

## Sermon

### ***Salt, Light and Treaty***

**Matthew 5:13-16**

5<sup>th</sup> February 2023

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Last week, we looked at the opening words of the Sermon on the Mount – the Beatitudes. I made the point then, that Jesus starts with the character of his followers before there is any suggestion of changing the world. It is very easy to be sure that we can change the world for good – but if our motives and our character is not good, nor will the result be.

It would take too long to expand on all the readings or even all of a reading, so I will focus on salt and light.

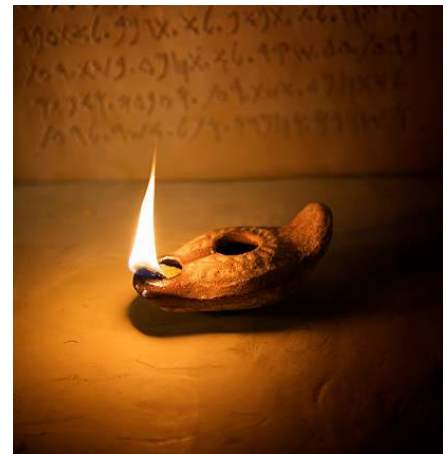
#### ***Light of the World***

Jesus also spoke about our being the light of the world. “Light” is often used as a metaphor for teachings that bring revelation to people. Light can also represent the presence of God (e.g., “the light of his countenance”).

Jesus who is **the** light of the world makes **us** to be the light of the world. How? Because he is the light of God within us.

Light is to shine forth. That’s the purpose of being a light. He explains the obvious by saying you don’t light a lamp in your house and then cover it with a bowl; you put it on a stand so its light can shine forth. Now the sort of lamp he was talking about was like this. It was no more than a single candle flame. But at night, as your eyes adjust to the darkness, a single candle is surprisingly useful.

So too, a hilltop city cannot be hidden – it is plain to see. The light of Christ in us will shine out and give glory to God the Father. If there was any doubt about whether this is about human effort or Spirit-inspired fruit, doesn’t that make it plain? People will give glory to God the Father, not to the struggling disciple who is trying to attain the Kingdom through good works!



#### ***Salt of the Earth***

Jesus’ other analogy is salt. We have all heard it before so I won’t labour the point. Salt is used to preserve food and to flavour food. Even though the percentage of salt in a recipe is tiny yet it makes a big difference to the taste. We need not be surprised at being a minority in society. Jesus said we would be.

'Salt' carried a lot of meaning in those times. Not only its functions of preservation and flavouring but in both Aramaic and Greek the words meaning tasteless have a dominant meaning of 'foolishness'. The Jewish teachers also equated salt with wisdom. Let us retain our saltiness – our wisdom -and not become bland and foolish in our society.

It was a common practice in the time of Jesus to put salt on the wick of a lamp to increase its brightness. To anyone of that culture, the association would imply that the "salt" of wisdom will make our lights shine even brighter.<sup>1</sup>

Jesus declares we have a role of flavouring and preventing decay in society – if we keep true to our nature. If not - we are foolish and worthless.

There is yet another layer of meaning associated with salt. It is more apparent in Mark's quoting Jesus in Mark 9:50:

"Salt is good, but if it loses its saltiness, how can you make it salty again? Have salt in yourselves, and be at peace with each other."

"Have salt in yourselves and be at peace with each other." In first century Israel salt was used as a symbol of faithfulness in friendship and the Old Testament refers to "a covenant of salt" as enduring.<sup>2</sup>

So we have outreach and protective ideas. The light metaphor is about being visible, shining, projecting, revealing, informing. The salt metaphor covers a range of meanings which are more protective: preservation, purity, flavour, wisdom, enduring faithfulness.

### **Waitangi**

Tomorrow is Waitangi Day. The early missionaries who came here, were not particularly well trained in missiology – the study of being missionaries. England only started sending missionaries anywhere about 20 years before they came here. But they had conversations with Maori about the great God Atua and his Son who died for all people. I saw some quotations from reports sent back to CMS in England by early missionaries in which they recounted the content of their discussions with Maori. It was simple stuff that you all know. They lived on display in front of local Maori who watched their manner of life and they told them about salvation and following the ways of God.

In 1830 there was something of a breakthrough in spiritual interest in Paihia. Missionary Richard Davis reported to CMS on a conversation with several Maori after a church service:

Peta spoke next in a very pleasing way and said, "Yes it is a happy thing indeed to believe in God, for I have found it is; it is the only good thing in the world, etc. Another said, "Since I have continued to pray and to think upon God my heart has been full of light, consequently I am happy."<sup>3</sup>

Do you see how they are using light as a metaphor for the revelation they have received? The light of the missionaries has shone into their lives and brought the light of Christ to shine in their hearts too.

What about salt? Certainly, as the gospel was embraced by Maori, it changed culture. The burden of constant warfare and *utu* (revenge) was broken off them while many other changes occurred for good. Yet there is also an application of *salt* to the treaty itself. We have learned that Biblically salt carries meanings of enduring covenant and of faithfulness.

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<sup>1</sup> Eduard Schweizer, *The Good News According to Matthew*, Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1975. W. A. Elwell and P. W. Comfort, *Tyndale Bible Dictionary*, Wheaton, Ill.: Tyndale House, Tyndale reference library, 2001, Lamp, Lampstand. 797-8. Cited by the Passion Translation footnote on Matthew 5:13.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid, footnote on Mark 9:50. See also Numbers 18:19; 2 Chronicles 13:5

<sup>3</sup> Richard Davis to the Lay Secretary, 5 Mar 1830 (CRL, CMS/B/OMS/C N M5:447-48) quoted in the Thesis, "The Maori Conversion and Four Early Converts" by Malcolm Falloon accessed <https://ourarchive.otago.ac.nz/handle/10523/12099>

I found an interesting article<sup>4</sup> by an Anglican priest, The Revd Dr Malcolm Falloon, whose PhD was on the early conversion of Maori. He pointed out three factors around the signing of the Treaty which are often ignored because our focus tends to be on the legal interpretation of the Treaty rather than other actions which accompanied the signing. Those three factors were: Hobson's greeting; Patuone's gift; and the distribution of treaty blankets.

### **Hobson's Greeting**

I have told you in a previous year that as each chief signed, Hobson shook his hand and said, "'He iwi tahi tatou" (We are one people). It was also clearly based on Ephesians 2:14 "For he is our peace, having made both into one."

It confirmed what Henry Williams, the leading Anglican missionary, had told them that by signing, "they would become one people with the English. Under one Sovereign, one Law, human and divine."

Thus it linked the secular and spiritual dimensions together in a way which made a sense to the Maori worldview.

### **Patuone's gift**

After the signing, Patuone<sup>5</sup>, a leading Nga Puhi rangatira and peacemaker, stepped forward and presented Hobson with a greenstone *mere* expressly to be given to Queen "Wikitoria". This was reported by Mathew Felton who was present with Hobson.<sup>6</sup> Felton wrote to his wife, "This is the most valuable offering he could have made for they are now so scarce it is impossible to procure them – not one of the chiefs present but himself had one." He may not have understood its cultural meaning.

Dr Falloon wrote, "Rangatira who wished to make peace with an enemy would send their *mere* pounamu to their opponent, who, by accepting it, would establish an enduring peace."



About 500 Maori assembled to witness the signing that day. They would have known well what that gift signified.

The signing of the paper was **the** meaningful action in the British worldview; the gift of the mere was the **Maori** cultural equivalent. It linked the treaty to traditional peace-making practices.

### **Treaty blankets**

When all had signed that day, Hobson asked William Colenso to give out blankets and tobacco to those who had signed. This has been viewed with scepticism by later settlers and historians, however, that merely shows a lack of understanding of cultural protocols.

Firstly, Hobson, had been careful not to offer any gifts until the ceremony was completed so there was no suggestion of bribery or purchase of the agreement.

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<sup>4</sup> <https://www.odt.co.nz/opinion/bible-echo-treaty-greeting>

<sup>5</sup> Photograph credit: [Alexander Turnbull Library](#), William Strutt Collection (E-452-f); Reference: [E-452-f-003-2](#)  
Photograph by John Nichol Crombie between 1856 and 1862.

<sup>6</sup> Quoted in <https://collections.tepapa.govt.nz/document/3736>

Secondly, not to have offered a koha would have been understood as a deliberate insult by Maori who place such importance on reciprocity and hospitality.

Thirdly, Dr Falloon wrote:

“In later years, the red treaty blankets were worn as a mark of distinction by Maori Rangatira.”

“For Maori, what you wore was an important indication of your beliefs and allegiances.”

“Hence, Maori enthusiasm for treaty blankets was not a sign of short-sighted avarice, but of a newly-formed allegiance and a continuing recognition of the agreement.”<sup>7</sup>

The signing of the Treaty was bigger than the words on paper, just as a marriage certificate represents but does not state all the intentions, hopes and beliefs of the couple marrying that day.

As our nation remembers the Treaty tomorrow, let us for our part be true to the ‘salt’ of the covenant it expressed.

### ***Personal witnessing***

Finally, let’s reflect on our being salt and light in everyday life. We Anglicans readily default to the idea of living a good life and hoping people will be drawn to God by seeing it. But that is not all there is.

Do you know if you feel positive or excited about something you want to tell people about it?

### ***Upprella***

I had an example on Friday. It was raining and I had my umbrella with me. As I went to use it, I told the person I was talking to about its great design. It is called an “upbrella.” It is designed so you can put it up or lower it from inside the car without opening the door fully. It really works. What’s more when you fold it, the wet surfaces are enclosed so you don’t get the inside of the car so wet. I just had to tell that person how neat I think it is. We both recognised it was a good example of how easy it is to tell someone about something that engages you.



So let’s get excited and start to open up to people. Maybe we start by praying that God would use us: remember the “use me” prayer? Try praying, “Lord, use me,” in the morning. You could pray that God would give you natural opportunities to have a conversation about spiritual matters. You might pray that the Holy Spirit would make your words count. How about praying for those you will speak to later on, that God would prepare their hearts and minds? Jesus, “**You are** the salt of the earth; **you are** the light of the world.” So let’s be salt and light to our community.

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<sup>7</sup> <https://www.odt.co.nz/opinion/bible-echo-treaty-greeting>