

Sin & Sorrow

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[0 : 00] Genesis is a book of origins asking questions like, how did we get here? What's the point of life? And also, what on earth has gone wrong, right?

Why is it that there are joys and sorrows mixed in life and it seems like all the good things go so quickly and all the sad things seem to last forever and life feels so short?

How are we in this mess of life and all its glory and all of the ruin? Genesis tells the answer.

Genesis tells the answer.

And in tonight's passage, in Genesis 3, it's the saddest page of the Bible. Before we pray for the preaching of God's word, though, I do want to say one thing before we go about talking snakes.

You've got a talking serpent in Genesis chapter 3, and maybe you've read this passage so many times, it doesn't bother you. Maybe for other people, you read this and you're thinking to yourself, like, it makes you doubt or feel weird about Genesis 3.

[1 : 03] Like, what am I supposed to do with talking animals? Or you brought a friend tonight and you're like, why did I bring them on talking snake week, right? It's good to understand in the Bible, first off, it's not Narnia where animals are just like talking to each other all over the place.

There's only one other instance of an animal speaking in the whole Bible. It's Balaam's donkey, Numbers 22. And it's very clear in that that the Lord intervenes to open the mouth of the beast, right, to speak.

And so what's going on here in Genesis chapter 3, what we're seeing is ancient Israelites, they would read this and they would know that it's not like all the snakes just talk where they are.

They didn't just have a conversation with their neighbor Mordecai, who was like, yeah, I was talking to a snake this week. And they're like, oh, yeah, that makes sense because I just read Genesis 3.

They know animals don't speak, right?

And so a good reader, the first audience of this would hear it and they would know that something more is going on, that the serpent is the embodiment of evil.

[2 : 09] And what gets unwrapped on later on in the Bible of what that is, we refer to as Satan, the devil, the evil one, the deceiver, right? The narrator of Genesis is simply okay with just leaving it as what it is and describing it, okay?

Just thought I'd say that in case some people struggle with that. Before we look at Genesis 3 more closely, let's pray. Father, we have restless hearts that need to find their rest in you.

So would you use the preaching of your word to this end? We pray all this in Christ's name. Amen.

All right, so this is the page in Scripture where sin enters the picture.

So you've got to talk about sin. Our outline then has three things about sin. First off, I want us to see the tragedy of sin from this passage. Secondly, the twisting of sin.

Sin enters and it twists things, right? And then last thing is the termination of sin. We want sin to be ended, okay? The tragedy, the twisting, and the termination.

[3 : 19] So first off, the tragedy of sin. We talk a lot about sin in church, not just for job security, for ministers, but also because it is a tragedy.

There's many reasons we talk about sin, but one of them is how tragic it is. I mean, just think about it. If there is a tragedy in your life, if there's one that happens in your nation or in the world, what do people say?

Never forget. Lest we never forget, we have to remember the tragedies that have happened because something that was, something came in and something changed, and now it'll never be the same because of this tragedy.

And so how does the tragedy of sin manifest itself in our passage? I want to point out four different things underneath tragedy of sin, four different aspects of sin that we see in Genesis chapter 3.

We see shame, we see blame, we see pride, and we see isolation. Shame, blame, pride, isolation. First off, shame.

[4 : 24] There's this play on words that's going on in the Hebrew. The serpent in verse 5 promises that Adam and Eve's eyes will be opened, and they will know.

They succumbed to the temptation, they take the fruit, they eat it, and verse 7 says their eyes were opened and they knew. But what?

Their nakedness. Now what's interesting is just right before Genesis 3.1 that we read at the end of chapter 2, it says about man and woman that they were naked and they were not ashamed.

There was no shame in this. So what's changed? Now Adam and Eve feel shame, and because of that they feel like they need to hide and to cover up.

This is the tragedy of sin. Feeling like we have to hide. We're created to be known and to be loved, and yet we're so afraid of being known and being seen for who we really are, we settle for being loved and kind of known, right?

[5 : 32] We manage that part in our lives. And so what we do is things just like Adam and Eve do in verse 7. We sow fig leaves to cover ourselves.

We desperately desire to cover up, and so we want to spin and control how people see us because of our shame. And so we avoid certain activities because we're not good at them and do only the ones we are good at.

Or we avoid certain conversations because we don't want people to know that we might actually not be as smart as we let on. Or if somebody knocks at your door unannounced, you frantically clean the house just in case they could come in and judge you and see that your house isn't immaculate all the time.

Or we give prayer requests that aren't actually dealing with what's really going on in our life. It's, you know, for like your uncle's, like rubbish man's, I don't know, like dog walkers, something or other, who's going through a hard time.

Let's pray for them. Why? Because if we actually said what was really going on, we'd feel so much shame that we struggle with doubt, or we're not perfect parents, or our marriage isn't perfect.

[6 : 42] So we try to cover up, right? We try to sow fig leaves that cover our shame. We want to see, but not to be seen. We want to judge, but not to be judged.

We're all trying to cover up. Do you feel the tragedy of shame? It makes us do foolish things. I bet you many people here tonight, you're thinking of something even right now, a very foolish thing that you've done.

Why? Because of shame. Do you see what Adam and Eve's grand plan was? When they start to feel shame? Oh, God's coming. You know what we're going to do? We're going to hide from him in the trees.

Like he's just created the world. We know he's big and infinite and all of those things, but we're just going to hide, and I think that's going to be the thing that solves our shame. But that's what shame does. That's what sin does.

It's irrational. It's tragic. First aspect of sin that we see that's tragic is shame. Second thing is blame. Because of our shame, we kind of deflect, and we name in other people what we can't bear to be named about ourselves.

[7 : 53] Shame leads to blame. It just happens to rhyme. Didn't plan it that way. Do you see it in our passage, though? What is Adam's immediate response when God comes and asks him what he's done?

It was the woman. It wasn't, don't look at me, God. It was the woman. In fact, in the Hebrew, there's an extra pronoun in there for emphasis, so if you were translating it literally, it'd be like, it was the woman, her, she, that one.

Not me. And not just that. It wasn't just the woman. It was the woman that you gave me. Blames God.

And so God turns and he asks the woman, what's this you've done? And what's her response? It was the serpent. You know, like the embodiment of evil? That one that came in God.

Like, you didn't tell me there were serpents in the garden. Come on. It's not my fault. And all of this, it's just so tragic. It's profoundly sad, this blame that we see.

[8 : 53] Because at the end of chapter 2, man and woman, there is harmony. Things are as they're supposed to be. And the man is, he's got love poetry coming from his lips.

A bone of my bone, flesh of my flesh. Ah. And now, all of a sudden, it's preservation of the self. It's also tragic. Because of sin, we feel like we have to put down other people in order to hide our own deficiencies.

So a lot of times, where does that manifest itself? We're harsh to our families. Don't you dare give us a bad name. We use words like fig leaves to cover our nakedness, to spin the truth of our lives, to boast about our accomplishments, to counterattack.

Have you seen yourself lately? Blaming me? Look in the mirror, bub. We create these habits of blame. And these subtle ways that deflect our culpability in sin.

Because we want to hide. And we don't want to let people in. So we blame other people. It's like this fig leaf utility in our lives. I mean, it's probably the number one go-to.

[10:06] I mean, I haven't seen all the conflicts in your life and in your house. I haven't been there for them. But I've been around enough people and seen it in my own life. What do we tend to do when conflict comes? We deflect.

Start blaming the other person. You know, sure, I shouldn't have done that, but you did that. You started it. Right? Right? I'm having a hard day.

My parents were the ones who made me like this. Come on. It's not my fault. If you weren't so incompetent, if you just did the job right, I wouldn't be raising my voice and angry. I don't want to actually name what we're doing wrong.

We blame other people for those things. And many of those things might have some truth in them. Maybe the other person did start it. Maybe your parents did mess you up in a big way.

Maybe the other person was a jerk first. But we avoid actual healing and reconciliation because we blame.

[11:02] It's tragic. Hiding in shame. Blaming other people. Third thing is pride. What's the temptation in verse 5 that the serpent uses?

To be like God. And in particular, it says to be like God in knowing good and evil. A lot of commentators on that talk about in knowing good and evil.

It's not just knowing what is good and evil, but getting to define for oneself what is good and what is evil. Basically, to take God's place.

That's God's role. He gets to say what is right and what is wrong. And man and woman want to take that place. It's a pretty good summary of pride. To want to live in God's place without regard to God and get to define what God should be defining for yourself.

I'm numero uno. Nobody else gets to tell me if I did something wrong. They just knew the stress that I was under. I'm okay. Everyone else is the problem.

[12:08] People owe you. People are answerable to you. You call the shots. And in this, then, pride becomes like plagiarism. Right? It's us pretending like we're God.

Taking the things of God and saying, I did that. I'm responsible for that. Be like if you wrote a song and I stole it. Or if we work together and we, maybe even I barely did anything and you cleaned this entire sanctuary and then people show up and I act like you didn't do anything and I take all the credit for it.

Or you tell a really good joke. And I'm going to do it. I like stealing jokes, guys. I've got to confess that right now. If a joke is good, you've got to tell it again because it's just, it needs to be heard. Right?

But in those other instances, do you see what happens? Somebody's robbed you of what you're due. There should be an honor that you're due. And they take it away. And they play it off like it's them.

You'd be upset. So that's what pride does. Pride robs God of the glory more than, you know, a silly example like stealing a song. More so, God is the creator, as the sustainer, as the ultimate one.

[13:15] They take that, we take that glory for ourselves. And in robbing God of his glory, we rob ourselves of actual joy and contentment.

Because we're created to be God. You were created as a creature. We end up miserable. And it's tragic. You ever been around a proud person?

Maybe you're realizing right now it might be you. And they don't, they never listen, right? I always know the best way to do something. It's sad.

It's annoying at times too, right? It's annoying a lot of the time. But if you think about it, how sad of a way to live in this world. To never be able to admit that you're wrong.

And all the problems out there are just because people don't listen to you. It's what the Bible says sin is like. It's pride that we know what's best and what to decide right and want to decide right and wrong for ourselves.

[14:14] It's like my way or the highway. It's tragic. So that was shame, blame, pride. Last one, isolation. Verse 8. God comes for his regular talk with Adam and Eve.

And where are they hiding? They're isolated. In the trees. Do you see the tragedy of sin? Not only do you feel shame.

I want to cover up. I feel like you can't let people actually see who you really are. Not only do you just try to survive and get through the week by blaming other people and kind of pointing out their weaknesses in subtle ways.

Like polite ways, right? You wouldn't be too obvious with it. That would be rude. And underneath all of that, there's this root sin of pride. The ego constantly calling out for itself.

Give me attention. See what I've done. But all of that, great tragedy, is all of those things keep them from walking with God. The very thing that they were created for, relationship with God.

[15:17] They have been made to know, and we have been made to know, and to enjoy, and to commune with God himself. And because of sin, we choose isolation rather than life eternal.

They get a breaking of relationship from God because they're isolated in the trees. Right? Again, we want to be known and to be loved. You've been created to be known and to be loved.

Being the known part, ah, it makes us cringe. We try to kind of be loved, but it ends up happening as we just live lives far apart from one another because of sin, and even more tragically, apart from God.

Live in isolation. Wondering if we can be truly seen and delighted. And it's all so tragic that we choose isolation over communion.

And the tragedy of sin is this curse. Sin leads to sorrow. You're created to find joy and fulfillment in your work. And what does God say to Adam?

[16:16] Curse it as the ground because of you, man. Because of what you've done. It's going to be toil. It's going to be hard. It's going to fight back. Created to bring life into this world.

What does he say to the woman? Childbearing is still going to happen. It's going to happen through pain. Created to live. What does he say to man and woman?

You're going to die. Created from the dust into the dust, you're going to return. It's tragic. I wonder if you're here tonight, too, and maybe you're skeptical about some of these things, the truth claims of Christianity, or even the beginning of the Bible in Genesis.

Can we actually believe this? I don't know. I would just say to you, I want to challenge you in this moment before we move on. Whatever you think about the Bible, when you see this in Genesis 3, this description of what is wrong with the world, doesn't it ring true to you?

Don't you see this in your own life, in the lives of people? People struggling with shame, blaming one another, pride running rampant. People living in isolation.

[17:24] Isolated from their creator. Yeah. It's the tragedy of sin. Shame, blame, pride, isolation. Second thing I want us to see is the twisting of sin. How sin comes in and it twists things.

The twisting of sin. The word used in verse 1 in the Hebrew to describe the serpent, it says in our translation, it's crafty. Now what's interesting is that word gets translated in other parts of the Bible, like in Proverbs, and it's not necessarily a bad thing.

You know how it gets translated in Proverbs a lot of times? Prudent. Prudent. You see, what it's describing is a way of dealing with somebody subtly.

Kind of understanding the nuances, the gray areas of life, and that can be used for good, prudence. Or it can be used for evil, to deceive, to twist.

That's what the serpent is doing. Let's look at how the serpent twists things as he comes in. How sin twists things. So the narrator, he describes God as the Lord God in the first half of verse 1.

[18:35] Lord being God's covenantal name, right? His relationship with his people. This is what they should call him. God is because he is God. He is God alone. He is the creator. He's not just the creator.

He's the Lord God. That's how it describes him, right? In the first part of verse 1. How does the serpent refer to him to Eve? God. Takes away the Lord part.

And continues to do so as he tempts her. And Eve kind of picks up on this. Verse 3, she says God, right? And yet, when God actually shows up in verse 8, he's reintroduced as what?

The Lord God. Why mention that? I think there's this subtle clue within the text that the key to temptation for the serpent is for man and woman to forget their covenantal relationship with God. You know, it's in this covenant relationship that there is a creator-creature distinction, and yet, with that distinction, there is love, there's joy, there's intimacy, there's promise, there's relationship, there's communion.

[19 : 43] Forget all about all that. It treats God as if he's abstract rather than he's personal. That's how the serpent is twisting things and coming in with temptation. Right?

The boundaries and distinctions between God and man, they're not there to suppress, but for us to actually flourish in our life. And the serpent, everything he does, it's just so sneaky. He never directly tells the woman to sin. Did you notice that? Hey, just go ahead and sin. Why don't you just sin a little bit? He doesn't say that. He hints at it. He tells these half-truths. You will surely not die. Well, they don't immediately. Right? But the curse comes because of it. And he calls into question God's trustworthiness.

Could God really be good if he's going to keep something like that from you? Even the way the serpent asks his questions, it paints God as some overbearing parent, right?

[20 : 42] Deceptive, insecure, holding out the good stuff from Adam and Eve. You know, like, he can't really be the Lord. He can't be a loving, heavenly Father and trustworthy.

If he doesn't want this for you, right? If he really loved you, you'd be able to decide right and wrong for yourself. And we see the twisting in shame, blame, and pride.

So this is how it manifests itself. This is what sin does. With our shame, you know, if we have done something wrong, if there's something that we, when we break God's law, and there's guilt that comes, a lot of times, you should feel shame.

Right? That is God in his general providence for us, because his law is there. Even the wicked know it. You should feel some sense of, oh, I haven't done something right.

But sin comes in, and you see, the devil, he wants to accuse. He wants to twist the knife even deeper. So rather than going, I've made a mistake. I'm still created in God's image. Maybe there's hope for reconciliation.

[21 : 42] Instead, we go from I made a mistake to all of a sudden I am a mistake. That's what our shame tells us. Done all these wrong things. Not only wrong things that I've done, but me my whole life.

It's just a mistake. With our blame. Yeah, sure. Other people do mess up and sin against us. Your spouse is far from perfect. Your boss has made bad decisions at your workplace.

Your parents have given you some baggage that you've got to carry around in life. And yet we avoid the truth about our own struggles through our blame, because it's this twist of sin.

It twists until you can't see your part in the tragedy. Blame comes in. It's that person's fault. And maybe at first you're kind of seeing it. I'm like, I know I did something wrong.

But that person's more wrong. And by the end, as you blame the other person, you've forgotten about what you've done. It just subtly twists and twists and twists and brings you further away from the truth.

[22 : 44] The nature of pride is that it's cloaked often in half-truths, like the ones the serpent tells, and we're oblivious to it. So we say things like this. I've said things like this in my own mind.

I've heard people. I deserve to be happy. Is happiness a bad thing? No. No. God created you. There's happiness. There's joy. Right? But if it becomes at the expense of other people, right? See that twisting that happens? I won't hurt anybody. It's my choice. Right? Well, yes, it is your choice. And maybe you won't hurt anyone in the short term.

But what if that anyone is yourself? I don't know. We say things like, I've seen this work. We need to do it my way. Yeah, maybe you have seen it work before. You know what?

You're probably right. I believe you. You've seen it work. But maybe there's other ways you could do it. Or maybe it worked 30 years ago, and maybe now it might not work as much. I just have more experience than these people.

[23 : 45] They should listen to me. That could be very true. You could have more experience, and people should listen to you. But maybe also you're steamrolling people. The problem with pride is that it twists things.

Good things get warped. It doesn't just want to flip us in the place of God, but it twists everything around us. The desire to love becomes the desire to possess.

The desire to order things becomes the desire to control. The desire for joy becomes self-fulfillment at any cost. And the Apostle Paul, in the New Testament, in 2 Corinthians 2.11, he actually gives this warning.

He says to not be ignorant to Satan's devices. It seems like we're not only to draw lessons for why the serpent brought this temptation in, but also how he did it.

It's subtle. It's ever so slight twisting of the truth more and more and more and more to go further and further away. Why is the evil one like this?

[24 : 53] Because he's cunning. He's smart. Satan just came in and was like, God, bad. Be selfish. Like, no God. Do whatever you want. Like, you just be like, it's too obvious, right?

So instead, plants these questions. Are you sure? Are you sure? This can't actually really apply here in this situation, does it?

Is one time really that bad? Did God actually say that? Is that really the right interpretation? Don't I deserve this?

Aren't there worse things? But nobody else is doing the right thing. And when we fall for these half-truths and the twisting that sin does, we remain in isolation.

Cut off from life. And here's how twisted things get. In this world, even our virtue gets twisted. The 18th century American theologian, Jonathan Edwards, he draws a distinction between what he calls common virtue and true virtue.

[26 : 02] Common virtue and true virtue. In common virtue, what he talks about is, you know, common virtue is the way that the world, most people kind of motivate towards good things, towards good ends.

But true virtue is motivated by love of God and neighbor. It's for beauty's sake. It's because we know it's the right thing and it pleases God. When we delight in that, we want to love him and we want to care for other people.

So, let me give an example to show you what he's talking about with common virtue. Let's take honesty. Okay? Don't tell lies. Tell the truth. Be honest.

How do we often motivate ourselves, our children, other people to be honest? What are some of the ways that we use to motivate those things? Shame.

Right? Be honest or you're going to turn out like someone no one wants to be around. It's true.

Right? But if that's the motivation for it, you're leading with shame.

[27 : 01] You're telling people, hey, tell the truth. Otherwise, you're just going to have to hide. You have to keep hiding. You don't want to be one of those people. People aren't going to want to be around you. So, we use shame to motivate people towards virtue.

Or, take another example. Pride. Be honest. You don't want to be like other people who aren't honest. You're better than those people. You're better than that person.

Tell the truth. You're not like those liars. You're better than them. Tell the truth. Even for our virtue, we're using these root sins to get that.

And so, what happens? We have all of these public leaders who seem so virtuous. People, leaders in the church. And they have this big fall. You find out they've been lying this whole time.

And it surprises us. But should it be that surprising? Because so many times, at the root, it's rotten. It's rotten at the core. Because we're using shame and pride to get to our virtue.

[28 : 03] Hmm. Jonathan Edwards, he does say it's better to have common virtue than no virtue at all. It makes the world an actual, like, livable place. But ultimately, we want love of God and love of the neighbor.

That's what he talks about, true virtue. See how sin twists things? Sin is a tragedy. It's sneaky because it twists God's good design and good creation. What hope is there for any of us, right? What we need is a termination of sin. We've seen its tragedy and how it twists things. We need it to end. We need it to be terminated. And you see, there's good news in our passage even before we get to Genesis 3.15.

And it's this. God comes and he finds Adam and Eve. He pursues them. There's this good news that you cannot hide from God.

Because maybe as scary and terrifying as that might seem to some people, that your guilt would get exposed. It would be far worse if you could actually hide from God. Because then maybe he couldn't find you.

[29 : 10] And you'd be left in isolation. But the Lord God enters into the place of tragedy and sin. He pursues them.

God's question in verse 9, where are you? Where are you? This isn't a hide and seek question, right? Oh, like you've hid so well in the trees. I don't know where you are. He's asking, where's your heart? It's like a question of a father as their teenager stumbles in past their curfew with alcohol on their breath.

Where have you been? What have you done? You can tell me. You can trust me. In verse 21, All of us, we've been trying to cover ourselves since Genesis chapter 3.

But we need a different covering. One we can't provide. Because try as you might. You still feel shame. You still blame other people. You still struggle with pride.

And we still feel isolated. But what if you let God cover you? It's the sacrificial death of another in Genesis 3 that provides the clothing that they need.

[30 : 33] And what if it wasn't just a temporary covering, but it was actually a permanent covering? Well, one that didn't just deal with the outward issues, but got down to the very root of what is wrong.

Something that could actually enter in and start to untwist sin. And the tragedy of it all. So you see, amidst all the list of all these consequences of sin that's going to lead to sorrow, that's going to lead to death.

There's this promise that God makes in Genesis 3.15. That there's going to be enmity between the seed of the woman and the evil one, the serpent.

And the offspring of the woman will bruise the serpent's head as he bruises its heel. And again, if you're hearing this for the first time, a lot of the details, if you've been in church your whole life, Oh, Jesus, right?

If you're hearing it for the first time, maybe some of the details, What is that going to look like? It's somewhat enigmatic. But what's clear is that there's going to be a special person who's going to do the work of a champion.

[31 : 36] To have a victory in the place of other people fighting on behalf of others. And he is going to receive a wound while he also inflicts a decisive defeat against this evil one.

And what we confess and believe is that this true champion, the second Adam, has come in Jesus. He comes to deal with our sin and our sorrow. How does he do it?

It's the same feet that Adam and Eve hear walking in the cool of the garden asking them where they are. Those feet get nailed to the cross. And on the cross, we believe that he hangs there and bears our shame.

Do you think it's weird? Like it goes in the Gospels, it goes into great detail about how Jesus was stripped naked and hung on the cross naked. He is there uncovered, taking our shame for us.

For all of us who are constantly trying to pass the blame, Jesus says, I'll take it. God made him who knew no sin to be sin so that we might become the righteousness of God.

[32 : 51] Cursed is the one who hangs on the tree. I'll take that curse. Bring it on. I will absorb it. For those who struggle with pride, we look at him, the one who didn't count equality with God, a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself.

Even to the point of death, even death on a cross. You know, and for those living in isolation, for those too proud to come out of the shadows or too afraid to admit that you're hiding.

You hear the voice of this second Adam said, come. All you who are weary, weary from all the shame in your life and having to blame other people and having this charade of pride going about that you're better than everyone else.

If you're weary from that, would you come? You find rest for your soul. We don't just need relief from sin. We need it ended.

We need it terminated. And by faith in the second Adam, the hope of the gospel is that you can actually experience that now. You can know Jesus actually has done something about your shame now.

[33 : 57] That he has actually taken the blame for your sin now. That it has been done. That it is finished. And that starts to change you now. It starts to motivate you in a new way.

You're not trying to keep up with the Joneses. You're not trying to prove yourself to other people. You're not even trying to prove yourself to God. But you know the one who's given his life for you has named you.

And has welcomed you. And desires you. And he's pursued you. Couldn't hide from him. He's found you. Sin no longer has dominion.

It doesn't control you. It doesn't control your destiny. It's not the thing that you serve in this world.

And if you're here this evening and you don't believe any of this, my simple challenge and question is, why don't you want to?

Don't you want this to be true? Don't you want to not have to deal with shame and constantly be blaming other people? And not live an isolated life but actually have people who know you and who love you?

[35 : 04] Don't you want to hear? Do you hear his voice? It's calling to you. It's calling to you. Come out of hiding. Come to him. Where are you this evening? Where are you?

He calls to you. And his offer is that you let him cover you. And you let him name you. And you let him rejoice over you.

And you let him secure your life. By believing that he has sent his son to give his life in your place.

Let's pray. Heavenly Father, we ask that full of the hope of the gospel, that you'd help us by your spirit to be a people who name our sin without letting it name us.

That we'd forsake our pride and receive a victory over sin and sorrow that only comes by faith in Jesus. That we'd participate in the hard work of sanctification, in prayer, in living in fellowship and community, in worship to untwist the lies of sin and to live in the light, not in the shadows.

And would you help us to be a people thus called and bound by the gospel, who don't live lives of isolation but live as new creations in Christ, pointing to the new creation to come.

[36 : 28] We pray this in the name of Jesus, the one who takes our sins and heals our sorrows. Amen.