By Faith Alone: Week Fifty-one: Day One

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.
There are lessons to be learned from Scripture. One of those lessons is that not all gifts are free. That’s what Luther writes about today. He looks at the interaction between Abraham and Ephron. He goes on to describe the lessons to be learned.
He begins with Genesis 23:13 – “[Abraham] spoke to Ephron so that the people of that region could hear him. He said, ‘. . . I will pay you the price of the field. Take it from me so that I can bury my wife there.’” He goes on to write:
“Ephron, a landowner in Hebron, tried to talk Abraham into accepting a piece of land as a gift, free of charge. Ephron was saying, ‘Something this trivial shouldn’t come between us. You are a prince of God, and I am rich. Even if you paid me ten pounds of silver for the land, that money wouldn’t matter to me.’ This was a great show of respect for Abraham, a prophet and teacher. But Abraham used good sense and refused the offer. He preferred to own the land and purchase it at a fair price.
Abraham could have said, ‘I know that you are generous, devout, and kind. Yet I’ve know people in other places who taught me a hard lesson about how unpredictable people can be. So I’ve learned to be cautious. In Egypt and Gerar, the people treated me with respect and dignity at first, but in the end, they threw me out. I helped the people of Sodom, but all they showed me was ingratitude and abuse. If I accept this field as a gift, then your descendents may forget your unselfish gift to me after you’re gone. They may decide to take back the land by force, exhume Sarah’s body, and take it away. We are foreigners in a strange country. To prevent something like that from happening, I prefer to purchase this piece of land. Then, your descendants will have no right to demand that the property be returned.’
Even in purely secular matters, godly people should treat others with respect. As God’s people live in the world, they should conduct their business carefully. Like Abraham, they should use common sense, be courteous, and show respect in their dealings with each other and with everyone else.”

By Faith Alone: Week Fifty-one: Day Two

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.
Today Luther talks about a lack of trust that shows itself in anxiety and worry. He begins with this from Matthew 6:25 – “So I tell you to stop worrying about what you will eat, drink, or wear. Isn’t life more than food and the body more than clothes?” He goes on to write:
“We can’t seem to let go of our anxieties and worries as long as we live. Yet, God gives us everything we need hour by hour, without needing any assistance form us. So why do we keep on having foolish fears and anxieties about trivial little needs, as though God can’t or won’t supply us with food and shelter? We should hang our heads in shame when people point out this foolishness to us. Yet, foolish is the only way to describe those rich, well-fed people who are always worried about having a full pantry. They have plenty of food on hand to serve nourishing meals, but they never share a meal with anyone or invite dinner guests. They have empty beds but never ask anyone to spend the night.
Accordingly, Christ is plainly telling us what foolish people we are. It should be enough to make us want to spit on ourselves in utter disgust. Still, we continue to grope along in our blindness, even though it’s obvious that we’re incapable of providing for our basic needs without God. This alone should be enough to make us Christians and to keep this thought in mind: ‘Undoubtedly, I never held in my own hands even one fleeting moment of my life. If I must trust God for my very life and limb, why should I worry about how I’m going to find nourishment from day to day?’ Not trusting God for your daily needs is like having a wealthy father who is willing to lavish thousands of dollars on you, yet not being able to trust him for money in an emergency.”

By Faith Alone: Week Fifty-one: Day Three

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.
Today Luther talks about suffering for doing good. He writes about what will eventually happen to those
who persecute you unjustly – who remain unbelievers (and it would seem that Luther considers those who inflict unjust suffering upon Christians who are doing good to be unbelievers – I don’t think the distinction is that clear).
I would prefer to focus on those who suffer for doing good. How are we to respond? Luther quotes 1 Peter 3:13-14 which says: “Who will harm you if you are devoted to doing what is good? But even if you suffer for doing what God approves, you are blessed. Don’t be afraid of those who want to harm you.”
You are blessed because of the relationship that you have with God. He has called you to be His child – part of His family. That relationship can’t be destroyed by men. So even if you suffer at the hands of men, you are blessed because you are still a child of God. It’s not a time of joy, it’s not comfortable, but it can’t rob you of the life that Jesus died to give.
By bearing up under unjust suffering, you become a witness to that hope. You become a living testimony to that hope – a testimony to those who hunger for that hope. Bearing up under unjust suffering, that opens a door to be asked to give a defense for the hope who lives in you. Then you can share Christ with those who hunger for the life He freely gives to all who will believe.

By Faith Alone: Week Fifty-one: Day Four

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.
Today Luther talks about calling on the Lord. He begins with this from Psalm 118:5 – “During times of trouble I called on the Lord. The Lord answered me and set me free from all of them.” He goes on to write:
“You must learn to call on the Lord. Don’t sit all alone or lie on the couch, shaking your head and letting your thoughts torture you. Don’t worry about how to get out of your situation or brood about your terrible life, how miserable you feel and what a bad person you are. Instead, say, ‘Get a grip on yourself, you lazy bum! Fall on your knees and raise your hands and eyes toward heaven. Read a psalm. Say the Lord’s Prayer, and tearfully tell God what you need.’ This passage teaches us to call on him. Similarly, David said, ‘I our out my complaints in his presence and tell him my troubles’ (Psalm 142:2). God wants you to tell him your troubles. He doesn’t want you to keep them to yourself. He doesn’t want you to struggle with them all alone and torture yourself. Doing this will only multiply our troubles.
God knows you will be too weak to overcome your troubles by yourself. He wants you to grow strong in him. Then, he will be the one who receives the glory. Out of difficult experiences emerge true Christians. Without troubles, people talk a lot about faith and the Spirit but they don’t really know what these things are or what they’re saying.
You must never doubt that God knows your troubles and hears your prayers. You must not pray haphazardly or pray as if you’re shouting into the wind. This mocks prayer and tests God. In this case, it would be better not to pray at all. You must learn to appreciate the part of the passage that says, ‘The Lord answered me and set me free from all of them.’ The psalmist acknowledged that the Lord heard him and released him from is troubles.”

By Faith Alone: Week Fifty-one: Day Five
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Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.
Today Luther writes about the struggles that we have between dependence and independence – between trust and control. Sin is always at work to tempt us to cut ties with God – to take control. And that is a dead end. Luther begins with this: “Jesus responded to them, ‘What I teach doesn’t come from me but from the one who sent me’ (John 7:16).”
He goes on to write: “Christ answered his adversaries carefully. He showed that he understood them and realized they were accusing and slandering him. They thought that his teaching came from the devil. So Jesus answered them, ‘What I teach doesn’t come from me but from the one who sent me.’ Does that make sense? If Jesus’ words were not his own, why did he preach, promote, and embrace them so strongly? Why did he refuse to accept the honor of his own words? Why didn’t he say, ‘This is my teaching’?
Christians often say, ‘This is my sermon, my baptism, my Christ, my God.’ Or we might say, ‘my gospel.’