

Captain Marvel, Women Superheroes and the Church

Some Christians think it's sinful to go to movies. That's not my conviction. While I avoid films with profanity and gratuitous sex, I'm a total movie buff. And I especially love it when a film inspires me, makes me laugh or cry or reinforces a basic Christian principle.

I believe movies have become the language of our generation. So if I'm going to reach people with the gospel, I will likely need to use every available cultural reference to convey that message. That's why I'm not against using a movie clip in a sermon.

If the apostle Paul were alive today, he'd likely borrow material from the latest blockbuster to make his point. He quoted secular poetry, reasoned with Greek philosophers and told the Corinthians: "I have become all things to all men, that I might by all means save some" (1 Cor. 9:22b). Paul knew he had to be relevant to his culture to reach his audience.

I didn't go to see Captain Marvel expecting a faith message. Most superhero movies are pure popcorn entertainment, big on CGI effects and lacking in serious character development. And since Captain America and the Black Panther are already my favorite comic book heroes (apologies to Thor fans), I didn't expect to be impressed by the story of a woman named Carol Danvers who ends up becoming the equivalent of a human atomic blowtorch after she is (spoiler alert!) exposed to an alien radiation blast.

But by the end of the film I was cheering—especially during the short mid-credits scene when we learn that Danvers, aka Captain Marvel, will join the other Avengers in their next movie, *Avengers: Endgame*. Apparently when the evil Thanos

begins wiping out most of the universe, this female superhero will show up to help Captain America, Black Widow, Thor, Hulk and Ant-Man save the day.

Wait a minute ... a woman is going to win the final Avengers battle? Lots of fans got upset when they learned that the creators of Captain Marvel made the character a woman. Marvel Comics actually had several superheroes by the name of Captain Marvel, of both genders. But when Avengers fans realized where this story was headed, some saw it as a feminist plot.

Keep in mind, we are talking about a movie based on comic books. This is fiction, people. It's a story that involves a talking raccoon, a man from another planet who carries a magic hammer and a man who can shrink himself to microscopic size at will. Yet when some people learned that Captain Marvel was a female Air Force pilot whose DNA was manipulated after she was taken to another galaxy, they launched a protest.

So basically there are many people out there who have a problem with the concept of female superheroes. Captain Marvel doesn't fit our traditional narrative about women being weak and demure while men do all the heavy lifting. This idea is pervasive in many churches, where women are expected to play minor roles while the men lead, preach and make decisions.

For many years, I've questioned this guys-always-lead narrative because I don't see it in Scripture. The book of Acts tells us that when the early disciples were baptized in the Holy Spirit, God's fire came upon both men and women. Everyone was ignited. Everybody in the upper room became a superhero after that experience—empowered to heal the sick, cast out demons and transform nations.

And after that spiritual explosion, Peter announced that the old patriarchal rules had changed. He declared: "'In the last days it shall be,' says God ... your sons and your daughters shall prophesy" (Acts 2:17a). Women played a limited role

under the Old Covenant—even though there were exceptions like Deborah, Esther and Miriam. But when the fire of the Spirit showed up in the New Covenant era, the door opened for women to be preachers, missionaries, justice activists, prophets and world changers.

Captain Marvel reminds us that we need some flame-throwing, demon-stomping, Holy Ghost-filled women superheroes today to finish the job of evangelizing the world. This task Jesus gave us cannot be finished by guys alone. We need all hands on deck. Men in the church should be less intimidated by strong women and more welcoming of their spiritual gifts.

Just as Nick Fury sent Captain Marvel a distress signal, asking her to hurry back to Earth to crush Thanos, I'm sending a message too. I'm asking every woman of God to suit up. Let the Holy Spirit empower you. We need you to join this battle.