sitting at the feet of Jesus is truly the best seat in the house. He who has the ears to hear, let him...her her...hear.

PRAYER

Make us sensitive to Your nearness in these moments, O God....to Your peace and power and purpose for us. Wrestle with us in the hidden corners of our lives where pride and ambition so often are in conflict with sacrifice and service in Your kingdom. Help us to find the best seat in the house, the one that puts us at the feet of Jesus....willing to give of ourselves without thought of reward or recognition. In His name we pray. Amen.