By Faith Alone: Week Fifty: Day One
Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.
Today Luther talks about the genuine Gospel. He defines what that Gospel is (as revealed in Scripture) and writes of the necessity of preaching that Gospel so that people will hear and believe that Jesus is their Savior. He begins with this: “God has given us a new birth because of his great mercy. We have been born into a new life that has a confidence which is alive because Jesus Christ has come back to life” (1 Peter 1:3). He goes on to write:
“The book of 1 Peter is a wonderful letter and a model for us. Peter begins by explaining who Christ is and what we have received through him. He says that God has given us a new birth to a living hope through Christ’s resurrection. Likewise, the Father out of pure mercy has given us everything, apart from our merit. These are genuinely evangelical words that must be preached.
May God help us. How little of this message do we find in other books. Even among the best, such as those written by Jerome and Augustine, we find hardly anything. Therefore, we must preach about Jesus Christ, that he died and rose from the dead and why he died and was resurrected. We must preach so that the people will believe in him and through faith be saved.
This is what it means to preach the true gospel. Any preaching that is different than this is not the gospel, no matter who preaches it.”

By Faith Alone: Week Fifty: Day Two

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.
Luther talks about a broken and sorrowful heart. A hardened heart would be the opposite. A broken heart is ready to receive a word of mercy. A hardened heart feels no need for mercy Luther begins with this: “The sacrifice pleasing to God is a broken spirit. O God, you do not despise a broken and sorrowful heart” (Psalm 51:17). Luther writes:
“David talks about ‘a broken and sorrowful heart.’ In other words, this is a sincerely humble heart that is almost dying out of despair. David is saying that God doesn’t hate a broken and sorrowful heart, but rather accepts it with joy. The message we proclaim brings life and God’s approval to us because it strengthens us and fights against sin and death. In fact, the gospel demonstrates its power when we are sinful and weak. It’s a message of joy that can only be experienced when sorrow and distress are present.
But we want to have the message of life and joy without any sorrow or death. What fine theologians we think we are! We must learn that as Christians we have to live with death all around us, with regret and a trembling conscience – between the teeth of the devil and hell. In spite of all this, we must hang on to the message of God’s kindness. Then in all circumstances, we can say, ‘Lord, you want only the best for me.’
In this psalm, we read that God finds no sacrifice more pleasing than a broken heart. The tax collector exemplified this attitude when he said, ‘God, be merciful to me, a sinner!’ (Luke 18:13). The tax collector offered the Lord the most desirable sacrifice, a sorrowful heart that trusts in God’s mercy. This is a comforting way to think about God. God’s true nature is to love people who are troubled, have mercy on those who are broken-hearted, forgive those who have fallen, and refresh those who are exhausted. This psalm calls us to trust in God’s mercy and goodness alone. It encourages us to believe that God is on our side even when we feel abandoned and distressed.”

By Faith Alone: Week Fifty: Day Three

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.
Luther talks about vocation – about our station in life. He makes the point that no occupation or vocation is more blessed than another. You don’t have to give up one vocation for another in order to be saved. He quotes from 1 Corinthians 7:17 where Paul writes: “Everyone should live the life that the Lord gave him when God called him. This is the guideline I use in every church.”
Luther goes on to say, “Christians have freedom. Faith and the Christian life aren’t restricted to any
particular station or position in life. But they are above, in, and throughout all positions in life. Therefore, it’s not necessary for you to accept or give up any position in life to receive salvation. Stay in whatever place the gospel finds you. You can remain there and be saved. It’s not necessary for you to give up your marriage and run from your non-Christian spouse for the sake of faith or salvation. If you are married, whether it be to a Christian or non-Christian, whether with a good or evil person, you are neither saved nor condemned because of that. If you are unmarried, you also are not saved or condemned because of being single. It is all free – free!
As a result, if you are a Christian and remain one, you will be saved, and if you remain a non-Christian, you will be condemned. ‘This is the guideline I use in every church’ means ‘among all Christians to whom I preach. For I do not teach them to leave their position in life and stri up unrest, but to remain where they are and live in peace.’ So you see that Paul doesn’t call any position in life a blessed one except this one: being a Christian. The others he frees up so that in and of themselves they neither save nor condemn us. But all positions in life – no matter how well kept – can be blessed through faith or cursed through lack of faith.”

By Faith Alone: Week Fifty: Day Four

Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.
Luther speaks about the foolishness of God. What seems to be foolishness to us, is wiser than the wisdom of men. We don’t gain salvation through a reasonable and logical process of thought and exploration. We don’t gain salvation by making God’s revelation conform to human standards of what is reasonable – of what makes sense.
Luther begins with John 6:43-44: “Jesus responded, ‘Stop criticizing me! People cannot come to me unless the Father who sent me brings them to me. I will bring these people back to life on the last day.’” He goes on to write: “When Jesus said, ‘Stop criticizing me,’ he wanted to curb human wisdom or reason. We should also clip the wings of human reason when it comes to Christian doctrine. God’s Word isn’t the kind of teaching you can grasp with reason. It doesn’t reach the human heart that way. The more educated and the more sharpened a person’s reasoning ability, the less he understands. Christian teaching doesn’t appeal to reason. That’s why our reason complains about it. I don’t want to place my hands and set my feet on someone outside of myself, someone who was so silly and foolish as to let himself be crucified. How am I supposed to believe that Jesus is my Savior? Reason cannot grasp this. We must take every thought captive so that it’s obedient to Christ (2 Corinthians 10:5).
Jesus is saying, ‘Stop complaining that I claim to be the bread of heaven. You want to understand this on your own. You want to be smarter than I am when you ask, “Don’t we know his mother and father?” But when I tell you how the Father has drawn you to me, it can’t be understood by your reason. When you hear about how the Father draws you, reason draws you in a different direction. Whoever wants to understand these words must close his eyes, shut the gates of reason, and let himself become like a blind person.’ This is what God wants. Whoever refuses to be led by God, but wants instead to be led by reason, will be irritated by the message of Jesus and will continually complain about it.”

By Faith Alone: Week Forty-nine: Day Five

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.
Luther talks about prayer again today and the whispers that the devil uses to convince that we don’t need to pray because God already knows what we need. There is more at work than in the process of praying than an exchange of requests and answers.
Luther begins with this from Matthew 6:8 – “Your Father knows what you need before you ask him.” He goes on to write: “You might wonder, ‘Why does God insist that we pray to him and tell him our problems? Why doesn’t he take care of us without our having to ask? He already knows what we need better than we do.’ God continually showers his gifts on the whole world every day. He gives people sunshine, rain, good harvests, money, healthy bodies, and so on. But no one asks God for these gifts or thanks him for them. If God already knows that we can’t live without light or food for any length of time, then why does he want us to
ask for these necessities?
Obviously, he doesn’t command us to pray in order to inform him about our needs. God gives us his gifts freely and abundantly. He wants us to recognize that he is willing and able to give us even more. When we pray, we’re not telling God anything he doesn’t already know. Rather, we are the ones gaining knowledge and insight. Asking God to supply our needs keeps us from becoming like the unbelieving skeptics, who don’t acknowledge God and don’t thank him for his many gifts.
All of this teaches us to acknowledge God’s generosity even more. Because we continue to search for him and keep on knocking at his door, he showers us with more and more blessings. Everything we have is a gift from God. When we pray, we should express our gratitude by saying, ‘Lord, I know that I can’t create a single slice of my daily bread. You are the only one who can supply all of my needs. I have no way to protect myself from disasters. You know what I need ahead of time, so I’m convinced that you will take care of me.’”
Even as God hears and answers our prayers, we are being changed. We become more aware of our total dependence upon God and His blessings. As a result, we become more thankful. We see more clearly and concretely His hand at work for our good.