

# The Surprising Truth about Jesus

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Preacher: Tim Bowden

[ 0 : 0 0 ] This is the morning service at Holy Trinity on the 7th of September 2003 the preacher is Tim Bowden his sermon is entitled The Surprising Truth About Jesus and is based on Luke chapter 5 verses 27 to 32 This made no sense at all if Jesus came from God why is he hanging out with guys like that?

and that's what they say the Pharisees and their scribes were complaining to his disciples saying why do you eat and drink with tax collectors and sinners? it makes no sense to them at all that someone from God would be a friend of sinners and I take it that one of the great tragedies of the Christian church these days is that in many ways we have become more like the Pharisees than we have like Jesus my job takes me to many many different church buildings and I am yet to see a stained glass window that celebrates Jesus partying with sinners prostitutes, tax collectors Jesus doesn't appear that way in stained glass windows were Jesus to come to Melbourne how comfortable would you feel about the idea of him being down at Crown Casino sharing his time with problem gamblers and drug dealers and whoever else might happen to be there sometimes we need to take a good look at ourselves to make sure we are actually following the one who we say we follow but the thing I want us to think about here is can you imagine how Levi must have felt when Jesus, the man from God seeks him out even though he is someone who uses other people even though he is someone who by definition is a sinner even though he is someone that the rest of the religious world shuns

Jesus wants him what must that have done for him that this man Jesus, the man who represents God is a friend of sinners for a number of years I worked for a removalist as I was going through university and I won't tell you the firm for which I worked for reasons which may become apparent we had two mottos in our company one was we may not be the best but at least we're the most expensive maybe you've used us there was another motto which at the time I thought was distinct to us but my conviction is now it's a motto of all removalists everywhere and it comes in handy when you're loading a truck the motto goes like this if at first it doesn't fit make it and I am truly sorry if you've lost furniture to that particular motto I spent some time working as a removalist and you learn the tricks of the trade and I guess in any job there are some things that you should do some things you can do and some things that you must never ever do and in removals one thing you must never ever do is leave a fridge door shut with the power off for any length of time because the seal around a fridge is so tight that the air inside cannot circulate and over even a very short amount of time the air inside goes rotten it's even worse if there's actually some food inside perhaps you can try that next time you're about to go away for holidays just turn the fridge off before you leave and see what happens when you return please don't try that just if you're considering it not a good idea anyway one day I was working in the warehouse and one of the removalists asked me to go and get a fridge so we could load it in the truck this fridge had been in storage with the power turned off and the door shut for three years and I approached the fridge it looked like a fridge you know kind of square and white and nothing remarkable about it but as I put it on the trolley the door swung open and at that point

I became a victim of what removalists call the fridge monster there was a smell that erupted out the door that had a physical presence I mean this was a weapon of mass destruction and the fridge monster rampaged through the warehouse for the rest of the day I shut the door as soon as I was hit by it but it was funny the other removalists would walk into the warehouse take one breath and go oh who let the fridge monster out and everyone's going it's a casual who doesn't know what he's doing so my fault but it strikes me that you and I in many ways are not dissimilar to that fridge that is from the outside we may look fairly unremarkable fairly clean normal straightforward but sealed up on the inside where we do not open up where we will not let other people see are all kinds of darknesses all kinds of lusts and greed and priorities and emotions which we shut up on the inside because we fear that if people knew that that's what we were like in our hearts then they wouldn't want to be our friends

I want you to know that God's love for you is firmly based in reality he sees the twistedness that you manage to hide from other people and he sees the corruption that you may be managing to hide from yourself he sees those things and he loves you anyway God's love for you is based on reality he knows the deepest darkest thoughts of your hearts and he loves you anyway and we know that because this man Jesus came to Levi his darkness was all on the outside and there for all to see and Jesus was a friend of him Jesus the friend of sinners and when I discovered that in year 12 that I didn't need to make a certain mark in order to be loved by God I thought it was the best news I'd ever heard the friend of sinners though is also the doctor of sinners and remember I said Jesus is a remarkable healer that he is able to heal sicknesses and diseases in a way that no one else in human history ever has but here he takes the kind of picture of physical sickness and health and transfers it into the spiritual realm he talks about spiritual sickness and health verse 31

[ 6 : 09 ] Jesus answered those who are well have no need of a physician but those who are sick do see here Jesus draws a parallel between being a sinner and being spiritually sick he says that sinners people who have pushed God aside are spiritually sick and his point is straightforward if you're healthy you don't need a doctor but if you are sick you do and we know that a couple of months ago my daughter Georgia who is three was sick really for the first time in her life she'd had a pretty good run but then all of a sudden one morning we woke up and she was feverish and lethargic and she had a rash and there were all sorts of other really yucky things going on we didn't know what to do about it I mean we kind of take two panadol and see if it goes away but she clearly needed a doctor and we wanted two things from a doctor we wanted a diagnosis that is we wanted to know what was wrong with her and we wanted a treatment we wanted something to be done about it and it's the same for us with our spiritual sickness our symptoms vary but I think we see them most clearly in the way that we do things that we know we shouldn't do or even worse we do things that we don't want to do maybe in the way that we cut and scar people even the people we love with the words we speak to them the way that we use other people to meet our own needs the way that we seek and pursue and value things that we really know aren't of great value all these different things are symptoms what does the doctor say is the real diagnosis what does he say is the real problem well Jesus says the real problem is our sin sin itself is the real problem the fact that we have shoved God aside and put other things in his place is the root cause of our spiritual sickness because as we do that there are really two consequences that follow the first one is to push God aside like that is to become guilty we have committed an offence against God and as guilty people we have much to fear

Jesus says because on the final day Jesus spoke in graphic and horrifying terms about the awful nature of God's judgment upon guilty people but that's only one consequence of our sin the other is we are not only guilty of sin we are victims of sin it is not only an offence against God it's actually a tragedy upon us for us to be engaging in sin you see sin enslaves us it degrades us made much the same way that a chronic and terminal disease enslaves and degrades someone's body so our sin enslaves and degrades us spiritually it makes us less than we should be it makes us I guess you could say less than fully human less than fully human the way that God wanted us to be and that is a tragedy that's the diagnosis what's the treatment well the only treatment Jesus says is death but not our death the death of the doctor in our place let me explain as the biography continues to unfold we see that Jesus very clearly saw that his mission in life was to save people to spiritually heal people and we see that the great climax of that that the point at which his healing work becomes complete happens when he is executed on a Roman cross outside the gates of Jerusalem because as he dies there this man Jesus who himself never shoved God aside who was not a sinner nonetheless experienced both its consequences that is

God treated him as if he were guilty of sin and he experienced God's wrath in all its fullness God's judgment in all its horror but secondly he became a victim of sin he became a victim of sin all the way to death which is the ultimate consequence of sin and this man Jesus in doing that substituted himself for us that is he underwent the destiny that we deserve in order that we wouldn't need to face it and the proof that all this is true the proof that the doctor has treated sin is what happened on the third day afterwards that as Jesus was raised from the dead physically bodily literally raised from the dead it showed that the power of sin was broken that sin could no longer hold down or hold back the followers of Jesus that the power of sin was gone there was an advertisement on TV a number of years ago that I thought was just brilliant it showed a doctor's surgery with a doctor a mum and her young boy and the advertisement starts with the doctor saying in a very grave manner

Mrs. Jones the test results are back and the news is not good I'm afraid your son has cancer and the camera kind of froze on her face and you could see the shock the grief the horror maybe some of you know those things all too well when it comes to cancer and then the ad continued the doctor opens a drawer of his desk he pulls out a packet of pills and passes them across the desk and he says have him take two of these each morning with breakfast and come back in a fortnight for the all clear it was an ad to raise money for cancer research and it worked because it tapped into the hope that I imagine all of us know wouldn't it be great wouldn't it be great if cancer could be knocked on the head with a packet of pills for a fortnight wouldn't it be great if there was a doctor who could just banish cancer like that wouldn't it be fantastic if cancer that great enemy of humanity was no more but what we see in the life the death and the resurrection of Jesus is that there is a doctor who can treat the far greater enemy of humanity than cancer there is a doctor who can treat sin there is a doctor who has power over sin a doctor who can heal sinners from the sin that lurks so deep in us there is a doctor who promises life life after death and life now to those who turn to him for the help he brings

Jesus came as doctor for sinners but the friend of sinners and the doctor of sinners is also the lord of sinners the final sentence here Jesus says I've come to call not the righteous but sinners to repentance he came to the sinners but he came to call them to change someone said he loves us just the way we are but he loves us too much to leave us that way he calls us to repent repent religious kind of word isn't it it basically means to do a uui so if I'm walking this way and I repent I turn around and I walk that way I trust that's not me making that buzzing noise by repenting in such a way that's what repentance is it's to turn around in fact if we think about sin as being the act of shoving God aside then repentance is about putting God back if sin is about blocking your ears to the voice of God repentance is about starting to listen again if sin is about doing your thing when you want how you want as you want then repentance is about doing

[ 13 : 38 ] God's thing when and how and as he wants in fact Levi gives us a good example of repentance Jesus says follow me Levi gets up leaves everything and follows him Levi devotes himself to Jesus Levi becomes a man who listens when Jesus speaks who obeys when Jesus commands who believes when Jesus trusts who follows Jesus in every way shape or form who so aligns himself to Jesus that that is the defining commitment of his life that is what Jesus calls from you in the mid 18th century there was a slave trader by the name of John Newton John Newton made his living by tearing families apart and stacking men women and children like logs of wood in the dark hold of his slave ship and there they would lie in their own filth for weeks on end and those who survived would enter into the living hell of slavery the crew that engaged in this sort of work was every bit as hardened as callous and as brutal as we can imagine and their captain led them in all those things then through a variety of circumstances

John Newton turned to the Bible and he found in Jesus a friend a doctor and a lord and his life over time turned around and as he grew in his Christian faith he actually became a clergyman and he spent his life telling people about Jesus we remember John Newton now for two main reasons one he was one of the great patrons of the fight to abolish slavery in the British Parliament there's repentance in action from trading to abolition but the second reason is that he wrote perhaps the most famous hymn of all Amazing Grace which we've just done Amazing Grace how sweet the sound that saved a wretch like me John Newton said on his deathbed a fortnight before he died at the age of 82 my memory is nearly gone but I remember two things that I am a great sinner and Jesus is a great saviour and I reckon there he nailed it he knew who he was but more importantly he knew who his lord was he knew that God's love for him as shown in Jesus was not based on his performance but on the love that comes from God and you know his joy his security in that love continues now beyond the grave understand very clearly if you are not a follower of Jesus

Jesus calls you to repent to turn around and to follow him and that is not a light or insignificant call it is a call for your whole life to be re-evaluated and adjusted it is not a decision that any of us should make glibly or lightly but it is a decision that we need to make because what is the alternative as it stands we are guilty of sin before God and we are victims of sin who face death what is the alternative it seems to me that repentance is the wise thing to do that to turn around to turn around and follow the friend of sinners the doctor of sinners and the lord of sinners is the only way to go but it does raise the question I mean Jesus is the friend of sinners doctor of sinners lord of what if you are not a sinner what if in Jesus language here what if you are spiritually healthy what if you don't need a doctor what if you don't need Jesus well that is it is a good question if you are not a sinner you don't need Jesus but let me warn you self diagnosis is really tricky the Pharisees the teachers of the law in this story are very confident of their own spiritual health but as we look at them we can see smug pride we can see hypocrisy we can see arrogance we can see spiritual sickness that they themselves can't see there's a bloke called Max Edwards who lives not far from where I live who was experiencing some discomfort in his foot one day he didn't think much of it but after a couple of days as he was going to bed he kind of lifted up the sole of his foot and had a look and sometime in the previous couple of days he had trodden on a nail and it had been lodged in his foot for a couple of days he said and again I quote it had cut a neat hole about the size of my finger in the bottom of my foot it turns out that Max Edwards suffers from a rare disorder called hereditary sensory neuropathy which basically means you lose sensation in your limbs and people who have hereditary sensory neuropathy often cut themselves and don't notice and because they don't notice infection sets in and infection leads to blood poisoning and gangrene sometimes amputation and sometimes even death now I was especially glad to find out that hereditary sensory neuropathy is really rare but its spiritual equivalent is not there are very many people who think

I don't need Jesus I am spiritually healthy I'm fine but nonetheless they suffer from spiritual neuropathy can I encourage you if you're thinking I don't need that please don't rush that diagnosis why not get your hands on a bible and investigate the doctor for yourself why not ask some Christians some questions or maybe do a short course to find out because the stakes riding on this diagnosis are too big to ignore but I imagine in this room there are many people who knowing knowing that we are sinners have turned to our doctor have turned back to the Lord there may be some here now who know that they're sinners but have never turned never repented never asked for forgiveness why not do that right now it would be a great thing to do this morning you've come to church I don't know what you've been expecting but you could walk out you could walk out knowing Jesus your friend your doctor and your Lord and you could know that sin no longer carries a weight over you that would be a good thing to do wouldn't it it's a decision that only you can make it's not one that anyone can make for you but a good thing to do with that decision would be to express it in a prayer by talking to God you could pray a prayer that goes like this dear God

I know that I am a sinner I'm sorry for turning away from you thank you for sending Jesus to save me help me to follow him and to be thankful there's nothing kind of magical about those words but they kind of express some of the things that came out of this Bible passage and they express a decision to turn back and to trust the doctor why don't we all close our eyes and I'll pray through that prayer again more slowly I'll pause at the end of each sentence and if at the end of the sentence I have said something that you need to say to God if I've expressed a decision that you want to make then you just say a mental yes me too and at the end when I say amen you can say a mental too right which is what amen means God will hear you when you pray let's pray dear God I know that I am a sinner I'm sorry for turning away from you thank you for sending Jesus to save me help me to follow him and to be thankful amen they say that the longest journey begins with a single step and that is most certainly the case for our spiritual journey as followers of Jesus it begins with a step and if you've taken that step today that's fantastic that's really exciting the journey stretches in front of you and you have much to look forward to and we here at this church would love to help you as you make that journey and Paul's going to talk about some of the ways that you might like to go forward from here but can I say as Paul comes up if you've made that decision that really is wonderful news well done please sei it means that if you've heard of theist of Jesus in this chapter and how that means to the world it means that he doesn't but could we do it not really not really whether he has done or whatever what does is watch it means that he wants to really or because we have

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