

Followers of the Way

No other gods

Heather Scammell 11/01/2026

Good Morning everyone and a Happy New Year, though that can sound a bit hollow given the current state of the World today. We are 11 days into January, I wonder how many New Year's Resolutions have already been broken? Or how many look back over the past year and realise that their lives didn't transform the way they had hoped, or that the pressures of life that were mentally shelved for the Christmas festivities are still there when the decorations are packed away; bills must be paid, the weather is cold and days are still short and the nights are long. The deep malaise hovering over our land is palpable. But what was read in Churches across the land just a few weeks ago?

*The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light;
on those living in a land of deep darkness, a light has dawned (Isaiah 9:2)*

The light shines in the darkness and the darkness has not overcome it (John 1:5)

You will be pleased to know that this isn't going to be a pity party; it is all too easy to be dragged down by the relentless stream of doom and gloom and lose the focus on our risen Lord. We are Resurrection People, called for '*such a time as this*' and we live in exciting times – God is on the Move.

So why start the year with a challenge to have 'No other gods?' It is anachronistic that even a nominally Christian country names this month after the Roman god Janus, the two headed god looking both backwards and forwards. Wikipedia tells me that "Janus presided over the beginning and ending of conflict, and hence war and peace. The gates of the Temple of Janus in Rome were opened in time of war and closed to mark the arrival of peace. As a god of transitions, he had functions pertaining to birth and to journeys and exchange, and in his association with Portunus, a similar harbour and gateway god, he was concerned with travelling, trading, and shipping." As an aside, there was a determined rebranding of the terms BC and AD to try and separate us from our Christian heritage, but no such qualms about months or weekdays named after false deities. The Romans would have been very familiar with the nature of their gods and brought them with them as they extended their empire – including to the UK when Julius Caesar 'came, saw and conquered.'

Janus 'presided over the beginning and ending of conflict, and hence war and peace.' Except that he didn't – as the Christians martyred as human torches, the original 'roman candles' by the Emperor Nero, testified. What does Isaiah 9 tell us?

*For to us a child is born,
to us a son is given,
and the government will be on his shoulders.
And he will be called*

*Wonderful Counsellor, Mighty God,
Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.
Of the greatness of his government and peace
there will be no end.
He will reign on David's throne and over his kingdom,
establishing and upholding it
with justice and righteousness
from that time on and for ever.
The zeal of the Lord Almighty
will accomplish this.*

The Chief Priests and scribes who advised Herod when the Wise Men came to seek 'He who has been born King of the Jews' would have been familiar with this passage. No wonder Herod reacted with such fury – such a child would challenge not just his 'kingship' as the ruler appointed by Rome over the area, but the supposed 'divinity' of both the Emperor and that of one of the better known Roman gods, whom Wikipedia tells us 'had an ubiquitous presence in religious ceremonies throughout the year.' We would do well to remember that whenever anyone tells us to 'keep religion out of politics,' the two have been enmeshed since time immemorial (& not just regarding Christianity!).

Remember "The gates of the Temple of Janus in Rome were opened in time of war and closed to mark the arrival of peace?" A visual representation that would have been understood by all, a symbol of the state of Rome at a time of military conquest. But in John 10:9, Jesus says, 'I am the gate; whoever enters through me will be saved. They will come in and go out, and find pasture.' And in Revelation 3:20, 'Here I am! I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with that person, and they with me.'

We have the two headed stone idol, whose Temple gates were symbolic of the state of the Roman Empire, or the 'gate' that is the Living God, who quite literally gave up all the Glory of Heaven to open the way for us to stand before our Father's throne, made righteous by the blood – I know which I prefer!

Did you notice the reference to Janus 'as a god of transitions,' with functions pertaining to birth and to journeys and exchange?'

You are probably aware that the City of London already has some quite pagan undertones, with Gog and Magog, Freemasonry and more recently a determined move to accommodate Islamic finance, all of which require concerted Prayer warfare. The 'other gods' of the Bible have always wrestled for power, the demonic is alive and real today; I don't think it is a coincidence that we were at our strongest economically when we were nationally secure in our Christian heritage. Then there is the concept of transition. "Out with the old, in with the new," is the cry as the Clock strikes midnight at the turn of the year, yet we realise very quickly that little has changed and revert to the old normal as the weariness and disillusionment creeps back in. So, we do well to remember our calling as Christians to be; 'in the World, but not of it.' We worship One who says, "Behold I make all things new" (Rev21:5). Christianity is not the only Religion to mark rites of passage, birth, marriage, deaths etc (aka, 'hatches, matches and dispatches') – indeed it might be argued that the function of many religions is to give meaning to the milestones of life. But

the birth of Jesus heralded so much more than was provided by the religions of the day. We mark our decision to follow Christ with baptisms – Christ Himself was baptised by John. Our baptism marks the death of self and the resurrection to new life in Christ, as well as the symbolic cleansing in water. It is a physical representation of what happens in the spiritual.

The likes of Cicero, Ovid and Varro would have looked to Janus as a god of motion, looking after passages, causing actions to start and presiding over all beginnings, the stepping out of doors, covered passages, even the gates of the city. It was claimed that to Janus belonged the connection of the notions of beginning, movement, transition and thence, time; as such, he was considered the guardian of the gates of Heaven and was accordingly invoked first, regardless of the god the petitioner wished to placate. And there perhaps we begin to understand what was so revolutionary about the birth of Christianity – the pagan gods were capricious. Shakespeare puts it well in King Lear, “As flies to wanton boys are we to the gods: they kill us for their sport.” What a contrast between the pagan, demonic deity, who demands obedience, submission and surrender, but treats the devotee with disdain and contempt, and our God who, “*so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.*” (John 3:16) Were it not for the name of the month, I doubt I would even have heard of Janus – the role the Romans ascribed to him has not stood the test of time; he has been tested and found wanting. Yet Christ bears the scars that should by rights be ours, as He stands before the Throne of Grace pleading for His children.

We can compare the inanimate pagan idols, physical representations of the demonic, with the Relational God of the Bible, who looked at His creation and ‘*saw that it was very good.*’ We worship a God who wants us to love Him by choice, not coercion; this means risking that, in our fallen state, we will make bad choices that separate us from Himself. From the moment that sin entered the world, our God showed His care for us, understanding that in our own strength we can never measure up to His holiness, yet providing the means in the most costly of ways to reconcile us with our Creator. We do not worship a flawed, self-serving deity of pagan religions; we worship a God who is so holy He simply cannot tolerate sin, but who delights in our company and wants us to be transformed into His image. Our God really is ‘a great big God’ as the old chorus goes.

And yet we still live in a fallen World, a world where the enemy is proactive and beguiling. A world where truth is perverted and twisted, where language is redefined and God’s standards are derided and mocked. The challenge to be ‘*in the World, but not of it*’ (John 17:14-16), can be a very real battlefield. Just this week we have heard of another high profile Christian writer who has succumbed to fleshly temptations and been found wanting. We like to think we live in the worst of times, it certainly seems that we are doing everything we can to test God’s patience with us, but throughout Scripture we see the people of Israel turning from God, bringing judgment on themselves, and then once again turning back to Him. Imagine Moses coming down from that true Mountain Top experience with God carrying the stone tablets, ‘*written with the finger of God*’ (Exodus 31:18), and finding the people dancing round a golden calf made by his own brother, what a betrayal! He must have been full of enthusiasm to share with the people he served, buzzing from the reality of his intimate encounter with the Living God, shining from being in His presence – and before he had even shared the Ten Commandments, the people who

had trembled at the lightning flashes from the mountain top were already breaking the first two, by worshipping a false god and bowing down to a created image.

Fast forward to the present day; most of us learned the Ten Commandments alongside other Christian basics, in an education that was at least loosely Christian, but that is no longer the case – recent interference by the Supreme Court in Northern Ireland has even made it illegal to promote Christianity in nominally Christian schools. Today's children do not necessarily learn the Lord's Prayer, some schools even substituted 'the little **boy** Jesus' for 'the little **Lord** Jesus laid down His sweet head' in the carol 'Away in a Manger', so as not to offend Muslims. It can only get worse if the Islamophobia legislation is passed. Prayer, even silent prayer in your own head, is forbidden outside abortion clinics, where child sacrifice is repackaged as 'healthcare.' Assisted Dying (otherwise known as eugenics, or state sponsored murder on economic grounds) may yet be forced through the Lords by a mass influx of newly created Labour peers and the short-lived exuberance over the ending of puberty blockers looks set to be swept away by a new, widely delivered 'clinical trial', rather than a proper appraisal of the impact on those who have already been given the drugs. I was brought up short recently when I heard Tim Dieppe of Christian Concern reference a UK survey that revealed that 50% of respondents don't, (or didn't) know any Christians. I wonder if that is the case, or if the reality is that the Christians they meet have been so persuaded that Faith is a personal matter that they no longer advertise their belief? Either way, it is a huge condemnation of modern society. Church of England and Church in Wales weddings are at their lowest since the 1830s. Church attendance in 2025 was down 90% from the 1930s. Laying aside the very real problem of modern day apostasy within churches, we see this outworking in the fragmentation of society, the pandering to minority interests at the expense of our Christian identity, and increasingly authoritarian Government openly acting against the electorate. To the lost and the secular, the future looks very dark indeed. And yet God is on the Move – Bible sales are up and young men in particular are coming to Faith almost spontaneously, with little or no input from Evangelistic Campaigns.

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So let's hop back to the foot of Mount Sinai and consider those broken tablets, shattered by Moses, in visible response to the way he must have been shattered by the betrayal of the people. What was the first Commandment written by Almighty God? '*You shall have no other gods before Me*' (Exodus 20:3).

It's all too easy for us to think that we would never behave as they did – we have the Holy Spirit, we live in the light of the Resurrection, we are Followers of The Way. But how many of us banged saucepan lids in support of 'our NHS' whilst banned from meeting together in worship (in direct contradiction of Scripture)? How do we prioritise our time, our money? I used to have a poster on my student wall asking the question, 'If you were arrested for being a Christian, would there be enough evidence to convict you?' It is chilling to see that challenge becoming a reality in the 21st century.

Do we eat meat offered to foreign gods? Now that Halal slaughter is embedded in the food supply, if you eat meat, you almost certainly have – but we're British, we don't like to

make a fuss. That street preacher was probably overstepping the mark, and they're often a bit cringe, so I won't protest at his arrest! My bank, or my pension policy, handles my money, so I don't really know who benefits from the investment and I am careful to tithe my income, so that's OK. I've supported that charity for so long that I hadn't realised that their values are no longer in line with those I support and I don't want to rock the boat by questioning them. Nobody wants to be preached at all the time, so I let the odd blasphemy, or rude joke, or petty crime pass – everyone does it, so it's not really wrong. 'Your Truth' matters to you, so who am I to call it out and jeopardise our friendship? We may not actively bow to golden calves, but that was a physical representation of what we now fight in the Spiritual realm and a real battle rages in the Heavens for the soul of our Nation.

What can we do about it?

- Firstly remember that the Battle belongs to the Lord – we are merely foot soldiers in His army and historically He chooses the weak and the misfits to fulfil His purposes, so we are in good company.
- We can make sure we are 'battle ready,' we can immerse ourselves in Scripture, remembering that the Bible is relational, written to enhance our relationship with God; the more we spend time with Him, becoming familiar with His character, the more we will be the 'salt and light' that this World so desperately needs.
- We can test ourselves against His plumb line and where we are wanting, we can seek His Grace to become the people He would have us be.
- Don't be deterred by thinking some of the modern technology is to be added to an already full schedule, it may help – use a Bible App, or Christian teaching as well as worship songs. Get into the habit of talking to God throughout the day (every red light is a chance to wait upon God.) Practice the Presence of God.
- Sometimes we have to learn to be gentle with ourselves, what God asks of us is that we do what He purposes for us – too often we try to do too much, often relying on our own strength and berating ourselves for falling short of our own unrealistic expectations.
- We need to step out in faith at the prompting of the Spirit – but He trains us at the appropriate pace and the moving of mountains comes long after the building of sandcastles; learn to recognise the prompting of the Spirit, practice the Fruit of the Spirit and learn to recognise your Gifting.
- Interact with other like-minded Christians. For some, that may be exclusively online, but where possible I strongly encourage person-to-person contact as well. If this is problematic for you, ask the Lord – He really does want what is best for you and '*will provide your needs according to His riches in Glory*' (Philippians 4:19).
- '*Delight in the Lord and He will give you the desires of your heart.*' (Psalm 37:4); there is power in Praise.

You will be aware that we finished last year in a state of flux. *Followers of The Way* will continue to change and evolve (in a Godly sense) unless, or until, He shows us He has another purpose for us, and we continue to pray for discernment to tread the path He has for us. But I hope we are all united in our desire to follow our Lord, whatever the personal cost. It is easy to be glib about it when the times are good – to be led beside the still waters and have our souls restored. But we also have to walk the Valley of the Shadow of Death and fear no evil, for His rod and His staff comfort us. In my mind's eye, the Valley of the

Shadow of death is narrow, dusty and rocky, treacherous under foot with sharp stones and loose scree that can cause us to slither and stumble. We know intellectually that Goodness and Mercy shall follow us all the days of our lives, but we don't necessarily feel it when we are let down by loved ones, we are rejected, life is hard. Sometimes it is because God is leading us through experiences to hone us for the future, sometimes we have taken our eye off the ball; wittingly or otherwise, we have bowed the knee to foreign gods and are reaping the consequences. We are all learning to recognise the difference and respond accordingly. But it is important to remember that God loves us and wants what is best for us – He knows that, however tempting be the face of the 'other god,' they are the masquerades of demonic entities, intent on luring us into the pit of Hell.

Some of you will be aware that I attended a Methodist Church for many years; for me the stand out service was the Covenant Service, held at the beginning of each year. It was a chance to publicly renew our commitment to Christ, to affirm the vows of our baptism and to determine to devote the coming year to the service of Our Lord. Philip Quenby taught us much about the significance of Covenant in the Old Testament, how it was legally binding, involving walking through the shed blood of a sacrificed animal; hugely symbolic when seen through the lens of the sacrifice of Christ. What it reveals, more than anything, is that God is totally committed to us and I have found it helpful to recommit myself to Him at the beginning of each year. It is a sort of affirmation of Joshua 24:14-15:

Now fear the Lord and serve him with all faithfulness. Throw away the gods your ancestors worshipped beyond the River Euphrates and in Egypt, and serve the Lord. But if serving the Lord seems undesirable to you, then choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve, whether the gods your ancestors served beyond the Euphrates, or the gods of the Amorites, in whose land you are living. But as for me and my household, we will serve the Lord.'

The readings we had this morning all point to our Covenant relationship with our Father.

So, in conclusion, I would like to lead you through a prayer of recommitment (which I have shamelessly lifted from the Methodist Church, but which definitely predates their current apostasy!) I will say the words, but do please join in your hearts:

*Christ has many services to be done:
some are easy, others are difficult;
some bring honour, others bring reproach;
some are suitable to our natural inclinations and material interests,
others are contrary to both;
in some we may please Christ and please ourselves;
in others we cannot please Christ except by denying ourselves.
Yet the power to do all these things is given to us in Christ, who strengthens us.
Therefore, let us make this covenant of God our own.
Let us give ourselves to him,
trusting in his promises and relying on his grace.*

**Eternal God,
in your faithful and enduring love**

you call us to share in your gracious covenant in Jesus Christ.

**In obedience we hear and accept your commands;
in love we seek to do your perfect will;
with joy we offer ourselves anew to you.
We are no longer our own but yours.**

**I am no longer my own but yours.
Your will, not mine, be done in all things,
wherever you may place me,
in all that I do
and in all that I may endure;
when there is work for me
and when there is none;
when I am troubled
and when I am at peace.
Your will be done
when I am valued
and when I am disregarded;
when I find fulfilment
and when it is lacking; when I have all things,
and when I have nothing.
I willingly offer
all I have and am
to serve you,
as and where you choose.**

**Glorious and blessed God,
Father, Son and Holy Spirit,
you are mine and I am yours.**

**May it be so for ever.
Let this covenant now made on earth
be fulfilled in heaven. Amen.**