

Christian Movie Trio Brings Hope Over Easter Weekend—Wowing Even Atheists

Three faith-based films helped multiply box-office numbers this weekend, with two of the three hitting the top 10 best movies in America.

I Can Only Imagine, *Paul, Apostle of Christ* and *God's Not Dead: A Light in Darkness* played in theaters across the nation over Easter weekend, cumulatively grossing nearly \$70 million since *I Can Only Imagine* premiered last month.

Of the three, *Imagine* continues to dominate, taking the No. 4 spot on Box Office Mojo's top movie hits, following *Ready Player One*, Tyler Perry's *Acrimony* and *Black Panther*. *Paul* took 10th while *God's Not Dead* landed at No. 12 on its debut weekend.

"Many religious movies speak the basic, universal language of spectacle and outrage, of wonderment and melodrama. Indeed, that's why they can often appeal to nonbelievers like me. But here is one—produced by Affirm Films, the arm of Sony that develops titles for the faith-based audience—largely devoid of sensationalism, a film that delves quietly into substantive issues of belief and forgiveness. Free of flash and fantasy, it asks to be taken seriously, which might make it a harder proposition for the unconverted," writes atheist critic Bilge Ebiri for *Village Voice*.

Of *Paul*, he writes:

"In such subtle ways, the film occasionally transcends rhetoric. When Luke finds himself among a group of Christians who are to be fed to the lions the next day, he reassures them the pain will be momentary, that afterward they will all wake

up happy and whole in Heaven. Caviezel brings just enough trepidation to his delivery that we wonder how sincere Luke is about that whole momentary pain thing; he says later that he is haunted by their faces. The characters speak often of the promise of the afterlife, but they all seem to understand that the real struggle remains here, in the world at large. There's little in *Paul, Apostle of Christ* that's not predictable, but the film engages honestly enough with its ideas that at times it feels like a small ... well, let's not use the word *miracle* in this case. It doesn't shy away from complexity, and for that we can all be grateful—believers and heathens alike.”

Faith-based moviegoers have been supportive of the *God's Not Dead* franchise and see the third as a welcome installment.

“We feel the movie is a welcome addition to the series, perhaps the best,” Frost Smith writes for Answers in Genesis. “As a moviegoer, the script, acting, visuals and overall story were compelling. As a Christian, I felt camaraderie with both people in the theater and on the screen, as did my other moviegoers. Naturally there was almost no foul language, innuendo, and the mild bit of violence seemed to be the only cause for the PG rating.”

The film, however, performed less than expected in the box office.

“Not so impressive was the debut for Pure Flix's ***God's Not Dead: A Light in Darkness***, which finished outside the top 10 and short of expectations,” Brad Brevet writes for Box Office Mojo.

He continues: “In fourth is Roadside and Lionsgate's ***I Can Only Imagine***, which expanded for the second weekend in a row, this weekend playing in 2,648 theaters (+395) and bringing in a strong \$ million, pushing the film's domestic cume over \$55.5 million, becoming Roadside's largest domestic release ever, topping ***Manchester by the Sea***'s \$ million run in 2017. ...

“Also outside the top 10 is the disappointing debut for Pure Flix’s **God’s Not Dead: A Light in Darkness**. Debuting in 1,693 locations, pre-weekend expectations were for an opening around \$4 million, but the film managed just \$2.6 million over its first three days, ~\$5 million short of the \$7.6 million opening for **God’s Not Dead 2** in 2016 and more than \$6.5 million shy of the \$9.2 million opening for the first film back in 2014, despite the fact the first film opened in just 780 theaters.”

Nevertheless, the films brought hope over a weekend meant for faith and reflection.

Fellow Actor David White talking about his newest film opening this Easter weekend. Positive, inspiring film for the whole family! #GodsNotDead

– Scott duPont (@RealScottduPont) April 1, 2018

Share the Gift of Grace this #Easter!

Forgiveness. Redemption. Hope. That’s what we celebrate and that’s what is at the heart of the transformational true story of #ICANONLYIMAGINE. Gather your family to see it beautifully illustrated in a fresh way! #ThursdayThoughts

– Matt Dickerson (@MattDickerson) March 29, 2018

I highly recommend going to see I Can Only Imagine. Even if you have no interest in going, I promise it will change your life. ☺ there wasn’t a dry eye in the theater. I didn’t know how much I needed this film. Wow. #Icanonlyimaginemovie

– Jessica Livingston (@jesslivingstonn) April 2, 2018