

Closure for all your mess

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[0 : 00] Well, I'm going to pray for us, and then we'll take a look at this passage together. It's a great passage that we've got this morning. Thinking about the Lord's Supper, thinking about the night.

Many things happened on the night, the last night before Jesus died, but we're just thinking about this, the last supper and Jesus being betrayed. So if you want to keep a thumb open in that part of the Bible, that would be great as we look through it.

Let me pray for us. Almighty God, we thank you so much for your word, the Bible. We thank you that you have decided that this is the best way, that this is the way that you wanted to speak to us. We thank you that we don't come to the Bible as just words on a page, as a dead book, but it is living and active. It is sharper than a two-edged sword. It pierces us.

It goes right into the depths of who we are and shapes and changes us as we hear from you directly through the Bible by the power of your Spirit. And so now as we think about this, as we come to it and as we think about it together, as you speak through the preaching of your word, I pray that you would illuminate truth to us about your Son and that we'd be edified to know and to live as your people.

[1 : 12] And we ask for this in Jesus' name. Amen. It was just a normal day, a normal shift at Dulles International Airport for a man called Vaughan Alex.

Vaughan Alex was an American Airlines ticket agent and had been for some years. It was a very normal day when two men, brothers actually, ran into the terminal. They appeared lost.

It didn't seem that they knew where they were going and they approached his counter. They were first class passengers and were late for their flight and appeared flustered.

Vaughan Alex went above and beyond to ensure that they boarded their flight, flight 77, instead of rebooking them onto the next one that would come a couple of hours later.

It was a decision that over 20 years later, Vaughan Alex still has to live with. There is not a day goes by where Vaughan Alex doesn't feel the guilt of checking in these two brothers.

[2 : 17] The two brothers were named Salim and Nawaf al-Hazmi. The date was September the 11th, 2001. Vaughan Alex had checked in two hijackers.

Flight 77 crashed into the western side of the Pentagon at 9.37am, killing all 64 on board. When interviewed, Vaughan said this, I blame myself.

I thought, you know, if I had done something different, if I had not led them on, if I had just said to the agents, these two guys are late, let them get the next flight. We have one at noon. It's no big deal. If that was any one of us who was in that situation, we would feel the same way.

And yet Vaughan had done nothing wrong. He'd just done his job. And yet he's felt guilt ever since. Guilt, shame, is a horrible emotion.

Vaughan didn't need to feel this. It was misplaced, guilt and shame. But we know, instantly, we know what he has been feeling, don't we?

[3 : 30] We all know that emotion. Because the reason he's feeling it is because of the consequences of his actions. That his consequences, he feels, had direct actions, and could he have done something to stop it?

It was misplaced, guilt and shame. However, we know that emotion. Because we know it. Because maybe we felt that in a similar way, misplaced, guilt and shame.

But the reality is, for each of us, we know the truth of guilt and shame for things that we've actually done. We know there are things in each of our lives where that feeling of guilt and shame that we want to get rid of, the emotion is the same.

We feel like that because we know the consequences of our actions. How that might have hurt someone. How that might have impaired a relationship. How we've done something and we feel that we're responsible for the consequences.

And what we really want and what we struggle with is we actually want to move on from the emotion. What we want is some form of closure when we're directly responsible.

[4 : 49] We want the guilt and the shame taken away. We want to be loved despite our past. We want to be able to move forward. This morning we're thinking and reflecting on the night before Jesus' death.

Jesus eating his last Passover meal. His interactions with his betrayer Judas. Jesus eating his last supper. Jesus eating his last supper. Jesus eating his last supper. The first communion.

And as we reflect, it demonstrates something really powerful to us as we think about what's going on here. It demonstrates that closure for our past is not only possible, but it's guaranteed in the gospel.

Closure of past shame and guilt is not just possible, but it is guaranteed in the gospel, the good news of Jesus Christ. We're going to be thinking about that in three points.

The foreknowledge of Jesus, the honour of Jesus, and the assurance of Jesus. The foreknowledge of Jesus, the honour of Jesus, and the assurance of Jesus. We're going to start off with foreknowledge.

[5 : 57] Foreknowledge, it's quite a strange word perhaps that we don't use every day.

Foreknowledge is having an understanding of something before it happens. It's another way that you could talk about it. I want you to notice with me that the events of this Passover week, of this day, through the whole thing as we read it, they are known with great precision by Jesus.

In the first instance, in planning for the Passover meal, Jesus knows where they're going to eat and how it's going to happen. He has foreknowledge. He tells his disciples where to go, what they'll find, who they'll talk to, and what to say.

You see a second time afterwards when they're eating together, Jesus knows who will betray him and how he will betray him.

When after finishing the supper, he knows, doesn't he, that his death is imminent. He knows that this is the last time he will eat with them in this way. He knows. He says, truly I tell you, the very last verse that we read, I will not drink again from the fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it new. He knows. There is one sentence right in the middle of our reading that captivates or captures this idea of foreknowledge. It's verse 21. You see what it says?

[7 : 15] Look with me. Verse 21, the Son of Man will go just as it is written about him. Everything that was happening to Jesus had been planned, ordained, and in many cases in the Old Testament, written down.

The reason Jesus has this astounding foreknowledge of what's taking place is because the reason he came in the first place was to accomplish what he would do in this last week of his life.

It was no accident. It's always the plan and known about way ahead of time. Even the betrayal of Jesus by one of his closest friends was predicted a thousand years before.

Let me read for you the line from Psalm 41. Listen to this. It reads, Psalm 41 verse 9, Even my close friend, someone I trusted, one who shared my bread, has turned against me.

Jesus knew that Psalm 41 was about him. It predicted it. That psalm is written by King David. It's a kingly psalm now put in the mouth of the king.

[8 : 25] When Jesus sung that, he knew what he was singing, that this was about his future betrayer. It means, what it really means is this, it means that Jesus dying in the week of Passover was not an accident.

It wasn't an accident that it happened at all, but it wasn't even an accident that it happened to happen on the same night that they were celebrating. Passover. What was that all about?

Every year, God's people, every year they remembered and celebrated that God had rescued and redeemed his people from slavery to Egypt. They celebrated every year by eating the same meal that their ancestors had prepared 1,500 years beforehand on the night they were freed.

Each family killing a lamb, painting the blood on the doorposts, that's before the Israelites escaped from Egypt so that their eldest child didn't die. The lamb died in place that night to save the eldest child, to save the people.

That lamb Jesus knows, he has known, for 1,500 years, was pointing to this moment. It was pointing to this moment in his life, this week, when he will die to save and redeem and rescue God's people from their slavery, not to a hostile nation, but from captivity to sin.

[9 : 54] They are all eating a meal that points to him and he's the only one who knows it. Right there. He knows it's always the plan.

He has foreknowledge. It should give us great confidence, shouldn't it? It should give us great confidence about our own future. If Jesus' death is not a surprise to him, it means nothing else is a surprise to him and it means that if he has a plan, an intimate plan for his life, it means he also has a plan for your life and for mine.

And if he can bring life out of his own death, we can trust that he has a plan for our world as well. That he can bring eternal life, that he can bring new life, that he can redeem everything that has gone wrong out of death.

One of the reasons we have hope because we know the living God always has a plan. We can be certain that it will come to pass and we can be certain that it will be good. Can I encourage you today that whatever you're going through in life right now or this week, Jesus knows your situation better than you do.

He knows your situation better than you do. We don't have foreknowledge and the apparent uncertainty is hard for us. But Jesus even has a foreknowledge of your life.

[11 : 22] If the plan was that his own death can bring untold riches to the world, any difficulty, any misery, any hardship we face, he is able, more than just able, but he will use that in ways that we don't understand to bring spiritual riches personally into your life.

In the midst of chaos, things that we don't understand, God is using that in your life to give you life. He's using that so that you flourish and blossom and grow because he can bring life out of death, he can bring great blessing upon when you go through difficulty.

Jesus has foreknowledge. The second thing I want to talk about is that we've talked about the foreknowledge of Jesus we see in this passage. The second thing I want to talk about is the honour of Jesus in this passage.

Being invited as a guest to eat together was a tremendous honour. It still is, I suppose, but in those times it was a great honour.

All the way through we see Jesus honouring others in this passage. We see in the preparation for Passover, we see honour from the disciples to Jesus, don't we?

[12 : 48] The disciples want to eat with him, they want to spend this special meal that happened once a year, they want to spend it with Jesus. And Jesus honours them back.

He involves them in the preparation, but he also, whilst also confirming that he's already planned it and he's going to be the host of the meal. He's saying you're going to go ahead and make sure everything is ready because I'm actually going to host you.

You're invited, you're asking me, but I've planned it and I'm going to host you to eat with me. Jesus not only honours them by hosting the meal, but you notice he serves them.

Being invited to dine is an honour. Jesus dines and in doing so shows great honour to his friends.

They're all invited, they come together, he's the host, they're eating together, he's invited them. Which is why, when we think of that, the betrayal of Jesus is so shocking. You can imagine the scene, can't you? Friends reclining, eating together, remembering, encouraging one another, perhaps singing the psalm that we just sung, relaying the story of how God had rescued their ancestors reading scripture, reminding themselves as they ate of the Passover lamb.

[14 : 08] It was like Christmas for them, when people, they get together, everybody has to celebrate Passover in Jerusalem, they're making their way to Jerusalem from all different parts of the country, they can hear the chatter from other parties going on round about, all celebrating.

Jesus has chosen them to be the honoured ones who will celebrate Passover with him, making memories, catching up, having good times. There is no doubt about it, they would have felt a closeness to Jesus, given the honour he had extended to them by being their host for the evening. The betrayal of Judas is deeply shocking. It's alarming! Because of how his actions that very night dishonour the host.

At a moment when Jesus is showing them the ultimate honour, his betrayer. You see, the very moment when he does it, the bread Judas is eating is bread Jesus has provided for them.

And look, you can see in the way that Jesus explains it, he emphasises that, that they're eating together, that he's honouring Judas while they were reclining, and we keep getting this phrase reminding them that they're eating together while they were reclining at the table, eating.

[15:29] Truly, he said, truly I tell you, one of you will betray me, one who is eating with me. The dishonour of it all. It's no wonder they're saddened, they ask, surely you don't mean me, do you?

They're aghast. They can't mean, it's almost, it can't be one of us, you've got this right, to confirm it is one of the twelve, he says, one who gets bread into the bowl with me.

It is one of you. You see, the subtext behind what is going on, he's saying, one of you who I'm honouring by eating with, one of you honoured ones will dishonour me.

And yet, and yet, the beauty of Jesus, the character of Jesus comes through. Jesus is dishonoured, he knows it's going to happen and yet, he maintains honour to his betrayer.

Can you imagine how you'd react knowing what Judas was about to do that night? I know what I'd do, I'd have called him out, you little tour rag.

[16:41] I'd have called him out ages ago, Jesus knew ages ago this was going to be done, he never would have gotten into the twelve, I'd have called him out, ages have kicked him out, I would have embarrassed him in front of everyone.

You can imagine, you know, Peter's quite well known for being a bit of a loose cannon, if Peter had known, no doubt, he'd have swung for him, he would have swung for him, no doubt about that, Jesus doesn't.

Even in the midst of his betrayal, Jesus honours Judas. What a man, lets him slip out quietly.

Doesn't alert anyone. The consequences for Judas are eternal. Water that man who betrays the son of man, it would be better for him if he'd not been born.

The reality here is every person is actually honoured by Jesus, every person. Because Jesus honours those by inviting them to dine with him, but he's actually invited every person to dine with him.

[17:55] Even today, being invited to dine with someone is an honour, isn't it? And it actually becomes more of an honour the more respect you have for the host.

You think, even with people who've gone before, nobody would ever have turned down dinner with Nelson Mandela. Do you think anybody would turn that down?

I don't think, get an invite, Nelson Mandela, come around down South Africa, feed you a lovely meal, go, no, don't fancy it, got to wash my hair, never happen, or the royal family, come around Buckingham Palace, I'll do your nice scrub up lunch, be a great honour.

Jesus invited every person to dine with him. There's a story, a parable in Luke's gospel, Jesus tells a parable, you know, parables, story with a spiritual meaning, tells a story of a great banquet, the story of a man who prepares a banquet, a feast, perhaps you might call it, and he invites lots of guests, and what happens is the initial guests that he invites, who the man honours by inviting them, they all have excuses why they can't make it, and the excuses are ridiculous, like I've just bought a new cow, or they're crazy, why you weren't going.

So the man, putting on the banquet, what he does is those who have sent out the invites, he sends out his servants, and the words he says are this, he says, then the master told his servant, go out to the roads and country lanes, and compel them to come in, so that my house may be full.

[19:31] You see, that is a picture of the living God, Jesus Christ, inviting everyone to come and dine with him, that he goes out with the good news of Jesus, and he compels everyone, the invite is to every single person to come in to his house and eat with him at his table by personal invitation to dine with the king of kings.

Everyone has been given the royal invitation, and the way that he honours you, the way that you honour Jesus back is by just saying, yes, I want to come. He honours every single person by personal invite.

he hints at it in verse 25. Truly I tell you, I will not drink again from the fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it new in the kingdom of God.

He will drink the wine again at the banquet with his people, and we're invited to drink it with him.

Have you RSVP'd to Jesus?

Because he wants to honour you. he wants you to be there to sit with him and to eat with him at his table.

[20 : 44] He's showing you honour just by the invite, and he'd love you to come. He's made a way for you to be there. So we've thought about the foreknowledge of Jesus, now looked at the honour that Jesus shows.

We're going to finish with the assurance of Jesus. So they're eating this Passover meal, and at the end of the meal, Jesus finishes it with a twist.

There's a twist to the normal proceedings. As I mentioned, there would have been lots of prayers, there would have been reading from the Bible, there would have been singing Psalms, but Jesus now does something different.

What does Jesus do? He initiates and institutes what has come to be known, or what we call the New Covenant. That word covenant sounds a bit of another word we don't often use.

A way to think about it, what is a covenant? It means a spiritual contract. A spiritual contract.

Marriage is called, the only other time that I can think of covenant being used in our modern world is a marriage covenant.

[21 : 55] It's called that because a husband and a wife make a spiritual contract with one another before and with God. the couple commit to one another to be faithful and to love one another through thick and thin.

Jesus Christ, the living God, makes a covenant, a spiritual contract with his people that is binding, something that he will always be committed to, something he will never waver from.

Even if we fail in keeping our side of the deal, he never will. He commits that he will never fail on his side of the deal, on his contract. He commits to keeping covenant, spiritual contract promises.

What we see in this supper is the initiation, the institution of this spiritual contract, this new covenant between God and man, between Jesus and what will become his church's people.

Israel has been waiting for this moment for centuries, for centuries. Jeremiah speaks about it.

[23 : 05] The prophet Jeremiah says to the people of God, he says, this is what's going to happen. He said, behold, the days are coming, declares the Lord, when I will make a new covenant, when I will make a new spiritual contract with my people.

He says, this is the covenant that I will make. This is the spiritual contract that I will make with them. I will put my law in them and I will write it on their hearts. And I will be their God and they shall be my people.

For I will forgive their iniquity, their sin, and I will remember it no more. That is the new covenant. This is always what God is planning to do. This is where all these three ideas that we've been looking at come together.

The foreknowledge, the honour, it comes together in the institution of this new meal because this Passover is reinterpreted with Jesus Christ at the centre.

It was always about Jesus but now it takes a new test where it becomes directly related to his impending death. Verse 22. While they were eating, Jesus took bread and when he'd given thanks he broke it and gave it to his disciples saying, take, take it, this is my body.

[24 : 17] The unleavened bread that they'd always eaten up celebrating Passover, part of the Passover meal was now reinterpreted, it was now the symbol for his body.

Verse 23. Then he took a cup and when he'd given thanks he gave it to them and they all drank from it. This is my blood of the covenant which is poured out for many, he said to them. The wine. There would have been three or four glasses at certain points of the Passover meal where they drank wine. It's now been reinterpreted. a symbol for his blood. And there is something special about the wine.

Notice what else he says. This is my blood of the covenant. This is my blood of the spiritual contract which is poured out for many.

You see, the blood, the blood is what ratifies the deal. It's what certifies the contract. contracts. Modern day, if you think of a contract, there has to be a way of certifying it, of ratifying it.

[25 : 26] We do that often with signatures now. Sometimes that signature, though, if it's an important thing, it has to be in the presence of witnesses to say, yeah, I saw that actually happened.

That happens with the marriage covenant. The spiritual contract of marriage is certified, ratified by signatures in the presence of witnesses. That's those who go to the wedding and there's other people who sign it too.

God's covenants, the spiritual contracts he makes with his people, they always were certified with blood. The blood sacrifice of an animal in the past was what sealed the deal.

It is Christ's death, his blood poured out, his death that seals the deal. It puts a seal on the spiritual contract, his covenant with his people. You see what that means?

You see what the blood of Jesus, his death means? What this covenant means? It means that God is covenantally, he's contracted spiritually always to forgive you because of Jesus' blood.

[26 : 32] He initiated this agreement. It was his idea. It wasn't anything to do with us. We didn't go up to him and say, by the way, I think this is a great thing that you should sign. He came up with the detail and then he signs it himself.

What that means for each of us is that if you've turned to Jesus Christ, God has to forgive you. He can't not because of the blood of his son.

He said this. He's made a spiritual contract with you that he has to do it. There is absolute assurance that your sins have been completely and fully paid for.

The blood of Jesus Christ is sufficient. it is enough. It is all that is needed to secure your forgiveness forever. Nothing else is needed to be forgiven but the blood of Jesus being poured out for you in your place.

Nothing else. It demonstrates just how much God loves you. His love is a committed love.

[27 : 36] It is an unbreakable forever love. and it gives closure. It gives closure.

It reminds us doesn't it? The thing that we're all hunting for. Those things, that feeling that we started with of guilt, of shame, the things perhaps, even misplaced, even if it's misplaced, guilt and shame, where we feel.

We often have that phrase, don't we? People say, oh I need to forgive myself. I understand that it's about just coming to terms with maybe something that's happened and you want to feel at peace with yourself about what's gone on.

You're wanting to try to formulate and come up with your own kind of closure. But actually that you don't actually need to forgive yourself. Because this gives you true closure.

closure. This gives you true closure, assured closure on anything that has gone on in your past that maybe you struggle with.

[28 : 43] Maybe there's things in my life that happened 20 years ago that I still come to mind and I think, oh my goodness, what did I do? This gives closure.

Permanent. the blood of Jesus in the new covenant, the spiritual contract of God is that he has to forgive you and it really is wiped clean and it really is as far as the east is from the west and it really is to the bottom of the ocean.

We carry on this practice today to remind us his death of his forever commitment to us. How Jesus the suffering servant who was and who is and who always will be, who is of infinite value, who poured out his blood to ensure salvation towards us that gives us closure on our sins.

And so if you've ever doubted God's love for you, if you've ever sinned and thought I've really blown it, how could God love me after what I've done, let the supper be like a visual word to you.

As you eat his body, as you symbolically crush his body with your teeth, and as you pour his blood into your mouth, just like it was poured out of his side when his sword was stuck in, let the supper remind you that his body and his blood was crushed and poured out for you so that you could be sure, so that you could have the certification, the signature on the dotted line of God's spiritual contract, written in his blood, that you are forgiven and you always will be.

[30 : 31] And nothing can separate you from that love. Let it give you closure on your sin. Jesus' plan from the beginning of the world was for this moment.

He has foreknowledge of what he would do. He honours you by inviting you to eat. His plan was to give you assurance by his death of his love for you forever.

And you have the seat at the table that you're invited to. This is the proof that you can point to. You have a place at the banquet. You've got a name at the seating plan of the heavenly banquet.

There is a place for you because your forgiveness is assured. All your sins are forgiven forever.

You can have closure.

Let me pray. Almighty God, I thank you for the love of Jesus Christ that you have for us.

[31 : 48] Lord, I come and you know for my own heart and for the hearts of your people, you know amongst us there are sins in our past, things that we've done, even misplaced and misdirected shame and guilt, but there is things that we've done that even still comes to mind and we're ashamed and we feel guilty for, even though we know that it is paid for.

And we desperately want closure and to be able to look at those things and to truly know that it is cast to the bottom of the sea. I thank you that the death of your son gives us true closure. I thank you for the new covenant that is written in your blood. God, I thank you that it's not just a committed love, it's a love that has promises that are sure and steadfast and will never fade or die away so that you are obligated if we trust in your son to forgive us. I praise you for that. I pray that as we take the supper today that you would move in our hearts powerfully and change us, melt our hearts to recapture that love and that praise that we have for you because you've bought us at a price. And so we ask for this in the name of Christ. Amen.