

SERMON

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What if Jesus got it wrong? Hold that thought, I'll come back to it.

There's an arc to the storyline of the first three Star Wars movies – I'm not talking about the first three filmed and released, I'm talking about the very controversial prequels – episodes 1, 2, & 3. These three loved or hated movies are the back story of how Anakin Skywalker became Darth Vader.

Sorry if that's a spoiler...but I'm guessing if you didn't know that, you don't really mind me saying it now. Now, although I am a much bigger fan of the Star Trek universe than I am of the Star Wars storyline, I will admit to appreciating these three movies more than most people. Yes, they have a multitude of problems, but what I love is the story they offer.

Over the course of three movies, you see this young innocent child raised in a desert become one of the greatest villains of all time. But how does that happen? How does an idealistic and slightly naïve, earnest citizen of a galactic republic become the evil cyborg who murders his mentor and plots to kill his own children?

As a kid, seeing the middle arc of the story – where I was completely devastated by the reveal that Darth Vader was Luke's father – you get some brief narration on what happened. Anakin was seduced by the dark side, betrayed the Jedi Knights (the good guys) and the rest is history. In the end of Episode 6, the Return of the Jedi, Anakin is redeemed because he turns back to the good side and throws the real villain down an energy shaft to his death...kind of, but that doesn't matter for now.

In the first 3 episodes, you walk the journey of young Anakin as he grows to adulthood and you see the two or three moments that end up shaping his path to villainy.

And they don't seem so villainous. There's a moment in Episode 2, when he's talking politics with the love of his life – whom he isn't supposed to love – and he describes a new way of governing in which someone who is wise tells everyone how they're supposed to be good. He's pushing back against a galactic democracy because – and I know this will surprise you to hear this – it's not exactly efficient, and people don't always agree on what is the right thing to do. The scene ends with him acknowledging it's a dictatorship, but “well, if it works...”

In episode 3, as the turn to bad guy is nearing its completion, Anakin tells that same love of his life – who is now pregnant with what will be his twin children – “I have brought peace, freedom, justice, and security to my new empire.” You'll just have to imagine the passion in one of the few lines that were well-delivered by an unfortunate casting

choice...or bad direction depending on who you listen to.

And in that moment, you can see it. Anakin didn't become Darth Vader because he wanted to be evil. He became evil because he wanted to be good. He wanted to fix what was broken. He wanted to take care of people. He wanted to bring freedom and justice to a universe that didn't offer either.

But Anakin never got it...not until 3 episodes later when his grown son showed him the simple truth, said a million ways, but always and forever true: power corrupts and absolute power corrupts absolutely. The first 6 movies of this massively successful series have been rightly framed as the redemption of Anakin Skywalker, even if we barely knew his story for a couple of decades. They portray this truth about power and that it takes the unconditional love and hope of Luke to overcome hate.

We won't talk about the last three movies...because they were just terrible.

Jesus' time in the wilderness wasn't a straightforward battle between good and evil, it was a test of who Jesus was going to be, what it would mean to be the Son of God sent into the world. The path to worldly power was always an option. Think about what he's being offered.

Turning stones to bread in a world with a massive underprivileged class sounds like a pretty good use of divine power. For a Messiah who spent as much time healing people as he did teaching people, he clearly could've used the power to help thousands. Much like he feeds thousands with two fish and five loaves.

From the top of the mountain, Jesus is shown the entire world, filled with dictators of varying degrees of corruption; filled with the despair of injustice and inequality; filled with resource mismanagement...and it could all have been his if he just would've acknowledged the power he was being offered.

No good person who wants to make the world a better place would turn down that offer. Imagine how much good you could do – how many wrongs you could right. But this isn't a "good person," this is the Messiah. This is the Son of God.

What the devil, the tempter, failed to see is that worldly power always corrupts. The path that led Anakin to the dark side is the path that Jesus recognized for what it was: the power of deception, the ease with which we can become manipulated to believe the lies of the world in the pursuit of the truth.

Star Wars is not a theological work. Anakin, Luke, and Leia are not Father, Son, and

Holy Spirit. But there's a truth there about how we deal with power. There's power in the deception of the wilderness tempter that is so easy for us to live out, even when we don't intend to.

The truth that comes from the gospel, the truth that leads us out of the wilderness is that the way out goes through the cross. The way that Jesus chooses – **chooses** – to bring salvation to the world is to deny the power of the world and act in love, to embody sacrifice.

God sacrifices himself on a cross, and the world is redeemed. Turns out Jesus was right all along. Thanks be to God. Amen.