

THE MEANS JUSTIFY THE END

2 Corinthians 5:21

Kate is an FBI agent involved with suspected kidnapping in Arizona. She and other agents have been conducting surveillance on a big house in the desert where many people go in and few come out. They break in and get into a shootout with criminals, but find no sign of a kidnapping. But the bullet holes from the firefight help to reveal what is in the walls of the house—bodies wrapped in plastic. Bodies of those caught in the fighting between drug lords. Meanwhile police outside the house go through a shed looking for drugs. Then a bomb goes off from under the shed killing many agents. The FBI agent is horrified.

She is then recruited to go over from Texas into Mexico to go after the drug cartels. She meets Matt, the agent in charge who is very casual wearing a loose shirt, sandals, and sunglasses, and a mysterious figure named Alejandro. The agents go into Mexico; then as they are on the bridge driving back into the United States, they notice two cars with suspicious looking young men in them. The agents get out of their SUVs and surround the cars, but Kate stays inside. She wonders what they are doing. The agents urge the men inside to not shoot. But they do and end up being efficiently slaughtered by the agents. Kate is totally shocked as they drive off leaving behind the carnage. When someone expresses concern about the bad publicity, another agent responds, “It won’t even make the news in El Paso.”

Kate continues to be caught up in all the bad things the other agents do. She learns from Matt that they are CIA agents who have fought terrorists and are now empowered to carry on a war with the cartels. They are sowing violence among the drug traffickers to create chaos, to have the cartels knock each other off. Alejandro is a hitman himself who works for whoever will help him kill his enemies. Kate is part of the group because as an FBI agent she has domestic authority to act within the US borders that the CIA agents don’t have. Kate ends up confronting Alejandro, who has killed in cold blood a drug trafficker. He shoots her in her bullet-proof vest to disarm her and tells her never to point a gun at him. In the end Alejandro gently tells Kate that the war on drugs is a world of wolves, and she, as a decent person, is no wolf.

Some of you may recognize that the story is the plot to the movie, “Sicario.” “Sicario” are the gunmen for the cartels who seem to have no choice but to obey the orders of the drug lords. The name “Sicario” comes from the “sicarii,” a group of Jewish zealots who at the time of Jesus were assassins who wanted to kill Roman officials and any who dealt with them. As critics have reviewed the movie, they talk about the fine line between good and evil. In fact one commentator mentioned that Kate, the agent who wants to be ethical and law-abiding, can be the real villain in the story because her standards stand in the way of accomplishing anything. Matt and Alejandro may not follow all the rules, but they are effective. It is the classic idea of “the end justifies the means.”

Does it? It sure doesn’t seem that way in the world we were taught to know as children. There is good, and there is bad. It is black and white. But we grow up into a different world. The movie-makers of “Sicario” use desert tones, lots of beiges to emphasize that in the world of

the drug wars, it is not black and white. The “Sicario” killers come from poor families who struggle to survive and end up being trapped in the life they live because their only way out is being killed by the drug lords. Alejandro is so hateful because his wife’s head was chopped off and his daughter was thrown in a pool of acid.

So does the end justify the means? Is it okay to live together before marriage because we can “test out” a relationship before getting caught up in something permanent? Is it okay to “fudge” on a lab report to get a passing grade? Is it okay to waste resources because the little we personally use is just a drop in the bucket? Is it okay to just keep quiet when someone does wrong because it will keep the peace? Adam and Eve ate from the tree because the fruit looked “good.” But did that end justify the means, ignoring God’s commands?

In a very different movie, “A Man for All Seasons,” the main character is Sir Thomas Moore, an important leader in England at the time of King Henry VIII. Moore is in trouble because he refuses to sign the petition that would make Henry head of the church in England so he can divorce his wife and marry Anne Boleyn. A man named Richard Rich has approached Moore asking for a job as a lawyer, but Moore only offers him a teaching job because he knows Rich will easily be corrupted by bribery. Rich comes to Moore’s house begging for a job in the courts, but again Moore turns him down. Moore’s wife, daughter, and son-in-law witness this and urge him to have Rich arrested. Moore refuses because the man has not broken the law. They reply, “But he’s dangerous. The son-in-law says it would not be wrong to break the law to stop the devil. Moore replies, “And when the devil corners me and I need the law to protect me, and it’s not there, what do I do?” Later Moore is sentenced to death because of Rich’s perjury.

It didn’t seem like holding the means helped Moore in the end. But as he is confronted by officials to sign the petition, a friend tells him, “Thomas, just sign it for fellowship.” Moore replies, “And when you die and head to heaven and I head to hell for this will you join me in hell for fellowship?” Moore may have been executed for not letting the end justify the means, but he died knowing he was in arms of his loving Savior.

The end does not justify the means. That is why both abortion and apartheid are wrong. How can we get out of the evil that entangles our world unless we take matters into our own hands and do whatever to stop it? It is a vicious cycle. Our efforts to eliminate evil become evil themselves. As Isaiah said so profoundly, “All our righteous deeds are like a filthy rag.”

But God took that very evil and used it to destroy evil. He did it by making Himself the victim of evil. Paul says, “For our sake God the Father made His Son to be sin who knew no sin, so that in Him we might become the righteousness of God.” There was no greater evil than the suffering and death of Jesus. As sad as it is when soldiers die in battle, it is much worse when little children are killed. Why? Because we see them as defenseless and innocent. Jesus was the height of that as He allowed Himself to be defenseless and as He is the only truly innocent person who has ever lived. But in that greatest evil comes the greatest good. Jesus became sin; He became the recipient of all the punishment we deserve so that we can be freed from evil. In Him the means, His suffering and death, justify the end-our restoration to God.

That is the same “means” that can justify the end of whatever we do. On our own no matter what we do will eventually fail because our “means” is apart from God. Even the seemingly best things we do are done to make us feel better, to make us think we are better than other people, or to make us believe that others will give us something in return. The best we can do is essentially selfish; it condemns us. But as we trust in what Jesus has done for us, then all we do in response to what Jesus did is right with God.

This Lent we journey again with Jesus to His suffering and death on the cross. We see Him tortured for our sake. We see Him brutalized for us. And we see Him rise on Easter. That is the means that always and in the end justifies you and me.