

“The Just Shall Live By Faith.”

Text:

1) Habakkuk 2:4

Suggested Hymns:

2) Romans 1:16–17

330, 195, 332, 282, 321

3) Galatians 3:11

4) Hebrews 10:38

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with you all. Amen.

We have four texts for our sermon today. Habakkuk 2:4, ⁴ *“Behold the proud, His soul is not upright in him; But the just shall live by his faith.”*

Romans 1:16–17, ¹⁶ *For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes, for the Jew first and also for the Greek. ¹⁷ For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith; as it is written, “The just shall live by faith.””*

Galatians 3:11, ¹¹ *But that no one is justified by the law in the sight of God is evident, for “the just shall live by faith.””*

And Hebrews 10:38, ³⁸ *Now the just shall live by faith; But if anyone draws back, My soul has no pleasure in him.”* (NKJV)

Lord God, heavenly Father, sanctify us through Your truth. Your Word is truth. Amen.

Dear friends in Christ,

In preparation for a God-pleasing observance of the Reformation Festival we have given ourselves to an intensive study of God’s Word. Following the injunction of Paul in his letter to Timothy: All things are to be *“sanctified by the Word of God and prayer,”*¹ let us consider one of the three fundamental doctrines on which the work of the great Reformer, Dr. Martin Luther, was based.

It is also important to recall the three fundamental doctrines. The first is that the only source of saving knowledge are the Scriptures. Secondly, that the only requirement for salvation is faith in Jesus Christ, and thirdly, that the only reason for our salvation is God’s grace in Christ. These are the three sola’s - Scripture alone, faith alone, grace alone.

In preparation, then, for our Reformation Festival Communion today we have likewise chosen one of these fundamental doctrines for meditation, in fact the chief of the three, the doctrine that we are saved by faith alone without the deeds of the Law. Scripture says in Ephesians 2:8–9, ***8 For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, 9 not of works, lest anyone should boast.*** This means that ***“The just shall live by faith.”***

As the words of institution of the Holy Supper are found four times in the Scriptures to make them all the more clear and sure to us; and as the life of our blessed Saviour is recorded four times in the New Testament; so also this most important teaching of Christianity that the just shall live by faith, the article on which the Christian Church stands or falls, is found four times in the Bible.

It is written once in the Old Testament and three times in the New Testament, so that there can be no doubt or indecision regarding this important teaching.

The Holy Spirit found it good for our instruction, and our growth in faith, and in godliness, to explain three of our texts by using the appendage ***“The just shall live by faith.”***

Let us under His divine guidance study the fuller meaning of this blessed teaching in preparation for a worthy reception of the blessed Sacrament: *The Just Shall Live by Faith.* May the Lord bless our meditation.

1. Habakkuk 2:4

4 “Behold the proud, His soul is not upright in him; But the just shall live by his faith.

The just shall live by his faith, not by his might. In the Old Testament the doctrine of salvation and justification by faith was often presented to the children of God in the form of visions and pictures and parables and illustrations.

The Prophet Habakkuk had been sent by God to warn the people against the threatening approach of the Chaldeans, who wanted to conquer the Israelites and take them into captivity. He warns them not to depend upon their own strength. The believing children of God, of the Israelite nation, could readily see that in God alone they could have hope to withstand the Chaldeans.

But now he turns to the Chaldeans and, as it were, warns them not to trust in their strength because God would destroy them in turn because of their pride.

And to the believing children of God in Israel he brings the reassurance that in the matter of the complete and final deliverance from all their enemies, not only of the Chaldeans, but of sin and death, they must turn to the promises of God and believe them.

That is the point made by Habakkuk when he says: *4 “Behold the proud, His soul is not upright in him; But the just shall live by his faith.*

As Luther discovered, Faith is holding firm to the God who can be trusted, even though we can't always understand His ways. Faith believes the visions and revelations God gives to His prophets, trusts in God's promises, and, in the face of trouble, difficulty, and calamity, finds its assurance there.

Luther wrote:

A mighty fortress is our God,
A trusty shield and weapon,
Our faithful helper in all need,
Our stay, whate'er may happen.

2. Romans 1:16–17

Justification by faith is brought by the Gospel, not by the Law. That which was clearly taught in the Old Testament, the Apostle Paul in the Epistle to the Romans expands when he says: *“16 For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes, for the Jew first and also for the Greek. 17 For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith; as it is written, “The just shall live by faith.”*

The Apostle is telling us that the reason he is not ashamed of the Gospel of Christ is that this is the means by which God brings salvation to the people. This is the means by which the faith that justifies is worked in the hearts of men. *17 For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith; as it is written, “The just shall live by faith.”*

We may study the requirements of the Law from now until the end of time but will not obtain justification before God through it. The righteousness which stands before men is still unrighteousness before God. Before the eyes of the

world we may pass as honest, and upright people. We may look the policeman in the eye, and the judge and the magistrate, and defy them to convict us of any violation of the state law.

But the righteousness which prevails before God is so high and so holy and perfect that *“by the works of the law no flesh shall be justified”*² in the sight of God. The study of the Law can only bring about condemnation and the manifestation of the wrath of God. The Law at best is the schoolmaster which leads us to the necessity of salvation and deliverance.

But in order to have faith created in us and strengthened in us, we must go for refuge to Mount Calvary and the Cross of Christ. The blessed good news of the grace of God in Jesus Christ channels and conveys and offers and seals to us the faith which justifies, the faith by which we live, the faith by which we are declared righteous before God.

Only when Luther learned that “God’s righteousness” is the righteousness that God gives did his troubled soul find peace.

The Gospel brings salvation for everybody who believes because God is the one providing the righteousness everybody needs. Sinful human beings produce nothing useful to save themselves. God in Christ has done it all! By His perfect life as the sinner’s substitute, Christ earned the righteousness that all people owe to a just and holy God. By His innocent death on the cross, Christ paid for the many things we and a world of sinners have done wrong, and the good we have failed to do.

In the Gospel God now invites sinners to accept Christ’s righteousness as their own. And when sinners in faith accept Christ’s merit, God looks at them as though they were just and holy. God declares the sinner innocent of all wrongdoing. This marvellous exchange whereby Christ takes our sin on Himself and gives us His righteousness is called *justification*.

As Paul tells us, this way of receiving righteousness from God is *“from faith to faith.”* In other words “by faith from first to last.” It is purely by grace, without any merit on the sinner’s part. The prophet Habakkuk indicated this already centuries earlier when he said, “The righteous will live by his faith.”

3. Galatians 3:11

¹¹ But that no one is justified by the law in the sight of God is evident, for “the just shall live by faith.”

The sweet comfort of this justification by faith is experienced when it is contrasted with the threats of the Law.

The Apostle Paul points out in the Epistle to the Galatians: ¹⁰ *For as many as are of the works of the law are under the curse; for it is written, “Cursed is everyone who does not continue in all things which are written in the book of the law, to do them.”* ¹¹ *But that no one is justified by the law in the sight of God is evident, for “the just shall live by faith.”*

The Galatians had sought to be saved by the Law and the Gospel. The Apostle points out the utter folly of such an attempt.

He points out that the more the threats of the Law became manifest in the heart and the accusing conscience of man, the more the sinner labours to achieve perfection, the more he will realise that no man is justified by the Law in the sight of God.

It is when the threats of the Law have become manifest in our heart, when the thunders and lightnings of Sinai threaten us with destruction and perdition, when we are alarmed and terrified, that the Gospel good tidings of the grace of God become the sweetest story that was ever told.

It is then that our Redeemer becomes the Beautiful Saviour. It is then that our heart is lifted up in joy in believing that we are *“justified by faith without the deeds of the Law”* as we heard earlier in the Epistle Lesson.³

God’s plan of salvation is not based on human performance but on faith. Abraham believed, and that faith was credited to him as righteousness.

4. Hebrews 10:38

³⁸ Now the just shall live by faith; But if anyone draws back, My soul has no pleasure in him.”

The faith which justifies is, finally, an enduring faith. We read in Hebrews 10:38–39, ³⁸ *Now the just shall live by faith; But if anyone draws back, My soul has no pleasure in him.”* ³⁹ *But we are not of those who draw back to perdition, but of those who believe to the saving of the soul.*

Justifying faith is more than a historical act which once takes place in time, but does not continue. We read in Matthew 24:13 that *he who endures to the end shall be saved.*

It is not sufficient to be able to say that we were once baptised into the Christian faith, nor that we once were instructed and confirmed in the Christian faith. It is necessary that by the grace of God we continue in the faith which justifies us before God. The person who draws back will perish.

So in order that we may continue in this faith and conviction and that we are saved by faith through grace, let us use the means of grace.

May God grant to you in His grace the assurance that you are saved not by your might, but by your faith. May your study of the Word increasingly show you that the means of grace is the Gospel, not the Law. May you, in the hour of distress when the threats of the Law threaten to drive you to despair, cling firmly to the Gospel foundation, the Cross of Christ on Calvary.

May you faithfully make use of the means of grace, so that your faith which justifies you may be an enduring faith unto the end.

At this Reformation Festival Communion, where we take our stand with the great Reformer on the basis of this central doctrine of justification by faith alone, let us confess in the words of the hymnist that we are saved not by our might, but by faith:⁴

Guide me, O Thou great Jehovah,
Pilgrim through this barren land.
I am weak, but Thou art mighty;
Hold me with Thy powerful hand:
Bread of heaven,
Feed me now and evermore

Let us confess our conviction that this our faith has been brought to us not by the Law, but by the Gospel:⁵

Not the labours of my hands
Can fulfil Thy law's demands;
Could my zeal no respite know,
Could my tears for ever flow,

All for sin could not atone:
Thou must save, and Thou alone.

When the trials and the tribulations of life cause the sting of the Law to make itself felt in our heart and conscience and mind so that we do not know where to turn, let us flee to the Cross on Calvary, and trusting in the certainty of Jesus' promise, pray:⁶

Abide with me; fast falls the eventide;
The darkness deepens; Lord, with me abide:
When other helpers fail, and comforts flee,
Help of the helpless, O abide with me.

And finally, in view of the necessity of continual faith, and the shortness and transiency of this fleeting life, let us pray that God would keep us faithful unto the end in the words of the Lenten Hymn⁷

Be Thou my consolation,
My shield, when I must die;
Remind me of Thy passion
When my last hour draws nigh.
Mine eyes shall then behold Thee,
Upon Thy cross shall dwell,
My heart by faith enfold Thee;
Who dieth thus, dies well.

In conclusion, let us recap by listening to the first article in "*What we believe*" A summary Statement of our Faith. The Holy Scriptures.

We believe that though men have written the 66 books of the Bible, the Spirit of God inspired them, so that every word in them is also God's Word. As a result, the Scriptures are fully authoritative and without error on the matters they treat. They are the only rule and standard by which we must determine and test all doctrines.

The centre of the Scriptures is Jesus Christ, our Saviour. He is the key to the right understanding of the Scriptures, for no interpretation of the Scriptures dare contradict the central doctrine of justification by God's grace, through faith, without our keeping of God's Law, for Christ's sake.

This reaffirms our central thought for today, *“The just shall live by faith.”*
Amen.

The peace of God, which passes all understanding, will keep our hearts and
minds, in Christ Jesus. Amen.

¹ 1 Timothy 4:3

² Galatians 2:16

³ Rom 3:28

⁴ Hymn 347

⁵ Hymn 330

⁶ Hymn 543

⁷ Hymn 52