**By Faith Alone:** Week Sixty-three: Day One

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

We all have a calling. Pastors, teachers, youth directors, missionaries and the like certainly have callings from God. But so does the factory worker, the corporate executive, the mother at home, those who are retired and those who are in school also have a vocation.

Luther begins his talk about vocation with this from 1 Corinthians 7:24 – “Brothers and sisters, you should remain in whatever circumstances you were in when God called you. God is with you in those circumstances.”

He goes on to write: “We all have a calling in life. We serve God when we wholeheartedly take care of these responsibilities. An official who governs well serves God. A mother who cares for her children, a father who goes to work, and a student who studies diligently are all servants of God.

Many overlook this God-pleasing lifestyle because they consider simple, day-to-day work insignificant. They look instead for other work that seems more difficult and end up becoming disobedient to God.

Doing what God requires is a sign of superior wisdom. God requires that you work hard at your calling without worrying about what anyone else is doing. Yet few people do this. A poet who reflected on what people are like once said, ‘The farmer would like to be a shopkeeper, and the shopkeeper a farmer.’ As the saying does, ‘The grass is always greener on the other side of the fence.’

Few people are satisfied with their lives. The person in the pew wants to be a member of the clergy. The student wishes he were the teacher. The citizen thinks he should be mayor. Few people are content with their calling. However, there is no other way to serve God except simply living by faith, sticking to your calling, and maintaining a clear conscience.”

**By Faith Alone:** Week Sixty-three: Day Two

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

Today is another lesson in prayer. Luther begins with this from Matthew 6:7 – “When you pray, don’t ramble like heathens who think they’ll be heard if they talk a lot.” He then goes on to write:

“Believers don’t view prayer as hard work, but as a responsibility that’s easy to fulfill. They pray in faith because they know God has promised to hear them. They pray from the heart, revealing their agony and needs. They pray with groans and sight, as Paul says, ‘The Spirit intercedes along with our groans that cannot be expressed in words’ (Romans 8:26). The Spirit knows that God is listening to him and that excessive rambling isn’t necessary.

Elijah, Elisha, David, and others in the Old Testament used few words when they prayed and came straight to the point. The fathers in the early church said it well, ‘Nothing will be accomplished by long-winded prayers.’ In fact, the church fathers recommended short, whispered expressions of sorrow and prayers consisting of only a word or two. This kind of praying can be done anytime, even when reading, writing, or doing other tasks.

However, people who think of prayer as bothersome, difficult work will never find any joy or satisfaction in their prayer life. Their only source of pleasure will be their continual rambling. If you try to pray, but you have no faith and you feel no sense of need, your heart won’t be in it. And if your heart isn’t in your prayers, but you still feel obligated to pray, then prayer becomes boring and difficult. This becomes obvious when you look at physical work. If a job is done reluctantly, it will be boring and annoying. But if a person’s heart is in his work, he isn’t even aware of the difficulty of his task. So, whoever has an inner joy when he prays isn’t aware of the hard work and trouble involved. God doesn’t want long, drawn-out prayers. Instead, he wants sincere prayers that flow out of a faithful heart.”

**By Faith Alone:** Week Sixty-three: Day Three

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

Luther talks about poverty. In his context, poverty was something that one aspired to in order to grow closer to God – in order to gain His favor – to gain heaven. But God calls us to a different kind of poverty. Luther begins with this from James 2:5 – “Listen, my dear brothers and sisters! Didn’t God choose poor people in the world to become rich in faith and to receive the kingdom that he promised to those who love him!”

He goes on to write: “You may wonder, ‘What? Do all Christians have to live in complete poverty and not own anything? Do we have to get rid of all of our honor, prestige, and power? What are prosperous people, such as business owners and government officials, supposed to do? Should they sell all their possessions and give up their authority in order to buy heaven from the poor?’ The answer is no. Scripture doesn’t say that you can buy heaven from the poor. But it does say that you should be counted among the poor and also be spiritually poor. Jesus said, ‘Blessed are those who recognize they are spiritually helpless’ (Matthew 5:3).

The little word spiritually shows that self-imposed poverty won’t bring God’s blessing. It’s not intrinsically evil to have money, own possessions and land, or employ workers. These are all gifts from God, and the way God has ordered our society. No one is blessed simply because he is a beggar and owns nothing. Jesus was talking about being spiritually poor, or spiritually helpless.

The world can’t keep on going without money, respect for authority, land ownership and servants. A lord or prince can’t be poor and fulfill his responsibilities in life. In order to carry out his official duties, he must have the necessary resources. So the idea that we must live in poverty is incorrect. The world couldn’t keep going if we were all beggars and owned nothing. We couldn’t support our families and servants if we didn’t have any money. To sum up, being financially poor isn’t the answer. So, be satisfied with whatever God gives you, whether it’s poverty or prosperity. But be sure of this: Each and every one of us must become spiritually poor in the sight of God.”

**By Faith Alone:** Week Sixty-three: Day Four

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

Today Luther writes about hope – a hope that is certain and sure. He begins with this from John16:33 – “I’ve told you this so that my peace will be with you. In the world you’ll have trouble. But cheer up! I have overcome the world.”

He goes on to write: “We should learn to remind ourselves of Christ’s victory. In Christ, we already have everything that we need. We only live to spread this message of victory to other people. With our word and example, we tell them about the victory that Christ secured for us and gave to us. Christ, our victor, accomplished everything. We don’t need to add anything to it. We don’t need to wipe away our own sins, or try to conquer death and the devil. Everything has already been done for us. We’re not fighting the real battle. We’re only suffering now in order to share in Christ’s victory. All of our suffering combined, even all the suffering and blood of the martyrs and saints, wouldn’t give us the victory. It’s not accomplished by what we do. Some people claim that we ought to be able to conquer sin, death, and hell on our own. By saying this, they insult Christ. But our struggles and fighting come way too late. The battle must be won beforehand if we are to have any comfort and peace. Christ says, ‘I have already won. Accept my victory. Sing about and glorify it. Take comfort in it.’

We know from the past, when believers were severely tested, the Holy Spirit reminded them of Christ’s victory and strengthened them so that they could endure everything. They could even face martyrdom, relying on Christ’s victory. May God help us also to hold on to Christ’s victory during our troubles and when we’re dying. Even though we don’t understand these words of Christ completely, we can still believe in them in times of trouble and reassure ourselves: ‘My Lord and Savior spoke these words to my heart. In Christ I have a victor over the world, death, and the devil. It doesn’t matter how small and weak I am. Amen.”

**By Faith Alone:** Week Sixty-three: Day Five

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

Today Luther talks about the struggle that it is at times to give thanks to God and praise Him for all of His good gifts. We know that He provides for our every need, but we don’t always acknowledge that (publicly or privately). Luther begins with this from Psalm 51:15 – “O Lord, open my lips, and my mouth will tell about your praise.”

He writes: “By asking the Lord to open his lips, David showed how difficult it is to offer thanks to God. This is something God demands of us (Psalm504). Talking about the Lord and thanking him publicly require an extreme amount of courage and strength because the devil is constantly trying to stop people from doing this. If we could see all of Satan’s traps, we would know why David prayed for the Spirit’s strength and asked the Lord himself to pen David’s lips. He wanted to tell the devil, the world, kings, princes, and everyone about the Lord.

Many things can keep our lips shut: the fear of danger, the hope of gaining something, or even the advice of friends. The devil uses these ways to stop us from offering thanks to God, as I have often experienced in my life. And yet, at important times, when God’s honor was threatened, God stood by me and opened my mouth in spite of the obstacles. The Spirit urges us on, just as Peter says, ‘We cannot stop talking about what we’ve seen and heard’ (Acts 40). The Spirit prays to God for us with many groans (Romans 8:26). Then, the Lord opens our lips to announce his praise.

Whenever Scripture talks about praising God publicly, it’s talking about something extremely dangerous. This is because announcing his praise is nothing other than opposing the devil, the world our own corrupt nature, and everything evil. For how can you praise God without first declaring that the world is guilty and condemned? Anyone who condemns the world is asking to be hated and puts himself in a very dangerous situation.”