

MIDDLE GROUND

Middle Ground in the Bible

- Make sure your seat belt is securely fastened... We are going to go on a long, dark journey deep into some **GRAY** areas...
- Beware of the words: Always, Totally, Clearly...
- Sometimes it's all we can do to just keep our heads above water... Sure, we don't sink down into the mire of sin, but we don't necessarily act like pillars of righteousness either... This is NOT wrong. It's just is not necessarily RIGHT either... We make choices that clearly aren't the best choices we could have made... But, they also aren't the worse choices... We often chose the gray areas...
- **The Middle Ground**
 - We spend a large part of our life living in the Middle Ground, but we never really talk about it. We talk about righteousness. We talk about sin. But, we never really talk about **ALL** the stuff that's in the middle... That's normal... Nobody remarks when the weather is just so-so... If it's sunny and great you mention it... Or, if it's ugly and cold you say so... But, if it's just "okay"... Why talk about it?
 - Well... what if it was just "so-so" everyday... What if it never really got sunny and warm... But, it never really got cold and ugly either... What if you have gotten so used to mediocrity that you have started to forget what Good really was?
 - There's an old saying, "*What once were vices are now merely habits.*" What if that is true in our lives also? What if we've made so many compromised decisions we have forgotten what life without compromises is like... or even that there is life without compromises?
 - What do we do when we find ourselves **living** on Middle Ground? How do we recognize it? Is it something we should avoid? Is it something we even **CAN** avoid?"
- Our purpose, then, for the study today is three-fold:

- Purposes:
 - 1) To remind us to remember to look at what is Right and what is Wrong, instead of just accepting the Middle Ground.
 - 2) To demonstrate that complications arise whenever we chose the Middle Ground.
 - 3) To encourage us to strive for the higher ground, and not be so morally complacent with accepting a life in the Middle
- Believe it or not, the Bible is full of examples of Middle Ground...
 - We don't notice them
 - They are not gleaming lessons of Righteousness
 - They are not condemned examples of Wickedness
 - They are usually just recorded actions that are of themselves neither right or wrong...
 - They hold lessons for us nonetheless
- One that always confused me, and started me down this road was David with Achish.
 - "Was it wrong for David to go live among the Philistines?"
- 1st Samuel 26:1-2
 - 1 - And the Ziphites came unto Saul to Gibeah, saying, Doth not David hide himself in the hill of Hachilah, which is before Jeshimon?
 - 2 - Then Saul arose, and went down to the wilderness of Ziph, having three thousand chosen men of Israel with him, to seek David in the wilderness of Ziph.
- Saul was basically insane with hatred and jealousy at this point in his life...
- This is the third major military attempt he has made at trying to kill David
- David and his men have been hunted for months, and are living like animals in caves
- 1st Samuel 27:1-4:
 - 1 - And David said in his heart, I shall now perish one day by the hand of Saul: there is nothing better for me than that I should speedily escape into the

land of the Philistines; and Saul shall despair of me, to seek me any more in any coast of Israel: so shall I escape out of his hand.

- 2 - And David arose, and he passed over with the six hundred men that were with him unto Achish, the son of Maach, king of Gath.
 - 3 - And David dwelt with Achish at Gath, he and his men, every man with his household, even David with his two wives, Ahinoam the Jezreelitess, and Abigail the Carmelitess, Nabal's wife.
 - 4 - And it was told Saul that David was fled to Gath: and he sought no more again for him.
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- David had (many) options, I would like to generalize with three options today:
 - Continue to Run - The clearly Right Option
 - Kill Saul - The clearly Wrong Option
 - Escape to the land of the Philistines where he knew that Saul wouldn't go...
 - The Neither Right or Wrong Option... The Middle Ground
 - This example shows us some of the Characteristics, or Properties, of the decisions that we make, and I would like to Generalize them as follows for our discussion:
 - The Clearly Right Choice - Righteous - Hardest - Leads to Eternal Life
 - It clearly would have been right for David to continue to stay in the promised land, and continue to run from Saul and hide in caves... God had promised him Kingship, and God would protect him, and reward him for his faithfulness in God's protection.
 - The Clearly Wrong Choice - Sinful - Easiest - Leads to Eternal Death
 - David had ample opportunity for this... He could have taken the easy way out. He knew that it was sinful to strike the Lord's Anointed, and that he would not be serving his Lord if he chose this option.
 - The Middle Ground - Neither Sinful nor Righteous - Complicated - **CAN** lead to either Eternal Life or Death - Depending on how you deal with complications
 - David chose the Middle Ground. It wasn't wrong. He wanted some peace in his life. He didn't want to have to be running all the time, and hiding in caves like an animal. He had men following him, and they all had wives and families. This option allowed for them to settle down for a year and a half while everything cooled down with Saul... There was nothing wrong with the choice that he made...

- But... It brought with it complications...
 - It **ALWAYS** does...
- 1st Samuel 29:1-2:
 - 1 - Now the Philistines gathered together all their armies to Aphek: and the Israelites pitched by a fountain which is in Jezreel.
 - 2 - And the lords of the Philistines passed on by hundreds, and by thousands: but David and his men passed on in the rereward with Achish.
- Great... Now, he's in a position where he is faced with maybe having to go into battle against Israel...
 - A Clearly Wrong thing to do...
- This would not have come up if he had chosen the higher road...
- And frankly, this wouldn't have come up if he had chosen the lower road...
- Complicated Lives are one Hallmark of a life lived on Middle Ground
 - To the extent that we make decisions in our life that are Clearly Right, we will have less complications... Harder roads, maybe... But... Not so many complications
- Another interesting example from the Old Testament is Lot...
- Genesis 13:8-11:
 - 8 - And Abram said unto Lot, Let there be no strife, I pray thee, between me and thee, and between my herdmen and thy herdmen; for we be brethren.
 - 9 - Is not the whole land before thee? separate thyself, I pray thee, from me: if thou wilt take the left hand, then I will go to the right; or if thou depart to the right hand, then I will go to the left.
 - 10 - And Lot lifted up his eyes, and beheld all the plain of Jordan, that it was well watered every where, before the LORD destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah, even as the garden of the LORD, like the land of Egypt, as thou comest unto Zoar.
 - 11 - Then Lot chose him all the plain of Jordan; and Lot journeyed east: and they separated themselves the one from the other.
- We make a big deal about Lot, "Looking at Sodom...", "Pitching his tents toward Sodom...", and finally, " Dwelling in the gates of Sodom..."
- But you have to remember:

- 2nd Peter 2:6:

- 6 - And turning the cities of Sodom and Gomorrha into ashes condemned them with an overthrow, making them an ensample unto those that after should live ungodly; And delivered **just Lot**, vexed with the filthy conversation of the wicked.

- Lot is going to be in the Kingdom, so don't judge him too harshly...
- Notice how Abraham was willing to live in Sodom also...

“if thou wilt take the left hand, then I will go to the right; or if thou depart to the right hand, then I will go to the left.”

- Lot is Clearly a Righteous Man who is never condemned for his decision to live in the city...
- **YES!** The city is condemned, and destroyed! **AND**, Lot suffers greatly, losing his family in the process...
- He had the same three choices he could have made:

- The Clearly Right Choice - Eke out a living on the hard hillsides of the country, grazing his herds across a much larger area, and working harder to find water and food for his family - This sounds like a harder road than a “well watered valley” - But, as we can see from the example of Abraham, he would not have been punished for making that choice... On the contrary, he would have been rewarded

- The Clearly Wrong Choice - To join in with the men of Sodom, sinking to their level of depravity, and enjoying the pleasures and profits of sin that would obviously have been readily available there - This would have been the easiest thing to do, as our sinful natures gravitate their naturally - But, it also surely would have lead to Death

- The Middle Ground - Move to where the grass is always greener. Chose a lifestyle for yourself and your family that is easier, and more pleasant. All the while, hoping that you can keep yourself, and your family “unspotted” from the world.

- COMPLICATIONS will arise - All of a sudden, you've got Homosexuals banging on your door in the middle of the night looking to rape your house guests. Your daughters seem a little perverted, and your wife loves the shopping mall and her friends more than she respects you...

- **SURE**, it's NOT wrong...

- But, in hindsight you often see that it's a choice that brings with it all kinds of troubles and problems, that you could have avoided if you'd chosen to live on "higher ground"...
- Abraham is a good example of this...
- Genesis 12:10:
 - 10 - And there was a famine in the land: and Abram went down into Egypt to sojourn there; for the famine was grievous in the land."
- This is the same Abraham to whom God had just said,
 - 7 - Unto thy seed will I give THIS land.
- The Clearly Right Choice would have been to realize that God wants to give this land to your seed. He is not going to allow you to die in it without children... Stay in the land... Take the harder road, and tough it out. Obviously, a tough decision, and one that requires a good amount of Faith.
- The Clearly Wrong Choice would have been for Abraham to think that God had abandoned him, and to forsake God altogether
- The Middle Ground was for Abraham to maintain his faith in God's promises to him, but still take his family down into Egypt for their protection...
- Clearly NOT Wrong... But, look what happens almost immediately...
- Genesis 12:11-12:
 - 11 - And it came to pass, when he was come near to enter into Egypt, that he said unto Sarai his wife, Behold now, I know that thou art a fair woman to look upon:
 - 12 - Therefore it shall come to pass, when the Egyptians shall see thee, that they shall say, This is his wife: and they will kill me, but they will save thee alive.
- Would he be in this position of "having" to lie, if he had made the Clearly Right Choice? No. Would that choice have been harder on him and his family physically? Probably. Would it have required a huge amount of faith? Definitely.
- This brings out two other qualities of the three choices we're looking at...
- Faith
 - One choice usually requires a large amount of Faith.

- One choice usually requires no Faith at all.
- The Middle Grounds appears to require less faith in the beginning...
 - But evolves into something very complicated that tests you often to the limits of your faith in beyond
- God's Involvement
 - One choice usually requires us to accept that God is in control of our lives, and He will care for us
 - One choice usually requires us to ignore that God even exists, and that we have to do everything ourselves
 - The Middle Ground usually involves us having some Faith that God is alive and active, but we feel a need to help ourselves out a bit...
- Today, I'd like to look at some of the Middle Ground I've found in my life
 - And some that I'm sure is in your lives also...
- We'll look at three different segments of our lives:
 - Middle Ground in the Home
 - Middle Ground in the Workplace
 - Middle Grounds in the Ecclesia
- Again, our purpose today is threefold:
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