

Some of the best films and stories leave us feeling both enthralled and uncomfortable in equal measure. Most of us will remember the reaction to seeing the film Schindler's list for the first time. Telling the story of how Oskar Schindler rescued Jews from Nazi Germany a compelling story in itself, but what sticks in our memory is how it was all filmed in black and white except for one little girl in a red dress... (if you haven't seen the film I won't spoil it anymore.

More recently I watched the film ***One Life*** telling the story of how Nicky Winton organised the evacuation of 669 children from Nazi occupied Czechoslovakia. Again, it wasn't just the story that captured us but then the clip from the TV program that's life that reunited Nicky with many of the children he rescued decades later.

The best stories enthrall and touch the affections, the emotions.

This is what is happening with this story that Jesus told of the unforgiving servant.

The story is told to answer Peter's question about how often he should be forgiving a brother or sister who sins against him. In what he thought to be a demonstration of generosity and grace he suggested seven times. Of course, we know Jesus blew that idea out of the water when he said, '**...not seven times, but seventy-seven times.**' (Matthew 18:22)

To explain why Jesus was expecting so much of Peter he told this story.

A man who owed his master an incredible sum of money was summoned to pay the debt. When we read **ten thousand bags of gold** we shouldn't really get caught up in how we understand this. In the Greek, this was actually the largest number they had a word for. They didn't understand billions, or even millions. This man owed as much as anyone could imagine. There wasn't a bigger number for them to understand.

Think of it this way, the UK national debt is said to be almost three trillion pounds. I'm not sure I even know what a trillion is... the US national debt is thirty-six trillion dollars. Who can imagine that...

This is the impact of this story – how could this man owe so much, how could he repay so much – these are the questions anyone hearing this story would have been asking. Imagine then the shock when master showed incredible mercy and allowed this man time to work the debt off – again, how would he ever do this?

As the story continues surely everyone must have been wondering what next, how would such an act of grace and forgiveness affect this man? The answer came soon enough. It seems this fortunate soul met another man who owed him a hundred silver coins. Again, don't get caught up with the numbers, it is the comparison – on the one hand a debt that is beyond measure, beyond counting at the very limits of understanding – and on the other something manageable, something normal, something that could be worked out.

It's not only the contrast between the debts that is stark but the contrast in how both those debts were managed. Instead of showing the mercy he received this first man shows no mercy, no understanding, no compassion.

When the original master got to hear about what had happened understandably he demanded immediate payment, the man was thrown in jail and tortured until payment could be made – but let me ask, how do you make payment not only on such an unimaginable debt, never mind when you are in jail and being tortured and so can do nothing to even make a dent in it.

In effect this man was never being released from prison or his torture.

Last Sunday we talked about understanding the value of the Kingdom of God against the cost. Today we are confronted with the importance of understanding the extent of the grace we have been shown in Jesus.

We talk about the cross, we talk about the death of the Son of God as though it were something trivial, minor, insignificant. It is as though a word is being used that we can't really understand or visualise, something more than a trillion. This means we all so easily lose sight of the cost that was paid for our atonement and forgiveness and as a result we all too easily lose sight of the size of the debt that we have been forgiven.

The story of salvation, the story of scripture is a good story, but it only becomes a great story when it affects us, when it touches our emotions and we begin to understand the depth of love, the cost that lies within it.

When was the last time we really considered the cost of our salvation, when was the last time we really thought about the extent of our debt to God. We talk about sin in the same way we talk about the cross – it is just a word, meaningless in so many ways because it doesn't touch our emotions.

God helps us understand what it means when he describes his sinful and disobedient people as being adulterous. We are in a relationship with God, and we have been adulterous. We understand this, some of us will really understand this because we have been hurt in this way. All of us can imagine the pain, we all understand the impact of adultery – this is the extent of our guilt, our sin, our debt to God because this is how we have treated him.

That adulterous nature is then compared to Jesus' death to forgive us, the wronged party, paying the debt, restoring the relationship (and not because he was asked to, but because he wanted to; not because we sought forgiveness, but because he offered it.) When we allow this story to touch our emotions, when the Holy Spirit enables this story to touch our emotions this is when it becomes incredibly powerful – life changing.

How do we know this story has affected us, changed us, how do we know when it has taken root in our lives in a way it didn't with the unforgiving servant?

The old King James translation of the bible translates the Lord's prayer in this way: ***forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors***. (Matthew 6:12) When we have understood the depth of God's forgiveness then we offer that same grace on the same level.

This morning, I have only one question. Have we understood the extent of our debt and the incredible cost and value of our salvation? Has this story affected our emotions, our hearts, our very being as well as just being a compelling read. If it has only been a compelling read, then we haven't been changed, we haven't understood and so the day will come when our ungratefulness will shine through and we will be just like the unforgiving servant, eventually we will be in place where we are asked to pay a debt that cannot be paid.

If this story touches our hearts, our very being, our emotions, then it will change us and it will change not only how we relate to our neighbours but to God as well.