

The Bulletin

Meeks St. Church of Christ

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“Empty Seats” Part I

by Brian Meade

The year 2020 started with so much promise and potential, but soon started to be a different one than what we have ever seen in our lifetime. The Coronavirus began to lockdown everyone, except essential workers. This meant that after March, churches were no longer meeting like they once had for so long. There were a lot of empty seats!



Many preachers and Bible class teachers began doing on-line studies in various venues such as Zoom, YouTube, FaceBook, and many similar areas of communication. These all provided a way to reach congregants and helped in some ways to get the gospel out in ways like never before. But for the majority of the year, the normal order of how we, as a church, was disrupted. It made things extremely difficult to grow in such an atmosphere. That is putting it mildly.

If any good came out of the lockdowns and online services (and I believe much good has been done), it gave us a greater appreciation for being able to freely meet for Bible studies and worship. For many months, we greatly missed assemblies—gatherings that may have

been taken for granted that we can always have an opportunity to meet as the body of Christ (Acts 20:7; 1 Corinthians 5:4; 11:23-26; 14:26; 16:1-2).

The purpose of my article today is to look at “empty seats” before, during, and after this Pandemic of the Coronavirus. Seats were empty before the year 2020 and they will be so for a variety of reasons. Yet, there are some important lessons we can learn from *why* seats are not occupied by those who need to be in the assemblies of the saints. We need to see what a glaring absence says!

In I Samuel 20:18, the Scriptures tell us, *“Then Jonathan said to him, “Tomorrow is the new moon, and you will be missed because your seat will be empty.”*

We find the absence of David at the king’s table, that is announced by Jonathan, also a glaring absence as well. David wanted to know the reaction of Saul to his absence, and soon found out his intention toward him. But the fact that his seat was empty caused those who loved David to miss him, but not King Saul!

There are times that seats are empty because:

(1) Some Never See The Need to Assemble.

But they need to! It is sad that many will be lost because they do not worship and serve God in the local church. This is where faithfulness begins, when all see the need to be where the presence of God is among us.

(2) Some Don’t Make It A Priority To Be At Services.

Attendance to worship and Bible study assemblies should be a top priority, but some look at it as less than important. They are here with us only occasionally and thus, lack dependability in their service.

(3) Some Have Moved Away And Their Seat Is Empty.

When families move away for economic or other reasons, we bid them farewell, and miss them being with us. But as long as they remain faithful to the Lord in their new location, all is well. We understand why their seat is empty.

(4) Some Are Occasionally Working And Their Seat Is Empty.

We do have some in our assemblies who have employers that do require an occasional work period on a Sunday. This is not an every Sunday occurrence and is not what they would choose to do, if they had a choice.

(5) Some Are Physically Sick And Their Seat Is Empty.

This is another occasion where someone gets an illness like the flu or some other contagious sickness that keeps them at home for a while. I believe the Lord understands when we are hurt or sick in some way or another or even now in the times that we are in—quarantined because of the Coronavirus. That is not forsaking the assembly that Hebrews 10:25 forbids us to do.

(6) Some Seat Are Empty Because Some Have Gone On To Be With The Lord. Sadly, we know many who have occupied seats in the building of the local church and are no longer with because they have passed from the scene in death. We all know we cannot stay here on the earth forever, and yet it is difficult to let them go. We may be like Paul in having a desire to stay and a desire to depart to be with Christ, which is far better (Philippians 1:23). Our whole goal in this life is to go to heaven. But yet, we must leave an empty seat on earth— where we once served Christ here.

(7) Some Are Empty Because Of Circumstances Beyond Their Control.

There are times that circumstances cause us to miss services, even when we greatly desire to be there. There may be a closed road due to snow, or a flat tire on our vehicle, or some other mechanical problem that delays or keeps us from assembling. I once was going to a Gospel Meeting at a certain place in Kentucky when a logging truck overturned and blocked my road leaving my house. I had to stay home and missed a good sermon that night. Those incidents are few and far between, but they do cause us to be an empty seat when they do happen. We cannot help, what we cannot help.

What Empty Seats Can Do:

(1) They Can Show Who Does Not Want To See The Lord.

When Jesus was here on the earth, great crowds followed him to be healed and to listen to His teachings (Matthew 4:25; 5:1; 8:1; 13:2; 14:13). The Bible records the time for us that some Gentiles wanted to see Jesus in John 12:20-22. It is given to us as an example of interest in seeing the Savior. We too should desire to see Jesus. We also see a great example of such desire in the story of Zaccheus in Luke 19:3-4. Because of his effort of climbing the tree to see Jesus, he got a golden opportunity to spend some time with Him at his own home.

All true spiritually-minded persons should want to spend some time with Jesus, but empty seats at Bible study and worship actually shows something about our faith. If we are an empty seat, we need to no longer stay away from where Jesus is being taught and honored!

(2) They Can Indicate That Our Faith Is Wavering.

Hebrews 10:23 tells us to not waver in our faith, as it says, *“Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for He who promised is faithful.”*

If our faith was wavering and faltering, what would be the signs or signals of such a dangerous thing? Can we determine that we are growing weaker in such areas as Bible study, prayer, and even attendance at worship. When we find ourselves being an empty seat, it makes it easier to miss more and more services.

(3) They Can Show Misplaced Priorities.

Jesus spoke of this kind of wrong priorities in Mark 4:19, *“and the cares of this world, the deceitfulness of riches, and the desires for other things entering in choke the word, and it becomes unfruitful.”* Some are empty seats because they are pursuing other things. They are absent many times because their treasure is in the world— Not in Christ’s service.

(4) They Can Show A Lack Of Love For The Brethren.

When we are gone from the assembly, essentially AWOL, it can be because we haven’t developed a love for our fellow laborers in the Lord like we should (1 Thessalonians 4:9; 1 Peter 1:22). There should be the closeness and bond of a family that prays and stays together in our congregation. If that love is gone, it will be easy to stay away and not our rightful place there at the building.

(5) They Can Discourage The Brethren.

When Paul penned the sad words of Scripture in 2 Timothy 4:10, *“for Demas has forsaken me, having loved this present world, and has departed for Thessalonica,”* we can only imagine the reaction of the brethren of Demas’ apostasy from the faith. We may know how they may have reacted from our having the same news reported to us in the local church. It can be somewhat discouraging when someone has chosen to no longer be faithful to the Lord. They have decided to be an empty seat because of the world’s appeal.

(6) They Can Remind Us Of The Need To Evangelize The World.

One of the great reminders of our need to reach out to the lost, is the amount of empty seats that we need to fill. Jesus gave us the great commission in Mark 16:15-16, *“And He said to them, “Go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature. He who believes and is baptized will be saved; but he who does not believe will be condemned.”* Jesus also said that, *“...The harvest truly is plentiful, but the laborers are few. Therefore pray the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into His harvest.”* Empty seats remind us that we still have much needed work to do! (Conclusion next week)

“Seven Rules of Life”

Lesson Text: **Galatians 6:16**. All of us are walking by some rule in life.
Which One guides Us?

1. The Mire Rule.

- Those Who Follow It, Destroy What They Can't Use.
 - A. Ezekiel 34:15-19; God saves from this kind— vs. 20-24.**
 - B. Jeremiah 38:1-13 (Vs. 6).**
 - C. 3 John 9-11.**

2. The Clay Rule.

- Those Who Follow It, say, *“Eat, Drink, And Be Merry.”*
 - A. The Rich Farmer- Luke 12:16-20.**
 - B. 1 Corinthians 15:32— Isaiah 22:13.**

3. The Iron Rule.

- Those Who Follow It, say, *“Might Makes Right.”*
 - A. Proverbs 1:10-14— Luke 10:30.**
 - B. Eli's Sons lived this way- 1 Samuel 2:15-17.**
 - C. Nathan's Parable- 2 Samuel 12:1-4.**

4. The Brass Rule.

- Those Who Follow It, Do Everything By Legal Right.
 - A. 1 Samuel 25:11.**
 - B. Priest and Levite- Luke 10:31-34.**
 - C. Rich Young Ruler- Matthew 19:20-22.**

5. The Silver Rule.

- Those Who Follow It, Believe Life Should Be About Keeping It Even.
 - A. “Eye for an Eye” Matthew 5:38.**
 - B. Luke 6:32-35; Matthew 25:25.**

6. The Golden Rule.

- Those Who Follow It, Practice To Other What They Want To Themselves.
 - A. Matthew 7:12; Matthew 5:43-45.**
 - B. Matthew 18:30-35.**

7. The Diamond Rule.

- Those Who Follow It, Prefer Others Before Themselves.
 - A. Abraham- Genesis 13:8-11.**
 - B. Romans 12:10; Philippians 2:1-4.**

News and Notes: Sick and recovering: Tim Harris Sr, Tim Harris Jr, Chad Harris, June Lawson (Lisa Busby's Mom), Debbie Keplinger, Janis Johnson, Daniel Holloway, Betty Hurst, Peggy Harville (cancer), Clois Wright, Dan & Linda Hunt, Mollie Harris, David Taylor, Randy Beaty, Sam Johnson, Sherry Doles, Roy Robinson, Danny Cottrell (Dan's Dad) and Annie Jean Harrison.

Those Who Serve:

Announcements:	Fred Johnson
Opening Prayer & Scripture Reading:	Russell Briggs <i>Galatians 6:16</i>
Song Leader:	Jerry Kennemur
Lord's Supper:	Sam Johnson
Preaching:	Brian Meade
Sermon:	<i>"Seven Rules of Life"</i>
Closing Prayer:	Tim Harris Jr.

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