

## Mr. EMPTY PEW

### Int.

1. Aim: To show that missing the services has a bad influence on all of us.
2. One of the most familiar faces seen at the services of the average church today is that of Mr. Empty Pew. This morning Mr. Empty Pew seems to have taken on mortality with a voice as pleasant and kind as any modernistic preacher, but as dangerous as that of John Barleycorn. He proceeds to carry on conversation with a few of the folks who have come out to the services.
3. Wanting to appear mannerly and polite Mr. Empty Pew approaches first of all the minister, who is about to begin his morning sermon.

### Discussion

#### I. Mr. Preacher

- A. "Good morning, Mr. preacher! How are you feeling this morning?"
- B. "Oh about as usual I guess. But please tell me, why have you interrupted the service in this manner?"
- C. "Now Mr. Preacher, you know I am always looking out for the good of others, and I thought from your looks that you weren't feeling so well and it might be much better for you and all concerned if you would dismiss the congregation with prayer and all go home."

- D. "No, no no!" replied the minister. "I would not think of such a thing. I do thank you however for your thoughtful suggestion."
- E. "Don't mention it. I have been thinking of you much here of late and just decided to have a little talk with you. You haven't appeared well the last few months, especially this winter and spring, and I have come to the conclusion that you are worrying too much about the church members; as to why they manifest such little interest in the affairs of the Church. I see they won't take part in Bible study and in the Monday Night for the Master program. You could not get some of them out with a stick of dynamite."
- F. "I know that some of them will come only to the worship service at 10:00 on Sunday morning and will never attend any other service during the week. I think however that I have diagnosed your case properly and I am going to prescribe a little remedy."
- G. MR. EMPTY PEW CONTINUES. "Your sermons are too cold and logical; you do not preach eloquently enough. You are living in an age of itching ears when people are heaping to themselves teachers after their own lusts. The thing for you to do is read more current literature and make your sermons a little more flowery. Cut out the scripture quotations and quote more from the Literary Digest and Time magazine."
- H. While Mr. Empty Pew continues to ramble on and speak of the people who stay at home and hear eloquent sermons on T.V. the minister recalls a few passages of scripture which reads as follows:

I. "And I, brethren, when I came to you, came not with excellency of speech or of wisdom, declaring unto you the testimony of God. For I determined not to know any thing among you, save Jesus Christ, and him crucified. And I was with you in weakness, and in fear, and in much trembling. And my speech and my preaching was not with enticing words of man's wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power:" I

Cor. 2:1-4

J. These words the minister quoted to Mr. Empty Pew, but it was just like pouring water on a duck's back. For he immediately replied:

K. "Oh yes, I know all that, but that was Paul living in a former age, an age of ignorance and superstition. Were Paul living and preaching today he would be wise enough to change his speech to please the people."

L. "Another weakness of yours," says Mr. Empty Pew, "Is this. You preach too much doctrine. People do not want to hear doctrine today, they want unity messages for all the people of all the churches. Your own church members will tell you that. You are fairly new to this area, but you will become wise some day."

M. Again the preacher recalls some scripture and quotes it:

1. "Let no man despise thy youth; but be thou an example of the believers, in word, in conversation, in charity, in spirit, in faith, in purity" - I Tim.4:12

2. "Till I come, give attendance to reading, to exhortation to doctrine." I Tim. 4:13

3. "Take heed unto thyself, and unto the doctrine; continue in them: for in doing this thou shalt both save thyself, and them that hear thee." I Tim. 4:16

4. "If any man teach otherwise, and consent not to wholesome words, even the words of our Lord Jesus Christ, and to the doctrine which is according to godliness; He is proud, knowing nothing, but doting about questions and strifes of words, whereof cometh envy, strife, railings, evil surmisings, perverse disputings of men of corrupt minds, and destitute of the truth, supposing that gain is godliness from such withdraw thyself. But Godliness with contentment is great gain." I Tim. 6:3-6
5. "O Timothy, keep that which is committed to thy trust, avoiding profane and vain babblings, and oppositions of science falsely so called: which some professing have erred concerning the faith. Grace be with thee. Amen." - I Tim. 6:20-21
- N. "Bah!" says Mr. Empty Pew, "You know that the principles, methods and message of that early church cannot be duplicated in the church of today. People want soothing words which ease their conscience and harmonize with their prejudices and preconceived ideas. If you want to be popular and live on easy street give the people what they want."
- O. "Another thing," said Mr. Empty Pew, "You are too strenuous in your condemnation of sin. Condone sin a little more, and your church members will not be easily offended."
- P. The minister continues to reply with the language of the Scripture "All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: that the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works. I charge thee therefore before God, and the Lord Jesus Christ, who shall judge the quick and the dead at his appearing and his

kingdom; preach the word; be instant in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort with all longsuffering and doctrine. For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but after their own lusts shall they heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears; and they shall turn away their ears from the truth, and shall be turned unto fables. But watch thou in all things, endure afflictions, do the work of an evangelist, make full proof of thy ministry." II Tim. 3:16-4:5

- Q. "Very well," Says Mr. Empty Pew, "If that is the way you feel about it I can say that I feel sorry for you. Just this little story and then I leave you. There was once a loyal preacher of the Gospel who thought along the line which you are now thinking. He received an invitation to work with a church that offered him a salary almost princely. He accepted. A short time after his arrival upon the new field he began to learn of the many sins of the congregation. He arose one morning in the pulpit and proceeded to drive out the Devil, believing as you now believe that the Devil must be driven out of the church to make room for God. His language however was just a little too hot for Mr. Goldsmith, the wealthiest member of the church and the largest contributor. For Mr. Goldsmith arose from his private seat, which no one dare occupy, with fire in his eyes and shouted: "Mr Preacher, we hired you to preach the Gospel. "Yes," replied the Preacher, "And to condemn the Devil and that is what I am doing." He proceeded with his discourse, "Now," says Mr. Empty Pew, "All that was very heroic on the part of the preacher, but it cost him his job. You certainly do not want that to happen to you do you?"

R. The minister dropped his head for a moment and a prayer was upon his heart. Shortly he shrugged his shoulders and with the voice of a brave soldier of the cross he replied: "All of your suggestions are very tempting and I know that hundreds of preachers have accepted them and acted accordingly, but personally I prefer to follow the Master rather than men. I know the road is rough and the load is heavy, but like Moses of old "Choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God, than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season; esteeming the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures in Egypt: for he had respect unto the recompense of the reward." Heb.

11:25-26

## **II. Mr. PROSPECTIVE CHURCH MEMBER**

- A. Having failed in his first attempt to turn a man from the way of righteousness to the way of error, Mr. Empty Pew now turns to his neighbor on his right, Mr. Prospective Church member, who is giving very close attention to the sermon.
- B. "Ah my good friend," says Mr. Empty Pew. "I perceive that you are contemplating church membership, am I right?"
- C. "Well, well, yes, I was thinking a little about it," comes the reply.
- D. "Now you Just give me your attention for a moment for I have some important advice to give you." I once thought as you are now thinking, and I continued to think until my thoughts brought forth action on my part and I became a Christian. That was one of the biggest mistakes I ever made. I have learned since that church membership does not pay. Why Just think of how much you have to give up; all the pleasures of sin."

- E. MR. Empty Pew continued to pour the poison vile of the Devil into the ears of his good friend whose attention was now drawn to the words of the Preacher: "Jesus said, "For whosoever will save his life shall lose it: and whosoever will lose his life for my sake shall find it. For what is a man profited, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul? or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul?"Mt.16:25-26
- F. But the whispering of Mr. Empty Pew drowned out the words of the minister and once again Mr. Prospective Church member was listening to this servant of the Devil. "Do you know," says he, "that I have discovered that all the preachers are out for the money. They are Just a bunch of lazy scoundrels; too lazy to work so they take up preaching. It sure is a soft job. Just think, they only have to work one day a week, and at the most not more than three or four hours. I sure wish I had it that soft."
- G. "But listen," says his good friend. "What is that the preacher is saying? "Behold, I send you forth as sheep in the midst of wolves: be ye therefore wise as serpents, and harmless as doves." Mt. 10: 16
1. "Think not that I am come to send peace on earth: I came not to send peace, but a sword. Mt. 10:34
  2. "And he that taketh not his cross, and followeth after me, is not worthy of me. He that findeth his life shall lose it: and he that loseth his life for my sake shall find it. He that receiveth you receiveth me, and he that receiveth me receiveth him that sent me." Mt. 10:38-40

- H. "Come now" says Mr. Empty Pew, "You don't want to listen to what that man has to say. Listen to me, I am trying to help you, The church is full of hypocrites. About two thirds of the membership are hypocritical. Even some of the men in the leadership are worldly. You certainly don't want to line up with a bunch like that, do you?"
- I. "But listen," said Mr. Prospective Church Member, "the preacher is saying something about that now."
- J. "The church is not a group of perfect people, but a group of imperfect people who have thrown themselves on the Mercy of God!
1. Paul has written, "For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God;"  
Rom.3:23
  2. and John says "If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us." (I Jn.1:8)
  3. Every man must give an account of himself to God. Jesus said, "I am the way, the truth, and the life; no man cometh unto the Father, but by me." (John 14:6)
- K. Mr. Prospective Church member who was somewhat wavering now leaned over to Mr. Empty Pew and whispered, "I don't care what the preacher says. I know that there are lots of hypocrites in the church and I think that I am Just as good as they are."

L. "Now you are talking," said Mr. Empty Pew. "Furthermore if you should go into the church it wouldn't change your life any. In fact you will have more evil thoughts after you go in than you had before. Look at the lives of any number of church members. You can't tell them from the men of the world. All this talk about the Christians living a clean life is Just bunk. You are a little excited now because you are naturally emotional. Wait awhile, think of these things."

M. The minister was now aware of the conversation that was going on and so he continued to give a few final scriptures hoping that the Prospective Church member would act upon them.

1. "If any man will do his will, he shall know of the doctrine, whether it be of God, or whether I speak of myself." John 17:7
2. "He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned." Mk. 16:16
3. "Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost." Acts 2:38
4. "Whosoever therefore shall confess me before men, him will I confess also before my Father which is in heaven." Matt. 10:32
5. "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life." Jn. 3:16

6. "Not everyone that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven" - Mt. 7:21
7. "And the times of this ignorance God winked at; but now commandeth all men everywhere to repent:" - Acts 17:30
8. "...behold, now is the accepted time; behold, now is the day of salvation."

II Cor.6:2b

N. Mr. Empty Pew, seeing that he had become the victor gave his good friend, Mr. Prospective Church Member, a slap on the back and said hypocritically, "God bless you brother." He then turned to look for other worlds to conquer.

### **III. MR. WAVERLY CHRISTIAN**

- A. He selected for his next victim a bosom companion Mr. WAVERLY Christian. He is a fellow driven by every wind of doctrine; like the surge of the sea driven by the wind and tossed. He is a double-minded man unstable in all his ways.
- B. "Good morning my friend," said Mr. Empty Pew. There was no reply. Mr. Empty Pew then glancing into the face of his old pal discovered the poor fellow to be fast asleep.
- C. The minister, whose eyes were searching the congregation saw that several heads were nodding while others were yawning. He finished his quotation from Job with a shout, "Thirty days and Nineveh shall be destroyed." People came to attention. Mr. Waverly Christian shrugged his shoulder, rubbed his eyes, then peeping around like a whipped

pup to see if any one was looking at him peered straight into the smiling face of his old companion Mr. Empty Pew. The minister was rehearsing the experience of Jesus in the Garden. See him that night in the garden lying on his face with the sweat oozing from the pores of his agonizing body, as it were great drops of blood falling down upon the ground.

1. Listen to what he says? "O my Father, If it be possible, let this cup pass from me: nevertheless not as I will, but as thou wilt." - Matt. 26:39
2. What cup? The cup is the New Covenant in my blood, says Jesus. The cup of death on the cross, the reality of which broke His heart. When he arose from prayer he came to his disciples and found them sleeping. He said to them, "Why sleep ye? rise and pray, lest ye enter into temptation." - Lk. 22:46

- D. Mr. Empty Pew sensing the situation and not wanting to lose his good friend, engaged him in conversation.
- E. "Evidently," said he, "You are not so vitally interested in the church and the preaching" "You know it wouldn't be half so embarrassing to you or discouraging to the Preacher if you would sleep at home. You have lots of friends who have learned that very thing, so instead of coming to church services and sleeping they just stay in bed on Sunday morning and snooze their religion away." "By the way" continued Mr. Empty Pew, "Have you been fishing lately?"

- F. "Yes I was out last Sunday but couldn't do any good. Fish weren't biting. I am thinking seriously of going next Sunday. You know Sunday is the only day I have off and I think every man should have some recreation," said Mr. Waverly Christian.
- G. "That is right!" said Mr. Empty Pew. "That is the way a large majority of church members feel, and I can't see any harm at all in going fishing on Sunday even if you do have to miss church. If a man pays his money and goes once a month I think that is enough."
- H. "By the way," said Mr. Empty Pew, "I see that you come to the 10:00 A.M. Service and seldom come in time for Bible Study. You also fail to make it on Sunday Night and Wednesday night all the time. Do you go to church elsewhere, or do you go visiting?"
- I. "Well you know" replied the man, "sometimes we go on a picnic Sunday afternoon and we have to get everything ready to go before we come to church. We miss Bible study and come at 10:00 and that way we can take off just as soon as Amen is said. Then by the time we get "back on Sunday night it's too late or we are too tired to think about coming. Then on Wednesday night we have got a lot to do around the house, with yard work and cleaning up and all the odd Jobs I Just don't have time to get out. But excuse me, I want to hear what that preacher is spouting off about."
- J. The minister was still quoting scripture, clarifying it a little now and then with an illustration.

1. "Upon the first day of the week let every one of you lay by him in store, as God hath prosper him, that there be no gatherings when I Come." - I Cor. 16:2
2. "Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is; but exhorting one another: and so much the more, as ye see the day approaching." - Heb. 10:25
3. The preacher briefly explained that this referred not only to, Sunday but any day that the church was to assembly together to worship.
4. "And upon the first day of the week, when the disciples came together to break bread, Paul preached unto them, ready to depart on the morrow; and continued his speech until midnight." - Acts 20:7

K. But the words of Mr. Empty Pew prevailed over the words of the Preacher and Mr. Waverly Church Member went home after church more determined then ever to go fishing next lord's day.

L. Yes, Mr. Empty Pew has spoken and his voice is most eloquent today and many are they who shall perish thereby!

## **CONCLUSION**

1. Who is Mr. Empty Pew? ? ?
  - a. The man who goes fishing on Sunday.
  - b. The family that sleeps-in on Sunday and stays home Sunday Night and Wednesday Night

- c. The family that stays home to cook dinner for company.
  - d. The family that goes visiting and forsakes the assembly on the first day of the week.
  - e. The Christian who will not come to the Sunday night services but watches T.V. or goes visiting.
  - f. The Christian who will not come to Wednesday night Bible study for he is too tired. Yet on Tuesday night or Thursday night he can go to a ball game, go shopping, or go visiting friends.
  - g. The Christian who will not attend the gospel meeting for he has other things to do that he feels are more important!
2. The influence of Mr. Empty Pew reaches a lot of people and he is a servant of the Devil.
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