



Iron Man 2

Wounded Saviors

Sequels are quite often duller than the originals. Being formulaic, they are put together to cash in on the success of their predecessors. They are typically produced to milk the cinematic cash cow. Fortunately, *Iron Man 2* does not fit this bill. It is as much fun as *Iron Man* but without the need to introduce and explain the characters, allowing the viewer to get right into this new story.

The film picks up several months after the first one left off, but reprises in flash-back Tony Stark's (Robert Downey Jr.) surprising press conference revelation of his dual identity. This revelation is critical, as Stark's alter ego is now in plain view.

Indeed, during the opening credits, we see magazine covers portraying the technologist and industry magnate as a savior. *Iron Man* is *Time's* "Man of the Year." Other newspapers show Stark as the person who has brought global fighting to an end. Subpoenaed to testify before a Senate hearing, Stark declares, "I have successfully privatized world peace!" With characteristic charisma, Stark flashes a peace sign and welcomes the audience's applause and semi-worship.

Just like the original, *Iron Man 2* is replete with spiritual references. Stark presents himself as the

savior of the world, and soaks in the world's acclaim. Surely the world needs a savior that is true. But not one like Tony Stark. As *Iron Man* he has dealt with the external conflicts but we need a Savior who can address our internal issue, the enmity we have with God (Col. 1:21). We have no inner

peace, and without it external peace is only temporary. Jesus is the Savior the world needs (Jn. 4:42), and he is as humble as Stark is egotistical.

In *Iron Man*, Stark discovered a literal and metaphorical internal change of heart. He realized he needed to give something back to society. Here he has regressed. Once more he is self-centered and self-indulgent. As an out-in-the-open hero, he now faces a government that wants his suit as a weapon, a business rival that wants his secret, an enemy that wants him dead, and a mid-life crisis that leaves him sinking into depression and alcohol. Stark is back into his playboy

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ways. He must face these internal and external demons.

The film is loaded with acting talent. Mickey Rourke plays Ivan Vanko, a discredited Russian physicist who blames Stark. Sam Rockwell, so good in *Moon*, is Justin Hammer, the weapons' supplier to the military and Stark's arch-rival. Gwyneth Paltrow returns as Pepper Potts, Stark's assistant who keeps him and his company running. Gone, though, is Terrence Howard, who had a falling out with Marvel Studios. Don Cheadle replaces him as Lt. Col. James Rhodes, who has a bigger part in this story, as does Samuel L. Jackson as Nick Fury, the leader of the Avengers. Making the strongest impression, though, is Scarlett Johansson as Natalie Rushman, a young lawyer for Stark Industries.

Rushman is in my favorite scene, as she takes on a whole platoon of security guards while her company driver Happy Hogan (played by the director, Jon Favreau, himself), struggles to fight one guard. In *Matrix*-like freeze-motion, we see her take all the guys down herself without need for a mechanical suit.

Of course, in coming to see *Iron Man 2* we come to see comic book action and these action scenes are terrific. Two stand out. The first is set against the stunning backdrop of the Monte Carlo grand prix. With Stark on the track, Vanko shows up to wreak destruction with a high-tech weapon

of his own. This is a spectacular sequence of flying cars and electric whips. Then there is the final battle where Stark with help combats Vanko again, now in an armored suit himself. The action is better and the climax superior to the original movie.

Vanko is a fearsome enemy, with his own de-

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mons and internal motivation. In one scene, he tells Stark in his Russian accent, “If you could make God bleed, people will cease to believe in Him. There will be blood in the water, and the sharks will come . . . All I have to do is sit here and watch, as the world will consume you.” He does not want to simply kill Stark; he wants to wound him and let the world bring him down. If Iron Man is shown to be invincible, his supporters will turn away.

Here is a classic contrast with the real Savior. If Stark’s blood is shed, his wounds will cause the peace that he has enabled to fall apart. His world cannot handle a wounded savior. But that is because Stark is not God, he is not the real Savior. In reality, the world needs a wounded Savior. It is by the shedding of Jesus’ blood that our sins can be forgiven (Heb. 9:22). His blood was poured out for us on the cross as he died there for us; by his wounds we are healed (1 Pet. 2:24). And with his death and resurrection Jesus has inaugurated his kingdom, a kingdom that will ultimately usher in peace (Isa. 9:7). One wounded savior ended peace; the other wounded Savior brings peace.

Another point of reference for biblical Christianity comes from Stark’s claim, “I am Iron Man. The suit and I are one.” His Iron Man suit is an anti-type of Jesus, who has come to be one with the human person. The real Jesus comes to us and makes his dwelling in us (Jn. 14:17-18). He said “I and the Father are one” (Jn. 10:30). The fullness of God in Christ is the very same fullness we have been given in Christ (Col. 2:9). When we choose to follow Jesus in obedience and love, we can no more be separated from Christ and his love (Rom. 8:35), in whom we find our new identity (2 Cor. 5:17), than can Tony Stark be separated from his suit in which he derives his identity.

One semi-humorous scene has Stark, dressed in his Iron Man outfit, hosting his birthday party. Full of swingers egging him on, he uses his technological weaponry as party poppers to entertain this wild and drunken crowd. And he is drunker than they are. He has gone off the deep end, in the realiza-

tion of his mortality. He has hit rock bottom in his character. So far down is he that he faces off in a *mano-a-mano* combat with his friend Rhodes, who has donned another of Stark’s mechanized suits. Not a fight for life and death, this is fight for dignity and respect. Stark cannot accept anyone else giving him orders or wearing his suit. This takes attention away from him. He is a lone ranger. He needs no help. He wants the limelight all to himself.

This brings us to a final key theme of the film: partnership; fighting together, supporting one another. Rhodes says to Stark, “This lone gunslinger act is unnecessary . . . you don’t have to do this alone!” Stark thinks he does but he really doesn’t. Americans have adopted the lone gunslinger mentality. And we have extended it even into our faith. Too often followers of Jesus think we can live out our faith on our own. Yet it is simply not true. Of course, we must come to Christ on our own; it is as a personal decision of ours to make. But once we are part of his family we are part of the body of Christ (1 Cor. 12:13). We all contribute to the well-being of the corporate body of Christ (1 Cor. 12:14-27). We cannot live alone with God. We need others; and they need us. Stark learns this lesson and comes to depend on his friend. We can learn this, too.

Despite the depression Stark overcomes his demons and emerges stronger, though narcissistic. Wounded, he is not weaker. Flying, he is more grounded. As a savior, he is still less than perfect.

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