

The Newsletter of the Churches of God, UK

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Regd Charity No 283358

**November/December
2014**

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Matthew 28:19-20*

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A LOST CHANNEL

Calamity! A favourite TV channel—gone. Freeview 80 has disappeared. I watch that every day, and now it has disappeared from the small screen. (After a frantic search it showed up on Channel 130.)

Really, though, in the grand scheme of things it isn't at all important. For, measured against another 'lost channel' mine is truly insignificant. But few have noticed this one has also gone. Long gone.

Troubled Times

Few would argue that this is not 'a time of trouble' for our world. Globally, nationally, locally and even personally we face seemingly unsurmountable challenges.

Economically, the world is on the brink of financial melt-down. *Socially*, unrest with populations on the move as they seek to improve their lives or to escape persecution—thus straining relationships and public services in reluctant host nations, and prompting a clash of values and culture, and racial tensions. Then there's the threat of climate change (however it is caused), civil strife and destructive hot wars, disease pandemics, water shortages.

It is recognized that man has been 'civilized' for nigh on six thousand years. Surely time enough for us to get to grips with what ails us—those outward expressions of our defiled human nature. But no, for generation after generation we time and again repeat past mistakes, never learning. *Why?*

There have, of course, been amazing advances as human ingenuity

builds on existing discovery, and as we exploit more of earth's resources. Ignorance, however, still stalks the planet. Again—*why?* What is that 'missing channel'?

In the Beginning

Man in his beginning, and contrary to our modern mind-set, was at the peak of his potential, in perfect harmony with his environment, capable of an endless physical life, and equipped with the mental capacity to control his environment. He walked and talked with, and was instructed by, his Creator with whom he was in perfect fellowship. But it didn't last.

We were not created as automata—but to qualify, through our choices, to become worthy of becoming part of the Family of God in whose image we are created.

The apostle John defines the source code for our in-built operating system: '*...in the beginning was the Word*' (John 1:1). That word was spoken, the Creator face-to-face with the created—the Channel through which He communicated His perfect way.

Paradise Lost

But faced with a choice of continuing in that perfect way as instructed by the Creator, man was seduced to follow a path of self-determination. The human mind became progressively corrupted from the perfect 'operating system' with which we were created.

The apostle Paul explains why: '*...knowing God, they did not glorify Him as God. Professing to be wise, they became foolish...who changed the truth of God into the lie, and worshiped and served the created thing more* *cont'd p.3*

The Perfect Man

Man in his beginning—direct from the hand of the Creator—was physically perfect, created from earth's elements with an inborn spirit unique to his race. His uncorrupted DNA incorporated all that he could become. His sustenance was turned to pure energy without residue. He was intelligent, rational—and wise as long as he adhered to God's guidance. He could have lived endlessly.

It didn't last. Influenced by a death-dealing spirit he chose to follow his own path contrary to that divine guidance. He decayed physically. He lost his perfect environment. Crucially, he could no longer relate face-to-face with His Creator, only through a prescribed onerous ritual of sacrifice.

Divine Plan

God, however, had foreseen this weakness and '*...before the foundation of the world*' (I Peter 1:18-20) had prepared a remedy. To further His plan to '*...bring many sons to glory*' man had to be reconciled to the Father by the sacrificial death of a perfect man. But sin had wreaked such havoc that '*...there is none good*'. None but a member of the Godhead, the Creator of all, could fulfil the role of the perfect sinless man—if he remained sinless.

God took on human flesh, experiencing first hand as our example all the temptations which confront us in our corrupted nature—*yet without sin*. Through His unique suffering and death at the hands of the religious and secular authorities complete reconciliation with the Father became possible:

He was wounded for our transgressions; He was bruised for our iniquities; the chastisement of our peace was on Him; and with His stripes we ourselves are healed. All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned, each one to his own way; and Jehovah has laid on Him the iniquity of us all
Isaiah 53:5-6

Even though we personally embrace that sacrificial offering and have our sin forgiven—*only* through Jesus Christ—we still have our corrupted nature. On our own we could not '*...be perfect as I am perfect*'.

But death could not hold Jesus '*...who was declared to be the Son of God with power, according to the Spirit of holiness, by the resurrection of the dead*' (Romans 1:4). That same Spirit is given freely to those who have been through him reconciled to the Father, to enable us to put on those same characteristics that Jesus perfectly expressed in his walk among us as a man.

The Perfect Life

No Christian is without sin (I John 1:8)—we are far from the perfect state. But once we enter into a covenant relationship with God (through repentance and baptism) sin is covered by the shed blood of the Saviour: '*...As far as the east is from the west, so far has*

He removed our transgressions from us' (Psalm 103:12). We are, upon repentance, a 'clean slate' - our sin invisible to our loving Father.

But, said Jesus '*...Be perfect*'—and he shows us how. His way of life—the perfect reflection of the Father—as recorded in the Scriptures is the pattern for every Christian. Our sin is covered—not by our actions but by God's mercy, His grace, His loving kindness.

We may stumble over the technicalities of the Scripture text. We may be misled by sincere—but wrong—teachers. We may not be scholarly. Our understanding of the prophecies may be sketchy (or plain wrong, as with so many interpretations down the ages including our own times!). But if we have access to a Bible we are without excuse as to how we should walk in the footsteps of Jesus.

The *Gospels* are a four-fold independent witness to the life and teachings of Jesus, and he was himself the reflection of the Old Testament. We must each immerse ourselves in those teachings: '*...Your Word have I hid in my heart [memorized] that I might not sin against You*' (Psalm 119:11). Ω

An Image

Whether or not the return of our Saviour is imminent, it is clear that we are on the verge of troubling times. The economy of major nations is about to implode despite man's efforts. The very elements of our planet are volatile. Disease stalks our world. Social norms break down. But '*...be ready also, for the Son of Man comes at an hour when you think not*' (Luke 12:40).

Before He comes it is perhaps worth our attention to consider one who will precede the return of Jesus—described in the Scriptures as 'the Beast' and 'the man of sin'. Even if Jesus doesn't come until half a century from now this being will already walk in our midst. What will he be like?

Undoubtedly he will already be busy 'networking', mixing among 'the great and the good [so-called]' and at the world's 'top table'. A man of substance, too, having amassed great wealth. Intelligent, and a skilled and cunning and ruthless leader. But a deceitful liar with Messianic aspirations. To gain access to high places he will present himself as a man of peace, and a peace-maker. In his guise of gaining influence he will ingratiate himself with unsavoury, corrupt and dictatorial leaders around the world.

To enhance his work alongside the 'false prophet'—as predicted in the Scriptures—he will in the beginning of his master plan assume the mantle of religion to the extent of changing the world through thinly-veiled religious wars.

This is the template for the coming 'man of sin'. Be on the look-out for him. Ω

LOST CHANNEL...cont'd

than the Creator' (Romans 1:21-25).

Hence arose the bizarre mythology of the ancients — often based on 'heroes' from the past, often being Bible characters re-named—as they rejected the Creator's word and invented their own religions, formed their own ways to God. (Often these contained elements—eg of a dying and risen Saviour— of the true teachings originally delivered by the Creator.)

The Missing Dimension

Is it any wonder, then, that our world faces chaos? That the world's leadership blindly follow paths that lead only into a barren wilderness and to destruction? That endless global conferences achieve little? That lasting peace eludes us?

Parliamentarians may profess to seek God's guidance—but His clear principles for a peaceful and prosperous global society revealed through the Channel of His Word is ignored, rejected as archaic and irrelevant. A channel switched off, a *lost* Channel.

As a result the world stumbles to destruction, and as economies everywhere collapse and social norms break down a cry will go out for 'a strong hand from somewhere'. Global challenges need global solutions and an all-powerful global regime is necessary—and inevitable. But in human hands that regime will be dictatorial, oppressive, violent, ugly. And ultimately self-destructive—and, thankfully, short-lived.

Mankind no longer has the capacity to solve our problems. Our massive challenges on every front demand *a change of heart*. The missing dimension, the lost channel, is *spiritual*. It's 'not the economy, stupid'. It's not a lack of intelligence. It's not science and it's not technology. And the man-made—and largely satanic—world religions certainly have failed us.

Over the six millennia of human endeavor we have waded ever more deeply and unsuccessfully into the mire of human reasoning unenlightened by divine guidance. But change is coming: '*...At that time they shall call Jerusalem the throne of the LORD; and all the nations shall be gathered unto it, to the name of the LORD, to Jerusalem: neither shall they walk any more after the imagination of their evil heart*' (Jeremiah 3:17).

Instead, led by the survivors of the family of Israel nations: '*...I will put my law in their inward parts, and write it in their hearts; and will be their God, and they shall be my people*' (ch 31:33). With Jesus Christ at their head and empowered by God's holy Spirit they will return from a future exile to establish a model nation based on the divine Laws. At that time '*... the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the LORD, as the waters cover the sea*' (Isaiah 11:9). The prophet Micah adds: '*...But it shall be in the last days the mountain of the house [government] of Jehovah shall be established in the top of the mountains... And He*

Festive Substitutes

The apostle Paul was immersed in the Scriptures of the Old Testament—the inspired Word of God, he tells Timothy (II Timothy 3:15-16). They are the record of God's dealings with mankind since his creation, and they clarify for us how God looks at our humanly-devised practices. Not just 'Old Testament stuff' but His living and unchanging Word for every age, every nation.

This time of year is commemorated by many Christians as a celebration of the lives of those who have died—known as *All Souls Day*, during which prayers are said for the departed. The previous day focuses on the dead designated as 'saints'—*All Saints Day* (November 1), with a vigil on the evening before (*Hallowe'en*).

The festival is nowhere mentioned in the Scriptures—though certain related practices certainly are. Unsurprisingly, Hallowe'en—originally the pagan 'Night of the Dead' (*Samhain*) when 'souls' migrate to the Underworld—is replete with images of ghouls, witches, skeletons and all manner of grotesque creatures. All good fun for the children, it is said. But not what God thinks.

Step onwards a couple of months and the festive scene is dominated by another set of images to brighten the darkness of winter—food (lots of it), alcohol (even more), a frenzy of shopping (and mountainous debt), bright lights—and a lying fat, jolly man in a red body suit dispensing gifts. And lurking in the deep shadows is the supposed focus of the festival—Jesus.

Spring follows, with rabbits laying eggs. Sun-rise worship—a '...great abomination, hateful to God (Ezekiel 8). And He hasn't changed.

But is Hallowe'en or Christmas or Easter just 'fun'? Hear what God says: '*... take heed to yourself that you do not become snared by following [the practices of the Canaanites—for that's what Israel was repeating]...and that you do not ask about their gods, saying, How did these nations serve their gods, that I too may do likewise? You shall not do so to Jehovah your God. For every abomination to Jehovah, which He hates, they have done to their gods... All the things I command you, be careful to do it. You shall not add to it, nor take away from it*' (Deuteronomy 12:30-32). **Ω**

will teach us of His ways, and we will walk in His paths; for the Law shall go forth out of Zion, and the Word of Jehovah from Jerusalem' (ch 4).

Worldwide peace. Prosperity. An end to every false corrupting belief system. Hearts, minds, empowered by the in-welling Spirit of God. And Jesus Christ enthroned in Jerusalem on Mount Zion as King of kings and LORD of lords. **Ω**

One Way

There's an almost universal urge to worship 'God'. Two billion Christians, a billion plus in Islam, a billion Hindu, and countless other belief systems—each with its own form of worship. The urge is built into the human psyche. So—'many ways to God'?

Christianity uncompromisingly claims to be unique, the 'only way' to God: *'...there is salvation in no other One [Jesus of Nazareth]; for there is no other name under Heaven given among men by which we must be saved'* (Acts 4:12). That, on the face of it, unfairly excludes billions of humanity—both before and after Jesus.

A Jealous God

Most of us hang on to the belief system into which we are born. Christians retain allegiance to the Christian tag, Muslims remain faithful to Mohammed *etc.* Each faith has its own standards and requirements, its own rewards. But why such diversity, as each claims to worship one and the same God?

As He is our Creator, God merits our worship—and from the beginning He has been jealous as to *how* we worship. He, for example, accepted the offering of the first naturally-born human, Abel, while rejecting that of his bother. The Christian Scriptures tell us *'...God is not a God of disorder'* (I Corinthians 14:33), and He has clearly defined how we should approach Him in worship. His instructions to Israel, His model nation, were *'...you shall worship no other god. For Jehovah, whose name is Jealous, is a jealous God'* (Exodus 34:14). And He doesn't change but is *'...the same yesterday, today and forever'*.

But early in our history mankind in general lost touch and *'...instead of worshipping the imperishable God, they worshipped images resembling perishable man or resembling birds or beasts or reptiles'* (Romans 1:23). It was the beginning of home-made—and often devil-inspired—religions, and has since diversified through to our time.

The LORD warned Israel not to wor-

ship *'...the host of heaven'* [*ie sun etc*] (Deuteronomy 17:2-3), nor to use their religious artifacts, their rites and ceremonies: *'...you shall destroy their altars, break their images, and cut down their sacred poles'* (Ezekiel 34:13). Writes the prophet Jeremiah: *'...Do not learn the way of the nations...For the customs of the people are vain'* (ch 10:2-3).

The LORD of all is most particular as to how we approach Him!

Salvation Misunderstood

Just one way to salvation, then. But just what is 'salvation'? Joining a church? Labelling yourself 'Christian'? Getting to heaven? Doing good?

According to God's revelation in His Word, the usual notion of salvation is far from the truth. Not a stress-free life on earth, an end to life's challenges. Not just a 'statement of intent' to commit to Christ, not 'accepting Christ'. And not 'pie in the sky when you die'.

The reality transcends all we can imagine. For God is preparing, training, a people for Himself, a royal priesthood to join His Family alongside His firstborn, Jesus, and to reign with Him on Earth for a thousand years and then throughout eternity. *That* is 'salvation'.

Free to All

The invitation is open to all of mankind—to every era since Adam, to every race. Open even to those who never come within sound of the Gospel message—for such are included in The LORD's master plan for the ages. But open only to those who actively respond to it, accept His terms, and who remain faithful, for: *'...many are invited but few are chosen'*.

Anyone can come to Jesus and be 'saved'. But there's a cost: *'...Take My yoke on you and learn of Me, for I am meek and lowly in heart, and you shall find rest to your souls'* (Matthew 11:29). Jesus himself said *'...narrow is the gate and constricted is the way which leads to life, and there are few who find it'* (Matthew 7:14). Not, then, an easy message!

To be saved—to become a part of the Kingdom of God, His Family—we must follow that 'one way'. Jesus again: *'...I am the way'* (John 14:6). **Ω**

Ezekiel (ch 8) describes the sun-rise services held in God's temple, and the carved images adorning its walls. Even within Christianity such artefacts and practices are common, with sun-bursts behind the altar. He records, too, those who observed the forty days of abstinence in honour of Tammuz, and leading to the spring festival for Astarte (Eostre, 'Easter').

Worship Days

Every religion has its own days for worship which reflects and defines its god. In *Islam*, Friday is the day for formal corporate worship; this day is traditionally dedicated to the Norse fertility goddess, Freya (Venus). In *Christianity* it is Sunday, a reflection of its roots in sun worship. In *Judaism* it is the seventh day of the week, Saturday, recalling God as the Creator of all.