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

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.
Luther shares some words today about boasting.  We often look down on the braggart – on the one who is always blowing their own horn.  Too often the conclusion is to not boast at all.  But Luther reminds us that God’s Word tells us there is a proper time for boasting.  Luther begins with this from Galatians 6:14 – “It’s unthinkable that I could ever brag about anything except the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ.  By his cross my relationship to the world and its relationship to me have been crucified.”
He goes on to write: “Paul is saying here, ‘I am foolish, a sinner, and weak.  I boast in my suffering.  I brag that I am without the law, without works, without the righteousness that comes from the law, and finally, without anything except Christ.  I want it to be this way.  I am happy that I am viewed as unwise, evil, and guilty of all crimes.’  As Paul says to the Corinthians, ‘So I will brag even more about my weaknesses in order that Christ’s power will live in me’ (2 Corinthians 12:9).  For the cross of Christ has condemned everything that the world calls good, including wisdom and righteousness.  As Scripture says, ‘I will destroy the wisdom of the wise.  I will reject the intelligence of intelligent people’ (1 Corinthians 1:19).  Christ says, ‘Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you, lie, and say all kinds of evil things about you because of me’ (Matthew 5:11).  So this not only means being crucified with Christ and sharing in his cross and suffering, but also bragging about it and going along joyfully with the apostles, who are considered worthy of suffering dishonor for speaking about Jesus (Acts 5:41).
But some seek honor, riches, and pleasure for the name of Jesus and flee contempt, poverty, and suffering.  Do they brag about the cross of Christ?  No, rather, they glory in the world while using the name of Christ for appearances.  They end up making a mockery of it.”

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

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.
Today Luther writes about the apparent foolishness of God’s plan of salvation.  Much of God’s revelation about His plan of salvation makes little sense from a human point of view – from a rational point of view.  At the center of that is the person of Christ – the mystery of God and man being joined together in the person of Jesus of Nazareth.  Luther begins with this from John 6:42 – “They asked, ‘Isn’t this man Jesus, Joseph’s son?  Don’t we know his father and mother?  How can he say now, “I came from heaven?”’”
He writes: “This passage shows how the Israelites complained about what Jesus taught.  They thought it was ridiculous, foolish, and offensive for him to claim that he came from heaven and could give eternal life.  After all, they knew his father, Joseph, and his mother, Mary.  They complained because they thought he was either telling an outrageous lie or he was a complete fool.  Why would he try to convince them that he had come down from heaven when his parents lived near Capernaum?
John writes this as a warning to everyone.  When it comes to God’s Word and how God deals with us, we shouldn’t worry whether or not it makes sense.  If you want to be a Christian and understand the teachings of the Christian faith, you shouldn’t judge the Christian doctrines with your mind to find out whether or not they sound correct.  Instead, you should immediately say, ‘I’m not asking how it all makes sense.  All I need to know is whether it is God’s Word or not.  If God said it, then that decides it.’  Often, I have warned you not to argue about lofty, spiritual matters or try to figure them out.  For as soon as you try to make sense of it and put it in terms you can understand, you slip and fall.
Origen and other church fathers had that experience.  They made the mistake of reaching too high.  They tried to combine reason and worldly righteousness with the doctrines of the Christian faith.  These teachings transcend our reason.”

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

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.
Today Luther writes about involvement in public matters.  That has always been a point of contention in the Church.  How involved, if at all, are we to be in the secular matters of the world?  Luther begins with this from Genesis 21:27-31 – “Abraham took some sheep and cattle and gave them to Abimelech, and the two of them made an agreement. . . . that place is called Beersheba, because both of them  swore an oath there.”
Luther writes: “Abraham made a binding agreement with King Abimelech.  This incident shouldn’t be passed off as purely secular and superficial.  Instead, we should carefully note what Abraham did here because it can bring us comfort.  Some people think that Christians shouldn’t get involved in public matters.  But this story goes against that mistaken notion.  God didn’t establish the church to get rid of the family and government.  He wants the church to support them.  That’s why Abraham, the father of the promise and king of all earthly kings, doesn’t refuse to take an oath and enter into a binding secular agreement with this king.
No one should use Christianity as an excuse for not wanting to have a job or hold public office, as certain religious people do.  They’re only trying to avoid serving others.  But by avoiding this, they’re ignoring God’s command to love him and to love other people.  In the end, they will receive what they deserve for their hypocritical behavior.
We should carefully consider God’s laws and Abraham’s example.  Abraham didn’t concern himself only with religious matters.  He was a prophet of God, but he also dealt with matters relating to the government and his own household.  Se we need rulers in the world, as well as in the church.  The church doesn’t have the right to do away with the family structure or the government.  Rather, the church should affirm and support these institutions.”

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

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.
Today Luther talks about forgiveness – specifically in the context of the petition in the Lord’s Prayer that says, “Forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us.”  He begins with this from Matthew 6:14-15 – “If you forgive the failures of others, your heavenly Father will also forgive you.  But if you don’t forgive others, your Father will not forgive your failures.”
He goes on to write: “Some people wonder why Christ would attach such a condition to this part of the Lord’s Prayer: ‘If you forgive the failures of others, your heavenly Father will also forgive you.’  He didn’t attach similar conditions to other parts of the prayer.  He could’ve said, ‘Give us our daily bread today, as we give it to our children.’  Or, ‘Don’t allow us to be tempted, and we won’t tempt anyone else either.’  Or, ‘Rescue us from evil, just as we try to help others.’
None of the other parts of this prayer have a condition tacked on to it, except this one.  People are left with the impression that we earn forgiveness for our sins by forgiving others.  What does this mean for the doctrine that forgiveness of sins comes only through Christ and is received through faith?
Jesus phrases the prayer so that God’s forgiveness is linked to our own willingness to forgive others in order to make mutual love a Christian duty.  We should always forgive others.  After faith in Christ, loving and forgiving others should be our primary concern.  We shouldn’t cause other people pain.  Instead, we should remember to forgive others, even when they have caused us suffering, as we often experience in this life.  If we are unwilling to forgive, we can be certain that we won’t be forgiven ourselves.  If we are full of resentment and hostility, that prayer will be spoiled and all of the requests in that prayer will be rejected.  We must establish a strong and durable bond of love with other Christians that will keep us united.  When we come before God in prayer, we shouldn’t be divided into various splinter groups.  Instead, we should be guided by love, tolerate differences of opinion, and preserve unity.”

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

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.
Today Luther writes about God’s saving work accomplished in Christ.  He speaks about it on a personal level.  He begins with this from 1 Peter 1:13 – “Therefore, your minds must be clear and ready for action.  Place your confidence completely in what God’s kindness will bring you when Jesus Christ appears again.”
He writes: “The gospel tells us who Christ is.  Through it, we learn that he is our Savior.  He delivers us from sin and death, helps us out of all misfortune, reconciles us to the Father, makes us godly, and saves us apart from our own works.  Anyone who doesn’t acknowledge Christ in this way will fail.  For even if you already know that he is God’s Son, that he died, rose again, and sits at the right hand of the Father, you still haven’t known Christ in the right way.  This knowledge doesn’t help you.  You must also know and believe that he has done all of this for your sake – in order to help you.  Some have contemplated only Christ’s pain and suffering and mistakenly think he is now sitting in heaven with nothing to do, enjoying himself.  As a result, faith cannot come alive, and their hearts remain barren.
We should not think the Lord Christ belongs to himself alone.  We must preach that he also belongs to us.  Otherwise, why would it have been necessary for him to come to earth and shed his blood?  As Jesus said, ‘God sent his Son into the world, not to condemn the world, but to save the world’ (John 3:17).  So Jesus must have accomplished what the Father sent him to do.  God sent to earth not only Christ’s divine nature, but also his human nature.  As soon as he was baptized, he began what he had been sent to the world to accomplish.  God sent him to proclaim the truth and win us over so that all who believe in him would be saved.”