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In Defense of Peace

Ashley Huizinga
Dordt College

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In Defense of Peace

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Ashley Huizinga

Daily Scripture Texts

[Psalm 119:33-40](#)

[Leviticus 19:1-2, 9-18](#)

[Matthew 5:38-48](#)

[1 Corinthians 3:10-11](#)

A few months ago, I watched the war movie “Hacksaw Ridge” with some friends. The movie is the story of a pacifist, a “conscientious objector”, who enlists to serve on the battlefields of World War II. Throughout the movie, Desmond Doss (Andrew Garfield) challenges norms (as well as the patience of his peers and superiors) by refusing to carry a weapon as he trains and is deployed into combat as a medic, confronting the Japanese forces at the Battle of Okinawa.

War movies have never seemed to be quite my style, but this movie left me an unexpected swirl of powerful emotions and convinced me that perhaps I’m not giving war movies the respect that many of them deserve. Sorrow and humor and horror and shock twisted my mind and my heart into a hundred pieces as I wrestled with this film, for days afterward and even today. Such, I think, is just the bittersweet aftertaste of a stellar movie-going experience.

One might say the same of wrestling with this passage. It seems so easy to quote “turn the other cheek” at someone in pain, and leave it at that. To condemn any resistance of authority and to damn the actions of so many who dare defend against the hurt and sorrow of the circumstances life has thrown at them. To protest the protesters, and to complain that the weak should be left to deal with their own problems.

It’s also easy to pick out the verse “Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you”, and to claim that this verse is arguing for us to suffer all evils, to lie down in the face of wrongdoing and just let it happen for fear of responding in an unchristian way.

But these verses are not meant to be so easy. Our response is not to stand back and watch evil happening. The Bible here condemns a violent reaction, that which would bring harm to another. But we are allowed to stand with the weak, to defend the defenseless. In fact, we are commanded to do so: in Psalm 82:3, “Defend” and “do justice” are not passive verbs. Jesus does not tell His followers to stand back and watch as pain is inflicted on those who cannot fight for themselves. He demands sacrifice, not the toleration of wickedness in the hope that things will get better and the scars will fade.

Sometimes, things do get better. Sometimes, scars and memories fade with time. But the Bible – contrary to centuries of war and fearmongering in the name of the Christian religion – calls for peace, and for the defense of peace, by all who shoulder the burden of the label Christian.

Doss is no perfect human being, and the movie is not for everyone. But the significance that I drew from the film is the same as that which I draw from this passage. At the end of the two-and-then-some hours of mercy, carnage, and sacrifice, I walked out of the theater with a new perspective of this passage from the Sermon on the Mount, a new understanding of what the word “peace” means and the actions that peace might require of us. Perhaps, after reading these few words, so might you.