

Youth Culture Lesson
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Caped Christianity

The Dark Knight Offers Lessons of Faith

By Paul Asay

What Happened:

The Dark Knight Rises, the final chapter in director Christopher Nolan's *Dark Knight* trilogy, was released on video this week. In the movie, Batman must save Gotham City from evil forces—this time embodied by the hulking villain Bane.

Sacrifice and do-gooding is nothing new for Batman, of course. In the book *God on the Streets of Gotham*, the author suggests Batman is a little like us as Christians—an imperfect hero heeding a sacred call to serve others and follow a higher purpose.

"I believe we're all a little like Batman, trying to find our way in a messed-up reality and yet knowing, deep in our being, that Someone thinks we're special and that we can be special. Even as we plow through our very normal, non-superhero lives, we're all called for a purpose we can hardly imagine." —*God on the Streets of Gotham*

In *The Dark Knight Rises*, Batman takes another step into Christian metaphor—growing into more of a Christ-like savior for Gotham City.

As Batman prepares to try to save Gotham from Bane, he's deserted by his loyal servant and friend, Alfred, and betrayed by someone whom Batman thinks is an ally. These are echoes of Jesus' own experiences when His disciples deserted Him; Peter denied Him, and Judas betrayed Him.

After Batman is betrayed, the hero is beaten ferociously by Bane, who eventually breaks his back. The hero is so brutally abused that no one's really sure if Batman's dead—maybe even Batman himself, in a way.

He's thrown into a prison, a pit that several people refer to as hell. The reference might be seen as an echo of the Apostle's Creed, which tells us Jesus descended into hell before rising again.

It's interesting that Batman literally must crawl out of the pit as the other prisoners chant "Rise." Batman *does* rise—not in the same way Jesus did, but it calls to mind Jesus' sacrifice and miraculous resurrection. While Batman just had a city to save, Jesus rose to rescue the world.

Talk About It:

Author and professor C.S. Lewis believed stories, ancient or modern, can sometimes hold powerful spiritual truths. Sometimes they purposefully reflect truth, such as Lewis' own

Chronicles of Narnia. Sometimes they do so unintentionally, as he found in some ancient myths and fables. Superhero stories are as close as we get to fables that originate here in the United States: They're made up, but they're filled with big themes—good and evil, temptation and heroism, sacrifice and redemption.

What do you think makes Batman a hero? Is he a perfect hero? Does he have problems? If so, what are they? Do you think superhero stories such as Batman can reflect greater truths?

In the movies, do you ever see Batman tempted? By what? When does he sacrifice himself for others? Why does he do it?

Batman's often portrayed as a loner, but it always seems as if he has friends to help him. Who are his friends? How do they help Batman? Does Batman need them? Why or why not?

What the Bible Says:

“When I called, You answered me; You made me bold and stouthearted” (Ps. 138:3).

“If you falter in times of trouble, how small is your strength?” (Prov. 24:10).

“To this you were called, because Christ suffered for you, leaving you an example, that you should follow in His steps” (1 Pet. 2:21).

“And we, who with unveiled faces all reflect the Lord's glory, are being transformed into his likeness with ever-increasing which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit” (2 Cor. 3:18).

“I will open my mouth in parables, I will utter hidden things, things from of old—what we have heard and known, what our fathers have told us. We will not hide them from their children; we will tell the next generation the praiseworthy deeds of the Lord, His power, and the wonder He has done” (Ps. 78:2-4).