

Movie Review 'Amazing Grace'

This is one of the most inspirational movies I have seen in many years. It is the story of the journey of William Wilburforce, a man of the most amazing courage and conviction who obeyed the call of God to tirelessly put an end to the injustice of slavery in the British Empire.

The movie follows the career of this remarkable man who, with the support of his good friend and Prime Minister, William Pitt, take on the might of the British Empire against the most overwhelming odds and have the audacity to call on the Government to bring to an end a system that was the backbone of the British economy. One day, after having been influenced by John Newton, the author of this most famous of hymns after which this movie is named, Wilburforce comes to faith and finds that all he wants to do in life is serve God, which, for him at the time, means giving up his parliamentary career and spending a life studying the Scriptures. However God had other ideas for this young activist and through the persistent advice of a group of believers who have themselves been campaigning against slavery, as well as the advice of an ageing Newton, Wilburforce eventually comes to the conviction that he is being called to serve God by bringing an end to slavery.

The thing that struck me the hardest when watching this movie, were the arguments that were constantly put forward by the powers that be in defence of the slave trade – the very same arguments that we hear from our leaders in Australia today in defence of inaction on climate change. The leaders in the House of Lords in this movie continually deride Wilburforce's preposterous idea that would seemingly destroy the British economy. Sound familiar? Wilburforce is told that ending slavery would deny thousands of people their income and lead to a collapse in the British way of life. The last time I checked, Great Britain seemed to be doing very well, as I believe will Australia if we take the same sort of radical and necessary action to deal with climate change as Wilburforce did to end slavery.

Above all though, this is a story of one man's call to do what is right no matter what it may cost. It is a story of perseverance, it is a story of faith, and it is a story of courage in the face of ridicule and incredible odds. Wilburforce had the audacity to believe that he was doing the work of God. I am reminded of the words of Martin Luther King, who, when also faced with criticism from the powers that be in his own day, courageously cried out in one of his sermons, "if we are wrong, then God Almighty is wrong!". What faith and what conviction to make such a statement. Of course God was not wrong, and Wilburforce was not wrong, and after many years, the scourge of slavery in the British Empire was finally declared illegal and the long battle had been won.

The tragedy today however is that slavery does still persist, to the extent that there are now more slaves in the world than there were at the height of the slave trade in Wilburforce's time. We still have work to do. Campaigns like 'Stop the Traffik' (www.stophetraffik.org.au) are ways in which we can play our part to continue the great work that William Wilburforce carried out so bravely and which is portrayed with such inspiration in this remarkable movie.

*by Nils von Kalm
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