

Title: 01-Star Wars  
Text: Romans 1:18-25

(Thanks to Edward F. Markquart

[http://www.sermonsfromseattle.com/series\\_a\\_may\\_the\\_force\\_be\\_with\\_you.htm](http://www.sermonsfromseattle.com/series_a_may_the_force_be_with_you.htm) and Roy M.

Anker:

<http://www.christianitytoday.com/movies/commentaries/starwarspart1.html>: for many of the ideas in this sermon)

I can still remember sitting in the classic old picture theatre in Sydney with my sister and her boyfriend waiting for the start of Star Wars. My sister was allowed to go out with this guy as long as I went along too. And so as a pimply faced 13-year-old got to see the biggest movie premier of the year. And I still remember the tingle going up on spine as the music blurted out and a giant star cruiser rumbled through the theatre right over my head.

Star Wars, released in May 1977, was a breakthrough film. It is a combination of a “shoot ‘em up western,” with cowboys and Indians, cops and robbers, a love story, good versus bad, larrikin heroes, goofy sidekicks and of course, science fiction at its very best. The special effects were groundbreaking and sparked a whole new chapter of motion picture making

But Star Wars is not only a science fiction film; it is a religious film as well. And there are two themes which the Star Wars saga has which God would be very interested in: the theme of the Force and the theme of redemption.

One of the major themes of the Star Wars series is the theme of the Force. Instead of God, George Lucas' *Star Wars* saga speaks of 'The Force'. The Force is described by Jedi Master Obi-Wan Kenobi: "It's an energy field created by all living things. It surrounds us, penetrates us, and binds the galaxy together." As the clip showed, it is supernatural and flies in the face of skeptics like Han Solo.

This is highlighted by one scene in the Star Wars movie. In the Death Star briefing room Admiral Motti commends the Empire's newfound ability to control the galaxy through the construction of what he calls 'the ultimate power in the universe'. A menacing Darth Vader bitingly advises: 'Don't be too proud of this technological terror you have constructed. The ability to destroy a planet is insignificant next to the power of the Force.' Motti sneeringly dismisses Vader's warning with a reference to 'your sorcerer's ways' and 'sad devotion to that ancient religion' which has proven ineffective in locating either stolen data tapes or the Rebels' hidden fortress. However, Vader's reaction of choking Motti by the mere power of his thought indicates that in the world of Star Wars, at least, the Force is a very powerful dimension.

In 1977, Lucas' leanings were sharply at odds with the spirit of the day. In the recent two centuries, we have lived in an age dominated by science. In the eyes of many, science and technology have replaced God. God cannot be measured. God cannot be seen. God cannot be quantified. And if God cannot be seen, measured and quantified, it must not be that important. And so in this recent century, more and more people have come to the conclusion that God is part of an ancient, old legend from thousands of years ago. It is part of ancient mythology and superstition - an ancient myth, a legend, a fabled story from the deep and distant past.

However the Star Wars series strongly advocated that the spiritual and supernatural were an active and important part of the cosmos. As Sting sang, "we are spirits in the material world." Now, 30 years later, Lucas has been revealed to be a prophet in predicting the swing away from science back to a greater appreciation of the supernatural in life.

In the Star Wars series, the Force has two sides: the light side and the dark side. The light side of the Force is its elegance and beauty. The dark side of the Force is the element aligned with fear, hatred, aggression, and malevolence. Humans are able to draw strength from either the light side or the dark side of the Force. The heroes of the series use the Force for good whereas the bad guys use it for evil.

And this created concept of The Force has some important similarities to the God of the Bible.

Obi-Wan's teaching that the Force "surrounds us, penetrates us, and binds the galaxy together" is an echo of what Paul says in Ephesians 4:6 of 'one God and Father of all, who is overall and through all and in all' (Eph. 4:6).

Throughout the movies the characters use the blessing 'May the Force be with you' an echo of the old Christian blessing of 'May God be with you'. In addition, the voice of the Jedi Master Obi-Wan proclaims to young Luke Skywalker 'Remember, the Force will be with you always', reflecting Jesus' comforting of his disciples: 'And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age', (Mt. 28:20).

And finally Star Wars emphasised the contrast between good and evil - something which is also presented in the Bible. Star Wars cut through the confusing grey areas of modern morality and showed us that evil and good are as clear to distinguish as black and white. And it boldly showed us the consequences of following one or the other.

However, there are some important differences between the Force and the God of the Bible.

Because the Force can be manipulated for good or evil purposes, it possesses no morality or personality of its own. The Force is much like god as portrayed by the Eastern religions. It is not a person, but an essence, field, a force that exists in nature and which one should try to get in sync with. It has no specific purposes and makes no specific communication to humanity.

This idea that God is just a force whom we can tap into and use to empower our lives has become more popular in the West, mainly through the influence of the Eastern religions. Many people in Australia like to think of God as just some neutral, friendly, Force which can help them with their lives but really demands nothing from them.

However, this understanding of God is based mainly on wishful thinking. It is based upon human speculation about the character of God, rather than direct evidence. Further it defies logic. Have you ever considered how absurd it is to think that there is a God who has the intellect and power to have created the world but who now just doesn't care? When you look at creation how can you conclude that God has no character, personality or purpose, and that he would do all this and then not to seek to communicate with his creation?

The Bible shows that the exact opposite is true:

<sup>Ro 1:18</sup> The wrath of God is being revealed from heaven against all the godlessness and wickedness of men who suppress the truth by their wickedness, since what may be known about God is plain to them, because God has made it plain to them. For since the creation of the world God's invisible qualities—his eternal power and divine nature—have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that men are without excuse.

Unlike the Force, the God of the Bible is not an amoral power available for manipulation by people if they have the skills and perseverance to seek it out. The God of the Bible is a person with very definite opinions about what is right and wrong and he has been and still is actively taking the initiative to engage with humanity, not the other way round. And this refusal by most humans to engage with God, despite his obvious attempts to engage with them, means they are “without excuse.”

You know, even in Australia, most people still acknowledge the existence of a personal God. A growing number of people recognise the hand of God in their life even if they don't go to church. We know he exists, and when things get desperate enough we actually pray to him, but in day to day life, when everything is going okay, we want nothing to do with God.

And even if we do approach God we tend to want nothing to do with his morality or his standards. We want it to be on our terms, asking what God can do for us, rather than what we can do for him. That is a product of our selfish human natures. But when we have seen his eternal power and divine nature and yet choose not to engage with God we are without excuse.

The Force in the Star Wars movie bears some resemblance to what we call God but the Force would seem ambivalent as to whether humanity chose to engage with it or not. However, the God of the Bible is very concerned about how humans live and wants them to respond to him. He wants *you* to respond to Him.

However, it is not just the theme of Force that makes Star Wars a religious movie. At the end of the Star Wars series another important theme emerges: redemption.

For a long time during production and pre-release hype, the final movie in the series was entitled *The Revenge of the Jedi*; indeed, posters with that title appeared at many movie theatres. The ‘Revenge of the Jedi’ seemed like a perfectly sensible choice: the usual Hollywood formula: a happy climax, a standard “kill 'em all,” justice-is-done conclusion. It was what most fans wanted and expected from the story Lucas had told up to that point: the good guys vanquish all the bad guys, sending Darth Vader and the Emperor to painful death and perdition.

However, not long before its release, Lucas changed the title from “The Revenge of the Jedi” to the “Return of the Jedi”, and what a difference that makes.

The question was then, the return of what Jedi? Midway through *Return of the Jedi*, it looks like the last apprentice Jedi, Luke Skywalker, is also destined to die. Luke surrenders to Darth Vader and the evil Emperor, refusing to embrace the fear, hatred and aggression of the dark side of the Force. Knowing that he has lost his chance to win

Skywalker's soul, the Emperor begins to kill Luke by sending wave after wave of lethal electrical current through him.

The camera cuts regularly to bystander Vader as he watches both the agony of his son's loving self-sacrifice and, in contrast, the Emperor's obvious delight in torture and murder. In short, Luke chooses to die because he has at last comprehended and embraced the heart of Yoda's teachings: that the universe runs by love and that love should pervade all thought and action.

Seeing his son's willingness to die rather than use the power of the Force for aggression and murder, Vader musters the faint remnants of love and goodness of his days as a father and as a Jedi. On the verge of death himself, Darth Vader rises to destroy the Emperor in order to save his own son. In perfect symbolic appropriateness, the waves of electricity that fell on Luke now devour Vader and mortally wound the already weakened man. Vader acts to save his son but at the cost of his own life. But in doing so Darth Vader's life is redeemed.

Luke drags his father's seriously wounded body through the Death Star in an attempt to rescue him. Let's see what happens:

*Show clip two*

When Luke tells his mortally wounded father that he will die if he removes the mask and that he must get Darth Vader from the Death Star in order to save him, the hideously maimed old man, whose appearance is an apt visual reflection of his inner distortion, replies simply to his son, "You already have." Luke has given his father the opportunity for redemption. In this expression of love, both father and son realize the good and holy identity for which they were made. Evil, as manifested in the Empire and in Darth Vader has been defeated; goodness reigns.

Thus the title *The Return of the Jedi*: it points to a transformation that no one guessed was likely or possible. Even Darth Vader could be redeemed.

The reason that the movie is so powerful is that redemption is such a powerful thing. To see something lost, to see something pathetic, to see something that was once beautiful but is now damaged, to see something that seems hopeless, all of a sudden turn around - to see something found, to see something empowered, to see something beautiful again, to see a hopeless situation filled with hope - that is a powerful and beautiful thing.

And some of us here are in need of redemption. Our lives which were once beautiful and noble, like a Jedi Knight, have become ugly and scarred and stained and rotten. There is no light in our day. There is just sadness and despair and hatred. We have gone over to the dark side and we have given up hope of ever turning back into the light.

Today is your opportunity to experience redemption. To turn your back on the forces of evil and embrace the forces of goodness. But your saviour is not Luke Skywalker. Your saviour is Jesus Christ.

There is no difference, Romans 3<sup>23</sup> for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, <sup>24</sup> and are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus.

I believe in the power of the Force. I believe that the Force is not science fiction nor a legend from the past. I believe that there is a living, powerful, invisible Spiritual Power.

Jesus knew how to use that power. Jesus used that power to heal the sick and drive out the demons, to help the blind see and the lame walk. Like all people who have the Force on them, he used the power of God to fight the power of evil.

It is impossible to fight the power of evil in this world and in our lives without the power of the Force. You cannot fight alcoholism, you cannot heal broken relationships, you cannot forgive, you cannot fight the enormous demons like poverty, injustice and corruption, you cannot fight any battle without the power of the Force.

And it is only by the Force that you can find redemption.

George Lucas was right – there is a Force in the universe, but it has no dark side – it is only good. God is only pure and light and He seeks to engage with you in a personal relationship. And as part of that he seeks to redeem you, to buy you back from the dark side through his own personal sacrifice. May the force be with you.