

The Empty Seat

Text: I Samuel 20:16-25; 40-42

One of the most touching stories in the Bible is the undying friendship of David and Jonathan. In our text, David's life was in jeopardy from Saul, the jealous king and father of Jonathan. Jonathan devised a means to signal David through the means of his expert archery, as to whether David should remain hidden or come to the palace. The signal David received was that danger was still present; therefore, David cannot come back to the palace for a period of time. Meanwhile, back at the palace, Saul demonstrated his utter contempt for David and disgust with Jonathan, and so David's seat was going to stay empty. David did not realize at this time, that although he was an outcast and his seat would be empty, that Jonathan, the brave warrior, would continue to stand for the truth and his friend David. Eventually Jonathan's seat would be permanently empty (II Samuel 1:22-27).

On this Memorial Day weekend, we honor those who paid the ultimate price for freedom. President Lincoln said it best in his closing words of the Gettysburg Address: "...that from these honored dead we take increased devotion to that cause for which they gave the last full measure of devotion -- that we here highly resolve that these dead shall not have died in vain -- that this nation, under God, shall have a new birth of freedom -- and that government of the people, by the people, for the people, shall not perish from the earth."

1. MEMORIALS HELP US TO REMEMBER

Joshua 4:1-7

God wanted the Israelites to never forget their deliverance from bondage in Egypt, thus the twelve stones were placed on the banks of the Jordan at the crossing at Gilgal. Significantly, Gilgal means "a rolling." The past slavery in Egypt was rolling behind them. I believe this is also why twelve stones were placed in the riverbed of the Jordan, covered over with water to symbolize that the children of Israel were done with Egypt.

Today, around our country "Missing Man Tables" have been set up. These memorials will be found in auspicious state war memorials and can also be found in as humble a place as Chic-Fil-A. The display consists of a round table, illustrating the never-ending remembrance of the fallen patriot. It is covered with a white tablecloth, which stands for the fallen heroes' or heroines' purity of motive. There is a single red rose representing the grief of the family who miss their family member. The red ribbon around the vase represents the shed blood of the fallen. The lemon slice on the plate represents the bitter way in which the fallen had passed from this life. The folded American flag resting on the plate represents the valor of the deceased patriot. Salt sprinkled on the bread plate symbolizes the tears shed by waiting families. A lone candle symbolizes the light of hope. The open Bible represents faith in God who holds us. An inverted glass represents the fact that the missing and fallen cannot partake in the joys of life on Earth. And finally, the empty chair is lovingly placed to represent the absence of the fallen.

2. THERE WAS A TRANSITORY MISSING SEAT IN HEAVEN

Isaiah 6:1: "In the year that king Uzziah died I saw also the Lord sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up, and His train filled the temple."

Revelation 4:2: "And immediately I was in the spirit: and, behold, a throne was set in heaven, and One sat on the throne."

Between Isaiah's vision of One sitting upon a throne and John's revelation of One sitting upon the same throne, something happened. E.S. Elliot wrote, "Thou didst leave Thy throne and Thy kingly crown, when Thou camest to earth for me."

Philippians 2:6-8: "Who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God: But made Himself of no reputation, and took upon Him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men: And being found in fashion as a man, He humbled Himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross."

For a period of 33 ½ years, The Lord Jesus, Second Person of the Holy Trinity's throne was vacant. He Whom the angels waited upon was confined to Earth. He Whom all of Heaven worshipped was not manifest in the Third Heaven. The purpose of our Lord in giving up His seat was for our salvation. He gave up His seat to give us forgiveness of sins and residency in Heaven.

Now when Christ finished His mission to die, be buried and rise again for us, the Bible declares that our Lord took His seat back in the Glory! Hebrews 10:11-14: "And every priest standeth daily ministering and offering oftentimes the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins: But this Man, after he had offered one sacrifice for sins for ever, sat down on the right hand of God; From henceforth expecting till His enemies be made His footstool. And every priest standeth daily ministering and offering oftentimes the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins: For by one offering He hath perfected for ever them that are sanctified."

3. THERE IS A SEAT SAVED FOR YOU

Luke 14:16, 17: "Then said he unto him, A certain man made a great supper, and bade many: And sent his servant at supper time to say to them that were bidden, Come; for all things are now ready."

Luke 15:24: "For this my son was dead, and is alive again; he was lost, and is found. And they began to be merry." The Father of the prodigal son ordered the fatted calf to be butchered and served up.

My dear friend, Lance Carpenter wrote a most memorable song entitled, *He's Still Setting My Place at The Table*. Brother Carpenter is now with the Lord, but his song, which transcends time, reminds the prodigal that there is a way back home. Here are a couple of stanzas:

"It's amazing that I never saw, till today, Just how foolish, a son I have been.
The grass is not greener here and nobody cares, oh But I know where I've got a friend.
He's still setting my place at the table. He's still calling my name in prayer. He still looks
up the road, because somehow He knows,
His prodigal son is coming home.

I lost everything I had just to find out what I needed I had all along;
Now I'm leaving this place, I want to see my Father's face, just to hear Him say. "Son,
welcome home.

He's still setting my place at the table. He's still calling my name in prayer.

Now I'm in the right place. Just a trophy of grace;

The prodigal son has come home."

II Samuel 14:14: "For we must needs die, and are as water spilt on the ground,
which cannot be gathered up again; neither doth God respect any person: yet doth He
devise means, that His banished be not expelled from Him."

-Pastor Pope-