

Called to Be the Challenge of Change

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[0 : 00] put your hands up if you've been Christmas shopping yet. Put your hands up if you've done all your Christmas shopping yet. Put your hands up if the mention of Christmas shopping and yet in the same sentence fills your stomach with sickness, dread and nausea.

I read an article, and this is true, there is a union that has claimed that retail workers can be traumatised by repetitive Christmas songs being played relentlessly in shops.

Let me read it to you. It's the Union of Shop, Distributive and Allied Workers has asked that retailers choose a more varied selection of music and to start playing Christmas songs a bit later.

How about never? It claimed that constant repetition of Christmas songs in shops is damaging the mental health of some workers. It is also said that some workers have become traumatised by jingle bells and mistletoe and wine.

Clinical psychologist Linda Blair said, Christmas music is likely to irritate people if it's played too loudly and too early.

[1 : 20] It might make us feel that we're trapped. It's a reminder that we have to buy presents, cater for people and organise celebrations. You know, with music, and it's not just true of Christmas music being played in shops, but music anywhere, at any time, it can get its way into our minds, into our hearts, in a good way as well as an unhelpful way.

But you notice if you listen to a song, maybe you might not even notice that it's lodged itself in you and you carry it around with you so that where you go, you're humming it and then you suddenly notice someone else is humming it as well.

Have you ever had that happen? It's like there's a soundtrack. A piece of music can become a soundtrack to your life, that wherever you go, you get in the car and you're driving along and you haven't even switched anything on and yet that song, it suddenly appears.

Music can have that impact on us. And to the extent that we could say that we carry around with a soundtrack all the time, it can actually affect our mood.

What I want us to think about over these next few minutes is a different type of soundtrack. Not music, but more just mood. The sort of stuff that we carry around in our hearts, in our minds, that kind of shapes the way that we live, our mindset, our outlook.

[2 : 42] Because the way we tend to carry around dominant themes in our thinking processes will shape and determine the way we live our lives. We might not even be aware that we're doing it, but we can carry around in our minds certain thoughts, certain recurring thoughts, certain images, certain dominant themes, such that every decision, every conversation, everything, when we're on our own, we can become driven by it, but we are dominated by a sort of like a mental soundtrack that defines how we go about our daily lives.

The question I want to ask you is, what's your soundtrack? The passage we had read this morning from the Book of Acts, it comes from the story of the Book of Acts, the story of the early church after the time of Jesus on earth.

And it's very early on in that story. So Jesus has died, he's been raised from the dead, he's gone back to his father in heaven. He does so with a promise that one day he will return.

We do not know when that will be, we don't know exactly what that will be like, but we are given that promise, that history will eventually come to a climax when Christ will return, and we will all live forever in eternity, and there will be no more suffering and no more pain.

But in the meantime, we live in that period of history, and we don't know how long it will last, but it is finite, that is what the Bible promises. We live in that time where Jesus has come, and we live in that promise that one day he will return, and he will bring his kingdom in all its fullness.

[4 : 26] But in the meantime, in the early church, Jesus promised to his disciples that something special was going to happen, that they weren't going to be left alone, but the Holy Spirit of God, God's invisible presence, was going to come upon them and move among them in an amazing way.

And that's what has happened in the story, just as we pick it up, the one that we've just read. And so the Holy Spirit has come upon the church, the church has effectively come into existence, as the Holy Spirit of God has been breathed into it.

And we see Peter get up and start to preach what I suppose is effectively the first sermon in the history of the church. And he tells people about Jesus and what he has done.

And he tells about the promises of Jesus. And people begin to respond. And they say, well, what shall we do? And he says, you're to be baptised.

In fact, he says, repent and be baptised. I used to think repent meant stop. It doesn't, actually. It means just change. It means turn around, go in a different direction.

[5 : 40] If you like, it means change the soundtrack. You see, when we think about change, and this is what baptism represents, it means change, changing what is going on in our hearts and in our minds.

And in turn, that will change the way we live our lives. Baptism uses water. Water we use every day. You have to drink it in order to survive.

We also use it to keep ourselves clean. And it's that kind of thing that is being represented in baptism. That there's a change taking place. A change, an inward change, that also brings with it an outer change.

A change in the way we think, the way we see things. The soundtrack, the dominant things going on in our minds is when we approach our lives. Let me give you another picture to help explain what I'm trying to say.

I'm going to make a confession. And please don't like me all the less for it. I love jigsaw puzzles. Okay, I'll get my anorak now.

[6 : 48] I love jigsaw puzzles. Now, when I say that, I don't mean that I do them all day and all night. It's usually what happens. If we go away on holiday and we stay in a holiday cottage, more often than not, they tend to have a collection of games and jigsaws there.

And actually, that is really the only time that we tend to do them. But when I say jigsaw puzzles, I mean the thousand-piece-plus jobs. I think they're just great. And the times we've been on holiday and we've found these and we've tipped one open and it becomes addictive.

There it stays on the coffee table for the rest of the week. And yet, I'll be there, addicted to the thing, into the early hours. Tamara is shouting out, are you ever coming to bed? Just one more piece, just one more piece.

Three hours later, I'm still there. But one particular holiday, I can remember, we got a jigsaw puzzle, I can't remember what it was, but we emptied it onto the coffee table and we were there for about an hour.

We could get nowhere, nowhere with it. The bits seemed to sort of match up, but it just didn't seem to make any sense. And then one of the children went and grabbed one of the other puzzles and then we realised that the box that the pieces were in was the wrong one.

[8 : 04] We were working off the wrong picture. You see, the picture that we were looking at, the one we had in our minds, the one that we were trying to work towards, was a very different one entirely from the picture that was on the puzzle itself.

When it comes to living our lives, we all have a soundtrack, a picture going on inside us. A picture as to what life is, a picture of what the future is.

And it shapes the way we live and move and have our being. If we have a picture in our minds that is one thing, then our lives will be lived according to that one thing.

The Christian gospel gives us a picture. It gives us a soundtrack. It gives us something to live our lives by. And baptism represents the way in which that changes when we come to Jesus Christ.

What picture do you live your life by? What picture do you have in your mind when you face the joys of life and the things that make us happy?

[9 : 25] What picture do you have in your mind when you face the realities of brokenness and worry and sickness and death and dying and the things that can pull us into a place of despair?

You know, whether you're a Christian or not, whether you believe in God or not, whether you've given your life to Jesus or not, all of us face those same realities. Becoming a follower of Jesus

does not immunise you from the realities of the world.

We're still human. We still go through all of these challenges. But the difference has to do with the picture that we have in us.

And the calling of Jesus Christ is a calling that invites us to change the picture that we might otherwise have in our minds when we face those realities.

To change the soundtrack. What's yours? You know, as Christians reflect upon their experience of changing the soundtrack, of changing the picture and allowing God to define it, we'll have among us a number of different experiences and stories to tell.

[10:41] Some may be one of very sudden change. Some may be one of very gradual. I like the analogy that is drawn by the theologian Tom Wright. He likens it to the experience of waking up in the morning.

Now, it may be that you wake up to an alarm clock in the morning and it's a very sudden thing. Bang! The alarm comes on. Eyes open, you're awake, you leap out of bed. Just like me.

On the other hand, it might be that you wake up in the morning very gradually to the extent that you're not really quite sure at what point it is that you stopped being asleep and you started being awake.

But gradually and three or four or seven cups of coffee later, you recognize that actually you've just about entered the land of the living and you've woken up. Two different experiences of waking up. They're both waking up but one's sudden and one's gradual. You know, in the New Testament, the experience of coming to God and experiencing that change, that change of soundtrack, that change of picture is likened, actually, to waking up.

[12:03] Waking up to that new reality. The reality that whatever may hitherto have defined our lives, God knows that it can be so much better and so much fuller and more complete.

It might be that for some of us, that waking up to that new reality, that change, is a very gradual experience. To the extent that we're not quite sure at what point we stopped not believing in God and started to believe in God.

For others, it might be that it's a very sudden thing and they can put an exact time and date on the place where they came to Christ. You know, it doesn't really matter. What does matter is that we recognise that there is such a thing as being asleep and there is such a thing as being awake and there's a world of difference between the two.

What's your soundtrack? What's your picture of reality? Whatever that may be, God in Christ calls each and every one of us to wake up to his music, to wake up to his picture, to allow the hymn to set the soundtrack for our lives, to give us the picture to live by.

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