The Best Seat In the House
Luke 14:7-11 (NKJV)

Please turn with me in your Bibles to tonight’s scripture text in the Gospel of Luke, chapter fourteen, and let's read VERSES 7-11.

Luke 14:7-11 (NKJV)

7 So He told a parable to those who were invited, when He noted how they chose the best places, saying to them:

8 “When you are invited by anyone to a wedding feast, do not sit down in the best place, lest one more honorable than you be invited by him;

9 and he who invited you and him come and say to you, ‘Give place to this man,’ and then you begin with shame to take the lowest place.

10 But when you are invited, go and sit down in the lowest place, so that when he who invited you comes he may say to you, ‘Friend, go up higher.’ Then you will have glory in the presence of those who sit at the table with you.

11 For whoever exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted.”

PRAYER

Introduction

Sammy Morris was a Christian from Africa who came to the United States to attend school. The day Sammy Morris arrived at Taylor University in Upland, Indiana, the president of the school asked Sammy which room he wanted. Sammy humbly responded, “If there is a room nobody wants, give it to me.”
The school president later commented......” When I walked away from Sammy Morris that day, my eyes filled with tears. I wondered to myself, would I be willing to take what nobody else wanted?”

Its human nature to want “the best seat in the house” isn't it?

ILLUSTRATION: Years ago, our son Seth, our son-in-law Todd, Linda's dad and I went to see Michael Jordan and the Chicago Bulls plan an NBA exhibition game against Allen Iverson and the Philadelphia 76's at the Dean Dome in Chapel Hill.

When I was ordering the tickets on the telephone, I asked for the best seats she had left. I figured if we were going to plop down $28 a ticket we might as well get the best. Well the lady assured me I was getting some really “great seats” as she described them.

Well our “great seats” turned out not to be so great. In fact, we were sitting so far from the basketball floor we were in a different ZIP CODE.

When you go to a restaurant, you don't ask the hostess to give you the worst seats in the house, do you? When you go to see your kids or grand kids in a school program, you don't want the “worst seats in the house” do you? No, you want a seat where you can see everything that's going on.

What do you suppose is “the best seat in the Church building?” Well, most people would probably say its “the back seat!” I mean in all my years I have never seen anybody racing to get a front row seat for a worship service!
ILLUSTRATION

I read an article many years ago that DIPLOMATIC NEGOTIATING TEAMS spend many hours and thousands of dollars planning the “seating arrangement” when Diplomats from foreign countries come together to discuss International Relations. If a diplomat is made to sit in a seat that makes him feel “less important” than the other diplomats it can break down the diplomatic talks.

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Here in our TEXT, Jesus has some very important truths to teach us about THE BEST SEAT IN THE HOUSE.

We learn in VERSE 1 of this fourteenth chapter that JESUS had been invited to the home of one of the leaders of the Pharisees to enjoy a Sabbath meal. All of the “big wigs” in the Pharisees’ “religious circle” had gathered for this meal.

Well when JESUS arrived, he noticed that one of the guests was a man who had a disease called “dropsy.” Dropsy or “edema” as it was once known was an abnormal collection of serous fluids that causes a painful swelling of the face, neck and bodily extremities.

Now this brings up an interesting question. Why had this man been invited? There is no mention of him being a Pharisee or a religious “big wig,” so why is he there? He is a “total misfit” with all the other invited guests. He was there for one reason and one reason only! The Pharisees were using him as “BAIT” to entrap Jesus. Remember it was the SABBATH DAY. And there were numerous laws about what one COULD and COULD NOT do on the Sabbath Day. So as Luke tells us in VERSE 1, the Pharisees “WATCHED JESUS CLOSELY.”

Jesus was fully aware of their evil intent to trap Him, so He went on the offensive. He put this question to the Pharisees, “Is it lawful to heal on the Sabbath?” VERSE 4 says, “But they kept silent.” So Jesus healed the man of His dropsy, leaving the Pharisees dumbfounded as to what to say or do.
Well its time for dinner. And as everyone starts to make his way towards the table, Jesus notices there are some “jockeying for position” at the head table.

It was a custom in those days that the most honored guest sit closest to the host, with those of lesser honor sitting farther away. And the decision as to who got to sit in the seat of honor was determined by the HOST, not by the guests. Where one was seated at the table revealed a lot about where he stood on “the social pecking order.”

Seeing these men pushing and shoving to get to the best seats provided Jesus with a “golden opportunity” to tell a parable about “The Best Seat In The House.”

As we go back and look at our text we learn three valuable lessons.

First of all...........

I. The Best Seat In the House Is THE LEAST DESIRABLE SEAT (v.7)

7 So He told a parable to those who were invited, when He noted how they chose the best places, saying to them:

1. Notice these men weren't fighting over the worst seats. They weren't fighting over the seats farthest from the host. They were fighting for the most desired seats in the house......the seats of honor.......the seats nearest to the host.
2. If you were ever in High School band you remember each section of the band had CHAIR 1.......CHAIR 2......CHAIR 3 and so on and so forth. CHAIR 1 was the most “coveted” chair! That special seat was reserved for the best trumpet player, the best clarinet player, the best saxophone player, the best trombone player, the best flute player, so on and so forth.

3. Well “chair 1” at this dinner would have been the one closest to the host.......chair 2 the next seat.......chair 3 the next seat and on down the line.

4. Now if these men were fighting over “the most desirable” seats, chances are JESUS wound up sitting in “the least desirable seat” if He even got a seat at all.

5. The “least desired seat” is the place of humility. It is the place no one wants. No one is “proud” or “boastful” when he is sitting in the “least desirable seat.”

6. And from our LORD’S viewpoint, **THE LEAST DESIRABLE SEAT IS THE BEST SEAT IN THE HOUSE!**
Secondly, Jesus teaches us.....

II. The Best Seat In The House Is THE LEARNING SEAT (vs. 8,9)

8 “When you are invited by anyone to a wedding feast, do not sit down in the best place, lest one more honorable than you be invited by him;

9 and he who invited you and him come and say to you, ‘Give place to this man,’ and then you begin with shame to take the lowest place.

ILLUSTRATION

Picture if you will, you are at a formal wedding reception. Everyone has taken their places at the table. Then the new bride and groom make their grand entrance and walk towards “the head table” in the banquet room. As the bride and groom arrive at their seats they notice something is very out of place. Sitting in the chairs where THE BEST MAN and THE MADE OF HONOR are supposed to be seated is a strange couple dressed in blue jeans and tee shirts whom the bride and groom have never seen before.

The bride and groom grab the two strangers by the elbow and escort them out of their seats and return with THE BEST MAN and MAID OF HONOR who rightfully belong in those seats.

1. One of the greatest dangers in the Christian life is to think more highly of ourselves than we ought. PRIDE is a deadly enemy!

2. It is so easy to promote ourselves to a “position of honor” in the kingdom because we preach......or......teach a Sunday School class.......or......because we're an elder or deacon in the Church......or the best soloist in the choir.......or because we give more money to the Church than anyone else.......or because of all the good deeds we do for others.
3. And when we elevate ourselves to position of honor, it should not surprise us if the LORD humbles us in one way or another. Just like that “strange couple” at the wedding, the LORD may remove us from our SEAT OF HONOR and place us in a SEAT OF HUMILITY so we can LEARN OUR PROPER PLACE.

4. Humility is NOT something we are born with. It isn't a GIFT that some people are blessed with and others aren't. Humility must be learned, it must be experienced.

5. Oh brothers and sisters, when you and I consider our miserable wretchedness and we consider the holiness and righteousness of GOD, how could any of us ever proudly seat ourselves in a seat of high honor?

   Like JACOB we must “count ourselves unworthy of the least of God's mercies.”

   Like ISAIAH we must cry out, “Woe is me, for I am undone, I am a man of unclean lips.”

   Like the apostle PAUL, we must cry out, “I am the chief of all sinners.”

The Best Seat In The House Is THE LEAST DESIRABLE SEAT
The Best Seat in the House is THE LEARNING SEAT.
III. The Best Seat in the House is the LOWEST SEAT  (vs.10,11)

10 But when you are invited, go and sit down in the lowest place, so that when he who invited you comes he may say to you, ‘Friend, go up higher.’ Then you will have glory in the presence of those who sit at the table with you.

11 For whoever exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted.”

ILLUSTRATION

Recently in our Eldership Training Class, I was telling the men about an elder we had in the Wilkinson Church of Christ, some of you know him, his name is Marvin Smith.

Any time we had a Fellowship Dinner, it wasn't unusual at all to see Marvin Smith seated at “the little kid's table” away from everyone else. Marvin looked sort of funny sitting in one of those little wooden chairs with his knees all scrunched up. But Marvin wasn’t concerned about outward appearances. He humbled himself and took “the lowest of seats” in the room.

1. Isn’t that exactly what Christ did when He came to this world?

Philippians 2:5-11 (NKJV)

5 Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus,

6 who, being in the form of God, did not consider it robbery to be equal with God,

7 but made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a bondservant, and coming in the likeness of men.

8 And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross.
9 Therefore God also has highly exalted Him and given Him the name which is
above every name,

10 that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of those in heaven, and of
those on earth, and of those under the earth,

11 and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of
God the Father.

2. In God's divine order.............

*The way UP is DOWN.

*The way to THE TOP is to go to THE BOTTOM.

*The way to BE FIRST is to BE LAST.

*The way to GREATNESS is to become A SERVANT.

*The way to BE YOUR BEST is to become THE LEAST.

*The way to LIFE is to DIE to oneself.

3. Yes, the best seat in the house is THE LOWEST SEAT.
Probably many of you can remember the late DAVE THOMAS, the owner and founder of THE WENDY’S HAMBURGER chain.

In his book “WELL DONE: THE COMMON GUY’S GUIDE TO EVERYDAY SUCCESS” Dave Thomas wrote..............

“I earned my M.B.A. long before I ever earned my G.E.D. He joked.......”Well, I even have a picture of me in my M.B.A. graduation gown, “a snazzy, knee-length work apron.”

Some people look at that picture of me and think it was just a joke, when in reality it was a case of leading by example. At WENDY’S M.B.A. doesn’t stand for Masters In Business Administration, M.B.A. stands for “MOP BUCKET ATTITUDE!”

The Lord would have all of us to have a MOP BUCKET ATTITUDE wouldn’t he? In those times when you and I are wrestling with pride and tempted to boast or promote ourselves to a position of honor, may we remember the valuable lessons the LORD has taught us here in LUKE 14.

In life, may we seek THE LEAST DESIRABLE SEAT.......THE LEARNING SEAT ........THE LOWEST SEAT.

In the eyes of our LORD, that’s “THE BEST SEAT IN THE HOUSE!”