



Sample Sermon
"Answer the Call"

Written by David Stancil, First Baptist Church, Bristol, VA

I've been a *Star Wars* fan since Episode IV first came out in 1977. Like many others, I'm deeply attracted to this epic story of galactic conflict between good and evil, and after watching Anakin Skywalker become Darth Vader in Episode III, I watched the first trilogy all over again to re-experience the resolution of his eventual "deathbed conversion" and the final destruction of the Empire.

Key Passages:

- 2 Corinthians 5:19-20
- Ephesians 3:10-11

As much as I like *Star Wars*, though, I'm an even bigger fan of *The Lord of the Rings*.¹ *The Lord of the Rings* tells the same epic story of good vs. evil, and also has a happy ending, but the characters are richer and the plot has more depth. And, perhaps because the story is set on our own planet, I'm more able to feel a part of the plot as it develops.

There's an especially powerful scene in the second movie, *The Two Towers*, which resembles Luke Skywalker's comments before the final scene in Episode VI of *Star Wars*. Frodo and Sam have become lost in an awful wilderness and are unable to find their way out. Just as they're about to give up in despair, they happen upon Gollum, the wretched creature who was the previous possessor of the One Ring. Because of the Ring's evil power, Gollum has been consumed with desire for it, and he has wasted away into a horrible caricature of his former self.

Gollum agrees to lead Frodo and Sam out of the wilderness and to their destination, but Sam knows that Gollum's real desire is to find a way to regain possession of the Ring. Because he knows Gollum's true motive, Sam is continually mean to him. Frodo, on the other hand, has more compassion.

After one such incident, Frodo asks Sam, "Why do you do that, calling him names and running him down all the time?" Sam replies, "Because that's what he is, Mr. Frodo. There's naught left in him but lies and deceit. It's the Ring he wants. It's all he cares about."

Looking at miserable Gollum, Frodo says, "You have no idea what it did to him. I have to help him, Sam."

"Why?"

"Because I have to believe he can come back."

If we could travel into the dim recesses of the past and change that Ring to a certain piece of fruit, we might hear a very similar conversation. As God banished Adam and Eve from the Garden of Eden, stationing mighty angels to guard its gate, I can almost hear God saying, "You have no idea what their disobedience has done to them. I have to help them. I have to make a way for them to come back home" (Genesis 3:24).

That, in one sentence, is the story of the Bible. The Bible is the record of God's making a way for you and me, as those who have inherited a nature twisted and nearly destroyed by Sin, to come home again to what God's love had originally intended to give us.

Fast forward to the present. A couple of years ago, I had the opportunity to visit a Silicon Valley-style optical engineering company, where their secret pioneering work was expected to lead to both fame and wealth. I asked one of the engineers what the point of it all was: "Once you get past making things smaller, faster, and more powerful, and once you've become wealthy by doing so, what's it all really about?" The engineer answered, "It's better not to ask such questions."

That reminded me of something my friend Steve Hadden once said. Steve noted that the world is forever asking "What do you do?" but that this is the wrong question. The real question is "What are you doing with your life?" Like that engineer, most of us can't answer that question. We really don't know what we're doing with our lives.² Toyohiko Kagawa spoke for many of us when he wrote, "I read in a book that a man called Christ went about doing good. It is very disconcerting to me that I am so easily satisfied with just going about."³

So how would you answer the question, "What are you doing with your life?" As you think about your life beyond high school or college, are you going to "just go about," or are you going to make a difference with your life? And if it were possible to know why the universe exists and what your place is in it, wouldn't you want to know that and get on board?

There are many ways to make a living, many careers to contemplate, but the most exciting place to invest your life is in the eternal plan of God . . . and here's the plan. It has two parts. First of all, God's plan for your life is that you choose to allow God to so shape your character that you're willing, ready, and eager to spend eternity with Him. God wants you to experience the adventure of being born again through faith in Jesus, and God wants to use every experience you have to shape your character so that you're more and more like Him.

God loves you with a fierce and passionate love, and God's first plan is for you to receive that love and then to return it with a similar passion⁴. . . but there's a second part to the plan. Once you've been born again into God's eternal family, God wants you to join your life with other believers in a new kind of spiritual community here on planet Earth—a community so special and so powerful that only God can build it. As you've probably guessed, this community is often called the Church.

Here's where things begin to sound like *Star Wars*. You probably know that "long, long ago and far, far away," there was a war in heaven. Rather like the evil Emperor Palpatine in *Star Wars*, Satan hungered to be the ultimate power in the universe and launched a rebellion against God. God conquered Satan and his forces and banished them to Heaven's Alcatraz, a planet C.S. Lewis called "the Silent Planet," cut off from the normal communication and commerce of the universe.⁵

In Lewis's opinion, you and I live on that planet, and God's creation of humans as free beings right here in the middle of Satan's prison camp was the ultimate "in your face" from God. It's as if God said to Satan, "I'm going to show you. I'm going to make creatures out of nothing but dirt, and I'm going to put them in your back yard, where you have access to them all the time. I'm going to love them so much that they are freely drawn to me, and I'm going to recreate what you destroyed right under your nose."

What this means is that our situation really is similar to *Star Wars* and *The Lord of the Rings*, and, as happened in the High Councils in both movie series, God asks today, "Whom should I send as a messenger to my people? Who will go for us?" (Isaiah 6:8). At this very moment, God invites you—yes, you—to join in the battle to establish God's Kingdom "on earth as it is in heaven" (Matthew 6:10).

Can you imagine anything more exciting or more important to do with your life? Jesus said that it's worth selling everything you have to get on board with this! (Matthew 13:44). God's plan is for you to sign on as a Kingdom Builder and that you then spend the rest of your life in overt and covert Kingdom operations.

Being a Kingdom Builder doesn't necessarily mean that you'll live your life as a vocational minister, but every Kingdom Builder is a minister to the world through the Church, because the Church is God's invasion force in Satan's territory. The Church is made up of ordinary folks, like you, whose lives have become *extraordinary* as God's power transforms them. Jesus has guaranteed that His Church is indestructible. Jesus guarantees that although many battles and much suffering are still ahead, His Church is going to be victorious in the battle when all is said and done.

This confused, bewildered, terrified and terrifying world we live in is in desperate need of the word of God's care and faithfulness. We, the Church, are charged by our Lord Christ with living in the world while being different from it. We're called to be aware of the needs and hurts, the sorrows and joys, the confusion, the bewilderment and fear of persons who are still under the power of Satan, offering caring ministry that responds to these needs, and offering God's word of hope, forgiveness, and victory. And as we do this, God's Kingdom continues to come on Earth as it is in heaven.

There are many ways in which God may be calling you to serve the Heavenly Kingdom, but as you wonder and pray about the way that is laid out for you, I urge you to take seriously the possibility that God may be calling you to serve in vocational ministry through the Church. There are many more ways to do this than you know about right now, but every one of them is about the business of pushing back the Darkness; of proclaiming God's message of reconciliation; of reclaiming lives that have been captured by the powers of Evil (2 Corinthians 5:19-20).

The movie Gettysburg tells the story of another epic battle, the story of the three bloodiest days of American history. In the first scenes, a few days before the battle, Colonel Joshua Chamberlain of the 20th Maine Regiment says to his men: "This is a different kind of army. If you look back through history, you'll see men fighting for pay, for women, for some other kind of loot. They fight for land, power, because a king leads them, or just because they like killing. But we're here for something new. This has not happened much in the history of the world. We are an army out to set other men free."⁶ That's what the Church does, too.

There are many worthwhile things you could do with your life. There are many organizations to which you might dedicate yourself. But the Church is not one organization among many. The Church is the Body of Christ, through which the New Creation is being born.

We're not talking about a tiny plastic Jesus that you can put in your pocket or stick on your dashboard. We're talking about the Lord Christ who spoke the universe into being, who sustains it at this very moment, and who calls you into His service. F. R. Maltby said that "Jesus promised his disciples three things: you will be absurdly happy, completely fearless, and constantly in trouble." But it's even better than that: God wins!

How about it? What are you going to do with your life?

FOOTNOTES

- ¹The Lord of the Rings: The Two Towers, New Line Cinema (2003), Directed by Peter Jackson.
- ²Stephen L. Hadden, "A Vocation Clarification Seminar for College Students at Faith Baptist Church, Georgetown, Kentucky" (D.Min. project, The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 1987), p. 12.
- ³Epigram attributed to Toyohiko Kagawa and cited by Donald R. Heiges, *The Christian's Calling*, rev. ed. (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1984), p. 25.
- ⁴Check out Zephaniah 3:17.
- ⁵See Revelation 12:7; Ezekiel 28:11-19; Isaiah 14:12-17; Luke 10:18; Ephesians 6:10-17, 3:10-11.
- ⁶Ronald F. Maxwell, *Gettysburg*, based on *The Killer Angels* by Michael Shaara (Turner Pictures, 1993).