



August 14th

THE NEW SHOFAR

They will fight you, but they will fail. For I am with you, and I will take care of you. I, the Lord, have spoken!

Truth is vital for understanding our place in the world

One of the “signs of the times” in which we live today is the way truth has become a subjective thing. Words and ideas we once understood and used within the context of the foundation of our Western world – Christianity built on the Bible – are no longer acceptable or have had their meaning changed. Sadly, this applies to every aspect of life, including science and medicine.

Mother, Father, marriage, gender, sex, race, justice, equality for a few examples. Out of these revisions come all kinds of chaotic consequences. People now see themselves and others in terms of gender, race and colour rather than beginning with an affirmation that they and the others are children of God, made in the divine image and likeness. In Christ Jesus they have been saved, have been able to rejoice in the forgiveness of sins, are gifted with graces originating in the creative plan of God and have a meaning and purpose behind their existence.

I grew up with many experiences of having to defend my faith, to argue in favour of my life choices and for the way I understood the reality of God at work in our world. Today it is different as it is not possible to challenge these false prophecies without being labelled a bigot of some kind (homophobic, transphobic, racist, bully, misogynist and many more). Sticking your head up rings great risks.

The false prophets are as dangerous today as in Jeremiah’s day

The biggest challenge for the prophet Jeremiah was a similar public campaign by the false prophets of his day. Jeremiah was a dyed in the wool traditionalist. He preached the sovereign rule of God over all things and all people. The prophet could see signs of this divine rule in the events and encounters of everyday living. As he proclaimed over and over again, Yahweh was the only King over Israel. As King he had called the Hebrew people to be his own. They were summoned for a task and that task was to make God known to the nations. They were “special” because of the way God was working through them and with them. Without this intimacy in their relationship, they were just one more nation among many nations.

It was at this point the ministry of Jeremiah began. The people had wandered from God. We should note here that they had not abandoned God, just turned him into one God within a pantheon of “gods”. God was great but the divine actions were supplemented with these other gods – politics, military action, economic mechanisms, international intrigue and the gods of the land around them. Jeremiah prophesied how this would lead to their destruction for Yahweh was a jealous God.

Open the gates! Let the Babylonians in!

As we are learning today, the battle against “false truths” involves a personal cost. For many prophets of Israel that cost was death. For Jeremiah it was endless persecution, mockery, imprisonment and beatings. The false prophets hated him for sticking to the truth as revealed to Moses, by Yahweh, on Mt Sinai. They stood accused of simply telling the King and the people what they wanted to hear. Rather than standing under the sovereign rule of God, they were pliable, malleable and subject to the social whims and fancies of the time. They encouraged the king to seek military alliances and to fight against the Babylonian army. The locals were all assured that God was on their side.

Here is what Jeremiah preached... *Thus says Yahweh, the Lord God Almighty, the God of Israel: If you will surrender to the officials of the king of Babylon, then your life shall be spared, and this city shall not be burned with fire, and you and your house shall live...!* They had to believe God was God and that God ruled over all that was unfolding in human history. They were told to entrust their futures to God, that God would be their God, caring for them, speaking with them and protecting them even if they were living under Babylonian rule.

It was easy to have faith in God when Israel governed its own future and had her own little power base in that part of Palestine. Asked to believe when all seemed lost and darkness about to cover the earth (Babylonians climbing over the walls of the city), their faith was challenged and they turned to other sources for hope.

There is only one way to Life – faithful perseverance

This reliance on other gods had consequences: *if you do not surrender to the officials of the king of Babylon, this city will be given into the hand of the Chaldeans; they shall burn it with fire, and you shall not escape from their hand.* It was not God sending the Babylonians to punish them for their faithlessness. They brought all of this on themselves by their unwillingness to trust God. They took control of their own future, and like Adam and Eve, believed they could make their lives better than the life they had in the Garden of Adam and Eve.

Why would we presume things would be different in today’s world? We are under pressure to accept the words of the false prophets and accept their versions of the “truth”. When things have been embraced by politics and law we are expected to roll over and cease from our “hurtful” preaching. Christians are commanded to accept the status quo of these new movements and philosophies and abandon the Covenant God has made with us in the life, death, resurrection and ascension of Jesus who is our Lord and Saviour.

We live constantly on the cusp of a whole new era

Jeremiah stood at the end of an era, a time when unfaithfulness had so eaten away at the heart of a faithful Judaism, they were easily seduced into living under a number of kings other than Yahweh. For God, it was easier to allow Jerusalem to be destroyed than it was to bring the people to repentance. Try as Jeremiah did to lead them away from disaster, his ministry was rejected and like lemmings they followed their unfaithful prophets over the cliff and down into a world as captives in a pagan land.