

# **Who are You Going to Tell?**

## **Christmas Mixtape series**

### **by Bill Aumack**

This is week four, and it's our last week of our Christmas mixtape series. You enjoyed this? I have. It's been fun. But maybe it's because I remember the pain of making mixtapes. I don't know. Next week is communion. We'll be moving on with a new topic. The pastor's going to be doing that next week. Remember, speaking of communion, we start early on Communion Sabbath. So be here at 10:30 for foot washing. We'll do foot washing next door. 10:30 to 11. We'll be in here at 11 to start our service.

You know, and how many of you made a mixtape back in the day? Come on, fess up. A ton! And you know, when you start out, you had a list of songs. 'I want these songs on a mixtape,' and you're listening to the radio, and it's pretty easy to pick them out and go. But as you get down to that last one or two, it gets kind of difficult because you're waiting for the radio to play that song, and the DJ keeps talking over the intro or maybe you record the whole song, get to the end, and the DJ talks over the outro, and you've got to wind back and find the right spot to set up again. And it was hard. It was a lot of work.

And I know you young folks are going to find this hard to believe. But back in the day, it was hard work to get your music. You know, you had to go to the store and buy it. I know, I know, weird, right? They had stores in like every mall or even sometimes outside the mall. You go to Tower Records, and you would have to purchase your music, right? That's crazy talk. But there was something about the struggle of getting the music and finding the music you wanted, making your mixtape that had some reward with it at the end, right? You've accomplished the goal; you've done something.

Nowadays, you just go in and say, 'Play music that sounds like Journey.' You know, you get some Journey songs, you get some songs that sound like Journey, then all of a sudden you get a Metallica song, and you're like, 'That doesn't sound like Journey at all.' Right? You guys had this experience? Yes. You know, but that's how

it works these days. And the music doesn't quite sound as good because they compress it down so they can stream it efficiently, not use too much bandwidth. And it just doesn't quite sound the same as it used to. When you're sitting in your room, and you had speakers about four feet tall. Linda hated those speakers. I loved those speakers. And you know, the music that you kind of listen to in your teenage years when you're in high school, maybe into college, becomes the music of your life. That's kind of the music you stick with, right?

My dad likes the music that he'd listened to when he was in high school in the late 50s and early 60s. I like the music that I listened to when I was in high school. And my boys liked the music that they listened to when they were in high school. And all those music styles are very different from each other. But that's the kind of music that generally we like. And we stick with that music, and that's the music of our life. Until we get to Christmas.

When we get to Christmas, everybody sings all the same music. It doesn't matter how old you are, what era you're from, whether you live in the north or the south, whether you have snow for Christmas or sand for Christmas, whether you decorate a palm tree or a pine tree, we all sing 'Jingle Bells.' I have a friend who lives in Australia, and we were just talking about this the other day, of what is Christmas like in the southern hemisphere where it's summer right now? And he goes, 'It's really weird. Because when they decorate, everything was snow and Santa Claus is coming in. It's about 110 outside. It's just the weirdest thing, right?' But we all sing the same songs. We all sing the same Christmas carols, 'Silent Night,' 'Away in the Manger,' 'Oh, holy night,' all these songs, they're favorites. We love these songs. And rarely do we get a new Christmas song.

How many of you know this song? 'A baby will come.' The people in the band raised their hands. We have sung that song here every Christmas for 10 years. But it's so hard to get everybody to learn a new song because we only sing it once a year. It comes back around and he goes, 'I don't know this song.' Right? And that's, it's okay. That's just the way it is. Every year when we do that, I see everybody looking at me like, 'Wow, this is a new song.' It's okay. But 'Go Tell It On The Mountain' is my favorite Christmas song. And it's been my favorite Christmas song since I was in elementary school. And some of you have heard this story before,

and I apologize to you, but for our guests, we're going to go over it real quick again.

I grew up in kind of a unique environment in that my dad worked at boarding high schools for high school students, Adventist schools. He was the boys' dean, and I lived on campus at a boarding high school for most of my life, most of my childhood, all the way up through college. And we moved around to different places, and I always went to the little elementary school before I got to high school. The little elementary school was associated with the high school. It was just primarily there for the students, the children of the faculty that worked at the school. These were small schools, two and three-room schools that did grades one through eight.

But they were all kind of the same. At a Christian school, you start the day with what? Worship. Worship, right? And the teacher would say, 'Let's sing some songs.' And when you're in second and third and fourth grade, what happens? Everybody's like, 'Yeah, let's sing. Pick me, pick me.' Want to sing this song? What happens when you get to fifth, sixth, seventh, eighth? Too cool for that, right? I don't want to do that. Except for this guy. Because I like to sing. I'm not a particularly great singer, pretty average singer. The fact that you guys let me lead music here still astounds me all the time, because I don't have a great range and perfect pitch and all these things that great singers have. Just a pretty average singer. But I like to sing. I enjoy singing. And I didn't let that stop me when all the other kids didn't want to sing. I picked the songs anyway.

And I knew if I was strategic, I could pick 'Go Tell It On The Mountain' about four or five times a year. Because you had to about three weeks of Christmas, in other words, five days, you had worship, you had to do two or three songs. I could get three, four in there pretty easy. And maybe one time the rest of the year, I could sneak it in. And I'd request it, you know, in April. And some kid was like, 'Ah, it's a Christmas song.' The teacher would say, 'It's okay, we can sing it anyway.' And in a way, we'd sing it. And that's probably the only one singing, but I was happy.

And today, this is a song we're going to be talking about as you might guess. And in researching this story, I learned some new things that made me love this song even more that I never knew before because I'd never gone and researched it. This song is a Negro spiritual. And as such, due to the nature of those songs, you

know, they didn't write them down, they didn't record them, and they weren't published in books. And so after the fact, people went around and tried to gather them up. And because of the songs, people would sing different verses in different locations. People over here might have this group of verses. People over in this part of the country might have a different group of verses. So some of these songs have like 20 different verses with them. And that's kind of the way 'Go Tell It On The Mountain' is. And in fact, they would sing this song and they would change the words at different times of the year. So Christmas time, it's 'Jesus Christ is born.' At Easter, it was 'Jesus Christ is risen.' At other parts of the year, it was 'Jesus is Lord.' And they could change the words and the lyrics with this and do that. And that was really cool.

And a lot of people have recorded this song through the years, put it out on different records, different styles; it's done, it's sounded country and rock and folk and classical. It's just, it's been all over the place. It's a great song. And you guys are all going, 'Well, I don't think it's that great. I think it's that great.' So today it's that great, okay? And a lot of people do different things with it. And I know that here we do our little kind of bass intro that we worked up some years ago with Ray and Chris, and Evan has kept along in the way. Ben, can you play that little intro for us? So awesome, right? So awesome. And we make the song ours. And that's what people do with this song.

And the song is generally attributed to John Wesley Work. And John Wesley Work did not write the song. He never claimed to write the song. But he was an African-American who was very educated. He taught Latin and ancient Greek at the local school. And he loved music. And he was one of the first African-Americans to go around and collect these Negro spirituals in large numbers and publish them and make them available. And he had a group of singers called the Fisk Jubilee Singers. And they put out one album in 1901 that was called 'Songs as Sung by the Fisk Jubilee Singers.' And then a year later, they put out another song, another album, it was new songs, sung by the Fisk Jubilee singers. And this song was on it. And ever since then, people have attributed it to him, but he never claimed to write it. He just kind of published it first.

And we know the words, 'Go tell it on the mountain, over the hills and everywhere. Go tell it on the mountain that Jesus Christ is born. And when I was a

seeker, I saw it both night and day. I saw it the Lord to help me; he showed me the way. He made me a watchman up on the city wall. And if I am a Christian, I am the least of all.' And those verses are great. And those are the verses we've been singing. And I'm just giving you a fair warning that next year we're singing different verses. Because in my research for this, I found some new verses that are very much more Christmassy.

While shepherds kept their watchin' over silent flocks by night, behold, throughout the heavens, there shone a holy light. The shepherds feared and trembled when, low above the earth, rang out the angels' chorus that hailed the Savior's birth. And down in a lowly manger, the humble Christ was born, and God sent us salvation on that blessed Christmas morning. Wonderful words. So next year, you got that to look forward to. We're gonna learn some new words.

And of course, this refers to the story that we know in Luke. Open your Bibles with me to Luke chapter two. Luke chapter 2, verses 8 to 20. And we know this really well, and I'm just gonna read this kind of quickly to remind us of this story. Luke chapter 2, everybody there? In the same region, shepherds were staying out in the fields and keeping watch at night over their flock. And then an angel of the Lord stood before them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them. And they weren't terrified, but the angel said to them, 'Do not be afraid. For look, I proclaim to you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. Today in the city of David, a savior is born for you, who is the Messiah, the Lord. And this will be a sign to you. You will find a baby wrapped tightly in cloth and lying in a manger. Suddenly, there was a multitude of heavenly hosts with the angels praising God and saying, 'Glory to God in the highest, and peace on earth to people he favors.' Then, when the angel had left them and returned to heaven, the shepherds said to one another, 'Let's go straight to Bethlehem and see what has happened, which the Lord has made known to us.' They hurried off and found both Mary and Joseph and the baby who was lying in the manger. After seeing them, they reported the message that they were told about this child. And all who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds said to them. But Mary treasured up all these things in her heart and meditating on them. The shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all the things they had seen and heard, which were just as they had been told.

Keep your Bibles open; we're gonna come back. We know this story, right? We've heard this story every year at Christmas time. But just real quick, can you imagine being on the hills as a shepherd that night? Relaxing has been a long day, you're tired. You probably have a little flask with maybe a little bit of wine in it. You're relaxing, it's the evening time, the fire's there, just hanging out. And all of a sudden, in the middle of the night, it's like daylight. Now you gotta remember these people are not used to LED lights that can light up the whole yard. When it gets dark, it's dark until when? Sunrise, right? And all of a sudden, it ain't dark anymore. And they were terrified. And an angel's talking to them, and then there's angels singing, and then they're gone. I just imagine the shepherd's sitting there kinda in shock. Maybe we're gonna come back. One of them turns to the other, did you see what I saw? [shakes head yes] You gonna tell anybody what we saw? [shakes head no] Nobody will believe us, right? Who would believe this story? This is like people that show up today and claim to have seen aliens or something, right? We all look at them a little suspicious. But they decide to go down to Bethlehem and check it out and they find the baby and they worship the baby and they tell everybody they can find. And it says all were amazed. Now, can you imagine those shepherds later in their life, years down the line, their grandfathers now, and they got grandkids sitting on their knees, the grandkids are going, tell us the story of the angels. And grandma's going, he hadn't stopped telling that story. I'm so tired of that story. But grandpa launches off into that story again. Because it's, as far as stories go, it's right up there. That's a pretty amazing story.

And the shepherds, you know, they were pretty low in society. They didn't have much power or influence in their society. And that's kind of funny because the society really needed them. Bethlehem is five miles from Jerusalem. And Jerusalem needs a whole bunch of spotless lambs every day for the daily sacrifices. And they are part of that process, that machine of raising. They're responsible for bringing spotless lambs to the temple that they could be sold to you so you can have your sins cleaned. They're pretty important people. Furthermore, the clothes they wore were wool. They didn't have cotton and linen and rayon and spandex and whatever else. It was made of wool. But yet the shepherds had a lowly spot deciding on how much, even though the society really needed them. And we realize that God tells the lowly and the weak about Jesus'

birth first. The kings don't get to know, the rich people don't get to know, the people with power and influence and money don't get to know first, the lowly and the weak get to know first. And I think that says a lot about who God is.

Of course, this also talks about, or points us back to the Great Commission. So if you're still in Luke, turn back towards the front. We're gonna skip the book of Mark and go to the last chapter of the book of Matthew. Matthew 28, it's like the last page of Matthew, 28:16 to 20. This happens after Jesus has been crucified on the cross. He's been resurrected. He's appeared to people. Okay. It says the 11 disciples, because Judas is not with us anymore, traveled to Galilee to the mountain where Jesus had directed them. When they saw him, they worshiped, but some doubted. And we gotta stop right there for a second. I don't know about you, but one of my friends claimed to be the Messiah and I watched him die. I watched him get put in a tomb. And now he's standing around talking to me. I don't doubt anymore. Right? I mean, I go, yep, he wins, we go with him. Right? I just don't doubt. Now, it's not clear what they doubted about. Maybe some doubted that they could carry on this work. Now, if we keep doing this, Jesus, they're gonna come after us. And, you know, getting crucified looks like a whole bunch of no fun. We could just like skip that. So I don't know what they were doubting, but I always find that little phrase kind of shocking. But Jesus came near and said to them, 'All authority has been given me in heaven and on earth. Therefore, go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe everything I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always to the end of the age.' What are Christ followers supposed to do? Go and tell the nations, right? Go and tell all nations.

Now, if we were here in the US and we gathered 100 random people, some from the North, some from the South, some from the East, some from the West, some Republicans, some Democrats, some young, some old, some tall, some short, I don't know, random group of people. And we said to those 100 people, if I say the name Jesus Christ, do you know which individual I am referring to? How many of them do you think would say yes? Nearly all of them, right? 99, 100 of them probably. Now, they don't all believe in Jesus, and some of them may have a very distorted view of who Jesus is, but they know who you're talking about. And we could say, check, done. We went and told everybody. Everybody knows. Does it

feel like we're done? No, it doesn't feel like we're done. It doesn't feel like we're done because there's a second part to this. The second part to Jesus' command to go and tell is that we need to make disciples teaching them to obey. We haven't done that part very well. Everybody knows who Jesus is, but not everybody's a disciple and obeying. Right? And let's be honest, sometimes I think it's easier to talk to somebody who doesn't know who Jesus is and teach them about Jesus and make them a disciple, then it is to talk to somebody who has a distorted view about Jesus, get them to unlearn that and then follow Jesus. That's a much harder thing to do actually. But that's what we've been asked to do, to go make disciples, teaching them to obey. So I love Go Tell It On The Mountain because it reminds me of these things every week. I want to real quick here talk about one more song real quick. And Pastor already talked about this song, he stole my song. He had never heard of this album, I told him about this album and he went and stole the song and talked about it before I could get up there. He's not sorry. And it's good, right? It's good, jokes people, jokes, we're all good.

But this song comes from a Reliant K album. And if you have Spotify, you gotta check it out. It's got some great stuff on it. This album is called Let It Snow Baby, Let It Reindeer. Good dad joke right there for you in the title. And this has a whole bunch of Christmas songs on it. Some are really upbeat, some are more ballady. It's got a wide variety of stuff in them. I hate Christmas parties is a great one. The 12 Days of Christmas has some interesting little add-ons in it. There's probably the most upbeat version of Handel's Messiah you have ever heard.

But the song I want to talk about is I Celebrate the Day. And I'm not going to read the whole song because pastor did that already but I'm going to talk about some certain parts of it In verse one he starts out talking about how much Jesus meant to him how much he's changed his life and Then in verse two he says because here is where you're finding me In the exact same place as new year's eve From the lack of my persistency We're less than half as close as I want to be. Right Last year at New Year's Eve to now on Christmas. I haven't made any progress My spiritual life is stuck and it's my fault. It's my lack of persistency

And He talks about does Jesus know who he is the first time that you opened your eyes Did you realize that you would be my savior and The first breath that left your lips Did you know that it would change this world forever? And the song kind of

ends with to look back And think that this baby would one day save me. And the hope that you give That you were born so I might really live To look back and think that this baby would one day save me And I I celebrate the day That you were born to die So that I could one day pray to you to save my life.

And that's really what it's about, right?! Jesus was born to die so that we could pray to Him to save our life. It's the only way out. There is no other path out. That is it. And that's why Jesus was born. He was born to die so we could pray to Him to save our life. Have you heard the saying, 'Jesus is the reason for the season'? How many of you have heard that? Like 100%. I hate that saying. And I understand, right? It's almost a plea for help. Somebody is pushing back against the commercialism of Christmas, right? It's too commercial. I gotta buy stuff. I gotta go into debt. I gotta get everybody a gift. I gotta go to Christmas parties. I gotta do this. I gotta do this. And somebody says, stop. Too much. Let's stop and remember Jesus. And I get that. I get that. But Jesus is not the reason for the season. Jesus did not come here to improve his standing or his name or to gain fame. Jesus came for you. So what I want you to do is cross out Jesus and write 'you.' Probably should say 'you are the reason,' but we'll go with 'you is the reason,' okay? Maybe you want to put your name there. Will is the reason. Chris is the reason. Raquel is the reason. Becky is the reason. Bill is the reason. Right? We are the reason for the season. Jesus came to die for us. Right? Jesus didn't come for him. He didn't need to die on a cross. He came for us. And so when we look at 'Go tell it on the mountain,' what are we telling? See, because as Christians so many times, we talk about what we're against. Right? As Christians, we don't believe in that. Look at that movie Hollywood put out; that movie is bad. Don't boycott that. We don't smoke, we don't drink, we don't. We don't! That's all we talk about. And don't get me wrong, it's good to have standards. It's good to have morals. It's good to have these things. But let's not lead with them.

Imagine that you are, I was hoping Erlinda was gonna be here today; she missed this. Imagine that you are an LA Rams fan. Erlinda is our resident LA Rams fan. Imagine that you are an LA Rams fan. Do you tell everybody, 'I'm not a Charger fan, I'm not a Raiders fan, I'm not a Cowboys fan, I'm not a Green Bay fan, I'm not, I'm not, I'm not, I'm not.' Do you tell everybody what you're against? No, you tell everybody what you're for. I'm for the Rams. Well, why as Christians do we feel

the need to tell everybody what we're against? I don't want to be against anything. I want to be for love and compassion and mercy and grace and kindness and all these things that Jesus modeled to us. Yeah, we need standards and yes, we need to push back against certain things, but let's not be known for that. Let's be known for the people who are for love and kindness, for people who bring a positive message.

Just before we get to our reflection and our challenge, I want to leave you with a thought, something to think about this week, and we're going to unpack this more next year. I want you to imagine a world where not everybody's a Christian. Not all Christians even believe the same. Some of us believe different things than others. Not all Christians vote the same. Not all Christians sing the same music. Not all Christians worship the same way. Not all Christians do everything together, but all those non-Christian folks love the Christians. And when they see a new church being built in their neighborhood, they say, 'I'm glad those people are here.' And when their sons and daughters get married to Christians, they say, 'I'm glad my sons and daughters marry a Christian because they are good people.' Because what are they for? They're for love and kindness and mercy. They take care of the poor and the widows. And they are good people. And I know what those people are for. And I'm glad. Glad they're in my community. How different would our world be? And I can't control what all the other churches in the world do. I can't even really control what this church does. But you know, we all refer to the church we attend as 'my church.' I call it my church; you call it my church. It's my church. It's the church I belong to. I want my church to be known. As a church that has love and kindness, we treat people well. Even people that we vehemently disagree with, even people we say, 'You shouldn't be doing that.' We still love those people and treat them with respect. What a difference our world would be.

And I think when the song says 'go tell it on the mountain,' that's what it wants us to tell. Not a message of what we're against, but a message of love and what we're for. So a reflection this week. Are you sharing the love of Jesus with the people you rub elbows with? The people that you see every day, your workmates, your neighbors, your family. Are you sharing about the love of Jesus with them? Our challenge during this Christmas season, you got like eight days left. Share about who Jesus really is with just one person. Tell somebody, go and tell. That's what the song asks us to do. That's what Jesus asks us to do. Go and tell and live a

life of love and compassion and mercy and grace as best you can. We're all gonna make mistakes.

I didn't know if I was gonna tell you this, but I'm gonna tell you this anyway. I bought an air horn for my truck. Some of you know why. When you drive a truck, people love to pull out in front of you because they don't wanna be behind the truck. The problem is they pull out in front of you and they go slow. You wanna go slow, pull out behind me and go slow. So I bought an air horn. That air horn has sat on the floor of my office for two years now because I can't bring myself to put it in the truck because I know I will not live a life of kindness and mercy if I have access to that air horn. Know your limits, we're gonna make mistakes. But let's be a people that are of love and kindness.

Let's pray. Heavenly Father, please be with us this upcoming week, Lord, and give us the opportunity to share about Jesus' love for us, about the good news. Lord, we so desperately need in our world, our just crazy, whacked-out world. Could really use some good news. Help us to be brave enough to launch into those conversations when you put them before us. You will direct our words; you'll help us have the things to say. Lord, we just ask that you be with us, help us to be more like you, and help us to point others towards you as best we can. In Jesus' name, we pray. Amen.