

OK, so I would hazard to say that this sermon title *might* be one of the most unusual ones you’ve heard... even for ME. What ‘possible’ connection could that famous lead character in the ‘never-ending-saga,’ “*Star Wars*,” Luke Skywalker, have to do with the Good News of Jesus Christ? Aside, perhaps, that ‘Jesus’ and ‘Jedi’ both start with the letter ‘J’? Well, I would begin by saying that dating back to the connection our first born, son Chandler, made with Luke, Han, Leia, Chewy, C-3PO, and the rest of the intergalactic gang over 40 years ago, *Star Wars* has always been a favorite of mine. He and I still quote familiar statements from the first trilogy... such as the line by Han when he and Luke are attempting to rescue Leia from her prison cell, and the bridge asks what is going on. To which Han replies, “We’re all fine here... how are YOU?” Or that recurring line that is repeated by several different characters at various difficult moments: “I have a BAD feeling about this.” And, of course, the most well-known saying... so popular it even has an unofficial day named for it in the 5th month of the year: ‘May the fourth (‘Force’) be with you.’ So, on this Father’s Day, this movie is closely linked to the one who first made ME a father... well, God and my wife also had a little something to do with it...

But as I read today’s passage in Matthew... particularly with the statements of Jesus that He came “**to set a man against his father**”... and that “**one’s foes will be members of one’s own household**” (*Matthew 10:35-36*) ... my mind went to the ‘rocky’ relationship (no wait, that’s ANOTHER favorite movie, for another day) between Luke and his father. AKA, ‘Darth Vader.’

I don't know that one would have even had to see the second Star Wars movie, "The Empire Strikes Back," to know of the duel... 'lightsaber-style'... between Luke and Vader. And the two memorable lines spoken by each: "*I am your father.*" And the reply: "*That's not possible!*"

To find out that this evil man who so much epitomized everything that went against the good of what he believed... about his here-to-fore unknown father, and what his father supposedly stood for... rocked Luke's belief system to the core. How was it 'possible' that he and his biological father were so DIFFERENT? To be locked in mortal combat over those differences. Perhaps not too far from how we might struggle with Jesus saying that his very **purpose** was to put a father and son against each other... to even be a 'foe' or enemy. So, perhaps this piece of 'science fiction' might yet support some principles of 'religious fact' as described in our reading for today. Let us then consider the (capital) **Gospel** of Matthew as it compares to the (little) 'gospel of Luke... Skywalker.'

First of all, who here has never SEEN anything related to this multi-billion >> dollar 'franchise' known as "**Star Wars?**" Well, in Jesus' words, "***Have no fear!***" The central figure, Luke, is raised by his aunt and uncle, never having met his parents. He knows very little about either one of them. But comes to find out that because of his unknown heritage, he is really something special. But just doesn't know much about his talents and gifts... until he is introduced to this mysterious power known as "The Force." Synonymous with 'GOOD.' At battle against what is known as "The Dark Side." Synonymous with 'EVIL.' And it is in the midst of his face-to-face battle with the embodiment of that 'evil,' Darth Vader, that he is told of his arch-enemy's true identity. 'I am your father.' To which he replies, in disbelief, 'that's not possible.'

Luke's disbelief was, in no small part, was based on his 'supposed' father's own 'disbelief.' Disbelief in the principles that meant so much to Luke. Which is exactly what Jesus is talking about. When He says that he had **"come to set a man against his father"** it was not to do so out of disrespect... not in violation of the 5th Commandment (**"Honor thy father and mother"**)... but rather, to be careful that in 'honoring' a parent a child did not put that allegiance AHEAD OF their relationship with their HEAVENLY Father. It's pretty clear: **"whoever loves father and mother MORE than me is not worthy of me."** (Matthew 10:37)

As much as Luke would have been conflicted that his very own father would be such a prominent proponent of the 'dark side,' he did NOT let his family connection deter him from his service to the 'cause.' He could fully appreciate the truth of Jesus' statement that **"one's foes will be members of one's own household."** (Matthew 10:36) And I would imagine that many of us here can appreciate the validity of this verse for members of OUR own families. And I'm not just talking about those we may differ over political or social issues. Something MUCH more important than that. And that is the place of JESUS CHRIST in their lives. There are those close to you... perhaps even in your 'very own household'... who would ridicule you for your taking the time to come here to worship... or to get online to join in this service... or to spend your 'valuable' time in Bible study, or in quiet times of prayer. Wait... what? Someone in YOUR family who doesn't share in your Christian belief? *'That's not possible'*... The question is, whether inside your family or not, will you DEFEND your faith to others? Will you stand up for what you believe? We would do well to remember Jesus' words, and how we live up to them: **"I have not come to bring peace, but a sword."** (10:34) Or a lightsaber...

But even as Luke battled for his life against his very own father, he could have been encouraged by that small still voice of steadfast ones who had gone before him. Voices that reassured him in his struggle of the same truth that Jesus did to his disciples as they faced their adversaries: ***“Have no fear... Do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul.”*** (Matthew 24:26,28)

And the same holds true for us. As we seek to live out lives faithful to the Gospel of JESUS CHRIST, we too should ***“have no fear.”*** No matter how critical of us a friend or family member may be... particularly with regards to our Christian faith... we should not fear those who might wound us verbally, or even physically; but rather, the One who holds our very SOULS in His hand. ... Now, I know that we might struggle with Jesus using the word ‘FEAR’ with regards to God. Perhaps some synonyms like ‘RESPECT’ or ‘WORSHIP’ might be easier for us. But let’s face it, a little ‘fear’ is healthy. For all of God’s compassion and mercy, let us not lose sight of His POWER and MIGHT. Remember, it was that loving, caring Jesus who said about His Father, ***“fear him who can destroy both soul and body in hell.”*** (10:28)

Harsh words? Perhaps. True? YES! But look at what Jesus says immediately following this verse: ***“Are not two sparrows sold for a penny? Yet not one of them will fall to the ground apart from your Father. ... So do not be afraid; you are of more value than many sparrows.”*** (Matthew 10:29-31) (Notice I left out that whole ‘hairs of your head’ comment... 😊) No matter how seemingly worthless a mere sparrow might seem to us, to God they are indeed valuable. ***“Not one of them will fall to the ground apart from the Father.”*** ALL of God’s creation is of value and worth... especially his human creation.

Going back to Luke, as evil and irredeemable as his father might have seemed, it didn't keep Luke from giving up **hope**. At one point in a subsequent movie he says, *"I know that there is good in you."* Who might God be putting in your path of life who needs to hear that very same affirmation? It may be that close family member, or someone you meet this afternoon. But I can 'guarantee' you that there are a LOT of people out there... perhaps one of you listening today... who needs to hear those words of Jesus: ***"Do not be afraid; you are of more value than many sparrows."*** Yes, **YOU!** No, really ... one 'bird brain to another'...

There's one last illustration from Luke's life that I would lift up for our own. Jesus starts off this passage with the statement, ***"A disciple is not above the teacher, nor a servant above his master."*** (Matthew 10:24) In his instruction as a Jedi, Luke would have to be under the tutelage of a strange little green creature whose speech was a grammatical nightmare. ("Yoda") And though at times he had his doubts about this guy, with whom he was very different, yet Luke respected him. Listened. Learned. Grew. HUMBLE enough to never think he was greater than his teacher. Always willing to learn more...

How willing are WE to keep 'learning?' Even from someone very different than we are? It may be the wisdom of another person. Or of the Father, the Son, the Spirit. In the example of Christ, may we too, in the words of the REAL Gospel of Luke (the Apostle), ***"grow in wisdom and stature before God and mankind."*** (Luke 2:52) Never 'above' our 'master and teacher'... but LIKE Him...

In closing this analysis of the similarity between the fictional character of Luke Skywalker and the person of Jesus Christ, let me assure you that I am NOT trying to say that this series of movies are intended to be, in any way, an

apologetic for the Christian faith. What I AM saying is that just as secular MUSIC can express spiritual truths (for all truth is God's truth), so too can secular movies. Indeed, as we seek to make some semblance of sense out of an oft-times sense-LESS world, I believe it is every MORE important that we see how God is sending us messages through our everyday lives. As long as we look at that world, and our broken creation in it, through the LENS of Scripture. Rather than our culture shaping our perception of Christ, may CHRIST shape our perception of our culture...

And as for Luke, perhaps we can learn something from him in our own attempts to learn from OUR 'Master.' That as strong as was his love for his father, ultimately he would not compromise what he believed in. That as a Jedi, he sought to be a defender of the truth, and a Person of integrity... Channeling a mysterious 'force' within him to work for the good of mankind. No matter the cost. As we too battle, each and every day, our own struggle with the powers of the 'dark side,' may we too be persons of integrity, defending God's goodness and truth... empowered by that unseen 'force' within us known as the Holy Spirit. No matter the cost, let us, be REAL LIFE 'Jedis for JESUS.' **Jesus.** The original 'action hero'... who is active both IN this world... and OUT of this world...

CHARGE & BENEDICTION

"Whoever denies me before others, I also will deny before my Father in heaven. ...whoever does not take up the cross and follow me is not worthy of me."

These challenging words of Christ perhaps not that dissimilar from Darth Vader:

"I find your lack of faith disturbing." An assessment that our heavenly Father might sometimes have. But as disturbing as our lack of faith can be, let us hold on to the promises of our Lord Jesus.... that ***"everyone who acknowledges me before others, I will acknowledge before my Father...***

(that) ***those who lose their life for my sake will find it.***"

As we acknowledge God before others, we do not do it alone...