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The Really Good News: The M&M Gospel
Galatians 2:14-21

How do you feel about ***M and Ms?***

I love them, great candy, melt in your mouth.

They have lots of great uses too...

Did you know how many people have M&Ms in a bowl on their desk at work?

Kind of like a little 'make people happy' bowl!

And ***parents***, well, we did and I know other parents that use them,

To help with potty training, or chores, do this and you'll get an M & M,

Do more and you'll get another M & M.

A delicious reward system for following the rules!

M&Ms can positively motivate people into action.

Ever given someone an M&M (or any treat) for doing something well?

The whole idea of ***M&Ming is a popular psychology*** in our society....

We want to encourage people, motivate people, help keep people going

And what works better than a treat? Something happy and positive?

Do ***what's right***, and there's a treat waiting for you....

I'm indebted to Pastor Edward Markquart of Grace Lutheran Church in Seattle

Washington, and his sermon "M & Ms and the Gospel" (Sermons from Seattle),

because he discovered a kind of 'M&M theology',

and I'm going to share it with you this morning.

Edward and his family used M&Ms to get their kids up a mountain while camping. Ten minutes of walking...and an M&M for the kids.

Then it was eight minutes of walking...and whining for an M&M...

then four, then two, then...uh oh. No more M&Ms.

Well, turns out there is a **downside** to M&Ming.
 When someone gives you an M&M,
 It starts a cycle....a cycle that's pretty hard to break.
 In fact, I'd say it's a cycle that's pretty ingrained in our hearts and minds today.

If you do something right, and you get an M&M,
 Then you start to **expect M&Ms** whenever you do something right....right?
 And you're pretty upset if you don't get M&Ms when you feel **entitled** to them.

When someone else does you a favor, or gives you an M&M,
 you feel **indebted** to them---like you need to return the favor.
 When people help me out, whether they expect it or not,
 I feel like I have to repay the favor.

And when you do something nice for someone,
 don't you **expect** some kind of thanks in return?
 Maybe you don't say it aloud, maybe you'd even deny it, but don't you
 somewhere think it or feel it—that you **deserve** an M&M?

I give an M&M, now I **deserve** one in return.
 I scratch your back, you scratch mine.
 There's an M&M economy if you will.....

And if we take M&Ming to the level of religion.
 If we apply it to Christianity, as many, many people do....
 Then God is the **big giver of M&Ms**.
 God gives M&Ms to the whole world, and expects good behavior in return.
 The **better** we are, the more M&Ms we receive, blessings and favor...
 The **worse** we are, the less we receive, until we start acting right, right?
 Until finally we are living eternally by the great M&M factory in the sky.
 Good life—M&Ms---bad life, no M&Ms.

The truth is **all religions** are some variation of M&M religion,
 With an M&M giver,
 And those who receive M&Ms if obedient, and those who don't get the M&Ms

For Christians, Paul calls this M&M theology living by the ***works of the law***.
Following the rules, to get rewarded, and expecting blessing for being good.
And it's ***completely wrong***
according to our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

Paul reminds us that there is a different theology—the Jesus Christ, or ***JC one***.
In this one, blessings and favor are freely given, to everyone,
Without any regard to good behavior or actions.
Unbelievable isn't it?

Instead of handing out M&Ms that make you feel indebted or guilty or
pressured into acting a certain way,
Jesus ***justifies*** us---
Justification simply means he makes our relationship with God so good that all
the indebtedness, and guilt and pressure is gone.
We are justified—made right—with God.

You know how ***margins*** get straightened out or justified
On a word-processing document?
That's us—with Jesus' help, we get straightened out with God.
Not required to earn our way, or be in debt, or feel guilty or pressured,

Consequently when we are blessed we haven't earned or deserved it.
All blessing is freely given—we are freely made right and justified.
And it's all known as ***Grace***.

M&Ms have a 'you scratch my back, I'll scratch yours' built in,
But with grace, there's none of that. ***No quid pro quo***.
God is the giver of all that is good.
We don't deserve it, or earn it, but through the gift of Jesus' death on the cross,
New life, eternal life, is a gift to each of us who accept it.
Blessings are offered to us, a millionfold.

And it's a very ***special kind of love*** that's offered,
not just the 'blessings' like good health and wealth.
That's the world talking.

God's blessings are deeper and much more profound,
 God's blessings are things like peace while fighting **cancer**,
 and strength to care for a spouse with **Alzheimers**.
 God's blessings are encouragement to raise a child with **special needs**,
 and the faith to keep going when a marriage or a family falls **apart**.

This is with JC, not M&Ms, and it's important to know the difference.
 Because the Jesus Christ way is the way that hopefully
 We Christians start thinking about and loving one another...
 Not the M&M way.

If we have an **M&M kind of love**—you scratch my back, I'll scratch yours,
 If that's the core of our family, or friendship, or church
 Well, that's a problem.....that makes for a pretty **troubled** relationship,
 A sick relationship to be frank.
 Because we disappoint each other, all the time.

M&Ms are great candy. But very bad theology.

Giving and receiving M&Ms is **not the way** a loving God or Savior works,

Listen to Pastor Markquart: *God gives us his blessings, freely and generously; not because we merit it; not because we have obeyed the rules, regulations and rituals. God's blessings are given freely; they are not bribes; and this is very difficult for M and M people to understand.*
And so God's blessings come to you, not simply when you on top of the world and you your family are all doing well because you think you are following God's laws fairly well; but when you are at the bottom....
when you have bottomed out with alcohol, when you have hit the bottom with drugs, when you hit the bottom in your marriage/divorce, when you feel like you have totally messed up,
there is God to bless you with strength and healing and comfort, and God's hand will freely reach down into your hole and lift you up and out.....
It's so different than the godly M and M dispenser for over achievers.

How much better to leave the M&Ms in the bowl,
 And practice the JC, **Jesus Christ, way** with one another!
 How much better that I give to you, and don't expect anything in return—
 Because you are my brother and sister in Christ.
 You give to me, and expect nothing knowing you are doing it in God's name.

Because if you have the **JC kind of love**—
 sacrificially, without expecting something in return,
 If you love without conditions....
 Your relationships will not only be **healthy**, they will be joyful.

And you know **HOW** we can truly love like that?
 If we allow JC (Jesus Christ) to do it in us and through us.
 Because Jesus is the one who has done it for us.

Maybe you've seen **glimpses** of this kind of love.....
 I remember a precious mom watching her son fighting leukemia, and her
 telling me, why can't it be me? I would do it in a minute, I would take the
 leukemia, I would die for him!
 Or a husband who looks at his dying wife, and says so lovingly, I wish it was
 me, that I could be the one to suffer, not her.
 Jesus took our place and died for us—all out of love.

Jesus has such love for us,
 And has offered to **live in us, and love through us**.
 We can live beyond the M&Ms if we let go
 (Paul calls it being crucified with Christ),
 and we allow him to live in us.
 Paul says it this way, "*I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live,
 but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live I live by faith in the Son of God
 who loved me and gave himself for me.*"

Friends, hear the **really Good News** of the Gospel.
 M&Ms are great candy.
 But Jesus is great life.
 May we have the wisdom to know the **difference**. Amen.

