

FAITH ALONE
The First Sunday in Lent
13 March Anno Domini 2011
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Grace, peace and mercy from God our Father and our Lord Jesus Christ, Amen.

Our text today is Genesis 3:15 please listen carefully to our text: ***“And I will put enmity between you and the woman and between your seed and her seed; and you shall pierce His heel and He shall crush your head”*** So far the text.

Dear Brothers and Sisters in the faith. People often make the mistake of thinking that the Solas (Sola Fide, Sola Gratia, and Sola Scriptura or by faith alone, by grace alone, and by Scripture alone) as only Lutheran – or at least some form of Reformed theology, if they come from a non-Lutheran background. The tendency is to connect these truths with the Reformation Era or with the sixteenth century and thereafter. However the fact is that these Reformation principals, which were championed by Martin Luther and his followers, are simply the faith exercised by those true believers in the Old Testament all the way back to Adam and Eve and every Christian since.

Viewed from the perspective of the Gospel principles, the entire Scriptures unfold the same fundamental truths that Luther once laid out in his theology. Today, I hope to focus on one of those truths and show you what God’s people have always believed, at least when they have been faithful. Although this sermon will begin with Genesis chapter 3, it will embrace all of Scripture. Today’s sermon is about the principle of (Sola Fide) faith alone, as illustrated by the Old Testament faith. Our “text” from Genesis is simply one example of that faith. So the sermon theme “Faith Alone, is expressed by the Old Testament and New Testament alike.

The passage from Genesis 3 illustrates this principle of faith alone. In it, God promises Adam and Eve the Gospel promise: the promise of a Savior from sin and death. We know that they understood this promise and believed it, even though they misidentified the Messiah, because Eve named her first Son Cain, meaning, ***“I have gotten a man, the Lord”***. God did not give them any proof of this promise, just the promise itself. It called for faith, and they believed. There was no statement about *“If you believe,”* just the promise. The promise was their comfort, their joy and their hope. And they believed.

It was the same with Noah. God told him to build the ark because He was going to cause a great flood. I don’t know how He communicated with Noah. I’m sure He has ways of making it’s clear that it’s from Him, and that He means business, but having no experience with direct conversation, except for my part in prayer, I cannot imagine what it was like for Noah. But Noah believed. He believed so strongly that he built the ark. A vehicle never built before. It was actually built by faith alone.

Noah may well have had more than we do. For he “heard”, whatever that process involved, but once God had spoken, Noah had to take God at His Word and trust Him to do what He said He was going to do. Remember, it never rained in the pre-flood world in the manner that it rains today. Noah was trusting God to do something totally unique in the absence of any evidence that such a thing could happen, let alone ever had. He had to walk by faith alone. Fortunately, he did.

Abraham was facing a similar dilemma. God spoke, and made promises, and Abraham had to walk by faith alone. The Bible tells us ***“Abraham believed God and it was reckoned to him as righteousness.”*** A man who had not fathered a child by his seventy-fifth year was asked to believe he would have a child, and a great nation of people would flow from him and his offspring. He was promised a piece of land he would never

personally own. He was told that through him all of the world would be blessed. Then God told him to leave home and family and just trust God to bless him and make him prosperous and the father of all nations. And Abraham believed. He believed so strongly that though, while he had been a childless man, his name meant “exalted father”, at the Word of God he accepted the new name which meant “the father of nations” by faith alone.

Moses by faith alone, returned to Egypt trusting God to lead a nation of slaves out from the most powerful nation on earth at that time. Joshua led the attack on Jericho by marching with the men of war around the city once a day for six days, and on the seventh day marching around it seven times, them blowing the horns, and then shouting. How absurd that must have sounded. That was what God promised would take down the walls of this well-fortified city. It sounds silly and highly unlikely to have any chance of working – but Joshua believed, and obeyed, and as the outcome, the walls of the city fell flat. It was by faith alone.

A shepherd boy became a great king – by faith alone. And prophets did wonderful things through faith, trusting God to do what He promised. Elijah battled the prophets of Baal and started a drought that lasted three years, by faith. Elisha cured leprosy, provided for the widow of Zarephath, and even raised a dead boy back to life through faith. The nation Israel waited, often unfaithful, but always with some who remained faithful, for God to accomplish the sending of the Savior. Under Zechariah, the people of Israel returned from their captivity in Babylon to rebuild Jerusalem by faith. All of these great things happened by faith alone. The people who participated in them had to take God at His Word, and trust in Him to do what He had promised.

Even the birth narratives of the New Testament are examples of the Old Testament faith. When Zachariah faced Gabriel, it was before Christ was born. There was no New Testament faith to be had. His Old Testament faith taught him to walk by faith alone, and when he spoke the prophetic words of the Benedictus, *And his father Zacharias was filled with the Holy Ghost, and prophesied, saying, Blessed be the Lord God of Israel; for he hath visited and redeemed his people, And hath raised up an horn of salvation for us in the house of his servant David; As he spake by the mouth of his holy prophets, which have been since the world began: That we should be saved from our enemies, and from the hand of all that hate us; To perform the mercy promised to our fathers, and to remember his holy covenant; The oath which he sware to our father Abraham, That he would grant unto us, that we being delivered out of the hand of our enemies might serve him without fear, In holiness and righteousness before him, all the days of our life. And thou, child, shalt be called the prophet of the Highest: for thou shalt go before the face of the Lord to prepare his ways; To give knowledge of salvation unto his people by the remission of their sins, Through the tender mercy of our God; whereby the dayspring from on high hath visited us, To give light to them that sit in darkness and in the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the way of peace* (Luke 1:67-79). And following the birth of John, he could only speak those words by faith alone.

Even Mary believed the ancient promises of a Messiah when she humbly accepted the visitation of the Lord as spoken by Gabriel to her. It was the Old Testament faith, grounded firmly in faith alone, and not in human behavior or particularly auspicious conditions surrounding her, that would cause her to believe what the angel spoke – and to face the obvious risks in the culture in which she lived and in her own personal situation. She did it by faith alone.

God has always dealt with His people in the light of faith. Adam and Eve had a problem taking God at His Word and trusting Him. Their sin was fundamentally unbelief, the lack of faith. From that moment on, God has dealt with His people with promises and has looked for faith, and counted faith – and not personal conduct primarily – for righteousness. The circumstance changed repeatedly throughout history, but the fundamental truth of Faith Alone has remained unaltered.

It was unaltered, but largely forgotten by the time Luther came along. He brought back into the light the

principle of salvation by faith alone. Your sins are forgiven through faith, when you hear of Christ's death and resurrection on your behalf, and believe it to be so. Faith causes you to trust God and know what was done was done for you personally, and then you actually expect God to do all that He has promised to do. That's faith! We stand with the same equipment that the men and women of God have possessed throughout history – God's Word and His promise, and faith which trusts in the Word of God.

Typically, the first Sunday in Lent carries the theme, "Quadragesima 40 days". Forty days in the wilderness Jesus was tempted, 40 years Israel wandered in the wilderness, forty days we shall observe Lent. Our theme is the same today; the faith of the Old Testament people to get through the 40 years was in that promise of God by faith alone. They looked for the Savior for somewhere near four thousand years, learning more about what God was going to do with each prophecy. They wandered and wondered for nearly 4 thousand years. We look back two thousand years to see what God did and to hear His clear promise of forgiveness of sins, life and salvation through Jesus Christ – all of which we take hold of by faith alone or not at all.

Although our time and place in history are different, and unique in its own ways, it's still the same as the Old Testament faith, grounded in what we now call a Gospel promise, Faith Alone now saves you. For by faith alone you know that Jesus Christ is your Lord and Savior and all your sins are forgiven a price paid in full by His blood. That you can count on! By faith alone, in Jesus Name, Amen and amen!

The Peace of God which passes all understanding keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus, AMEN.