

The Empty Seat

by Dr. Walter L. Wilson

"Thou shalt be missed" (I Samuel 20:18).

The main thought of this message is found in these interesting words, "Thou shalt be missed, because thy seat will be empty" (I Samuel 20:18). These words were spoken by Jonathan to David on the occasion of a feast which King Saul held regularly, and to which he invited the immediate members of his family and the leaders of his forces. The feast was to take place on the day after this conversation was held. A seat would be placed at the banquet table for David, but knowing Saul's enmity against him, as indicated to Jonathan, Saul's son, David did not intend to be present. Jonathan's reply to David is found in the words just quoted.

The empty seat may tell a sad story. The vacant chair at Saul's table told of David's fear and of Saul's enmity against him. It revealed the hatred of Saul's heart against the man whom God had chosen to be king. The empty place at the table aroused Saul's anger, and he inquired with much show of animosity concerning David's whereabouts.

Perhaps you have an empty chair at your table. It may be a high-chair where a little one once sat. That precious life has been taken and the vacant seat brings a heartbreak and the tears. It may be a vacant rocking chair that stirs the heart and brings back the days of precious fellowship with an aged grandmother. Perhaps it is the swivel chair in the den which once was occupied by an honored father. It speaks mutely of former days of blessing when his radiance filled the home with sunshine.

Sometimes a throne is vacant. A rebellion has robbed the people of their ruler and death has overtaken him from wicked hands. It may be that that throne-chair will never again be occupied by an imperial ruler. The democracy has superseded the autocracy.

Do you have a vacant chair in your home? Do the visiting friends ask about that little child's chair that stands in the corner unused, or the old, well-worn, reclining chair which silently testifies of its former occupants?

An Empty Seat Means Separation

David's chair at the feast would be empty because David was away from God's enemy and intended to stay away. He would not be found in the fellowship of those who were hostile to God's plans and enemies of God's people. He was away from the man who rejected God's Word. He would not sit with him at the same banquet table. He was away with one who loved the Lord, for Jonathan was true to God. David was away getting his faith renewed and his heart comforted. The Lord does not want His child to sit with the scornful, nor to keep company with those who are enemies of His Word.

The empty chair that day at Saul's feast was a potent testimony to the decision which David had made. He had separated himself to God. He chose rather to wander in the fields with God than to sit at the feast with Saul. It is never the will of the Lord that the child of God should feel at home in fellowship with an enemy of God. David was a man after God's own heart, and took God's path in separation.

Judas chose to vacate his place. He might have had a throne with the other eleven men, for Christ had said in Matthew 19:28—"Ye which have followed me, in the regeneration when the Son of man shall sit in the throne of his glory, ye also shall sit upon twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel." Judas chose a rope instead of God's robe. He chose hanging instead of reigning. He preferred money to the gifts of his Master. He hung from a tree instead of sitting on a throne. He became an enemy of Christ instead of ruling with Christ. He kissed the Saviour instead of crowning Him. His seat and his throne were taken by another. We may wonder whether Judas is missed in glory by the other eleven disciples who are there.

Empty Seats in heaven

How tragic it is that in heaven there will be many empty seats! Perhaps they will not be empty. They may be occupied by others, but those who might have had them and should have occupied them chose rather to find comfortable seats in this world and forfeit a throne in the next. Let each one of us ask ourselves whether we have chosen a seat there, or whether we are content with what we have here.

There was an empty chair at Jacob's table—Joseph was missing. The other boys were there, but his was an empty chair. Joseph was gone. The empty place at the table held the secret of the desperate, dark deed which the other brothers had perpetrated against the younger one. The father looked at the empty chair and checked back the tears. He looked at the vacant place at the table and wept over the tragic loss. Will the circle be broken in heaven? Will your chair be empty? Will your seat

be vacant? Will you let another take your place there while you are shut out?

There was an empty seat at David's table—Absalom, his own son, had rebelled. He had turned his back on his father and left the palace. David, the sweet singer of Israel, could only look at the vacancy and seek to control the emotions of his heart. He loved Absalom greatly and grieved over his absence deeply.

Absalom chose a path of wickedness and sin, and his chair remained empty. The grave in the woods and the vacancy at the table scarred David's soul grievously and he carried the wound to his death.

An Empty Chair in Father's House

There was an empty chair one day in the home of a loving father. A prodigal son chose the gifts of his father, but rejected and refused the father's love. Having received his inheritance, the son said good-bye to the one who had made the money, the one who had saved it for him, the one who loved him. He left an empty chair in the home, an empty bed upstairs, and an aching heart in the father's breast. How long that chair remained empty is not told. The vacant place at the table reminded the heartbroken father constantly of the absence of the boy he loved.

As the days went by, and the money was being spent by the prodigal, the call of the vacant chair became stronger and stronger. The father watched for that lad to come home—waiting, hoping, longing. Perhaps you are that boy. It may be you, too, have preferred the gifts instead of the giver, and the gifts have gradually or suddenly faded into oblivion.

The heavenly Father is watching and waiting for you to return and to occupy your seat at His table. It may be you would like to return just now. The chair is still there; a welcome awaits you. The Father desires to see your happy face again in the circle of His loved ones. Will you not come home just now?

The Wedding Robe Rejected

In Matthew 22:11 there is the beginning of a story which starts another vacant seat. The friend in this passage had come in to occupy a chair, but he was not robed with the wedding garment. He had not complied with the requirements of the host. He had presumed to wear his own suit, instead of receiving the garment which the master of the feast had specified. He had rebelled in his heart against the robe which the others had received and substituted his own will and wish, instead of the will

of the Lord of the banquet.

When the king entered the room, he questioned this friend about his impudence and his antagonistic attitude. No answer was received because the conscience of the friend reproved him and prevented the making of an excuse. The king ordered his servants to bind the man hand and foot and to cast him into outer darkness. The empty seat that remained was a mute witness to the severity of God against the one who rebels at His Word. Will there be an empty chair in glory because you would not bow to God's will and receive by faith the robe of righteousness obtained through the Lord Jesus Christ? Do let the warning of that empty chair prevent you from doing likewise!

Absent Ones Forever Missed

How sad is the cry, "He should be here!" How deeply grieved our hearts become when we note the absence of a dear one and the empty seat! It is so difficult to go back into the home after a funeral and see the chair where father sat, and the bed where he slept, and the desk at which he worked, all vacant and silent. How much more so will it be in heaven when we find that those we hoped would be there and expected would come, are absent!

The Lord does not tell us just how we shall feel about it. Of course, we shall have the mind of Christ. We shall think as He does about lost souls, but no doubt there will be a consciousness of the empty chair in the family circle, and the vacant seat which should have been occupied by a loved one who would not come.

Those words of Jonathan to David, "Thou shalt be missed, because thy seat will be empty," should stir our hearts to gather in as many as possible to the great feast of our Lord.

Will you be there, my friend? Someone will occupy the seats in glory. Will you have one? Do not permit the precious blood of Christ to be shed in vain as far as you are concerned. Do make Christ Jesus your Lord and Saviour now and He will have a seat for you in the Father's house.

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