

Unleashed: What's holding us back?

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[0 : 0 0] What have you missed or what are you still missing during this lockdown? I've missed so much and one of the strangest things that I've missed is driving.

I love driving, the sheer joy of the open road, not the M5 on a bank holiday. But there is something about being in a car, a long winding road, the windows down and my favourite tracks, which I have on a Spotify download called Driving.

I've put all my favourite tracks on there and one of them is by Green Day. And it's called Wake Me Up When September Ends. And in many ways, with all the challenges that we've been facing, like many of you, I wish I could just stuff my head under a duvet and wake up when September ends and it will all have gone away.

We know that's not reality. And we know that in this time, especially for us as Christians and in Christian leadership, we need to be wide awake, wide awake and alive to what God is doing at the moment and offering us in this season.

September compared with previous years is looking very different for many children and young people going back to school with masks and social distancing.

[1 : 3 0] And young adults starting college, university, starting back in apprenticeships with a diversity of regulations and constraints to contend with. Parents and carers not able to go and support their children.

Many people facing redundancy and others wondering if there will be a job for them when furloughing ends. If ever there was a year for us to be awake, this is it.

In the book of Acts, Luke wrote an account of a time when a small group of people who had witnessed Jesus wrongly arrested, believing that they too would be arrested, they had seen Jesus crucified and they'd hit the depths of despair, thinking that there was no future, only to experience the glorious resurrection.

His ascension and the wake up call for what would be the early church, just as Jesus had promised. The wake up call supported, empowered, enthused, excited, encouraged and enabled in the power of the Holy Spirit, which allowed them to speak to a world that brought change and transformation.

A group of people who showed that hope wasn't dead and new life was possible for all. It was a junction point in history. Junction points, I believe, are so important.

[2 : 5 5] Opportunities to wake up, engage afresh with God's purposes and see the way forward in a new way. And I strongly believe, along with many others, in the mess and unknowing of these past few months, leaves us as a church standing at a junction point that could give us an opportunity if we choose.

We choose to follow and take it. Last week, we finished our series on the I am sayings of Jesus. And like you, I have learned so much about the character of God through all that Jesus said about himself.

And it's no coincidence that we follow this series with a teaching series on the book of Acts in the Bible. This is supported by an inspirational book that many of us have read, and I hope you will too, over the next few weeks by Anne and Gavin Culver.

It's a book called Unleashed. Reading their book alongside the book of Acts made me even more hungry to engage afresh in that outpouring of opportunity that Holy Spirit gives us at this junction point.

If ever there is a time for our generation to shine his light into the fear and anxiety that so many people are experiencing, this is it.

[4 : 22] Gavin and Anne wrote their book with Brexit in mind, little knowing that an even bigger storm was about to hit in the form of Covid.

Their writing is a truly prophetic wake up call for us all. As Gavin says in page 117, this current junction point provides us, the church, with a wonderful opportunity to show what is different when we too face this uncertainty, but we do so with Jesus.

How does this impact the way we behave? What difference should it make to our sense of hopefulness? How can we help others who don't know Jesus to see in us the difference this makes?

That is truly inspiring because as we enter this series, and indeed a new series in the life of the church, a junction point is offered to us.

We have the space to consider the way we move forward. And much like the early church, it will depend on how we as a people respond and people see how we respond or have already responded.

[5 : 38] There's been some great stuff going on. TLG coaches supporting children and parents online. People queued for neighbours to get food and prescriptions.

People have helped those in other countries. We phoned people. We zoomed. We spoke safely distanced over garden fences to people maybe that we hadn't spoken to before.

We shopped for others unable to leave their homes. Families worship together at home. Maybe you're doing that now, bringing families together and Jesus into the heart of your living room, your kitchen.

For many who tell me that you worship from the comfort of your bed with a breakfast tray. Well done. Some churches closed. Eyes remained open to cook meals from our kitchen, thanks to Clevedon Aid.

The Make Lunch team filled room two with food that provided young people with meals during the holiday in settings where food was in short supply. And as I wandered around the church building, it wasn't empty.

[6 : 42] It was full of hope. The people of God responded. And I gave thanks that we are in the business of feeding others and that we are modelling the way God's people respond to challenge.

What does that junction point look like for us today? Have we been shaken and stirred? We certainly have. Yet as a nation, this town, our community, we have an opportunity to see a way forward.

And in moving in that direction, people will look to us, the church, to shine and proclaim Jesus and bring hope as they did in the early church.

In our reading this morning, they didn't know when Jesus was returning, so that there was this sense of urgency, which over the years, I think we have lost and we need to regain.

You know, it's not for you to know the times and dates the Father has set by his own authority, but he calls us to be witnesses, just as he did in the early church. And that urgency remains because nobody knows the time and it may be, may be in our generation.

[7 : 55] Maybe it's that urgency and commitment that made them so radically passionate that they sold land, they sold houses, they gave up the security of what was to step into the adventure that millions have engaged with since.

In amongst the grim news, and I've almost given up listening to the news, but I listen in the morning to Radio 4 and in amongst there, there is this glimmer of hope, this light often provided by hope for the day.

And Rydian Brooke is one of my favourite contributors, a Christian writer of which John Humphrey said, The problem with Rydian's thoughts is how often I find myself agreeing with him. It's most annoying.

People need to hear the message of hope and to see us modelling that at this junction point. I believe we are called to shape the culture we are called to serve and we do that and we join in where God is already at work.

Is that safe and comfortable? Probably no. Will it look sensible? Probably not. Will it look like the early church? In many ways I hope it will.

[9 : 09] As C.S. Lewis said in the Chronicles of Narnia, Aslan is on the move and he's not a tame lion. Maybe already you are sensing or hearing that roar afresh.

That rallying call of God for people to rise up and follow inspired and expectant. Perhaps these past few weeks you look back to the point maybe where you first met Jesus, a junction point where you decided to follow.

Yet somewhere, somewhere along the way, we lost our zeal, our passion, our confidence and our energy. I pray, I pray, I pray that in this season that we will regain that and get back on track.

Recent months have been brutally challenging for many. For many of you and for us as well as a family. The words of Tolkien's hobbit, Frodo to the wizard Gandalf, surely resonates with us all.

I wish it need not have happened in my time, says Frodo. So do I, said Gandalf. And so do all who live to see such times.

[10 : 29] But that is not for them to decide. All we have to decide is what to do with the time that is given us. I pray at this junction point, we will all be inspired, enthused and excited in the power of the Holy Spirit.

And as Jesus said, I am. I pray that in the power of the Holy Spirit. We can.