

## Monkey in the Middle

**Opening:** Different ways of dealing with problems

**Intro: Luke 24: 28-31**(2 unnamed men were walking with Jesus but didn't know it)

<sup>28</sup> By this time they were nearing Emmaus and the end of their journey. Jesus acted as if he were going on, <sup>29</sup> but they begged him, "Stay the night with us, since it is getting late." So he went home with them. <sup>30</sup> As they sat down to eat he took the bread and blessed it. Then he broke it and gave it to them. <sup>31</sup> **Suddenly, their eyes were opened, and they recognized him.** And at that moment he disappeared!

Ever play the game, Monkey in the Middle? Three people usually kids- play keep away with a ball - two toss a ball back and forth trying to keep the person in the middle from getting it – making a monkey out of them.

Cute kids game right? Its Insidious ... **a game about control**... think about it ... two people on the outside try control the person in the middle to make a monkey out of them)

The person in the middle must jump higher move faster than the others to intercept the ball to escape the middle - The middle is not the place you want to be!

God doesn't want us to be caught in the middle either –

The people in the Galatian Church found themselves caught in the middle –

Religious leaders of the old school had come into the church claiming their teacher Paul had no authority to teach things like **God's grace**. The old guard strong armed coerced and manipulated them stealing away their freedom and reintroducing the old ways of keeping the letter of the law.

Paul refers to them as **Legalists**. He was not only angry with the Legalists he was frustrated with the Galatian Christians

### **Galatians 1:6**

<sup>6</sup> I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting the one who called you to live in the grace of Christ and are turning to a different gospel— <sup>7</sup> which is really no gospel at all. NLT

What happened?

Fear and uncertainty can cause to act irrationally.

The Legalists scared the Galatians, telling them that what they were doing ... living by faith in God was not enough and that God was displeased with them and if they didn't want the wrath of God coming down on them they had better get their act together and follow the old tried and true methods.

Namely following their interpretation of the law.

*Eugene Peterson writes: When men and women get their hands on religion, one of the first things they often do is turn it into an instrument for controlling others. With the putting or keeping them "in their place."*

### **Protestant Reformation**

At twenty one years of age, a young man got caught in a thunderstorm – he realized he wasn't ready to meet God, and so he decided to change his life course to become monk, He became zealous in prayer, fasting and self affliction but it was no use, his religious efforts left him empty and afraid.

He began to study the Bible when he read [Romans 1:16, 17](#). It hit and his eyes were opened ... as he read this passage, *The just shall live by faith*

On October 31<sup>st</sup> 1517 Martin Luther posted his [Ninety-Five Theses](#), on the church door in the university town of Wittenberg. The Famous Wittenberg Board

Luther realized he had been the monkey in the middle until he discovered that faith in God and nothing else brought freedom

Protestant Reformation ... it all began with faith and grace

### **There are voices out there that would love to see you to give up on your faith!**

Some call themselves "Christian" while others make no such claim – they generally pounce when trouble strikes

- If God is so great where is He now when you need him?
- You're on your own –forget this nonsense and loosen up – what you need is some freedom

**Then there's the other side ...**–the, so called religious good guys – The Legalists

- Bad things are happening to you because your faith is weak
- You're not keeping all the rules
- That's why these problems are happening to you - funny that's exactly what they said to Job
- **Your child died because you didn't have enough faith to believe God**

☆ **Personal experience** – Maranatha Chapel young couple six month old child died from congenital birth defect – esophagus failed to grow – child slowly strangled

Miserable – sinister –people –merchants of death and despair

Having faith in God means we are willing to trust in God’s faithfulness for our present and future

**It’s Not smooth sailing** from that point on – on contrary – life’s challenges go on but the way you face them changes

### **Daily Bread ... Fiery Trials**

Fire can be one of the worst enemies of trees. But it can also be helpful. Experts say that small, frequent fires called “cool” fires clean the forest floor of dead leaves and branches but don’t destroy the trees. They leave behind ashes which are perfect for seeds to grow in. Surprisingly low intensity fires are necessary for healthy growth of trees. Similarly, trials – pictured as fire in the Bible – are necessary for healthy growth of trees.

I’m guessing the Galatians, were experiencing fires - like all of us brings a lot of questions and searching for answers

They fell victim to religious know it-all with their pat answers – Just go this and everything will be right

☆ **Personal** ... Years earlier Jen and I had a close friend a young woman who was going through terrible depression she and her husband wonderful people

The pastor of the church we and they were attending – stated from the pulpit “no Christian should ever be depressed” knowing her condition - adding guilt on top of her pain (in other words – snap out of it you’re a Christian!)

Not two weeks later the man found himself rushed to the hospital with severe physical symptoms – he was suffering from panic attack and depression

**What is the first rule in fighting panic attack?** – it’s not to buck up and tuff it out – the key is **acceptance** – which translates into stop fighting – when accept the feelings rather than fight them the process of peace healing begins

IS GOD PLEASED BY OUR EFFORT TO DO GOOD DEEDS AND KEEPING THE RULES?

Only if they are a result of a changes life that is in a spirit relationship with Him

God isn't looking for robots – He's after relationship

**The path way to freedom is not striving to say in control – its surrender**

**What Does God's brand of Freedom look like?** Freedom from:

- worry and anxiety
- fear
- addiction
- compulsion
- feelings of inferiority
- guilt
- the past
- whatever else is holding you prisoner

**Luke 24** The Road to Emmaus their eyes were opened to the fact that Jesus had been with them through the entire trip and they didn't realize it

**We're not alone either** Jesus spoke about never leaving us alone sending us a helper The Holy Spirit who would come along side of us to help

Listen to what Paul writes in **Galatians 5: 13-15, 18**

<sup>13-15</sup> It is absolutely clear that God has called you to a free life. Just make sure that you don't use this freedom as an excuse to do whatever you want to do and destroy your freedom. Rather, use your freedom to serve one another in love; that's how freedom grows. For everything we know about God's Word is summed up in a single sentence: Love others as you love yourself. That's an act of true freedom. ... For there is a root of sinful self-interest in us that is at odds with a free spirit, just as the free spirit is incompatible with selfishness.

<sup>19-21</sup> It is obvious what kind of life develops out of trying to get your own way all the time: repetitive, loveless, cheap sex; a stinking accumulation of mental and emotional garbage; frenzied and joyless grabs for happiness; trinket gods; magic-show religion; paranoid loneliness; cutthroat competition; all-consuming-yet-never-satisfied wants; a brutal temper; an impotence to love or be loved; divided homes and divided lives; small-minded and lopsided pursuits; the vicious habit of depersonalizing everyone into a rival; uncontrolled and uncontrollable addictions; ugly parodies of community. I could go on.

This is the opposite of freedom ... But check out the life that is influenced by God's Spirit!

### **The Fruit of the Spirit** [Galatians 5:22-23](#)

<sup>22-23</sup> But what happens when we live God's way? He brings gifts into our lives, much the same way that fruit appears in an orchard—things like affection for others, exuberance about life, serenity. We develop a willingness to stick with things, a sense of compassion in the heart, and a conviction that a basic holiness permeates things and people. We find ourselves involved in loyal commitments, not needing to force our way in life, able to marshal and direct our energies wisely. <sup>23</sup>Legalism is helpless in bringing this about; it only gets in the way.

The fruit of the Spirit ... is earmarks of being set free from all the hang-ups of life

#### **Remember that:**

- A tree doesn't eat its own fruit! It's meant for the benefit of others
- Fruit has an expiration date – if it hangs on the tree too long it rots and is worthless
- It needs to be harvested and shared – so a fresh new crop can come in

#### **Check this List of Fruits again:**

1. Affection for others
2. Exuberance for life
3. Serenity
4. Willingness to stick with things
5. Compassion to find the good in others
6. Loyal in our commitments
7. Gentleness
8. The ability to assemble and direct our energies wisely

The world is thirsty for freedom - model it for them by living under the daily control of the Spirit

Lets pray