

## Traveling 1st Class by Jeff Strite

1 Peter 2:4-2:12

OPEN: A plane was on its way to London when a blonde woman in economy class got up and moved into an open seat in the first class section. The flight attendant saw her do this, and politely informed her that she had to sit in economy because that's the ticket she paid for

The blonde replied, "I'm blonde. I'm beautiful. I'm going to London... and I'm staying right here."

After repeated attempts and no success at convincing the woman to move the attendant went into the cockpit and informed the pilot and co-pilot that there was a woman sitting in first class who refused to go back to her proper seat.

The co-pilot went back and explained why she needs to move, but once again the woman replies by saying, "I'm blonde. I'm beautiful. I'm going to London... and I'm staying right here."

The co-pilot returned to the cockpit and suggested that perhaps they should have the arrival gate call the police and have the woman arrested when they land.

The pilot said, "You say she's blonde? I'll handle this."

He went back to the woman and whispered quietly in her ear, and she says, "Oh, I'm sorry," then quickly moves back to her seat in economy class.

The flight attendant and co-pilot were amazed and asked him how he'd gotten her to move back to economy without causing any fuss.

"I told her first class wasn't going to London."

How many of you have ever flown on large commercial plane?

How many flown 1st class?

Most of us think of first class as having a little more leg room better food/ and a bigger selection of entertainment. But it's gotten wayyy more than that.

First there's the "kit" they give you.

British Airways offers a personalized kit by designer Anya Hindmarch. It holds a toothbrush, an eye mask, cotton socks, and a number of cosmetic products.

Then there's the food. Delta Airlines offers Entrées from renowned chef Michelle Bernstein on select flights over 1,500 miles.

And then, there's the seating. Many airlines now have seats that completely recline into a bed, and the beds are topped with glossy, silk-and-cotton bedspreads. You can slip

into your cozies in the luxury changing room, which has a full-length mirror. And, there's no need to push the call button when you're thirsty:  
1st-class suites come with their own mini-bars,

By comparison, everybody else sits in rows of seats that give little leg room and only recline a certain degree.

Everybody's on the same plane, BUT first class has it better than everyone else.

Now, the Bible tells us that we're just travelers in this world. We're just passing through. I Peter 2 says that - We are "...aliens and strangers in the world..." 1 Peter 2:11  
We're travelers riding on the same plane as everyone else but Peter is telling us here that we're travel here 1st Class. We have advantages and blessings the rest of the world does not have.

So, what advantages do we have?

1st – we belong to God – no one else does!!! That's how we GET into first class. We get to sit up in front with God. Verses 9-10 says we are "a people belonging to God... Once you were not a people, BUT NOW you are the people of God; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy."

I Peter 2:9-10

When Peter wrote this, he was referring to a prophecy out of Hosea 1:9-10 where God prophesied that there'd be a day when those who were "not His people" would be called the Sons of God. That's us!!!

Ephesians 2:12 says that before we became Christians we were "...separate from Christ, excluded from citizenship in Israel and foreigners to the covenants of the promise, without hope and without God in the world."

That's how things used to be. But now that we're Christians we've gained all of those things. We have God in our lives.

You see, once we became Christians we didn't just become worshippers of God we became are children of God. We didn't deserve to be children of God, but God "bumped us up" to first class

God says we were "...called out of darkness into his wonderful light." I Peter 2:9

Ephesians says it this way: "God raised us up with Christ and SEATED US with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus" Ephesians 2:6

We have been seated with God IN FIRST CLASS.

But now what exactly does that mean?

Peter tells us this means that we're not in 1st Class to be pampered.

We're in first class to be used. God has saved us to be useful and valuable to Him.

I Peter 2:5 says "you also, like living stones, are being built into a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood, offering spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ."

You and I are living stones. We're not dead weight. We're not huge boulders that need to be shouldered out of the way in order for God to get something done. We are LIVING stones.

ILLUS: Some time back, someone wrote a satire about a woman they called Gert Rizzoli. They wrote that she was so devoted to her spot in the pew at Featherside Congregational church that when she passed away last month, her family received permission to cast her body in bronze and set it in her favorite spot on the pew. To the consternation of some church members, her body is now permanently located in the aisle seat she occupied every Sunday for forty years.

Her daughter Sofia said "She loved gazing at the preacher from that spot, being the 1st in her row to receive Communion, having quick access to the bathroom. It gave her a sense of deep, spiritual comfort."

But fellow church-goers also remember Gert's stiff response to anyone who tried to take her place. One man was shooed away by Gert on several occasions when he arrived early and inadvertently took her spot, he says. Now the bronze statue serves as an irritating reminder of the encounter.

"It's like she's still there defending her seat," he says.

A family friend said "She was a Christ-like lady, except when it came to giving up that spot. She had a real sense of her turf. To her, it was like the Israelites: Once you get land, you don't give it up."

Now Gert is a fictional character - but she is the spitting image of a "dead stone." She did nothing but sit at church all her life. She was just dead weight.

She sat on the premises rather than stand on God's promises.

By contrast, we have been called to living stones which God builds into His spiritual house.

God didn't call us to be a pile of useless bricks.

ILLUS: In few weeks the builders are going to pile some bricks out front for our new sanctuary. For a while those bricks will lay around, but eventually they will be built into the new building and will serve a purpose. They will give the building added value.

God has called us to do something with our faith.

And that's the core of the next phrase in that verse:

1 Peter 2:5 says "you also, like living stones, are being built into a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood, offering spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ."

We are a priesthood, and that concept of our being a priests is repeated by Peter. In verse 9 he says: "... you are a chosen people, a royal PRIESTHOOD, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light." 1 Peter 2:9

Thus, if you're a Christian... you are a priest.

Just to give you an idea of what that means consider the Old Testament priests.

Only they were allowed into God's presence, into the tabernacle. And in that tabernacle there was a special table called the "table of showbread" (I walked down to the communion table).

On that table were 12 loaves of unleavened bread that only the priests could eat.

Now, in the New Testament, Christians are priests, and we are allowed to eat the bread and drink of the cup in God's presence. Others might partake, but it has no meaning for them.

You don't need a preacher/Elder or someone who calls themselves a priest to do that for you. YOU ARE THE PRIEST empowered and entitled by God to eat in His presence.

Again, in the Old Testament if someone who was not an Israelite wanted to become part of God's special Covenant, only the priests could do what was necessary to bring someone into that special relationship with God.

In the New Covenant if you're a Christian YOU can be the priest God uses to convert the saved to Christ and baptize them into Christ. You don't need a preacher/elder/priest you can do that yourself – YOU ARE A PRIEST.

And of course, that's the genius of God.

You've heard of the "prayer of salvation" that many churches use. Even though that prayer is not found in the Bible those congregations do it anyway.

But God didn't. God didn't teach us to guide someone in a "sinner's prayer" because that wouldn't do what He wanted done.

Consider: If someone prays that "sinner's prayer" does anybody else need to be

around? No.

But how many people does it take for a baptism to occur? Two. There HAS to be a Christian around when a new convert accepts Christ. That way the new Christian now has someone who can take them under their wing. Someone to disciple them and pray for them and guide them in the faith.

As a priest of God... those privileges are yours.

But Peter talks about something else that you can do as a priest. As a part of this holy priesthood, you can offer up “spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.”

Now, what does that mean?

Romans 12:1 says it this way: “I urge you, brothers, in view of God’s mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God— this is your spiritual act of worship.”

In other words, your priesthood is not a part time thing. You don’t put on your priestly robes and come to church or Sunday School and then take them off when you go home or to work.

You are a priest for God no matter where you are.

Your body is a living sacrifice. A tool for God’s use.

ILLUS: It’s kind of like when a couple get married and start a family.

Does the man stop being a husband when he leaves home to go to work?

Does the woman stop being a wife when she goes to the supermarket?

Do their children stop being their children when they go off to school?

Of course not!

In the same way, whether you go to work or to school, or to the market or a family gathering, you are God’s representative there. You are a priest of God all the time.

Wherever you’re at you are God’s representative to speak and do things that reflect the God you serve.

That’s what Hebrews 13:15-16 tells us:

“Through Jesus, therefore, let us continually offer to God a SACRIFICE of praise— the fruit of lips that confess his name. And do not forget to do good and to share with others, for with such SACRIFICES God is pleased.”

So, as God’s priest God calls you and I to speak and act on His behalf with those who aren’t part of the church. To share our faith with folks at family gatherings, at school or

at work. We need to find creative way to talk to others about our faith, or to do good things for them, or to pray for them. If someone you know is struggling with something in their lives you need to ask them if you could pray for them... right there and then. That action alone says they matter to you and you care about what's gone wrong in their lives.

One person said this "Live and speak in such a way that those who know you, but don't know God, will come to know God because they know you."

ILLUS: My dad once told of friends he had who would ask him to say grace at meals they shared there. The friends explained: "We know you are a Christian." Eventually those friends began to attend church and became Christians. Why? They said it was because of the example they'd seen in mom and dad.

God didn't save us and put us in first class seating just so He could pamper us. God put us in 1st class so that you could go back to the back of the plane and find ways to serve/talk to/ pray for those who don't have our advantages.

One more thing: you and I don't belong in 1st Class.

If we don't realize that we don't belong there we can end up being like that blonde in the joke I told earlier. She didn't belong in first class either... but that didn't stop her. She was convinced she belonged in 1st class because she was blonde and beautiful. And the punch line of the joke was her ignorance of reality.

You see, people who believe they belong in "1st Class". They believe they deserve to be honored by God because they're pretty good people. They believe they belong there because of who they're related to, or who they know, or because their morality is better than everyone else's (at least in their own eyes). Those are the modern day Pharisees... and we all know what Jesus' attitude was toward them. These folks approach God with a sense of entitlement – I BELONG THERE

But Peter was very clear that you and I don't belong there.

"Once you were not a people, but now you are the people of God; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy." 1 Peter 2:10

We deserved to be in the back of the plane. Our sins had disqualified us for God's blessings.

But something changed.

What changed???

That's right: we met Jesus.

As you come to him, the living Stone— rejected by men but chosen by God and precious to him—... the one who trusts in him will never be put to shame." 1 Peter 2:4 & 6

He's the ONLY reason we get to sit up front with God. Jesus saved us to change WHO we were.

Once we were not a people... once we'd not had mercy. But that all changed because we came to Jesus and trusted in His forgiveness

And because He did all that for us... He expects us to be His servants to the rest of the world. To help change them, as He changed us.

CLOSE: I want to close with a story by Tony Campolo told of the day he boarded an airplane traveling to Philadelphia.

"I was settled down in a window seat when I happened to glance across the aisle to the other side of the plane. There, seated next to the window opposite mine, was one of the most sophisticated and attractive women I have ever seen. She was absolutely stunning. It was hard to take my eyes off her.

After a few minutes, a very macho-looking, "with-it" guy got on the plane. He was almost a stereotype of the kind of guy who hangs out at singles bars. His satin shirt was unbuttoned down to his waist so he could let the "chicks" see the curls of hair on his chest and the gaudy gold chains hanging around his neck.

With great interest, I watched as he "moved" down the aisle of the plane.

He spotted the empty seat next to the stunning woman who had been holding my attention. He sat down next to her and then he "did his thing." He made moves that a New York "make-out man would have admired. And in no time at all he had the young woman thoroughly involved in conversation hanging on his every word.

As a sociologist I was fascinated with this interactive process.

But then an unexpected and exciting thing happened.

When he had her completely engaged, she made her move and pulled a reversal, suddenly extracting a Bible from her shoulder bag. Before the guy could figure out what was happening, she was laying the gospel on him. Her eyes sparkling with excitement, she began telling him all about Jesus. She pointed out verse after verse that showed the way of salvation.

I must admit that this sudden turn of events amused me. At one point, I had to bite my tongue to keep from laughing. But this was no laughing matter. Brilliantly and seriously, she told the story of God's salvation and after his initial shock, he began to listen to her

with genuine interest.

That woman understood what it was to be a priest of God. She was prepared for men like this. She knew exactly where to turn in her Bible to talk about Jesus and tell about how this man could become a Christian. Do you?

Do you know where to find the verses in your Bible that tell about believing that Jesus is the Christ the Son of the Living God? Do you know where to go to explain that we've all sinned and need to repent? Where it's found that we should make Jesus our Lord and Master? And where it speaks of the importance of being buried in the waters of Baptism?

If you don't... you need to start marking up your Bible. You need to be prepared.

Because you are a priest of the most High God, and this is your most important service to Him.