

Infectious Diseases aren't what they used to be

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[0 : 00] I wonder what you said. As Prime Minister, what problem would you solve first? And I put that at the top of your handouts. Would it be economic crisis, environmental change, health and education? You have to ensure the country's future prosperity. Maybe it's security in this age of global terror. What problem would you sort out first?

Well, Luke, our writer here, he answers our question with a nifty bit of narration. And if you're someone who likes order, this will frustrate you. Or you may find this is a work of genius. Because the key to understanding this passage today, the key to understanding what problem the PM should sort out first is a sandwich.

So, this is my favourite sandwich. This is a BLT, or in non-American speak, a bacon, lettuce, tomato. It's a fantastic sandwich. And I'm sorry for saying this, but a sandwich is two bits of same bread and some filling stuffed in the middle.

And if someone served you bacon, lettuce and tomato on a plate, he would say, well, it's good. But if you stuff it between two bits of bread, it's a work of genius.

I'm just going to put it there. I'm not going to eat that sandwich because I made it at 6am this morning and it's officially crusty. But in my sandwich, both bits of bread points to the filling in the middle. And here Luke has used two same stories, two same stories to point to the incredible story in the middle.

[1 : 46] On their own, each story is okay. But as a whole, genius. And so they, the bits of bread, the man with leprosy and our friend Levi, the tax collector.

And they're almost the same story. They don't look the same, but both men have the same sickness. And as we eat this sandwich this morning, as we try to figure out what problem the PM should solve first, as we consider that infectious diseases aren't what they used to be.

That's the title of the talk. My aim is that you would understand what Jesus would do, what problem Jesus would sort out if he was the PM.

I'll say that again. My aim is that you would see and understand what problem Jesus would sort out if he was prime minister. And so you've got a handout there and it tells you where I'm going. And please do keep your passages open, especially this morning, because the passage actually goes over two pages.

And we're going to be doing a little bit of flicking. So you'll need to have Luke chapter five open. Luke chapter five.

[3 : 30] Luke chapter five.

But worse than that, he's on commission. So I want you to imagine that ISIS invades Australia by force. So ISIS comes in, sweeps through the country by force. And then I want you to imagine my mate Glenn here.

I want you to imagine Glenn starts a job as a tax collector. Glenn is Australian. But now he's collecting taxes for the enemy. And worse than that, Glenn is skimming off the top of his own people.

Good on you, Glenn. He would be more hated. He would be more hated than ISIS itself, wouldn't he? Oh, I don't know what's going on.

But that is when you hear of a tax collector in the Bible. That is what we're talking about. And like the leper, our tax collector is religiously infectious.

[4 : 56] He's corrupt and immoral to the core. And there's no one God should associate with less. 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. In the second story, Jesus has dinner with Levi and his gang of tax collectors.

He associates with them intimately over a meal. That is like touching their uncleanness in their culture. And it's obvious what happens when you touch infectious diseases.

You touch it. It starts on your fingers, goes up your arm, until you become just as infected as the thing or the person who started you off. And the Pharisees, they rightly throw up a red flag.

Verse 16. Why does he eat with tax collectors and sinners? You see, 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.

[6 : 08] 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. Jesus is so clean.

He's so pure. He's so holy. That all of his goodness chases that infection down his arm, down through his fingers, down into the other person until they're made clean.

Verse 13. And immediately the leprosy left him. That's remarkable. And better yet, in verse 14, Jesus orders the leper.

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, the leper would not have seen a priest for years.

Remember, he's not allowed to. Barred from God and his people. But not anymore. Now cleaned of leprosy. But more importantly, relationship with God and his people restored.

[7 : 18] The same thing at Levi's house. The second bit of bread. Jesus is not sitting there in some plastic bubble at the dinner table. He's right there amongst Levi. Verse 29 tells us a large crowd of tax collectors.

There's a whole gang of glens sitting there. And Jesus is... That's the last time, sorry. Jesus is right there amongst them. Pharisees object.

Why do you eat with tax collectors and sinners? He doesn't disagree. He says, yeah, they're sinners. And that's awful. But verse 31.

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

It's remarkable. And so there are the two bits of bread. And the two bits of bread, like in any sandwich, they raise up issues like, what are we doing with just two bits of bread?

[8 : 25] What are we doing with these two stories? They raise up issues for us like this. How are you able to clean people, Jesus? How are you able to forgive sin and clean sin as though it were just an infectious disease?

Don't you care about sin? Don't you think sin's important? And these issues thrown up by our bits of bread, they point us to the filling in the middle.

And our sandwich filling, it's the really famous story of Jesus and the paralytic. And it starts out as a regular day in the life for Jesus. Have a look at 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. Crowds of people had flocked. There was no empty pews. Standing room only.

[9 : 27] 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.

It's just so packed. But then while Jesus is teaching, suddenly there's a soaring, a rough soaring sound. Suddenly, dust and bits of masonry start falling on the front row.

And then a big hole opens up, and the Palestinian sun blazes through, and everyone looks up, and there's a big hole. And then four heads pop through the hole. And we all look up and think, what is going on?

And then a mat is lowered down, or a bed. And on the mat, the mat or the bed, we all know who it is. Ah, that's Bob. He's the local paralyzed man.

We flick Bob some coins, because his life is pretty awful. You see, paralysis is terrible. A terrible thing. But 2,000 years ago, no wheelchairs, no sealed pavements, no disabled access.

[10 : 33] Paralysis is awful. Bob's only hope is his buddies. And they've come up trumps, because they've got Bob some face time with the miracle man.

And we know what's going to happen now, so let's just get on with the introductions. Bob, this is Jesus. Yes, he's about to heal you, so get ready to start walking. Jesus, this is Bob. He's the local paralyzed man.

Can you please do the honors? It's obvious what Bob's here for. It's obvious what Jesus has the power to do. Except that he doesn't.

Have a look at verse 20. When Jesus saw their faith, he said, friend, your sins are forgiven. And everyone stops.

Jesus has gone completely off script. He's gone mad. Can't you see his legs, Jesus? Imagine how he feels. Imagine how his friends feel.

[11 : 35] They've gone to all this trouble. I mean, they're up for the cost of a new roof, to say the least. And Jesus has said this stupid thing. Friend, your sins are forgiven.

But not only is it stupid, not only is it insensitive, it's religiously blasphemous as well. The religious elite, they get it right.

Verse 21. The Pharisees and the teachers of the law began thinking to themselves, who is this fellow who speaks blasphemy? Who can forgive sins but God alone?

Notice that Jesus doesn't correct them. Notice also that Jesus doesn't say that Bob's paralysis was the result of specific sins. That is karma.

Jesus doesn't believe in that. Rather, Jesus reads their minds. I love that little detail, but he reads their minds. And he answers their question with one of his own.

[12 : 35] Halfway through verse 22. 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. Both difficult to do. Much easier to say, your sins are forgiven. So I can do it right now.

So Booth, Glenn, Sue, your sins are forgiven. How do you know? You don't know. The beauty for me is it's invisible. You have no idea of knowing whether what I said is true.

But if you lowered a paralyzed man into the room right now, and I said, take up your mat and walk, 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, 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.

[13 : 43] Jesus can forgive sins with a word. And to prove he's telling the truth, he does what they think is harder to show his authority over sin.

At which point, Bob gets up, mat over the shoulder and he walks home. No crutches, no physio, no deep heat for unused muscles.

It's remarkable. And so that is the, that's the meat in the sandwich. And the meat in the sandwich begins to answer some questions thrown up by our bits of bread.

And I've put two of those questions on your handout. There are a few more but I've put a couple of them on your handout. So, such an issue thrown up by our bits of bread. Jesus, why do you eat with sinners and tax collectors?

Don't you think sin is important? Point two, Jesus thinks sin is our most serious problem. So, what if we asked the, remember the question we started with as Prime Minister, what problem would you solve first?

[14 : 50] What if we asked the people of Melbourne that question? What if we asked your family and friends that question? I guarantee you that sin won't be in their top ten responses.

Sin is not even a word in people's vocabulary anymore. They probably think it's an old-fashioned Victorian concept, if anything. But Jesus thinks it's our most serious problem.

And he makes it clear through a demonstration of priorities. Let me illustrate. I want you to imagine that poor old Glenn, he's late coming into church and as he rushes in the door, those heavy HTD doors slam shut on Glenn's arm and it chops his arm off.

And blood is going everywhere and it's all Glenn's eyes, you know, in real trouble. And in the process of Glenn writhing in pain and falling to the floor, he stubs his toe on one of the pews.

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

[16 : 05] Same here with Jesus. Everyone else looks at Bob and sees someone whose biggest problem is that his legs don't work. Jesus looks at the same man and says, here is someone who desperately needs his sins forgiven.

And that's because sin leaves people in darkness when it comes to God. Guilty is the language in Luke's Gospel. Jesus says that hell is the place where sin is paid for.

That is heavy stuff for a sunny Sunday. But Jesus arrives on the scene and he sees things in three dimensions, not two dimensions.

He sees things in 3D where God and eternity, the state of people's hearts are all over the landscape. And 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? This is point three on your handout. You see, if Melburnians are willing to accept that sin is anything, they'll say it's something between you and me.

[17 : 24] So imagine in my selfishness I hurt Glenn. And then I say sorry to Glenn. Glenn forgives me with a handshake and a hug. And the sin just sort of disappears into the ether.

The Bible says that is a dangerously two-dimensional view of sin. The Bible has a three-dimensional view. So sin first and foremost is against God.

There's a dimension between you and me to be sure. But first and foremost it's between me and God. He is the judge of the universe. Jesus is the son of man.

He makes the rules. When I sin against someone I'm actually breaking his rules first. He is chiefly offended before anyone else. And the Pharisees are right.

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 today to make us think hard about these issues.

[18 : 31] He's shown us Jesus in action so we will make deductions about him. To make us think if that and that is true then this must be true as well.

And I've put a couple of those deductions on your handout. So deduction A only God forgives sins. Jesus forgives sins. Deduction Jesus is God.

You see we always see Jesus doing loads of incredible things. He teaches with unparalleled authority. He answers your prayers.

Today he heals paralysis. He forgives sins. How is he able to do that? What is your explanation for Luke's eyewitness account? Luke says it's because he's God.

You see the Pharisees in verse 21 they rightly ask who is this fellow Jesus? That is the right question. And if you're not a Christian here today how would you answer that?

[19 : 35] Who is this fellow Jesus? How would Melbourneans answer that question? What would be the average response? I'm sure we get the standard ones of he's a holy man and he's a religious teacher.

I wonder if in today's day and age you'd get responses like he was a religious fundamentalist. Maybe he's a myth that all you Christians have cooked up because you're not strong enough to deal with the world.

But here's the thing today. Unless your view of Jesus is that he is God, unless you believe Jesus is God, you will miss out on the forgiveness of your sins.

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

Only God forgives sins. And that is exactly who Jesus is proving himself to be with miracle after miracle of God only power.

[20 : 41] You can react to this claim like the religious leaders in verse 21. They call him a blasphemer. That's pretty common in Melbourne. Jesus, you're way ahead of yourself. Get away from me.

Stay away from my life. Or like verse 26, you can praise God and in fact worship Jesus as God, as all 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 the authority on earth to forgive sins because he's God. Actually, our Old Testament reading, that was a prophecy from Isaiah and it says, when you see lame people walking like Bob, when you see them leaping like a deer, that's when you'll see the Lord.

Jesus is God. Another deduction, deduction B, sin is very serious, Jesus forgives sin.

[21 : 48] Therefore, deduction B, Jesus is the only one who cures our serious infection. Last week, I was co-leading a camp of teenagers, there was 200 teenagers, so I was holding on by my fingernails, but there's a game we play on camp and I want to play the game with you now.

So if you can all forget that you're grown up for just a few seconds and call out the answers. It's the 1030 service and we can do that. So the game is called Which Would You Rather? So here we go.

Which would you rather be 4'4 or 7'7? I would go with 4'4. Don't ask Jeff because he's nearly 7'7.

Which would you rather have wheels for legs or wings for arms? Wings every day. Exactly. Which would you rather, I love this one, this is my personal favourite, which would you rather have a guaranteed \$100,000 in the bank, guaranteed, or a 50-50 shot at a million?

Which would you rather? Right, everyone who says guaranteed \$100,000 has a mortgage. So it's only young people who say go for the million.

[23 : 04] That's right, take the \$100,000. If I could straighten this up slightly, which would you rather, have your sins forgiven or be healed of paralysis in a country with no Medicare?

Which would you rather? Well, I'll tell you Philip, Jesus would say forget the legs. He'd say take the forgiveness. You see, physical healing, physical healing in all its forms, whether it's healing your body or social justice, physical healing in all its forms is at best a band-aid.

20-year band-aid, 30-year band-aid, maybe a 50-year band-aid. Jesus says sin is the real problem because after physical death gets us, sin leaves us facing an eternal death.

That is Jesus' point of view. That explains his mission 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 workplaces and classrooms and households and neighborhoods full of people with the most infectious disease.

[24 : 33] Jesus is the doctor. And if you are a Christian here today, which is most of us, permission to challenge us, do we believe that sin is that serious?

do we show in the way we order our lives that we are right there in the battle every day against sin? Could there be a better New Year's resolution for 2018 than to use this year to get on top of that one sin that has really plagued you?

Do we prioritize sin between the really bad stuff like violence and abuse and the really acceptable stuff like driving rules and speaking about people?

Do you believe sin is that serious? Because if we do, then we'll also want to see other people take it that seriously as well.

We'll be joining in Jesus' mission to call people to repentance so they can be forgiven too. And actually Jesus' last words to us, have a look at the slide on the screen.

[25 : 42] Can I have the slide on the screen? These are Jesus' last words to us. Luke 24, he says, then he opened their minds so they could understand the scriptures. He told them, his disciples, this is what is 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.

You see, preaching, weirdly, preaching is the thing Jesus thinks can sort out the sin problem. not just any preaching or speaking.

So telling you about my hobbies, telling you about me, that's not going to sort out your sin problem. It's not going to lead you to forgiveness. forgiveness. When it comes to speaking about sin, loads of people, loads of churches will want us to stay quiet.

On Wednesday, I was at a feedback meeting for this camp that I was on last week, and one of the key feedbacks, the key feedbacks of the camp was, you guys mentioned sin, why can't you just mention love?

That was one of the key feedbacks. Loads of people will want us to stay quiet about sin. But my response is, why should we? We've got Jesus' command for us that was on the screen.

[27 : 04] We've been given the words that lead people to life, to forgiveness. And here's the thing for you, when it comes to speaking about sin and speaking about Jesus or evangelism, don't bother speaking about God and science.

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

You see, if you're a Christian, as most of us are, we can speak about sins forgiven, we can speak about repentance of our wicked past, we can speak of the joy of knowing Jesus, the joy of that certainty of a new life.

If you're a Christian, just tell people that. Just tell people what Jesus has done for you. There is no better evangelism strategy than that.

Tell people what the Lord has done for you. And as we finish, I want you to imagine old Bob, the paralytic again.

[28 : 15] I want you to imagine that that day, Jesus only forgave his sin. He was still paralysed. His friends still had to carry him out of that room that day.

The years go by, Bob never walks again, and then he dies. And he walks then towards the gates of heaven. And he's standing in line at the gate, and he's really nervous because he knows there's things on his record that mean he shouldn't be there.

He gets up to the front, and they check his record, and there's a big stamp across everything he's done. It just says, forgiven. They say, in you go. And Bob says, how long am I here for?

And they say, forever. Then a hundred years go by, and Bob walks up to Jesus face to face. He says, Jesus, I can't begin to thank you for forgiving my sins that day when my buddies cut a hole in the roof.

Jesus says, you're welcome. Then a thousand years go by, a thousand years. Bob walks up to Jesus again, says, Jesus, I'm so grateful you forgave my sin.

[29 : 32] Jesus says, you're welcome. You see, the game which would you rather, that's a bit of fun, but anyone of the people we know, our family and friends, they can encounter Jesus face to face as we speak about him.

as Jesus speaks about himself, and they can be completely forgiven forever. Isn't that something?

Let's pray. Lord Jesus, we declare that you are God, and we praise you that you have come to call sinners like us to repentance, that you would give your life, that we could be forgiven.

Help us have the boldness and the love for others we know who aren't forgiven. Help us tell them what you have done in our lives.

Help us be brave just to do that. We ask that in your name. Amen. for to a have the lost know who are v going toalom.