By Faith Alone: Week Fifty-five: Day One

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.
Today Luther talks about the hope that is ours in Christ and where that assurance comes from. The assurance that we have doesn’t come from us or our strength. It comes from God’s Word. It comes from the voice of God as He speaks to us through His Word of those promises that are certain and sure. The guarantee is the empty tomb.
Luther begins with this from 1 John 3:1-2 – “The Father has given us his love. He loves us so much that we are actually called God’s dear children. . . . What we will be isn’t completely clear yet.” He goes on to write:
“John wants to protect against faintheartedness by giving each of us this reassurance – god loves you. He repeats this and wants to deeply impress it on our hearts. He also reassures us that we are called God’s children because we are still in these bodies and we experience troubles from the world and from ourselves. We don’t yet feel like God’s children because we are still in these bodies. But we shouldn’t let that lead us astray because ‘what we will be isn’t completely clear yet.’
John tells us about the hidden Son of God. Previously, Christ revealed himself in the shadows, but he didn’t reveal himself completely. And God could not conceal himself any more than he does now. Nevertheless, God doesn’t withdraw himself form us. But the world, the corrupt nature, and the devil obscure our vision so that we don’t see God. The world in one layer, the corrupt nature the second, and the devil the third. We must break through all these layers with faith, which comes from the Word of God. This is how we are God’s children – not by physically seeing God, but by believing in God.
Faith in the Word promises great things to us about what we will become. Yet as long as we are in the world, our corrupt nature entices us and the devil seduces us. It isn’t yet clear to us what our future happiness will be, nor will it become clear. ‘No eye has seen, no ear has heard, and no mind has imagined the things that God has prepared for those who love him’ (1 Corinthians 2:9).”

By Faith Alone: Week Fifty-five: Day Two

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.
Today Luther talks about contentment – what it is and where it comes from. He makes what I am sure many would think too simple a distinction between those who are content and those who are not. He believes and so do I that true contentment comes only from God – from a restored relationship with God – from a fellowship established through the forgiveness of our sin. Those who don’t have that relationship are not whole. There is a piece missing – a big piece. That hole can only be filled by a restored relationship with God. No matter what you try to fill it with, you will never have enough. There will always be a need for more – a need that will never be satisfied by the things of this world.
Luther uses this from Ecclesiastes 3:26 as the basis for his conclusions about contentment. “God gives wisdom, knowledge, and joy to anyone who pleases him. But to the person who continues to sin, he gives the job of gathering and collecting [wealth].” The gathering and collecting is designed to turn them back to God – to see that there is nothing they can gather or accumulate out of this world that will satisfy the hole that they feel – that prevents them from being content.
For the believer, having been restored to God, they are content regardless of their wealth or lack of it. They are content because they have, by the forgiveness of their sin, been made pleasing to God. There is no hostility. There is no outstanding debt to pay. And their future is secure. They belong to Christ and nothing in all of creation can separate them from His love.

By Faith Alone: Week Fifty-five: Day Three

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.
Luther speaks today about a topic that was a burden that he carried in his early life. That topic is the judgment of God. And tied to that is the concern about how to remove that burden. Luther was taught that the burden of God’s judgment was removed by our works. And Luther tried. The harder he tried, the greater the
burden became. So what Luther writes today is the solution for that burden.
He begins with this from John 8:15 – “You judge the way humans do. I don’t judge anyone.” He goes on to writes:
“Christ doesn’t want to judge. He wants to help. So don’t picture Christ as a judge for whom you must do this or that to be reconciled. No, he is the Light of the world. He judges no one. Whoever follows him will no longer walk in darkness. Christ says, ‘If you feel your sin and admit it, and if you’re terrified by it, then hold tightly to me, follow me, and believe in me. Think of me as the Light. Then you won’t have to be afraid of being brought to court and being convicted. I have come to save the world. However, those who reject my help will bring judgment on themselves because they don’t want to be saved.’
Christ’s words are similar to what a physician would say to a patient. ‘I haven’t come to poison you. I want to help you. If you follow my advice, you won’t need to worry. If you refuse my advice and call me a scoundrel, if you hate me and reject my medicine, then you are willfully sentencing yourself to death. Then it’s your own fault. Certainly, I am not putting you to death. No, I’ll have to let you die because you despise and reject my medicine.’
We’re in the same situation. Christ will certainly keep his promise to us: ‘I don’t judge anyone. So don’t judge yourselves. You aren’t condemned in my eyes, for I am the Light that illumines the way to eternal life and salvation.’”

By Faith Alone: Week Fifty-five: Day Four

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.
The title for today’s devotion is a bit unusual. It is “Bad Examples Give Us Hope.” Luther writes about how the bad examples that we see in Scripture are met to reveal to us God’s mercy. He begins with this from Genesis 38:24 – “Judah was told, ‘Your daughter-in-law Tamar has been acting like a prostitute. What’s more, because of it she’s pregnant.’ Judah ordered, ‘Bring her out to be burned.’” She isn’t burned because Judah is the father. That God would work through such events to maintain His promise of salvation is a tremendous act of mercy and grace.
Luther writes: “God’s people often fall into sin. Their examples show us God’s endless kindness and mercy. He saves not only those people who were faithful and moral like Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, but also those who were immoral like Judah, Tamar, Reuben, Simeon, and Levi. Therefore, no one should be self-righteous about his own morality or wisdom. On the other hand, no one should give up because of his sins. Scripture praises the examples of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. At the same time, it describes the worst kinds of sinners. We see the virtues of the most godly people and the sins of the most wicked people – yet they all come from the same family.
This teaches us about repentance, faith, and forgiveness for sins. No one should brag about how good he is, but those who fallen into sin shouldn’t give up either. The Bible records the mistakes, weaknesses, and horrible sins of God’s people. This is meant to uplift and comfort those who are depressed because of their sins. Sinners need to be told, ‘Don’t give up. God wants you to trust him and believe in his promises. He can forgiven you, make you holy, and bless you just like he blessed Judah, Tamar, and other sinners.’ God doesn’t want us to depend on our own efforts or despair because of our sins. He wants us to trust entirely in his mercy and undeserved kindness.
We would have no hope if Peter hadn’t denied Christ, if the apostles hadn’t taken offense at Christ, and if Moses, Aaron, and David hadn’t fallen into sin. God wants to comfort sinners with these examples. It’s as if he were saying to each of us, ‘If you have sinned, turn around. The door of grace is open to you.’”

By Faith Alone: Week Fifty-five: Day Five

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.
Today Luther writes about God’s mercy made evident in Jesus’ sacrifice for us. He begins with this from Galatians 3:13 – “Christ paid the price to free us from the curse that God’s laws bring by becoming cursed instead of us. Scripture says, ‘Everyone who is hung on a tree is cursed.’” He goes on to write:
“The Gospel – the most loved and comforting doctrine of all – doesn’t focus on our works or the works of the law. Rather, it shows us the incomprehensible, inexpressible mercy and love of God towards us, who are unworthy and lost people. The merciful Father saw that we were oppressed by the curse of the law and held under it. On our own and through our own efforts, we could never have freed ourselves. He sent his only Son into the world. HE put all the sin of all the people on his Son and said, ‘You will be Peter, who denied me; Paul, who persecuted, blasphemed, and acted violently; David, who committed adultery, the sinner who ate the apple in paradise; the thief on the cross. In summary, you will be the one who committed all the sins of all the people. Make sure you pay for these sins and make atonement for them.’
At this point the law said, ‘I find Christ to be a sinner – the one who has taken the sins of all the people upon himself. I do not see sin on anyone else except him. Therefore, he must die on the cross.’ Then the law grabbed him and killed him.
Since this happened, the entire world has been cleansed and atoned of all sin and freed from death and all evil. If everyone in the whole world believed, God would only see purity and righteousness. This is because Christ would have taken away all sin and death. And even if there were any remnants of sin remaining, God wouldn’t see them because of the brightness of Christ, the Sun.”