

Christmas Eve Carol Service

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Date: 24 December 2017

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[0 : 0 0] Well, you get a wee rest now and get to listen to me. I don't know how restful that will be, but you get to sit down for a few minutes. Well, it's Christmas Eve, and that's got to be exciting. And I'm just going to put it out there that when it comes to Christmas, I love all the secular stuff. I love Christmas presents. I love Christmas food. I love Christmas TV. I love Christmas sport, mostly football, but a bit of darts as well just to vary things around a bit. Christmas music, the annual battle for the Christmas number one. Now, I know I'm meant to be the one whose job is to put Christ back into Christmas or solemnly urge you all to think about the reason for the season. But forget that for a moment and indulge me for a few moments as I give my thoughts on the top five Christmas singles 2017. Now, do you know who's top of the pile? Who made the Christmas number one this year? Don't shout out if you know, because we're going to do a top of the pop's countdown from five to one. So, it would spoil it for the rest if we let that bit of information out at this point. So, let's do that. Let's think about the five songs that have made it into the top five in the charts, the Christmas number one, two, three, four, and five. What I want to do as we think about each of them just very fleetingly, to think about how in some way each of these songs connects.

And that really explains why people listen and why people buy these songs, because in some way, they connect. Obviously, it's got to be a good tune, but there's also got to be some kind of connection that people feel. So, let's go through them. At number five, we have Anywhere by Rita Ora, over the hills and far away, a million miles from LA, just anywhere away from you. I nearly burst into song, but that would not be wise. Now, I'm not embarrassed to say that I really like this song.

I didn't think I would, but I do. And in what way does this song connect? Well, I think that it connects with our sense of restlessness, our desire for a fresh start or a new beginning. Just listen to some of the lyrics in this song. Some of you will be familiar with it. Many of you won't. But listen to some of the lyrics of the song. I know we've got to get away someplace where no one knows our name.

We'll find the start of something new. Just take me anywhere with you. Especially that longing, that desire, that thirst for something new, a new start, a new beginning, turning the page, a new chapter. There is in many of us that longing for a new beginning. I wonder if that echoes in your soul. I wonder if you can relate to that thirst for a new beginning. Well, that's the song that's number five in the Christmas charts. At number four, it's an old favorite. It's Mariah Carey, and all I want for Christmas is you. Now, I'm not pretending that this song has great depth.

It's less Mariana Trench and more kiddies paddling pool when it comes to depth. But I think it also connects with us at an important level or an important way. I think this song connects with our thirst for love, to love and to be loved. I think most of us have worked out that all the presence in the world won't satisfy that longing for love. And if you haven't worked it out yet, you're as well to find out sooner than continue under the illusion that lots of stuff and lots of things will somehow bring you bring you satisfaction. What we long for is for love, to be loved and to love, a love that is faithful and committed. I think this song, popular and we might even say superficial at some levels, connects with that need for, that desire for love. All I want for Christmas is you, somebody who loves me, somebody who I can rely on, somebody who will be there for me. I think the song also hints at the often sad reality that what we long for is often unattainable. That perfect relationship is something that even Santa can't deliver. Then at number three, we also have another old favorite. There was a big campaign, online campaign, social media campaign to try and get this song to number one. Didn't quite make it, but it did get to number three, last Christmas. Last Christmas, I gave you my heart,

[5 : 19] I gave you my soul, but the very next day you gave it away. Now that takes me back to teenage years. George Michael, what a legend. Sadly, a tragic legend. I wonder if he ever did find that someone special.

That he sings of in that song. Well, what about the song? How does this song connect with us? In what way is there that connection, at least with some of those who listen to the song? Well, I think it connects with our experience, and I think it's an experience that many of us can relate to.

Our experience of rejection and pain. The hurt and frustration that comes with failing to find that perfect relationship of being rejected, of being cast away. Last Christmas, I gave you my heart, but the very next day you gave it away. No longer needed, no longer required. Somebody's moved on, and we've been left behind. And people connect in some level with that. And yet, hope springs eternal.

Next year, maybe next year, I'll give it to someone special. But will next year really be any different? Then at number two in this year's top five of Christmas hits, we have Eminem. And of course, Ed Sheeran manages to get in there as well because he's everywhere. The ubiquitous Ed Sheeran with the song River. Now what this song, if you're not familiar with it, I have to admit, I wasn't familiar with it until I started checking what the top five were. And what this song lacks in Christmas cheer, and those who know it will know what I'm talking about, it makes up for in crude realism. The chorus that's sung by Ed Sheeran goes along these lines, I've been a liar, been a thief, been a lover, been a cheat.

All my sins need holy water, feel it washing over me. And the song kind of relates the sorry consequences of an illicit relationship and the guilt that is the bitter harvest of cold and self-centered pleasure-seeking. What seemed exciting, what seemed so good and pleasurable, and yet the outcome is guilt and pain and hurt and hatred and resentment. And I think we can also, can we not, relate to that. We can also connect in a measure to the chorus sung by Ed Sheeran, being a liar, being a thief, being a lover, being a cheat. And also that sense that somehow we need to be cleansed deep inside. All my sins need holy water, so goes the song. But in the real world, does that deep cleansing, does that cleansing water even exist? And that takes us to number one. Here I guess a drum roll would be appropriate, but we don't have drums, so you'll have to just imagine the drum roll. And at number one, surprise, surprise, it's Ed Sheeran again. And this time accompanied by Beyonce with Perfect,

[8 : 39] Perfect. It's the name of the song, Perfect. Baby, you look perfect tonight. And how does this song connect with us? Well, the song, I suppose, celebrates relationship nirvana, finding the perfect girl. And if only I could find that perfect girl or boy, my life would be heaven. Of course, the sobering reality is that perfection isn't out there. And even the lyrics of the song seem to hint that finding perfection is not all that it seems or isn't as achievable as the lyrics might suggest.

Listen to what the song says or part of what the song says. I have faith in what I see. Now I know I've met an angel in person and she looks perfect. But of course, she's not an angel and she only looks perfect. And even that skin-deep perfection is passing. Baby, you look perfect tonight, so goes the line in the song. But what about tomorrow? What about in the morning? Is that not an altogether different matter? I wonder if that sounds familiar, a search for something that is flawless, something that is perfect, something that never lets us down, something that's permanent.

I wonder if that connects also with many who listen to the song. Well, what has the Christmas story got to do with all of this? How does the Christmas story connect with the varied human aspirations and frustrations that the songs that make up the Christmas top five bring to light?

Could the baby born in Bethlehem be the one that not only looks perfect but is perfect? Could he be the one whose perfection extends beyond tonight to eternity? In the Bible, the word perfection carries two complementary meanings. It carries the meaning of completeness and also the meaning of comeliness or beauty. To be perfect is to be complete and altogether suitable for a given task. And to be perfect also can have the sense of being altogether beautiful without flaw, without any flaw of any kind.

And if we turn to what the Bible says of the one born in Bethlehem, then that is a description of Jesus. The one who is perfect in every way, a perfectly suitable Savior, a one who is altogether comely and beautiful and without fault of any kind. And let's try and connect Jesus to the aspirations and frustrations of the songs that we've so fleetingly made reference to. And as we connect them one by one, we think of the first song, that thirst for a new beginning. Well, Jesus is perfectly able to satisfy our desire and need for a fresh start or new beginning. Jesus offers a new beginning and He delivers a new beginning, a new life, the start of something new to take the word straight from the song.

[11 : 58] And such is the case that Jesus Himself compares becoming a Christian to a new birth, a new beginning. The invitation, the call that is presented to us, you must be born again and you can be born again and enjoy a new beginning, a fresh start in the company of Jesus. Perfectly able to satisfy that longing in the human heart. But we can also say that Jesus is perfectly able to offer to all and to you a relationship that is faithful and committed. Jesus came into the world to love you. He came to quench your thirst, to satisfy your hunger. He extends His hand of love to you. Will you take hold of it and discover that all you could possibly want or need this Christmas is Jesus, the one who can altogether satisfy at the very deepest level? Jesus is perfectly able to be the one who never disappoints, the one who is special in every way. If you really want to give your heart to someone special, and give your heart to the one born in Bethlehem. Give your heart to the eternal Son of God who came into this world to save sinners. Give your heart and your life to Jesus. Your heart and your soul will be in good and loving, reliable hands. Jesus is perfectly able to wash away your sin. Eminem and Ed Sheeran acknowledge this need for our sins to be washed away, the need for holy water of some kind that can deal with our sin and our guilt. And Jesus is able to wash away your sin. He died on the cross in the place of sinners, of liars, thieves, and cheats. And on that cross, He bore the punishment that we deserve.

Don't spend time looking for some magical holy water, some formula, some means of feeling better about yourself. Rather, trust in God's altogether holy Son who died for you and is able and willing to forgive you.

And finally, we can say that Jesus is perfect. He doesn't just look perfect. He is perfect. He isn't perfect for a season, but forever. He's not an angel in person, to pick up on the words of the song, but He's God in person. And He's perfectly able to bridge the chasm that separates sinners, such as we all are, from a holy God. In the words of the original and perennial Christmas number one, this is good news of great joy for all the people. And so, we join with the angels in proclaiming and singing, glory to God in the highest and on earth, peace to man on whom His favor rests. Let's pray.