

---

 ENTERING THE TREATY SPACE
 

---

I made a commitment many years ago that each year, around Waitangi Day, I would speak about how the Bible relates to the Treaty. I have done this in a variety of ways for over 15 years. I know that some of you will be rolling your eyes at this point. Thinking Not again. Just stick to the Bible. Politics should stay out of the church. And there is no doubt that issues around the Treaty have become very political and contentious in the last couple of years. There are strongly held and different views by Christians, politicians and historians around the Treaty and how it should be applied today. So I am really conscious of this as I speak today. Is it possible to speak about the Treaty and not be political? Or should we just ignore it.

I want to answer 4 questions today Factual as possible.

### What preceded the Treaty?

Two key things happened prior to the Treaty.

**The British Empire and revival.** British colonization had been terrible. Indigenous people were treated as slaves, with no rights at all. The British empire was the biggest the world had ever seen but it came at a terrible price. Millions were killed, forcibly removed or enslaved. Land, possessions, minerals were seized to make England the wealthiest country in the world, while all their colonies got poorer. English language and customs were forced onto indigenous people. While there were good things about colonization, it came with an appalling legacy.

Part of that legacy was a racist attitude that white is right. Winston Churchill, who I was bought up with as a hero for saving Britain in the war said of Indians: "I hate Indians. They are a beastly people with a beastly religion."

Alongside this was a spiritual revival in the United Kingdom and increased Christian influence in British govt. William Wilberforce and others had formed Clapham sect, a group of influential British leaders who sought to influence power. This group was responsible for passing of many laws that promoted justice, including that abolition of slavery. They were also backers of the Church Missionary Society and their move to NZ.

William Wilberforce's nephew James Stephen became the British colonial secretary and he gave the instructions to Lord Normandy to ensure Hobson set out the mutually beneficial principals of agreements that became known as the Treaty of Waitangi. Stephen was well aware of the atrocities that had been perpetuated on the indigenous people of other nations by the process of British colonization and was determined that this was never to happen in New Zealand.

Māori land and resources were to be protected by law and they were to be treated as equal rights citizens with the British.

**Declaration of independence.** Prior to the Treaty in 1935 34 Māori chiefs from the north of NZ signed the Declaration of the Independence of NZ. Later that number grew to 52. It was signed with the James Busby, who was the British resident in NZ. Missionaries Henry Williams and George Clarke translated the declaration and signed as witnesses. There were two key reasons for this declaration. One was that a French guy by the name of Charles Theirry announced he was going to come here and declare himself chief and set up a French colony. The other was that the British who were here were running riot, with no laws or govt.

The declaration basically stated that the country was independent and was made up of a confederation of tribes. Leadership was by a congress of the chiefs. The southern tribes were invited to join the confederation. The chiefs selected a flag, because they ran into problems with boats built in NZ that sailed overseas with out flag. This agreement was sent to the king of England, who acknowledged it. However the government colonial office were not happy. When the Treaty of Waitangi was made, it was made between the British Crown and the chiefs of the United tribes of NZ. That was a recognition of their independent sovereignty

When it came to the treaty of Waitangi Captain William Hobson then asked Henry Williams and his son Edward to translate a document he'd been working on to best represent the intentions of the Colonial Office.

Williams and son, who were both fluent in the Māori language, knew the words that would convey the intent of this covenant, which they hoped would not only bring British law to govern the unruly activities of British citizens but protect Māori from ruthless landgrabbers and give them a say in what happened in their own land. The missionaries were tasked with ensuring Māori knew the meaning of the treaty and of going about the country helping the Crown representatives gain signatures on this historic document.

### What does the Treaty say?

In Article 1 of the Treaty/Te Tiriti, Māori agreed to governance by the Crown

In Article 2, the Crown guaranteed to Māori chiefs (and by implication their people) the retention of the rights they already had, including tino rangatiratanga (chiefly mana and self-determination), and their lands, fisheries, and treasures

In Article 3, the Crown gave Māori the same rights and privileges as British citizens – another guarantee to Māori



that they would be protected in law by the British Crown, rather than subjugated and treated as less than equal

There is at times mention of a 4th article (phantom article) that guarantees religious freedom for all. This was talked about verbally but everyone agrees it is not part of the treaty.

#### **Why should Christians be concerned about the Treaty?**

Once we get our heads around our history and the Treaty, the key question is why should Christians be concerned about the Treaty? Surely we should just stay out of such things and focus on the gospel?

**God is concerned for all of life.** Ephesians 1:22. "all things" We have over the years, particularly in the Western church, separated our faith from the rest of life. We have made faith about something private between us and God. We have focused on behavior around certain key areas. Sexuality, Swearing, Going to church along with prayer, Bible reading. A good Christians behaves and faith is about not sinning and getting to heaven. Issues of justice, poverty and the environment were ignored. Issues of greed and consumerism, and gluttony were not a focus,. But in the last decades there is a growing awareness of God's concern for the planet, for justice and for the poor. It is very hard to read the OT and not see God's heart for these matters

And the problem is that issues of poverty, and the planet and justice by their very nature stray into politics. The reality is that all political parties are concerned about these issues to some degree or another. They just have different solutions. Some will be more effective than others. As Christians we can disagree on the solutions. But we can't suggest that somehow we should not be concerned about these things or that somehow our faith is not relevant to these issues.

**God concerned for justice** The Treaty came out of a concern for justice. And God is deeply concerned with justice. Māori have been treated with much injustice. Both in the past, but also many studies have shown that our present systems have a built in bias against Māori. If we are pakeha we struggle to see this, because the systems are designed from our world view. Māori well being is a lot less than non Māori. Health, education, income, prison stats. So there are significant issues of justice both past and present that God is concerned about.

**God is a God of reconciliation.** The biggest challenge of the early church was the issue of race. For centuries Jews saw themselves a chosen people, and inherited a view of superiority to non Jews. They saw their religion and their customs as far superior to every other race. So when they recognized Jesus as the messiah, they saw Christianity as inherently Jewish. After all Jesus was Jewish and the Scripture was Jewish. So if others wanted to follow Jesus they needed to become Jewish. This was the same mentality that some of the missionaries had; Māori could come to faith, but only if they became civilized English. (not all missionaries had this view)

The early church had to come to terms with the fact that others could come to faith and not become Jewish. This was as radical as saying in 1840 that British and Māori cultures were of equal value. This is what the treaty actually implied but that view came from the Christians in Britain rather than most of the English leaders and settlers.

God bought reconciliation between us and himself by entering our world and adopting our customs. Incarnation. The most painful thing the early church had to learn was that their Jewish culture was not superior to other cultures. Every person was equal and all cultures had to come under the Lordship of Jesus Christ. The image in Revelation of all tribes worshipping before the throne says that our culture is not extinguished by Christ, but is accepted and celebrated.

The treaty has become a source of division but it was intended as a means of reconciliation. That Māori culture and world view would be protected, celebrated and included in decision making. The alternative is that the dominant culture ignore and suppress the minority cultures. This of course is not reconciliation at all. So when people argue well we are all just kiwis, it is really arguing for the dominant culture to be in charge.

Reconciliation only comes when we enter another person world and understand where they are coming from, treating them as an equal.

**God keeps covenants.** When the treaty was conceived and written, it was deliberately written in the form of a covenant. Māori at the time had on mass turned to Christianity and were devouring Scripture at profound rate. They were very familiar with the concept of covenants. Old and new testament. Māori saw the Treaty as not so much a political document but as a sacred document between two people, with the church and God as the broker. The Treaty was conceived as a act of love to protect Māori.

The best example of how God sees covenants is found in the OT in the treaty between the Gibeonites and the Israelites. Joshua 9 The Gibeonites saw the Israelites conquering the nations around them, and were concerned they might be next. So an envoy went to the Israelite leaders, and pretended to be a nation that was from a long way away. They brokered a peace deal. 400 years later, the nation of Israel was in drought. When they asked God why, God told them it was because they were breaking the treaty they had made generations earlier. Saul had tried to wipe them out. Now this was not a treaty made in good faith. And after 400 years, I am sure Saul said, "We don't need to worry about that thing now. That was years ago and we were tricked into it.. But God saw the treaty was being broken and he was concerned. Why? Because God keeps his word. He is a covenant keeping God.

The Treaty of Waitangi was made in good faith, before God, and God is grieved at it being broken and ignored.

**God/ church central in the Treaty process.** It is impossible to read the story of the treaty and not realize how central the



**CENTRAL BAPTIST**

LOVE GOD : LOVE OTHERS

church and God are in it. Māori only signed it because the missionaries said it was good and for their benefit. And so when the treaty was broken and is ignored today, we have a vested interest in that. It is our reputation at stake. We are not on the sidelines but are central to the conversation. Māori have felt and many today still feel betrayed by the church for not standing up for them. It is not really possible for the church of NZ to say today: well the treaty is not what we are about. WE are just concerned for the gospel.

#### **How should we respond in this climate**

Given all of the above, how should we as the church of NZ, and as Christians respond?

**Listen more.** Read, listen to Māori. There is a huge amount written today about the Treaty and it's background. Prov 18:17 Danger of echo chambers. Social media. Common Grace Aotearoa Many Christians will happily share opinions and views that are often both racist but also simply ignorant. An example would be about the settlements to Māori for historical injustices. The amount currently stands at around 5 billion. This sounds a lot until it is put in perspective of how much was spent on say bail outs.

If we are not Māori, we also need to listen to Māori voices. We need to hear their views, their pain, their perspective. It will likely be very different from our own. But unless we are prepared to truly listen and engage, we will not understand. For many of us we have a Western perspective on time, on land, on justice. This comes from our world view, but it is different from other world views.

**Use language better.** It should help us not make sweeping generalizations. It should help us not make statements that cause offense to others. We live in a cancel culture. A culture that pits one side against another. A culture that wants to divide into tribes. The language we use is really important. Is the language we use divisive. Or healing. Are the words we use helpful or harmful. Are our comments on social media or with friends and family words that promote understanding Or foster further prejudice?

**be advocates for justice and reconciliation.** If these are important to God then we have to enter this space. Many of us feel uncomfortable in such a space. These are messy spaces. Spaces of protest. Spaces of submissions to govt. Spaces of public debate. In such spaces we can find ourselves alongside those who are very different from ourselves. People with whom there might be lots of things we disagree with. In such spaces we can find ourselves being verbally attacked and strongly opposed by others. These are not comfortable spaces for those who want life to be free of conflict. And because spaces of justice and reconciliation are often not about ourselves. White, middle class, then it is easier and simpler to do nothing. To put our head in the sand and ignore because they do not impact us personally.

4. Honour the Treaty. Respecting culture. Use te reo properly. Names of places

*Download or listen to this message at:*

[www.icbc.org.nz](http://www.icbc.org.nz)

## REFLECTION + DISCUSSION

What has been the impact of Western Christianity focussing on behaviours like sexuality, swearing and church attendance, while neglecting issue like justice, greed and gluttony?

Why is the issue of race so divisive around the world? How does Christianity speak into this space?

Share an example of entering a different "world" i.e. cultural, or a sub cultural group. How did it make you feel? How did you react?

What could you do to listen more to different perspectives than your own ( personal and cultural) on the treaty?

Given the divisiveness around the Treaty currently, how can Christian be a helpful voice in this space? Or are we scared to speak up for fear of criticism? Do we need to speak up more and take a "side"? (given we brokered the Treaty?)



**CENTRAL BAPTIST**

LOVE GOD : LOVE OTHERS