



THE NEW SHOFAR

All genuine truths will confess how Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father

February 27th

Weighing the cost of obeying

One of the more wicked aspects of the Covid regulations imposed on the entire population of Australia has been their impact on the mental health of so many men and women in this country. This has applied unequally and indiscriminately across the nation, with the greatest harm being done to the elderly, those who are living alone, those struggling with mental health issues and families where levels of family violence and cases of suicide have escalated. And let us not forget those families seeking to comfort and console the dying, those who are very sick and people in care. The list could go on to include school children and others.

In this our leaders have been joined by all kinds of scientists and medicos who seem to be battling for their own share of the limelight. One will stress a particular version of the “truth” and the appropriate way forward, while others will head off in the opposite direction. Our politicians and journalists seem to hunt down the expert that will support their own theories and positions rather than search for the ever allusive “truth”. Apart from discovering treatments, science has not helped us all that much. If anything, it has added to our pain and confusion.

The point here is the way human beings cannot bring hope alive in times of disaster and life-threatening circumstances. With Covid we have seen the chaos of politicians guided by hubris and the adrenaline rush of public performances. They have governed more for themselves and their futures than for the good of the very people they have been elected to serve – note that word “serve”. Not rule over, but serve, a form of action that requires self-sacrificing.

The Book of Sirach was written about 200 years B.C. and is something of a book of ethics for the Jewish faithful. It offers reflections on the whole of Israel’s history and tackles many troubling issues – why do bad things happen to good people, poverty, role of women, family, truth and more.

Sirach says it well

Things that have become commonplace really need to be sieved before they can be accepted as being any kind of “truth”. Just because millions of people follow a popular belief, does not mean it is true and does not mean it reflects the will of God. *Sieve out* the falsities of what is being proposed and said before living our lives around these ideas, laws and expectations. Not every new idea is good and acceptable before God.

This is also the same message we find across the New Testament. Take **1 John 4:1** for example. He warns his fellow believers of the dangers that come to the Church from false prophets, those who speak earnestly but falsely and lead believers astray. They need to be sieved, or tested before we presume they are compatible with the way God has commanded us to be living... *Dear friends, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, because many false prophets have gone out into the world.*

Take one example, the great battle going on in the UK, something recently addressed by our Prime Minister – transgender athletes in sport. Various ruling bodies have allowed transgender women (men who identify as women) to compete against women (those who were born as females) in sporting events. Activists, human rights commentators and politicians have supported this even accepting that a woman is a woman if he/she simply identifies as a woman. No science. Not objective markers, just “I feel that I am a woman, and so therefore I am a woman”. The truth according to the false prophets of which Sirach warns. But how does God describe women?

Lies, falsehoods and corrupt theologies

As we have discovered with the manipulation of the truth during Covid, so too when it comes to contemporary ethics, we are being snowballed by false prophets. Another example. Across the West there is a powerful push to reshape the way we talk about women. In the National Health Service in Great Britain, some hospital departments refer to mothers as “chest feeders” rather than offend trans women by the term “breast feeding”. Others want to talk of them as being “people with a cervix” rather than as being “women”. Why? Because some men who identify as being a female will not have a cervix and will feel excluded by the term woman. For the sake of the Kingdom, we need to ask ourselves where God is calling us in this.

Madness! As Ecclesiasticus teaches us (that is the Latin name for Sirach or Ben-Sira to give it the Hebrew name), test what is being thrown around as the “truth” in our world. *Sieve* it through the wisdom of the Creator God’s teachings and revelations. Only God is True and what men and women proclaim as the truth must be measured up against the realities of those divine expectations.

This is an excellent lead up to the season of Lent

Too many of our Church leaders have been seduced by the false spirits of the time and have compromised the Good News of the Kingdom of God for popularity, for acceptance by the contemporary age. They need to read their Bibles more closely for there they would find the tests they need to use in “sieving” proposed truths.

Going to 1 John again, we find the most important step is to test whether or not this new way *confesses that Jesus Christ is Lord*, that he is from the Father bringing alive in the world the will of the Father. Sieve. Test. Examine. Actively evaluate our activities, or words, our deeds and most importantly our lives as disciples under the bright light of the teachings and witnessing of Jesus Christ who is our Lord. That is a great way to spend the six weeks of Lent that lead us to Easter liberation.