



## INVICTUS (Cert 12)

**Reel Issues author:** Duncan Strathie

**Overview:** After 27 years in prison, Nelson Mandela is elected President and guides South Africa's emergence from apartheid on a journey towards forgiveness, painful healing and restoration in the context of the 1995 Rugby World Cup.

**Director:** Clint Eastwood (2009)

**Studio:** Warner Brothers

**Running time:** 133 minutes

**Caution:** Brief strong language

### HISTORICAL AND POLITICAL CONTEXT

Nelson Mandela was the founder and leader of the military wing of the African National Congress and had been arrested in 1962 for his activities in co-ordinating attacks against government and military targets. During his imprisonment he came to be a respected figure among black Africans and in the wider world became the icon of the anti-apartheid movement. In 1993 he was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize.

Nelson Mandela was released from gaol in 1990 and immediately began trying to find a way to bring reconciliation to South Africa which had previously been governed under the Apartheid ('separateness') system of racial segregation, which was enforced by the National Party from 1948 to 1994. The economic, social, political and democratic rights of the majority non-white inhabitants of South Africa were curtailed and minority rule by white people was maintained.

On release from prison, Mandela made a speech where he declared his commitment to peace and reconciliation with the country's white minority. He also made it clear that the ANC's armed struggle was not yet over when he said, 'our resort to the armed

struggle in 1960 with the formation of the military wing of the ANC was a purely defensive action against the violence of apartheid. The factors which necessitated the armed struggle still exist today. We have no option but to continue. We express the hope that a climate conducive to a negotiated settlement would be created soon, so that there may no longer be the need for the armed struggle.'

In 1994 Nelson Mandela and the ANC won 62% of the popular vote. On 10 May 1994 Mandela was inaugurated as the first black President of South Africa.

### SUMMARY OF PLOT

**(Warning: plot spoiler)**

To emphasise the separateness of apartheid the opening shots of the film show two groups of boys on either side of a road playing sport. On one side are the white boys in team kit playing rugby on lush grass at their privileged school. On the other side are black boys in tatty clothes kicking an old football around a patch of dusty waste ground. The scene is broken by the wailing of police sirens as a motorcade drives down the road between the two – it is President Mandela. The black boys run to the rusty fence shouting 'Nelson, Nelson'. The Sports Master tells his group of white boys that the 'country is going to the dogs'. This scene encapsulates the gulf that Nelson Mandela attempts to bridge.

On his first day in office, we are immediately introduced to Mandela's humanity, charm and politeness. He is not embittered or seeking revenge. He channels his energies into building bridges within his office and staff to serve as an example for the nation to follow. The theme of reconciliation is neatly captured in the relationship between Mandela's black ANC bodyguards and the white bodyguards who

previously protected De Klerk and are now intentionally thrown together by Mandela as a team. At the beginning of the film they distrust each other as sworn enemies. By the end of the film there is hope that new understanding can be worked out.

Mandela is brilliantly portrayed by Morgan Freeman (Oscar nomination) and is shown to be a consummate political opportunist with a canny intuition and ability to read what people feel. For the white Afrikaners, the one thing that symbolises their identity and national pride is the nation's rugby team – the Springboks. Having been excluded from the stage of world sport because of embargoes from the international community, the Springboks were chosen to host the 1995 Rugby World Cup.

The lack of international competition had dented the once invincible Springboks and they were no longer the force they once were. Sensing an opportunity, Mandela embarks on a careful strategy to befriend the Springbok Captain, François Pienaar, and use his charismatic personality to inspire him and the team to improve their game. If the Springboks can do well it would restore a sense of national pride and maybe begin drawing the divided communities together. Through hard work, with the support of the nation and Mandela and Pienaar's inspirational leadership, the Springboks win the World Cup against all the odds.

### SOME KEY ISSUES

**Prejudice:** South Africa's colonial inheritance was based on the mistaken idea that God had called the white Afrikaners to rule over the black and 'coloured' people of the nation. This spiritualised prejudice had led to racial and economic segregation with non-whites having few rights under the law and little opportunity to prosper. The government used the police and army to enforce apartheid, as a helpless

world watched on. Some have argued that the sanctions and boycotts imposed by the international community on South Africa served only to further isolate the non-whites, whilst others say that they worked because apartheid as a system has ended.

**Inspirational leadership:** Clearly Mandela was an inspirational leader before his imprisonment. His time in prison gave space for reflection and, in a speech made upon his release, he says that he hopes consensus can be built and a negotiated settlement achieved. Mandela is a firm believer that the lives of others can serve as an inspiration for everyone and so, as President, he seeks to live the example for the nation to follow. In one of their encounters Mandela tells Pienaar, 'In order to build our nation, we must all exceed our own expectations.' It is the inspiration Mandela drew from the poem *Invictus* that gives the film its title.

**Forgiveness and reconciliation:** With thousands dead and millions deprived of basic human rights, Mandela's release from prison could have been the catalyst for widespread violence and retribution against the white minority population. Mandela recognised that if the emerging 'Rainbow nation' was going to have a chance of catching up on lost years of development and offer everyone the opportunity to improve their circumstances, then all parts of the community had a part to play – including the whites. This could only become a reality if forgiveness and reconciliation develop to become defining characteristics of the new South Africa.

**The ability of sport to unite people:** The 2010 Football (soccer) World Cup ably demonstrated the ability of sport to offer a common shared experience for the host nation, continent and family of nations. In sensing an opportunity to use the Rugby World Cup finals as a vehicle to help bring greater unity to the fledgling

Rainbow Nation, Mandela demonstrated his political intuition. The scenes of multiracial jubilation after South Africa's victory provide the unifying and integrating crescendo the film has been building towards and point the way to what is possible.

### **Clip 1 Chapter 3 11.53 – 14.45** **(approx. 3 minutes)**

Nowhere is the sense of distrust felt more keenly than amongst those who form Mandela's personal bodyguard when they are suddenly thrust into having to work with the former President's SAS-trained Special Branch officers. Sworn enemies who may even have attempted to kill one another in earlier times now have to find a way to work together.

#### *In two's and threes*

- How did this clip make you feel? How do you think the two groups felt?

Mandela is determined that forgiveness and reconciliation are at the heart of his new administration. He tells Jason (head bodyguard), 'Forgiveness liberates the soul. It removes fear. That is why it is such a powerful weapon.'

- Have you ever been in a situation where you have been 'required' to show forgiveness when you didn't really want to? Again, how did that feel? Looking back on the situation now, was it the right thing to have done?

#### *Whole group discussion*

- What do think might have happened if Jason had not followed Mandela's instructions?
- Was there a cost involved? What was it and who paid it?
- Can reconciliation based on forgiveness ever be free of cost?

### **Clip 2 Chapter 10 45.34 – 50.37** **(Approx. 5 minutes)**

Before you watch the clip invite people to share what their 'philosophy of leadership' is – see if there are any common threads.

In the clip, Mandela invites Pienaar to tea at the Presidential Office. Through asking a series of open questions, Mandela coaches and mentors Pienaar by increasing his self-confidence to lead by example. Mandela clearly places great faith in Pienaar as both an individual and a leader.

Both Mandela and Pienaar try to lead by example. Mandela asks Pienaar how he thinks people can perform to a higher level than they think they are capable of and suggests that inspiration is the answer.

Ask people to think on their own:

- Who has inspired you to do more than you felt was possible?
- How did they achieve this – what exactly inspired you?

If some struggle to come up with an example from their own experience, ask them to think of a character in a film who has given a rousing speech to inspire people on to greatness.

Now watch the clip.

#### *Small group discussion*

- What exactly do you think Mandela did to Pienaar over tea in the Presidential Office?
- Why do you think Pienaar reacted the way he did when he returned to his girlfriend in the car?
- How would you have reacted? Did you find what Mandela said inspirational?

### Clip 3 Chapter 17 1.16.40 – 1.20.55 (Approx. 4 minutes)

Pienaar arranges a trip to Robben Island for the Springbok team and their WAGs.

#### *In twos and threes*

- Do you think he did this to inspire the team or for his own personal interest?

When Pienaar enters Mandela's cell there is a sense that he is 'trying it on for size' to gain an appreciation of what it was like to live there and to imagine himself to be Mandela in that place. As this process begins to take hold of Pienaar, he begins to see things, as it were, through Mandela's eyes and as he turns back to look inside, we see a ghosted image of Mandela sitting and reading *Invictus*.

*It matters not how strait the gate,  
How charged with punishments the scroll.  
I am the master of my fate:  
I am the captain of my soul.*

This is the last verse from the poem by William Ernest Henley.

#### *Small groups discussion*

- How do you feel you would have responded if you had been in Mandela's place in prison?
- What do you think Pienaar was thinking and feeling?
- Mandela could have taken *Invictus* as inspiration to continue an armed struggle against the white rulers. What do you think caused him to look for peaceful reconciliation?
- Christians might regard Jesus Christ to be captain of their soul. Who is captain of your soul? Do you feel that your life is guided by fate or some other force?

- This film portrays Mandela in a very positive way. What do you think were the main gifts and shortcomings of Nelson Mandela?

### Clip 4 1.55.03 – 2.02.20 (5 minutes, 17 seconds)

After repeated infringements, Pienaar is told to talk to the Springbok team to restore discipline. He uses the opportunity to give a final inspiring team-talk. The game plays out to a South African victory with slow motion passages showing the physical demands of this sport.

#### *Whole group discussion*

- What do people think of the way Pienaar led his team? Did he lead by example and did the rest of the team begin to share his belief that they were playing for all 42 million South Africans?
- Sport has a (perhaps unique) ability to bring people together. What impact do you think the Rugby World Cup had on South Africa's journey along the road of forgiveness and reconciliation?
- Which characters in the film develop respect for people of the opposite race and how do they show it?

In this clip, we see a number of former 'enemies' being reconciled in the joy of victory:

- Pienaar's mother and the maid.
- The boy and the policemen listening on the car radio.
- The bodyguards almost hug each other – but remember not to just in time!
- The Presidential Office staff.
- The white-bearded supporter and Jason the bodyguard.

Looking back in hindsight we can say that Mandela's choice of using the World Cup to help the process of healing was inspired and in itself inspirational. However, it could have turned out very differently – South Africa might have been eliminated after the first stage as the formbook suggested, or the Rugby World Cup might not have worked as a vehicle up to journeying this particular road.

#### *Small group discussion*

- What do you think would have happened if South Africa had been eliminated? How would the story have developed?
- Can you think of any other vehicle other than sport that might be able to travel along this difficult road?

### **GOD'S STORY**

**Prejudice, integrity and hypocrisy – Luke 6.37–45** – In these verses, Jesus is continuing a series of teaching on moral behaviour in general and hypocrisy in particular. Jesus didn't have much time for people who were hypocrites, he was always looking for an integrity between what people say they will do and what they actually end up doing. The white South African government claimed to be Christian yet for its 46 years in power practiced widespread discrimination.

#### *In pairs*

- Do you think Mandela is a man of integrity? How did those around him react to the message he was speaking and living?
- Prejudice often blinds people and so they carry on, as Jesus says, with the blind leading the blind. Mandela demonstrated that he was open to learning and open to change. He opened peoples' eyes to a new possibility. Jesus asks his followers to be open to learning and to change. What barriers

can prevent this? How might you be able to help people move away from prejudice?

- What do you think are the fruit of Mandela's life?

#### *Small group discussion*

In the film, there is little mention of faith issues except when Chester is asked to lead the team in a prayer after their victory over New Zealand. In his subsequent autobiography, Mandela has made explicit his own Christian faith and the important role it played in sustaining him whilst imprisoned. Desmond Tutu, the Archbishop of Cape Town, called Mandela 'God's gift to South Africa and South Africa's gift to the world.'

- In what ways do you think Mandela in the film is portraying Christian characteristics?
- Why do you think the film chooses to downplay this side of Mandela's life?

**Inspirational and prophetic leadership – Titus 2.6–8; Romans 5.1–5; Amos 5.11–14a** – Paul offers instruction and advice to Titus on how to be effective in leadership in the particular context he was facing.

#### *Whole group brainstorm*

- What characteristics do you think make a good leader?
- From those identified, which ones did Mandela demonstrate?
- How does Paul's instruction to Titus square up with how you feel Mandela performed?

#### *In pairs*

- How far would you see Romans 5.3–4 as a description of life's journey? How much of this pathway do you think Mandela travelled?

Amos was a prophet used by God to call people back to following him. Some of Amos' prophecies could

easily have been delivered against South Africa's rulers.

*Small groups discussion*

- In what ways might Mandela be described as a prophet to South Africa?
- Are there any prophetic voices speaking today on global, national or local issues?
- Share any areas where you are actively working to bring change – perhaps through acting differently yourself and working to bring change about and influence others in this way. Are any of these areas where the group can work together to make a difference?

**Sport and unity – Hebrews 12.1–2; 1 Corinthians 9.24–25** – The Bible talks of competing fairly but also of playing to win. In a team game, that calls for unity of purpose and each player performing their specialist role to the best of their ability – rugby is a particularly good example of this.

*In pairs*

- Can you remember playing a sport you didn't like or enjoy? How does that compare to playing a sport you really enjoy?
- Elite athletes push themselves beyond the limits of most people. We are urged to strive, as though we are running a race to win, to live a life of faith. What training and support can we draw on to help us?
- What things might you do to help you to 'run the race' and be even more effective in living out your Christian faith?

**Forgiveness and reconciliation – 2 Corinthians 5.17–20; Colossians 3.12–17** – From early childhood we all learn about forgiveness – often the person we find hardest to forgive is our self!

*Individual quiet reflection*

- Think of a time when someone forgave you for something serious – how did you feel?
- Compare that to a time when you forgave someone for something serious that they had done to you.

*Small groups discussion*

- What is forgiveness? Is it purely about emotions?
- How do we forgive when we feel it is too difficult? What happens when forgiveness is withheld?

*Whole group discussion*

- What do people make of this: Corrie Ten Boom, a Christian woman who survived a Nazi concentration camp during the Holocaust, said, 'Forgiveness is to set a prisoner free, and to realise the prisoner was you.'

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