

Infectious Diseases aren't what they used to be

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[0 : 00] Well, good morning, everyone. It's great to be back here again at 9am. My name is Vijay, if I've not met you. I'm part of the team at the 1030 service. As we begin today's passage, I want you to imagine that you are the Prime Minister. Maybe that's a nightmare for you. Maybe that's a dream for you.

I want you to imagine you're the Prime Minister. And here's my question. As Prime Minister, what problem are you going to solve first? As Prime Minister, what problem are you going to solve first? And at the top of your handouts, I've printed that question.

Maybe for you, it would be economic crisis. Maybe climate change. Maybe health and education. You have to ensure the country's future prosperity. Maybe it is security in this age of global terror. As PM, what problem are you going to solve first? And Luke answers our question with a nifty bit of narration. And if you're someone who likes order, this passage may annoy you. Or you may find that it's the work of genius.

Because Luke says the key to understanding this passage, the key to understanding which problem the Prime Minister should solve first is a sandwich.

[1 : 28] So this is my favourite sandwich. This is a BLT. Or in non-American speak, it's a bacon, lettuce and tomato.

There it is. It's my favourite sandwich. Forgive me for saying this, but a sandwich is two bits of same bread with some filling stuffed in the middle. And if someone serves you bacon, lettuce and tomato on a plate, it's good.

But if you stuff it between two bits of bread, it's a work of genius. It's my favourite sandwich. And in my sandwich, both bits of same bread point to the filling in the middle.

And here, Luke uses two same stories to point to the incredible story in the middle. And on their own, each story or each story is okay. It's good.

But put them together. And it's genius. And so the bits of bread are the man with leprosy and Levi, the tax collector. They are almost the same story.

[2 : 36] Although they don't look it, they're almost the same story. Both men have the same sickness. And this morning, as we eat this sandwich, as we see that infectious diseases aren't what they used to be, that's the title of the talk, my aim is that you would understand how Jesus would answer that Prime Minister question at the top of your handout.

My aim is that you would understand what Jesus would do if he was Prime Minister. And so please keep that handout with you. It's got some direction as to where I'm going.

And please do keep your Bibles open today. We'll be flicking a bit. The verse falls over two pages, and you'll need to have it open all the time. And so let's look at our sandwich.

The first slice of bread, in verse 12, we meet a man with leprosy. And the footnote of verse 12 says it could be any sort of skin disease. He is physically infectious.

But he's also religiously infectious in Jewish understanding. At the end of verse 12, he says, Lord, if you're willing, you can make me clean. You see, to go near him was to catch religious infection.

[3 : 52] You'll remember that the lepers used to be quarantined outside of the camp of Israel. No access to God's people. No access to God's house, the temple.

Barred from God. Religiously infectious. The second slice of bread is our good friend Levi, the tax collector. Levi is a Jewish tax collector working for Roman-occupied Israel.

That means he's a collaborator. And even worse than that, he's skimming off the top. And so I want you to imagine that ISIS invaded Australia.

Okay? Imagine ISIS invades Australia by force. And then Guy Manuel. I'm going to pick on Guy because he's got a good sense of humor. I want you to imagine that Guy Manuel is a tax collector.

And he starts collecting taxes on behalf of ISIS. Guy is Australian. But now he's working for the enemy.

[4 : 56] And even worse than that, Guy skims off the top of his own people. Poor old Guy. I think he would be more hasted than ISIS. Sorry, Guy.

But that is a tax collector. When you see a tax collector in the Bible, that is what you think. And like the leper, our tax collector Levi is religiously infectious as well.

He is corrupt and immoral to the core. There's no one God should hang out with less than a tax collector. And in both bits of bread, Jesus does the wrong thing.

He touches their uncleanness. So he physically touches the leper. Verse 13. Jesus reached out his hand and touched the man.

Outrageous. And he also has dinner with Levi and their tax collectors. In their society, to have dinner with people is to associate intimately with them.

[5 : 55] He touches their uncleanness as well. And it's obvious what happens when you touch religious uncleanness. You become infected as well.

You touch it. It goes on your fingers, on your hand. It goes all the way up your arm until you become just like the thing you touched. And the Pharisees, they rightly throw up the red flag.

Verse 16. Why does he eat with tax collectors and sinners? You see, they know. They know that to be holy, you have to hang around with holy people.

If you hang around with unholy people, you'll catch it, Jesus. You are not who you're cracked up to be. I think that's what they're saying in verse 16.

But here's the thing. You see, Jesus is so clean. He's so pure. He's so holy that all of his goodness chases that infection down his arm.

[6 : 53] So much so that when he touches the other person, they become clean as well. It's incredible. Verse 13. Immediately, the leprosy left him.

Fantastic. And better yet, Jesus orders the leper in verse 14. Don't tell anyone but go. Show yourself to the priest and offer the sacrifices that Moses commanded for your cleansing as a testimony to them.

You see, our friend with leprosy, he would not have seen a priest for years. Remember? Barred from God and his people. But not anymore.

Now, cleaned of leprosy. But more importantly, relationship restored with God and his people. It's remarkable. Same thing at Levi's house.

Jesus is not sitting there at the dinner table in some sort of plastic bubble. He's right there amongst Levi. And verse 29 tells us a large crowd of tax collectors.

[7 : 56] Not just one guy, Manuel, but tons of them. He's there with a gang of the worst sinners in town. The Pharisees object in verse 30.

Why do you eat and drink with tax collectors and sinners? Jesus doesn't disagree. They're sinful. That's awful, he says.

But verse 31, Jesus answered them, It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick. Jesus says, I am the doctor. You see, while everyone else is eating, Dr. Jesus is going clean, clean, clean.

It's remarkable. And so there are our two bits of bread. And like my sandwich, they point to the story in the middle. And they raise a bunch of issues for us.

The bread raises issues such as, Jesus, how are you able to clean people? How are you able to clean infectious sin as though it were just another skin disease?

[9 : 03] Don't you think sin is important? These issues point us to the incredible story in the middle. And so let's look at our middle, our sandwich filling.

It's the famous story of Jesus and the paralytic. And it starts out as a regular day in the life of Jesus. Verse 17. One day Jesus was teaching. And Pharisees and teachers of the law were sitting there.

They'd come from every village of Galilee and from Judea and Jerusalem. And the power of the Lord was with Jesus to heal the sick. You see, word had gotten out that the healer was in town.

Verse 15 tells us that crowds of people flocked. There was no empty seats. It was standing room only. They were everywhere, laying down in the front. But the place was packed.

And then verse 18. Some men came carrying a paralyzed man on a mat and tried to take him into the house to lay him before Jesus. But there was no room, was there?

[10:05] And so while Jesus is preaching, suddenly there's this soaring sound. Suddenly bits of masonry and dust start falling on the front row.

And suddenly a big hole appears in the roof. And the Palestinian sun beams down on everyone. And we all look up and we see four heads looking down on us like this. Then suddenly a mat or a bed is laid down or brought down in front of everyone.

And on the bed is Bob. And we all know who Bob is. He's the local paralyzed man. We flick Bob some coins every now and then because his life is awful.

See paralysis is a terrible thing. But 2,000 years ago with no disabled access, no wheelchairs, no sealed pavement, paralysis is truly awful.

And Bob's only hope is his mates. And his mates have come up trumps because they've got Bob some face time with the miracle man. And so let's just see what's going to happen.

[11:14] Let's get on with the introductions. Bob, this is Jesus. He's about to heal you. So get ready to start walking. And Jesus, this is Bob, the local paralyzed man. Can you just get on and do what you're going to do?

And it's obvious what Bob is here for. It's obvious what Jesus has the power to do. Except that he doesn't. Verse 30. Sorry, verse 20.

When Jesus saw their faith, he said, friend, your sins are forgiven. What? Everyone stops. And all you can hear is jaws dropping.

He's gone off script. Jesus has gone completely mad. Can't you see his legs, Jesus? Imagine how poor old Bob feels. Imagine how his buddies feel.

At the very least, they're up for the cost of the new roof. And Jesus has said this stupid thing.

Friend, your sins are forgiven. And not only is it stupid.

[12:16] And not only is it insensitive. It's horribly blasphemous as well. The religious elite, they get it right. Verse 21. Who is this fellow who speaks blasphemy?

Who can forgive sins but God alone? Jesus doesn't correct them. Neither does he say that Bob's paralysis is the result of specific sins.

That's karma. Jesus doesn't believe in that. Rather, Jesus, he reads their minds, which I find incredible. But he answers their question with one of his own.

Verse 22, halfway through. Why are you thinking these things in your hearts? Which is easier? To say your sins are forgiven? Or to say get up and walk? Have a look closely at verse 23.

Which is easier? To say your sins are forgiven. Both difficult to do. In fact, only God could do them.

[13:18] But much easier to say your sins are forgiven. So, I can do it right now. So, Olive, Guy, Peter. Your sins are forgiven.

And why? Because I say so. How do you know? The beauty for me is it's invisible. How do you know if I'm telling the truth? You can't see sins forgiven physically. But, if you lower down a paralyzed man right here in front of me.

And I say, get up, take your mat and go home. You will very soon learn whether my words have any authority. Which is why Jesus goes on to heal the man.

Verse 24. But I want you to know that the Son of Man, that is God's ruling King. The Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins. So, he said to the paralyzed man, I tell you, get up, take your mat and go home.

Jesus can forgive sins with a word. And you know he's telling the truth. Because he does what they think is harder to prove his authority over sin.

[14:26] At which point, Bob picks up his mat, puts it over his shoulder and walks home. No crutches, no physio, no deep heat for unused muscles.

It's remarkable. And so, that is the meat in the sandwich, as it were. And the meat begins to answer issues raised by our two bits of bread. So, Jesus, why do you eat with sinners and tax collectors?

Don't you think sin is important? That was from our two bits of bread. Well, actually, Jesus thinks sin is our most serious problem.

This is point two on your handout. You see, what if we asked your family and friends or your colleagues or the people you know, what if we asked them that prime minister question at the top of your handout?

I guarantee you that sin wouldn't be in the top ten responses we get. I don't think sin is in people's vocabulary these days. Maybe they think it's some sort of, you know, old-fashioned Victorian concept.

[15 : 30] But Jesus thinks sin is our most serious problem. And he makes it clear with a demonstration of priorities. And I want to illustrate. So, I want you to imagine that as Guy, again, as Guy walks into church, those heavy HTD doors there, they slam shut on Guy's arm and they chop his arm off.

And blood is going everywhere and Guy's trying to take it like a man, but he can't because his arm's cut off. And he's writhing in pain. And as he falls down, his leg flies out and he stubs his toe on the edge of the pew.

Now, I don't want to downplay the seriousness of a stubbed toe because we've all been there. But I guarantee you, when we take Guy to Box Hill Emergency, they'll go for the life-threatening wound first.

Same thing here. Jesus thinks sin is more serious than paralysis. Everyone else looks at Bob and sees someone whose biggest need is that his legs don't work.

Jesus sees the same man and the thing that cries out to him is, here is a man who desperately needs his sins forgiven. That's because sin leaves people in darkness when it comes to God.

[16 : 47] Guilty is the language in Luke's Gospel. Jesus says that hell is the place where sin is paid for. It is heavy stuff. But Jesus arrives on the scene and he sees our world, not in two dimensions, but three dimensions.

Where God and the state of people's hearts are all over the landscape. That's because he's the sin doctor. Another issue thrown up by our bits of bread.

Jesus, do you think anyone can forgive sins? And this is point three on your handout. You see, if Melburnians believe sin is anything, they believe it's something between you and me.

So, in my selfishness, I hurt Guy. And then I apologize to him. And then Guy forgives me. And with a handshake and a hug.

And the sin just sort of disappears into the ether. That is a dangerously two-dimensional view of sin. The Bible has a three-dimensional view.

[17 : 54] That is, first and foremost, my sin is between me and God. There's a dimension between me and you, to be sure. But God is the one who's chiefly offended.

He sets the rules of the universe. Jesus is the son of man. He runs the show. When I hurt someone, I'm breaking his rules first. He is chiefly offended.

The Pharisees are right that only God can forgive sins. Anyone who says to you, your sins are forgiven, has gone way above their pay grade.

And Luke has used his sandwich here today to make us think hard about these questions. To make us think hard as we look at Jesus in action so we can make deductions about him.

That is, if this and this is true, then this must be true as well. And what I've done on your handout, I've put a couple of those deductions. So let's look at deduction A. So firstly, only God forgives sins.

[18 : 58] Jesus forgives sins. We saw that. Therefore, Jesus is God. We always see Jesus doing remarkable things, healing people.

He teaches with unparalleled authority. He answers your prayers. He calls people into God's kingdom. In today's passage, he forgives sins.

What is your answer that explains that? What is your explanation for that data? If we ask Melburnians how they would explain Luke's eyewitness account there, what do you think they would say?

You see, the Pharisees in verse 21, they ask, Who is this fellow Jesus? That is the right question. Who is this fellow Jesus? If you're not a Christian here today, how would you answer that? Who is Jesus? How would the average Melburnian answer it?

[19 : 57] I'm sure we get the standard answers. We've always got a holy man, a religious teacher. But I wonder in today's day and age, if we get answers such as, he was a religious fundamentalist.

Maybe he's a myth that you Christians have cooked up because you're not strong enough to deal with the world. But here's the thing. Unless you believe that Jesus is God, you will miss out on the forgiveness of sins.

Unless you believe Jesus is God, you will miss out on the forgiveness of sins. A holy man, a religious leader, a myth, they cannot forgive your sins.

Only God can forgive your sins. And here, Jesus is proving that's exactly who he is with a few God-only miracles.

And you can react to this claim in verse 21. Like the religious leaders, they call him a blasphemer. That's very common. Get away from me, Jesus.

[21 : 05] You're way ahead of yourself. Or like verse 26, you can praise God and in fact worship Jesus as God, as Christians do.

You see, this passage is Jesus' way of announcing his mission in the world. Verse 32, I've not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance.

And why? Because he has authority on earth to forgive sins because he is God. Actually, our Old Testament reading, that was a prophecy from Isaiah, and it says, when you see lame people leaping like a deer, as Bob the paralyzed man did, then you will see the Lord.

Jesus is God. Another deduction is on our handouts. Sin is serious. Jesus forgives sin. Sin. Therefore, Jesus forgives or sorts out our most serious problem.

Last week, I partly run a teen camp, and there was 200 teenagers there, which was, I was hanging on by my fingernails. But on the camp, we play this game. And just for a second, I'd like you to forget that you're all grownups, and I want you to play this game with me.

[22 : 25] The game is called, Which Would You Rather? It goes like this. So, Which Would You Rather be 4'4 or 7'7? Which Would You Rather? Scream it out. Go on.

7-7-4-4. Okay. Which Would You Rather, have wings for arms or wheels for legs? Which Would You Rather? Wings every day, I reckon. Here's another one.

I like this one. Which Would You Rather, a guaranteed \$100,000 or a 50-50 shot at a million? Which Would You Rather? Yeah.

Everyone who says \$100,000 has got a mortgage. It's because it's a safety, isn't it? Well, if we could straighten up slightly, which would you rather to be forgiven of your sins or healed of paralysis in a country with no Medicare?

Which would you rather? Sins forgiven. Jesus would say, forget the legs. Take the sin. Forgiveness. You see, physical healing in all its forms, whether it's healing your body or social justice, physical healing in all its forms is a band-aid.

[23 : 38] A 20-year band-aid, 30-year, maybe a 50-year band-aid. But sin is the real problem because after the physical death has got you, sin guarantees an eternal death.

That is Jesus' point of view. That explains why his mission is to call sinners to repentance. Even if you're the most corrupt, traitorous tax collector, even if you feel a million miles away from God like some sort of spiritual leper, Jesus is the doctor.

Put on the 3D specs like the sin doctor and you will see households and your workplace and your neighbourhood full of the most infectious disease.

Jesus is the doctor. And if you are a Christian here today, just permission to challenge us. Do we think sin is that serious?

Do we show by the way we order our lives that we are right there in the battle every day with sin? Could there be a better New Year's resolution than to use your 2018 to get on top of just that one sin that has plagued you?

[25 : 02] Do we classify sins between the really bad ones such as violence and abuse and the really acceptable ones like road rules and speaking about people? Do we think sin is that serious?

Because if we do, we'll want to see other people take sin seriously as well. We'll be joining Jesus' mission of calling people to repentance for their forgiveness.

Not just any... Sorry. And that's because preaching, weirdly preaching, is what Jesus thinks can deal with the sin problem.

Not just any preaching or speaking. So, telling you about my hobbies, that won't deal with forgiveness and sin. But telling people about the sin doctor will bring them from infection to clean. Actually, Jesus' very last words to us in Luke 24, there's a slide for it on the screen. These are Jesus' last words to us. He says, Then he opened their minds so they could understand the scriptures.

[26 : 13] He told them, This is what was written. The Messiah will suffer and rise from the dead on the third day and repentance for the forgiveness of sins will be preached in his name to all nations beginning at Jerusalem.

Thanks, Barry. You see, when it comes to sin, loads of people, loads of churches, in fact, will want us to stay quiet. Stop talking about sin all the time.

Just get on with it. Move on. But I guess I would want to say, Why should we? We're obeying Jesus' command to us. We've been given the words that lead people to life in the gospel.

Why should we be quiet? And when it comes to speaking to people about Jesus and evangelism, don't worry about speaking about science versus God.

Don't worry about speaking about how secular our society has become. Don't worry about speaking about the reliability of the Bible. Just tell people what Jesus has done in your life.

[27 : 23] If you're a Christian, you can speak about repentance. You can speak about your record of sins forgiven. You can speak about the joy you have in Jesus and the new life he has guaranteed for you.

Just tell people that. Just tell people what Jesus has done in your life. There is no better evangelism strategy than that one. And as we finish today, I want you to imagine this.

I want you to imagine that Jesus only forgave Bob, the paralyzed man, that day and still left him a paralytic.

Bob's friends still had to carry him out of the room that day. And years go by, Bob never walks again and then he dies. And then Bob walks towards the gates of heaven.

As he's standing in line, he's very nervous. He knows he's done things that mean he shouldn't be there. When he gets to the front, there's a big sign over his record and it just says forgiven.

[28 : 34] They say, come on in. And Bob says, how long am I here for? And they say, forever. A hundred years go by and Bob walks up to Jesus and he looks at Jesus face to face and he says, I'm so grateful that you forgave my sin, Jesus.

and he says, you're welcome. A thousand years go by, a thousand years. Bob walks up to Jesus face to face and he says, I can't tell you how grateful I am that you forgave my sin.

Jesus says, you're welcome. You see, anyone we know, family, friends, maybe even you, you can meet Jesus face to face through our words about him, through his own words about himself and be guaranteed that your sins are forgiven forever.

Isn't that incredible? We're going to pray. Lord Jesus, we declare that you are the sin doctor. We're so grateful that you as God can forgive us our sins.

Lord Jesus, help us to tell people about you, to tell them what you have done in our lives. Please help us to take sin this seriously.

[30 : 02] We're so grateful that all of us have a story to tell about the amazing healing you have done for us. Give us the boldness and the love to do this.

We ask that you would be glorified. Amen.