

Psalms 25:1-10(ESV) ¹To you, O Lord, I lift up my soul. ²O my God, in you I trust; let me not be put to shame; let not my enemies exult over me. ³Indeed, none who wait for you shall be put to shame; they shall be ashamed who are wantonly treacherous. ⁴Make me to know your ways, O Lord; teach me your paths. ⁵Lead me in your truth and teach me, for you are the God of my salvation; for you I wait all the day long. ⁶Remember your mercy, O Lord, and your steadfast love, for they have been from of old. ⁷Remember not the sins of my youth or my transgressions; according to your steadfast love remember me, for the sake of your goodness, O Lord! ⁸Good and upright is the Lord; therefore he instructs sinners in the way. ⁹He leads the humble in what is right, and teaches the humble his way. ¹⁰All the paths of the Lord are steadfast love and faithfulness, for those who keep his covenant and his testimonies.

1 Thessalonians 3:9-13(ESV) ⁹For what thanksgiving can we return to God for you, for all the joy that we feel for your sake before our God, ¹⁰as we pray most earnestly night and day that we may see you face to face and supply what is lacking in your faith? ¹¹Now may our God and Father himself, and our Lord Jesus, direct our way to you, ¹²and may the Lord make you increase and abound in love for one another and for all, as we do for you, ¹³so that he may establish your hearts blameless in holiness before our God and Father, at the coming of our Lord Jesus with all his saints.

Luke 19:28-40(ESV) ²⁸And when he had said these things, he went on ahead, going up to Jerusalem. ²⁹When he drew near to Bethphage and Bethany, at the mount that is called Olivet, he sent two of the disciples, ³⁰saying, “Go into the village in front of you, where on entering you will find a colt tied, on which no one has ever yet sat. Untie it and bring it here. ³¹If anyone asks you, ‘Why are you untying it?’ you shall say this: ‘The Lord has need of it.’” ³²So those who were sent went away and found it just as he had told them. ³³And as they were untying the colt, its owners said to them, “Why are you untying the colt?” ³⁴And they said, “The Lord has need of it.” ³⁵And they brought it to Jesus, and throwing their cloaks on the colt, they set Jesus on it. ³⁶And as he rode along, they spread their cloaks on the road. ³⁷As he was drawing near—already on the way down the Mount of Olives—the whole multitude of his disciples began to rejoice and praise God with a loud voice for all the mighty works that they had seen, ³⁸saying, “Blessed is the King who comes in the name of the Lord! Peace in heaven and glory in the highest!” ³⁹And some of the Pharisees in the crowd said to him, “Teacher, rebuke your disciples.” ⁴⁰He answered, “I tell you, if these were silent, the very stones would cry out.”

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Oh, You Mean That Little Sin?

Jeremiah 33:14-16(ESV) ¹⁴“Behold, the days are coming, declares the Lord, when I will fulfill the promise I made to the house of Israel and the house of Judah. ¹⁵In those days and at that time I will cause a righteous Branch to spring up for David, and he shall execute justice and righteousness in the land. ¹⁶In those days Judah will be saved and Jerusalem will dwell securely. And this is the name by which it will be called: ‘The Lord is our righteousness.’”

A fictionalized story of an American tragedy will focus our thoughts today. This story happened in a place called Smalltown, America. The local newspaper headline stated: “Fatal Crash Claims One Life.” The detailed story related the account of a one-car accident. The car was driven by Joe Smith, and the other occupants were his wife, Barbara, and their three children. Cause of the accident was undetermined, but Barbara was pronounced dead on the scene. The remaining family members were all in critical condition at the local hospital. A quote from an emergency worker on the scene related how bad this accident was: “It’s a miracle that anyone survived this crash!”

Four days later, the newspaper headline stated, “Crash Claims Second Life.” One of the children had died. A few days later, the headline was, “Crash Claims Third Life” as a second child died. Nearly a week passed before the next headline, “Crash Claims Fourth Life.” The last of the children had died. Only the father, Joe Smith, remained alive—but just barely. He continued his struggle for life in the Intensive Care Unit. His condition was listed as “critical.” It was just about exactly one month after the accident that this story ended with the headline, “Crash Claims Final Victim.” Joe, Barbara, and their children were all dead. There were no survivors of this accident.

Although Joe never regained consciousness during the last month of his life, we’re going to take a trip into his subconscious mind to discover what was transpiring there following the accident. Joe heard that his wife was dead at the accident scene and silently cried out, “Why, Barbara, Lord?” The Lord answered, “The soul who sins is the one who will die” (Ezekiel 18:4). “What sin did she ever do?” asked Joe. And the Lord told Joe one. “Oh, You Mean That Little Sin?” When the first child died in the hospital, Joe silently cried out, “Lord, why my child?” The Lord answered, “For the wages of sin is death” (Romans 6:23). “What sin did my child ever do?” inquired Joe. And the Lord told Joe one. “Oh, You Mean That Little Sin?” For the second child, the Lord answered Joe’s why with, “each is to die for his own sin” (Deuteronomy 24:16). And the Lord told Joe one sin this child had done, and Joe replied, “Oh, You Mean That Little Sin?” The answer given to Joe’s why about his third child was, “everyone will die for his own sin” (Jeremiah 31:30). Again, one sin was disclosed and Joe’s response remained, “Oh, You Mean That Little Sin?” When Joe’s time to die came, there were no more questions—just the prayer, “Lord, forgive me and save me for Jesus’ sake.” And the Lord said, “I will—just as I did the rest of your family.”

Part of our fallen and sinful nature, it seems, is to minimize or deny the sinfulness around us. We tend to excuse our own sins and those sins of those whom we love and care about. Yet, sin is a killer. It leads us on the pathway to the day of our own death. Because we are by nature selfish and unappreciative of all that God has done for us, we often think that we deserve the blessings of God—that He owes it to us. Pride and self-centeredness can easily lead us to believe that we can get away with anything—that God will never permit any consequences of our sin affect us. With stubborn foolishness, we hold on to that thought even in the light of all the tragedies that do happen to other believers around us. Presumably, we deduce that we’re somehow different than all other believers.

Sin brought death into this world. Unless Jesus returns in our lifetime, we’re all going to die because of sin. However as we all know, there are some very unpleasant ways to die—and that scares us. Doctors sometimes attribute someone’s death to natural causes. Typically, that means old age, heart attack, respiratory failure, and the like. Strictly speaking, there are no natural causes of death. God created humankind to live forever. It is sin that brought death to us. Still, no normal person longs for a painful and drawn-out death. No, we’d like our moment of transition from this world to the next to be relatively pain-free. Regarding our death, Luther writes in the Small Catechism, “We pray . . . that our Father in heaven . . . when our last hour comes, give us a blessed

end, and graciously take us from this valley of sorrow to Himself in heaven” (Explanation of the 7th Petition).

Notice that Luther prays for a blessed end. He doesn’t say this is what we deserve. No, we know that God intercedes time and time again in our lives so that we don’t get what we deserve. That’s the love, mercy, and grace of God in action. Because of Jesus, we, who believe, won’t be spending an eternity in hell because of our sins. None of us know, for certain, the exact circumstances of our own deaths. But we do know that whenever it happens, it will be a blessed end. Blessed because we’ll go on to join the other believers with Jesus in heaven.

Finally, we turn our attention to our text and the people of Jeremiah’s day. For years, the prophet Jeremiah had been warning the people and the government about a day of judgment. His message fell mostly on unhearing ears. People didn’t want to hear that message; instead, they listened to words of the false prophets, who kept saying that everything would be okay. The people didn’t want to change their sinful ways. They wanted everything to remain as it had in the past. Now it was time for the consequences of their disobedience to the Lord.

The army of Babylon was at the very gates of Jerusalem. It was an overwhelming force. The Jews knew they had no chance to defeat this army. Only two options were available to them: surrender or hole up behind the walls of Jerusalem. Because surrender would mean death for many leaders and slavery for many others, they chose to lock themselves behind Jerusalem’s walls. But the Babylonian army didn’t mind waiting. They camped outside the walls and waited for starvation to give them the eventual victory.

It was a hopeless situation for the Israelites. Die of starvation or go into captivity—and perhaps being killed in the process. Who knew if the Babylonians would be merciful if they surrendered? Families and loved ones would certainly be separated—perhaps forever. The prophet Jeremiah had warned them and called them to repentance for their sins. Now, because there were no other options available to them, the Jews were, in effect, saying to Jeremiah, “Oh, You Mean That Little Sin?” Although the average Jew still wanted to minimize the magnitude of their personal sinfulness, not a single Jew was looking forward to the immediate consequences of these sins.

It was a black day in the history of God’s people. There was no easy way out. No matter what they decided to do, many Jews were going to die—either by starvation or the hands of the Babylonians. Into this hopeless picture, the prophet Jeremiah provides the Gospel words of our text. Through the prophet, the Lord assures His people that His promises will still be kept—a Savior will be born. The promise wouldn’t be fulfilled for another 600 years, but it would happen. These people would still endure the present consequences of their sin, but the promised Savior would nullify the eternal consequences.

As you and I proceed along with our daily lives, we face some of the same dilemmas that these ancient Jews faced. From our vantage spot in history, we know that the Savior has already come in the person of Jesus. We have been assured that the eternal consequences of our sinfulness were paid for in full on the cross. We aren’t going to spend eternity in hell because of our sins. Yet, unless Jesus returns in our lifetime, we’re all going to die. Likely, some of us will have peaceful deaths—an easy transition from here to there. However, it isn’t likely that this will be true for all of us. Some of us will experience deaths that aren’t all that peaceful—all that pain-free. Despite the exact circumstances

of our deaths, the promise of life eternal through faith in Jesus is ours. We depend on God to strengthen us to face whatever comes our way.

In the eyes of a sin-hating God, there is no such thing as a little sin. All sin leads to death. It's foolish for any of us to attempt to minimize our sins with descriptions like, "It's just a little sin." Jesus has provided the solution for our sin problem with His precious life on the cross. We ought not to excuse our own sins or the sins of those we love. Instead, we repent and confess them. In his unconsciousness, Joe Smith came to realize the magnitude of his own sinfulness—and the magnitude of God's love for him in Jesus Christ. Our prayer ought to mimic his, "Lord, forgive me and save me for Jesus' sake." And God's answer will be, "I will!"