**By Faith Alone:**Week Forty-eight: Day One

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.
Luther speaks about prayer today.  He begins with: “Never stop praying.  Whatever happens, give thanks, because it is God’s will in Christ Jesus that you do this” (1 Thessalonians 5:17-18).  He then writes:
“It’s good to let prayer be the first thing you do in the morning and the last thing you do at night.  Be on guard against false, deceitful thoughts that say, ‘Wait awhile, you can pray in an hour.  First, you must finish this or that.’  For with such thoughts, you turn away from prayer towards the business at hand, which surrounds you and holds you back so that you never get around to praying that day.
Of course, some tasks are as good as or better than prayer, especially during an emergency.  Nevertheless, we should pray continually.  Christ says to keep on asking, searching, and knocking (Luke 11:9-11).  And Paul says that we should never stop praying (1 Thessalonians 5:17).  Likewise, we should continually guard against sin and wrongdoing, which can’t happen if we don’t fear God and keep his commandments in mind at all times.  In Psalm 1 we read, ‘Blessed is the person who . . . reflects on his teachings day and night’ (Psalm 1:1-2).
We shouldn’t neglect the habi8t of true prayer and get caught up in necessary work – which usually isn’t all that necessary anyway.  We can end up becoming lazy about prayer cold towards it, and tired of it, but the devil doesn’t get lazy around us.”

**By Faith Alone:**Week Forty-eight: Day Two

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.
Luther begins with this: “The Lord was very angry with your ancestors.  Tell the people, “This is what the Lord of Armies says: Return to me, declares the Lord of Armies, and I will return to you” (Zechariah 3:2-3).  He then writes:
“In this passage, we see that Zechariah’s message was primarily concerned with belief and unbelief.  He pointed out that the greatest sin of the Israelites’ ancestors was not trusting in God when they wer4 undergoing trials.  Rather, they looked to other people for help.  In this way, they were rebellious and idolatrous.  Zechariah wanted the people of Israel to understand that the words ‘return to me’ should penetrate their hearts deeply.
A person ‘returns to God’ when he trusts in and finds comfort in God at all times, especially in times of need.  On the other hand, a person has turned away from God when he doesn’t trust in God.  When someone doesn’t trust God, his good works and sacrifices won’t be able to help him.  This is what happened to Israel’s ancestors.
In Zechariah’s time, when the Israelites were trying to rebuild the temple, they needed to turn to the Lord of Armies because of all the trials and troubles they were facing.  They had to cling to God and depend on him even if rebuilding the temple angered the emperor of Persia or the neighboring people.  God spoke.  He wanted to help, could help, and would help them so that Israel’s enemies wouldn’t overpower them again.
We, too, need to hear these warnings in the book of Zechariah.  Let everyone return to Christ, cling to him, and not fall away.  Let no one become scared or be led astray.  God speaks.  And God will do what he says.”

**By Faith Alone:**Week Forty-eight: Day Three

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.
Today Luther shares some words about sins that lead to death.  He begins with this: “But if a person has doubts and still eats, he is condemned because he didn’t act in faith.  Anything that is not done in faith is sin” (Romans 14:23).  He then writes:
“After coming to faith, no one should think that sin can be taken lightly.  Sin is truly sin whether it was committed before or after one comes to know Christ.  God always hates sin.  Every sin is a mortal sin – a sin that leads to death – as far as the act itself is concerned.  But it’s not a mortal sin for the believer.  Christ the Reconciler atoned for sin by his death.  For the unbeliever, not only are all his sins mortal ones but even his good works are sins.  As Paul says in Romans, ‘Anything that is not done in faith is sin’ (Romans 14:23).
The philosophers make a fatal error when they classify sins according to the acts themselves rather than according to the person who commits the sin.  A believer has the same sin and just as great a sin as an unbeliever.  But the sin of the believer is forgiven and not credited to him.  The sin of the unbeliever, however, is retained and counted against him.  For the believer, the sinful act is a sin that can be easily forgiven.  For the unbeliever, it’s a mortal sin that leads to death.  This is not because of the difference in the sin itself as if the believer’s sin is less and the unbeliever’s sin si greater.  It is because of the difference in the person who committed it.
By faith, believers see that their sins are forgiven for the sake of Christ.  Christ offered himself for their sin.  So they remain righteous in spite of their sin, although they have sin and continue to sin.  But unbelievers remain unrighteous.  Although believers aren’t free from sin, they know that their sin isn’t credited to them because of their faith in Christ.  This is the wisdom and comfort of true believers.”

**By Faith Alone:**Week Forty-eight: Day Four

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.
Today Luther talks about the difficulty of living in the promises of God.  Because we are weak and sinful people, we struggle to remain focused on Him and His goodness to us both in bad and good times.  Luther begins with this from Zechariah: “The Messenger said . . . ‘Remove Joshua’s filthy clothes.’  Then he said to Joshua, ‘See, I have taken your sin away from you, and I will dress you in fine clothes’” (Zechariah 14:23).
Luther writes: “Joshua, the chief priest at this time, was selected by God to lead the people.  In these verses and the ones that follow, God linked his promises to Joshua’s obedience.  By doing this, God guarded against Joshua becoming too proud as a result of his receiving visions, comfort, and promises earlier.  Rather than assuming that God was bound by his promises and had to fulfill them, Joshua needed to remain humble and continue to live in the fear of God.
We who live on this earth are such poor people.  We become easily discouraged and fainthearted when God punishes us and sends us problems.  Then, God has plenty of work to do to comfort and lift us up again.  After he comforts us and allows us to experience good times, we become proud and overconfident.  Then, he has to threaten and frighten us.  So, we area too weak and fragile to endure what God all9ows to happen to us – whether good or bad.  No matter what he does for us, he ends up having more work to do.  We can’t hold up under the bad times, and we can’t hold on during the good times.”
May God guard us from such folly.  May He help us keep our eyes focused on Jesus who is the author and perfecter of our faith – in the good times and the bad.

**By Faith Alone:**Week Forty-eight: Day Five

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.
That we have been chosen by God and not the other way around is the theme today of Luther’s devotion.  That we have been chosen by God to be His people – to be His child – is great news.  By His own declaration, we are a precious treasure in His sight.
Luther talks about this in the context of his time when those who chose the monastic life too often chose their own path – that chose to honor God so that God would then choose to be merciful to them as a result of their choice.  He writes:
“A fierce battle has been raging in this world since the very beginning.  Cain wanted to choose God on his own terms.  He wanted God to value his work and his offering instead of his brother’s.  The world has followed Cain’s example from that day until now.  The world always wants to turn this verse in John (John 15:16) around and say, ‘I don’t want to be chosen by God, I want to chose him first.’  But God cannot and will not tolerate this.  He turns their words back around and says, ‘You cannot and should not choose me.  I must choose you.  It won’t happen the way you imagine, but the way I want it to.  I want to be your Lord and Master.  I don’t want to be mastered by you.’  That’s why throughout Scripture God condemns and throws away this type of choosing that goes against what he commands.
Even Paul condemns this vice.  He says, ‘Let no one who delights in [false] humility . . . tell you that you don’t deserve a prize’ (Colossians 2:18).  Likewise, he says, ‘These things look like wisdom with their self-imposed worship, [false] humility, and harsh treatment of the body.  But they have no value’ (Colossians 2:23).  With these words, he describes those who practice useless, self-chosen worship and justify it by saying, ‘I mean well and am doing it for God and to honor him.  It will please him, and so he will be merciful to me.’  These people are twice as bad as God’s enemies. God called the Israelites out of Egypt and gave them the Ten Commandments, telling them what they should and shouldn’t do so that they wouldn’t invent ways to serve him.  In the same way, God wants to tell us what it means to serve him.”