

# Right Thing, Right Reason

2 Samuel 11:1-17, 26-27

5<sup>th</sup> Sunday of Easter

22 May 2011

The news headlines that dominated the global media this past week must rank as the greatest “fall-from-grace” story for a long, long time. Ever since, let me think ... ever since Tiger Woods 18 months ago! As we so well know, last weekend, Dominique Strauss-Kahn, the former head of the International Monetary Fund, one of the most powerful men in world financial circles, allegedly attacked a maid in his luxury hotel suite in New York City and now is being held under house arrest with the most stringent bail conditions. Oh, how are the mighty fallen!

The tragedy here is, unfortunately, multi-dimensional. Most of all, it was a tragedy of immense proportions for the poor woman who was assaulted and abused. An African immigrant. A single mother. One of society’s most vulnerable. But it is also a tragedy for Strauss-Kahn’s family who must be suffering terrible shame and embarrassment. And not forgetting, either, how great a tragedy it is for millions of people in countries struggling to deal with debt problems in the wake of the global financial crisis. As much as Strauss-Kahn may be a serial sex offender, he also has consistently displayed a unique ability to help countries in need. Like no-one else, he has been able to convince the European Union, the United States and many large global corporations to open up their bank accounts and be more generous than they would otherwise want to be in helping less fortunate countries.

Why do rich and powerful men such as the Strauss-Kahns, the Arnold Schwarzenegers and the Tiger Woods of the world do what they do? Why do they engage in the riskiest of behaviour thinking that they are beyond the reach of the law and that they will never be caught?

Do they do these things just because they can? Or, are evolutionary factors involved? Or, are their hormones and neurotransmitters out of sync? Is it a matter of cultural attitudes to women that are to blame? Or, did they experience abuse as children? Some have blamed readily-available, sexually-graphic material while others maintain that it is all to do with issues of power and anger. The causes are obviously complex and can vary widely from one individual to another.<sup>1</sup>

But one factor in particular would appear to be a common thread in the behaviour of these men. They treat women as objects rather than human beings. They see women as a means to an end – whether that end be power, control or sexual satisfaction.

Unfortunately, of course, such lamentable treatment of women is in no way new in the history of human behaviour. We only need to look back a few thousand

years to the times of David, King of Israel, for a good example of a highly placed man involved in extremely risky behaviour.

As you remember from the biblical story, David (like Strauss-Kahn) was an opportunist and, one day, just happened to spy the beautiful Bathsheba in an adjacent building as he walked around on his palace roof. One thing led to another, as is so often said, and then to another, and David soon received news that was totally to change his life. Bathsheba was going to have a baby.

Now, we can only imagine the absolute panic King David experienced when he discovered that Bathsheba was pregnant. He obviously realised instantly that he faced disgrace. His sin would find him out. He would be weakened in the face of his enemies. So, without missing a beat, he decided to take whatever measures were necessary, immediately embarking on a cover-up and a conspiracy. When he couldn’t convince Uriah, Bathsheba’s husband, to sleep with his wife while he was home on leave, he decided to send him to the front lines of battle where he would be – and was – killed. And all to protect his royal reputation. Whether these measures broke the ancient laws of Israel or not, it did not matter to David. This was an extreme situation. Extraordinary methods were warranted. The end justified the means.<sup>2</sup>

Talking about the end justifying the means, I must admit to being more than a little uncomfortable in the past few weeks with the US government’s foray into Pakistan to kill Osama Bin Laden. I started to become uncomfortable, in fact, the day after the events in Abbotabad, when I read the following quotation:

“I mourn the loss of thousands of precious lives, but I will not rejoice in the death of one, not even an enemy. Returning hate for hate multiplies hate, adding deeper darkness to a night already devoid of stars. Darkness cannot drive out darkness: only light... can do that. Hate cannot drive out hate: only love can do that.”<sup>3</sup>

Now, undoubtedly, Osama Bin Laden was a wicked and evil man. Undoubtedly, the world is a better place without him. But was this the right way to deal with him? To execute him in summary fashion in front of his wives and children? In the aftermath, the world hailed the courage and daring of the Navy Seals in undertaking such a breathtaking mission, using the latest surveillance and aviation technology. But I must admit, the whole episode left me cold.

Surely, Bin Laden should have been captured and put on trial. Is this not what happened to Adolf Eichmann, the Nazi war criminal, who was brought back to Israel from Argentina in the 1960s? Or, how about Slobodan Milošević and Radovan Karadžić, both

brought to trial at the International Court at the Hague in recent years for war crimes in Serbia and Bosnia in the 1990s? Or what about former army chief, Augustin Bizimungu, one of those responsible for the genocide in Rwanda and whose trial before the U.N. War Crimes Tribunal in Tanzania ended this past week. All of these men were responsible for rape, torture, massacre and genocide on a scale far greater than what Bin Laden did, yet they were dealt with in ways that met higher standards of justice.

The problem is that, when any country takes the law into its own hands and fails to meet commonly accepted standards of justice, it loses moral authority in the world. When it stoops to such methods of revenge and retribution, when it becomes judge, jury and executioner, then it departs from civilised codes of conduct and becomes no better than its enemies.

Not only that, it opens up the way for other countries to act in similar ways without the possibility of international censure. It means that Russian political refugees can be poisoned in London or that Palestinians can be shot in a Dubai hotel and the international community cannot criticise the countries involved. It is then so easy for those countries to point to others who are doing the very same and getting away with it. When the end justifies the means, the law of the jungle prevails.

Mind you, bowing to the temptation of putting the end above the means is not just the sole province of political leaders or intelligence services. It is one we all face from day to day on a personal level. If ever we use a friendship to gain a promotion, if ever we tell a lie to make ourselves appear better in the eyes of others, if ever we downplay the facts to strengthen a rumour, if we ever bully others into agreeing with our point of view, then we are also giving credence to the belief that the end justifies the means.

Similarly in church, if ever we water down the Gospel to attract greater numbers into the pews, if ever we use fear or guilt as a motivator, if ever we are willing to do anything to make money or close our eyes to the questionable source of funding, if ever we threaten to remove our offering to change church policy, if ever we tell people what they want to hear rather than what they should hear, if ever we peddle cheap grace to gain greater popularity, then again we play into the secular belief that the end justifies the means.

On the contrary, as Christians, let us ensure that we only ever do the right thing for the right reason. Unfortunately, we live in a world today where, “too many people think that the only thing that’s right is to get by, and the only thing that’s wrong is to get caught.”<sup>4</sup> But as Christians we must constantly do the right thing because it is the right thing to do. Because it is what our Christian conscience tells us to do. And, most of all, because it is what God wants us to do.

One person who did just this was Eric Liddell, the great Olympic athlete of the 1920s. As you remember

from the film *Chariots of Fire*,<sup>5</sup> Liddell, a committed Christian, refused to run in the 100 metres race in the Paris Olympics of 1924 because the heats were to be held on a Sunday. He was the favourite for the gold medal and was urged by many to come down off his high-principled horse for one day so he could bring great glory to himself and his country. The end would justify the means, they argued. But Liddell refused to compromise because his Christian upbringing had taught him only ever to do the right thing for the right reason. As a result, God blessed him by giving him the strength to win the Olympic 400 metres race which was not his best distance – and also by giving him the courage to serve with great distinction in subsequent years as a missionary in China.

The great preacher Charles Spurgeon once said, “Do right if heaven itself should grieve. If the skies should not be propped except by a lie, let them fall. Come what may, you must never in any degree or in any shape depart from the honest, the true, the right, the Christ-like, that which God commands, that which alone God will approve.”<sup>6</sup>

The temptation to let the end justify the means comes to us all in many shapes and forms these days. When it does, let’s remember only to do the right thing for the right reason, “to do that which God commands, that which alone God will approve.”<sup>7</sup> When we do, God will bless us and work through us to create a better world in which we all can live.

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St. Paul’s Presbyterian Church

Peterborough, Ontario

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<sup>1</sup> Janet Meyer, M.A., *Root Causes of Sexual Assault*, [http://www.ccasa.org/documents/Root\\_Causes\\_Short\\_Descriptions.pdf](http://www.ccasa.org/documents/Root_Causes_Short_Descriptions.pdf)

<sup>2</sup> 2 Samuel 11:1-17, 26, 27

<sup>3</sup> Source: Unknown. Attributed to Martin Luther King Jr but not written by him.

<sup>4</sup> J.C. Watts

<sup>5</sup> *Chariots of Fire*, Ian Charleson, Ben Cross, Dir: High Hudson, Warner Brothers, 1981

<sup>6</sup> Spurgeon Metropolitan Tabernacle Vol. 61 p. 379

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.