

Feb 5th Waitangi Day 2 Samuel 21:1-14

God takes justice (seriously,) and agreements seriously

Back in 1975 and 1985 our government made decisions to 'endorse' the Treaty of Waitangi. As you may know today, views of the Treaty of Waitangi range in our nation from negative to neutral to positive. Whatever the opinion, as Christians we should celebrate, not just commemorate, Waitangi. And why should we do that? Well, here are two simple reasons. The first one...

1. The Treaty of Waitangi embodied the highest of Christian ideals

The Treaty of Waitangi is an amazing document. Because of their Christian convictions, William Wilberforce and friends battled the slave trade. When they finally had success against the slave trade many involved began to look around for other humanitarian causes to serve. In the following years many charitable societies were established for various humanitarian purposes, one of which was the Church Missionary Society (CMS) where the desire was to spread not only the gospel, but also Christian justice at the same time. Mission work served to give the evangelicals 'proximity' to people and problems – which led to increased opportunity to address a wide range of humanitarian issues around the world, including right here in Aotearoa.

NZ was the last of the British colonies and the missionary hopes were that it would **not** be colonised. As discussions began in the 1830s regarding opening NZ for limited colonisation 20 years after the first missionaries were first invited to NZ by Maori, missionaries petitioned British parliament against this, citing the disastrous consequences of colonisation for the native peoples of other lands, and pleading for the preservation of the Maori people, their lands, language and culture. This missionary effort failed and NZ was opened up for limited colonization. Which is when E.G. Wakefield sent his brother to NZ to buy vast amounts of land, often purchased for very little, with Maori not yet understanding the Western idea of land-ownership.

This is where the bold and visionary efforts that resulted in our Treaty of Waitangi came in. Lord Gleneag then Lord Normanby in the British Parliament opposed Wakefield's desires to buy land in NZ for the purposes of colonisation. Captain Hobson who was also an evangelical Christian was sent to NZ to form a treaty, with a mandate written by Lord Normanby that expressed that the goal

was to 'overt this disaster' of colonisation if possible – but if not 'to mitigate it'. If you read the Treaty realising that native people's had not been afforded these protections before then you'll see just how amazing it is with the Christian ideals it embodied.

And we should understand too that Maori were the first instigators of the treaty. Why? They were the recognised sovereigns of NZ at that point in time. *So the British Government could not intervene without their invitation.* Maori invited this intervention because of the troubles that they were having with the influx of Europeans, and the extremely bad behaviour of some of these Europeans, take Russell/Kororaraka for instance known as the hell hole of the Pacific at the time.

Therefore, this is the first reason that a Christian should celebrate Waitangi, because the Treaty expressed the highest Christian ideals of its time in trying to protect the Maori people from disrespect, and the loss of their lands, language and culture. It was an attempt at justice though unfortunately before it's time, secondly

2. Our government's endorsing of the Treaty, following Dame Whina Coopers march to Parliament in 1975, was an act of courageous justice

Throughout most of history, if one people group took another people group's land then that was the end of the story. But not so in New Zealand! Our culture has a clear concept of justice, coming from our Christian foundations. Our system of law is based on the 10 Commandments. For this reason, injustice is not something to ignore, but something to stand against. This is a Godly and right thing to do – *and this is what our government chose to do!* The unjust confiscation of millions upon millions of hectares of land from Maori, sometimes happening because they tried to stand up for themselves while land was being taken, and so were punished with the confiscation of even more land was *unbelievably unjust!* Yet to endorse the Treaty was always going to be very troublesome because how do you put crimes committed over 100 years earlier right, and especially when it involves the ownership of a significant portion of the country?

And it was our government had the courage to take on that God-honouring challenge!

Now there exists a biblical precedent is found in 2 Samuel 21 where an agreement made generations earlier by Israel with the Gibeonite people was not being honoured, and so God's favour was removed from the land.

V.1 tells us that a 3 year famine prompts David to seek and inquire of the Lord. David wisely sought God in the face of chronic problems. David was concerned after the first year of famine, and even more after the second, but two years of famine did not make him look to a spiritual cause. It was after three years of famine that wisdom prevailed and David inquired of the Lord. Which reveals to us that David did not see a spiritual reason in every problem, but, he did not shut his eyes to the hand of God in circumstances.

David learns from the Lord that the cause of the famine is because of Saul and his bloodthirsty house. This massacre is not recorded earlier in 1 Samuel, but David did not question that it happened. Apparently at some time during his reign, Saul attacked and killed many of the Gibeonites. As a result the whole of Israel suffered for Saul's sin whether they knew about it or were an accessory to it or not. When David heard it, he knew the Gibeonites were a people *especially* wrong for Saul to attack and kill because... In the days of Joshua, more than 400 years before David's time, Israel swore not to harm the Gibeonites, a neighboring tribe (Joshua 9). God expected Israel to keep its promise, even though the Gibeonites had tricked Israel into making the agreement. Saul's crime was not only in killing the Gibeonites but also in breaking this ancient and important oath. This emphasizes these principles:

- God expects us to keep our promises. Also,
- God expects nations to keep their promises. And,
- Time does not diminish our obligation to promises. For...
- God's correction may come a long time after the offense.

If God has such a high expectation that men keep their covenants, we can have great confidence that God will keep His covenant with us. For example, there is an emerald rainbow around the throne of God to proclaim His remembrance to His everlasting covenant with His people (Revelation 4:3). Back to our scripture passage...

David speaks to the Gibeonites In V.2 The king called the Gibeonites. David knew he had to do something about this and so he initiated a resolution with the Gibeonites. It is noted that Saul had sought to kill them in his zeal for the children of Israel and Judah. We normally think of such zeal as something good. Yet Saul's *misguided* zeal was a sin and brought disaster on Israel. And this is a good example of how *good intentions* do not excuse *bad actions*. We often excuse bad actions in ourselves and in others because of what we think are good intentions.

But God examines both our *intentions* and our *actions*.
 So in verses 3-6 David makes an agreement with the Gibeonites. Beginning with asking, "What shall I do for you?"
 In resolving this matter with the Gibeonites, David did not dictate terms to them. He came to them as a servant, not as a king. He felt that if the Gibeonites could "bless the Lord's inheritance" Israel (v.3b), then the reconciliation would be complete and God's punishing of Israel would end.

The Gibeonites made it clear (v.4) that they did not want money or direct retribution. Though Saul made a wholesale slaughter of the Gibeonites, they did not ask for the same among the people of Israel. Instead they asked that seven male descendants of Saul be given to them to be killed. In those ancient times the request of the Gibeonites was considered reasonable. Instead of money or an "eye for an eye" they only asked for justice against Saul through his descendants. David agreed to this (v.6) He knew this was the right thing to do in this situation. So,

David (then) fulfills the agreement with the Gibeonites (vv7-9)

Choosing to spare the life of Mephibosheth the son of Jonathan, the son of Saul, because of the Lord's oath that was between David and Jonathan. He delivered the seven into the hands of the Gibeonites who killed them all together. The phrase in v9 "**before the Lord**" implies God approved of their execution. The *method* of death was also important, it was by hanging, because it fulfilled the promise of Deuteronomy 21:23:
he who is hanged is accursed of God.

These descendants of Saul bore the curse Saul deserved and so delivered Israel from the guilt of their sin against the Gibeonites. This same promise explains why Jesus died the way He did. Galatians 3:13 says, "*Christ has redeemed us from the curse of the law, having become a curse for us (for it is written, "Cursed is everyone who hangs on a tree")*."

Now the bodies of the seven men were deliberately left unburied. This was to emphasize the fact that these men were executed as an act of judgment (v.9).

Rizpah, the mother of 2 of the 7, then keeps vigil over the exposed bodies until the late rains poured down on the bodies from heaven. **(10-14a)** The coming of rain showed that the famine was over, that justice was satisfied, and that Israel was delivered. David then gave the order for the bones of the seven to be

collected and given a public burial, together with the remains of Saul and Jonathan. And after that v. 14c “God answered prayer in behalf of the land” and the famine in Israel ended.

David directed all of this and he did it partly on the principle stated in Numbers 35:33 *So you shall not pollute the land where you are; for blood defiles the land, and no atonement can be made for the land, for the blood that is shed on it, except by the blood of him who shed it.* The idea is that blood from unpunished murders defiles a land and God will one day require that blood from the nation.

After that, God heeded the prayer for the land:

It was not as if from the time Saul massacred the Gibeonites until David’s day that God did not answer any of Israel’s prayers. Yet there came a time when God wanted to deal with this sin, and at that time He would not answer their prayers until they dealt with it. There are many reasons for unanswered prayer.

When we see that our prayers are not answered we like David should seek God to address the problem, should there be one.

So there we have it, the biblical president found in 2 Samuel 21 where an agreement was not being honoured, and so God’s favour was removed from the land. David sought the Lord, the transgression was revealed, so David put things right! And this is what our government did in 1975 and whether Parliament would acknowledge it or not themselves- it is a righteous and just act in God’s eyes!

To Conclude:

We can therefore be proud of what our nation is attempting here! It’s wise that we also try to be understanding of it- resolving these crimes was always going to be troublesome and it would be fair to also recognise that *our Government is actually doing a good job!* For instance, how many of you have lost your house and land as a part of our governments efforts?

Did you know Maori probably receive back less than 1/1000th of what they lost? And, Did you know the Treaty Minister, at every treaty settlement, thanks the Maori people *for their grace in accepting the governments offer*, because we all know it is nothing but a token of an apology in comparison to what was lost. In other words, our nation is indebted to Maori for their grace in accepting the apology they receive when a Treaty claim is

resolved... with the inclusion of a pitifully small gift of land and money in comparison to the amount that was unjustly taken. God takes justice seriously and agreements seriously, therefore, we have great reason to celebrate this Waitangi Weekend! Let's pray: