

The Luther Sermon at Exeter Hall

by C.H. Spurgeon

C.H. Spurgeon passionately proclaims that true salvation is found not in external religious rituals but in faith that works through love, exemplified by Martin Luther's transformative discovery of justification by faith alone.

Scripture: Galatians 5:6, Romans 1:17, Hebrews 4:14, 1 Peter 2:9, John 3:16, Proverbs 31

Topics: "Justification By Faith", "Christian Faith", "Reformation History"

Description

In this powerful sermon, C.H. Spurgeon reflects on the life and doctrine of Martin Luther, emphasizing the central Christian truth that salvation comes through faith alone, not by external rituals or works. Spurgeon explains the nature of saving faith as a living trust in God that works through love, and he passionately warns against relying on religious formalism. He also highlights Luther's pivotal role in the Reformation, breaking the chains of superstition and priestcraft. This sermon invites believers to embrace and live out the doctrine of justification by faith with heartfelt conviction.

Transcript

BY C. H. SPURGEON,

"For in Jesus Christ neither circumcision avails anything, nor uncircumcision; but faith which works by love." Galatians 5:6.

PAUL makes a clean sweep of that trust in the externals of religion which is the common temptation of all time. Circumcision was a great thing with the Jew and, oftentimes he trusted in it. But Paul declares that it avails nothing. There might be others who were glad that they were not Jews, but Paul declares that their uncircumcision avails no more than its opposite! Certain matters connected with godliness are external and yet they are useful in their places—especially is that the case with Baptism and the Lord's Supper, the assembling of ourselves together, the reading of the Word of God and public prayer and praise. These things are proper and profitable, but none of them must be made, in any measure or degree, the ground of our hope of salvation, for this text sweeps them all away and plainly describes them as availing nothing if they are made to

be the foundations of our trust.

In Luther's day superstitious confidence in external observances had overlaid faith in the Gospel. Ceremonies had multiplied excessively under the authority of the Pope. Masses were said for souls in

"purgatory" and men were actually selling indulgences for sin in the light of day! When God raised up Martin Luther, who was born four centuries ago, he bore emphatic testimony against salvation by outward forms and by the power of priestcraft, affirming that salvation is by faith, alone, and that the whole Church of God is a company of priests, every Believer being a priest unto God.

If Luther had not affirmed it, the doctrine would have been just as true, for the distinction between clergy and laity has no excuse in Scripture, which calls the saints, "God's kleros"—God's clergy, or heritage. Again we read, "You are a royal priesthood." Every man that believes in the Lord Jesus Christ is anointed to exercise the Christian priesthood and, therefore, he need not put his trust in another, seeing the supposed priest is no more than any other man. Each man must be accountable for himself before God. Each one must read and search the Scriptures for himself and must believe for himself—and when saved, he must offer up himself as a living sacrifice unto God by Jesus Christ, who is the only High Priest of our profession.

So much for the negative side of the text, which is full of warning to this Ritualistic age. The chief testimony of our great Reformer was to the justification of a sinner in the sight of God by faith in Jesus Christ and by that alone. He could fitly have taken this as his motto, "In Jesus Christ neither circumcision avails anything, nor uncircumcision but faith which works by love." He was in the Augustinian monastery at Wittenberg, troubled and perturbed in mind, and he had there, in an old Latin Bible, this text, "The just shall live by faith." It was a new idea to him and by its means spiritual light entered his soul in some degree. But such were the prejudices of his up-bringing and such the darkness of his surroundings, that he still hoped to find salvation by outward performances.

He therefore fasted long, till he was found swooning from hunger. He was exceedingly zealous for salvation by works. At last he made a pilgrimage to Rome, hoping to find, there, everything that was holy and helpful. He was disappointed in his search, but yet found more there of what he looked for. On the pretended staircase of Pilate, while in the act of climbing it upon his knees, the Wittenberg text again sounded in his ears like a thunderclap—"The just shall live by faith." Up he started and descended those stairs, never to grovel upon them again! The chain was broken, the soul was free! Luther had found the L of God and, therefore, from that day on it became his life's business to flash that Light upon the nations, crying evermore, "The just shall live by faith."

The best commemoration which I can make of this man is to preach the doctrine which he held so dear. And you who are thus saved can best assist me by believing the doctrine and proving its truth in your own cases. May the Holy Spirit cause it to be so in hundreds of instances!

I. First, let us inquire WHAT IS THIS FAITH? We are always talking about it, but what is it? Whenever I try to explain it, I am afraid lest I should confuse rather than expound. There is a story told concerning John Bunyan's "Pilgrim's Progress." Good Thomas Scott, the Commentator, wrote notes to it. He thought the "Pilgrim's Progress" a difficult book and he would make it clear. A pious cottager in his parish had the book and she was reading it when her minister called. He said to her, "Oh, I see, you are reading Bunyan's Pilgrim's Progress. Do you understand it?" She answered innocently enough, "Oh, yes Sir, I understand Mr. Bunyan very well, and I hope that one day I shall be able to understand your explanations."

I am afraid lest you should say when I have done, "I understand what faith is, as I find it in the Bible, and one day, perhaps, I may be able to understand the preacher's explanation of it." Warned by this, I will speak as plainly as I can! And first, it is to be remembered that faith is not a mere creed-holding. It is very

proper to say, "I believe in God the Father Almighty, Maker of Heaven and earth," and so forth. But you may repeat all that and be no "Believer" in the Scriptural sense of that term. Though the creed is true, it may not be true to you—it would have been the same to you if the opposite had been true, for you put the truth away like a paper in a pigeon-hole and it has no effect upon you. "A very proper doctrine," you say, "a very proper doctrine," and so you put it to sleep. It does not influence your heart, nor affect your life.

Do not imagine that professing an orthodox creed is the same thing as faith in Christ! A truthful creed is desirable for many reasons, but if it is a dead, inoperative thing, it cannot bring salvation. Faith is belief of the Truths of God, but it is more. Again, faith is not the mere belief that there is a God, though that we must have, for we cannot come to God except we "believe that He is and that He is a Rewarder of them that diligently seek Him." We are to believe in God—that He is good, blessed, true, right and, therefore, to be trusted, confided in and praised. Whatever He may do, whatever He may say, God is not to be suspected, but believed in. You know what it is to believe in a man, do you not? To believe in a man so that you follow him and confide in him and accept his advice?

In that same way faith believes in God—not only believes that He is, but finds rest in His Character, His Son, His promise, His Covenant, His Word and everything about Him. Faith livingly and lovingly trusts in her God about everything! Especially must we believe in what God has revealed in Scripture—that it is verily and, indeed, a sure and Infallible testimony to be received without question. We accept the Father's witness concerning Jesus and take heed, thereto, "as unto a light that shines in a dark place." Faith has specially to believe in Him who is the sum and substance of all this Revelation, even Jesus Christ, who became God in human flesh that He might redeem our fallen nature from all the evils of sin and raise it to eternal felicity.

We believe in Christ, on Christ, and upon Christ—accepting Him because of the record which God has given to us concerning His Son—that He is the Propitiation for our sins. We accept God's unspeakable Gift and receive Jesus as our All in All. If I wanted to describe saving faith in one word, I should say that it is trust. It is so believing God and so believing in Christ that we trust ourselves and our eternal destinies in the hands of a reconciled God. As creatures we look up to the great Father of Spirits. As sinners we trust for the pardon of our sins to the Atonement of Jesus Christ. As being weak and feeble we trust to the power of the Holy Spirit to make us holy and to keep us so. We venture our eternal interests in the vessel of Free Grace, content to sink or swim with it. We rely upon God in Christ.

The Word employed to set forth faith in the Scriptures sometimes signifies to lean. We lean with all our weight upon our God, in Jesus Christ. We hang upon Christ as a vessel hangs upon a nail. "Recumbency" was a term by which the old Puritans used to describe faith—a lying, or leaning upon something out of ourselves. Guilty as I am, I believe God's Word that, "the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanses us from all sin." Trusting to that blood I know that I am cleansed from all sin. God sets forth Christ to be a Propitiation—we believe that He is a Propitiation and we take Him to be our Propitiation. By that appropriation our sin is covered and we are free! Faith is the grasping, the appropriating, the receiving into one's self of the Lord Jesus Christ.

I sometimes illustrate it by that passage of Paul where he says, "The word is near you, even in your mouth." When a morsel is in your mouth, if you desire to possess it so as never to lose it, what is the best thing to do? Swallow it! Let it go down into the inward parts. Now the word that we preach is, according to the Apostle, "in your mouth"—suffer it, then, by God's Grace, to go down into your heart, and you shall find it true that, "with the heart man believes unto righteousness; and with the mouth confession is made unto

salvation." This is the faiths which saves the soul.

II. In the second place we will consider WHY FAITH IS SELECTED AS THE WAY OF SALVATION. I would remind you that if we could not answer this question it would not matter—since the Lord has appointed believing as the way of Grace, it is not ours to challenge His choice. Beggars must not be choosers! Let us trust, if so the Lord ordains. But we can answer this question in a measure. First, it is clear that no other way is possible. It is not possible for us to be saved by our own merits, for we have already broken the Law of God and, future obedience, being already due, cannot make up for past defects—

"Could my tears forever flow, Could my zeal no respite know, All for sin could not atone You must save, and You alone."

The road of good works is blocked up by our past sins and it is sure to be further blocked up by future sins—we ought, therefore, to rejoice that God has commended to us the open road of faith! God has chosen the way of faith that salvation might be by Divine Grace. If we had to do anything in order to save ourselves, we would be sure to impute a measure of virtue to our own doing, or feelings, or prayers, or almsgivings and we would thus detract from the pure Grace of God. But salvation comes from God as a pure favor—an act of undeserved generosity and benevolence—and the Lord will, therefore, only put it into the hand of faith, since faith arrogates nothing to herself. Faith, in fact, disowns all idea of merit, and the Lord of Grace therefore elects to place the treasure of His love in the hands of faith.

Again, it is of faith that there may be no boasting, for if our salvation is of our doing or feelings, we are sure to boast. But, if it is of faith, we cannot glory in self. "Where is boasting, then? It is excluded. By what law? Of works? No, but by the law of faith." Faith is humble and ascribes all praise to God. Faith is truthful and confesses her obligation to the Sovereign Grace of God. I bless the Lord that He has chosen this way of faith because it is so suitable for poor sinners. Some among us, tonight, would never have been saved if salvation had only been prepared for the good and righteous. I stood before my God guilty and self-condemned. No youth ever had a keener sense of guilt than I had.

When I was convicted of sin, I saw my thoughts and desires to be vile in the sight of God—and I also became vile in my own eyes. I was driven to despair and I know that I could never have been cheered by any plan of salvation except that which is of faith. The Covenant of Works by reason of our weakness affords us no suitable way of hope at any time and, under certain circumstances, we see this very vividly. Suppose that you were in the last article of death? What good works could you do? Yonder dying thief found it a happy thing that by faith he could trust the Crucified One—and before the sun set could be with Him in Paradise! Faith is a suitable way for sinners and especially for sinners who are soon to die!

In some sense we are all in that condition and some of us, perhaps, are especially so. What man among us knows that he will see tomorrow's dawn? I bless God, again, that the way of salvation is by faith because it is a way open to the most unlearned. What fine theology we get nowadays—deep thinking they call it. The men go down so deep into their subjects and so stir the mud at the bottom, that you cannot see them and they cannot see themselves! I apprehend that teachers of a certain school do not, themselves, know what they are talking about. Now, if salvation were only to be learned by reading through huge folios, what would become of multitudes of poor souls in Bow, and Bethuel Green, and Seven Dials? If the Gospel had consisted of a mass of learning, how could the unlearned be saved?

But now we can go to each one of them and say, "Jesus died"—

"There is life in a look at the Crucified One! There is life at this moment for you!" However little you may know, you know that you have sinned. Know, then, that Jesus has come to put away sin and that whoever believes in Him is immediately forgiven and enters into eternal life. This brief and blessed Gospel is suitable to all cases, from princes to peasants, and we wonder not that faith was selected as the way of salvation.

III. But now, thirdly, I want to say a good deal, tonight, upon another question—HOW DOES FAITH OPERATE? For according to our text, it is, "Faith which works by love." It is a living, laboring, loving faith which, alone, saves the soul. I cannot tell you what hard things I have heard about this doctrine of Salvation by Faith. They say that it is immoral. I have heard immoral men say so and surely they ought to know! They say that it will lead to sin and those who say so would, I should think, be rather pleased with it for that reason if they believed their own statement. I have never heard a holy man charge faith with leading him into sin. I know no man that follows after God and lives near to Him who is under fear that faith in God will tempt him to sin!

The fact is, faith does nothing of the kind! Its action is most distinctly the reverse. Like the prudent wife in Proverbs, faith will do a man good and not harm all the days of his life. First, it touches the mainspring of our nature by creating love within the soul. What is needed, now, for the degraded classes in London? Sanitary regulations? Certainly, if they are not allowed to be a dead letter for the need of someone to carry them out. New houses? By all manner of means—the more the better. Lower rents? Assuredly, for no one has a right to get an excessive rent for unhealthy accommodations. Higher wages? Certainly, we could all of us do with a little more.

Many other things are needed. While yonder gin-palaces remain at the corners of the streets, you will not make much headway in lifting up the masses and I suppose the drink-shops will always flourish while the taste for drink remains. Suppose the licensed poison-shops were shut up—would that suffice? I think not. There are men and women in London, and thousands of them, who, if they were put into the cleanest houses and were a mile away from a gin-shop, would still drink and still turn their houses into pigsties! What is needed? Oh, if you could make Christians of them! Suppose they could be born-again? Suppose they could be made to love the things which they now hate, and hate the things which they now love? New hearts and right spirits are the need of London's outcasts!

How can these be produced? In the hand of God, the Holy Spirit—this is exactly what faith works in the heart! Here is a watch. "It needs cleaning." Yes, clean it. "It does not work. It needs a new crystal." Well, put in a new crystal. "It still does not work. It needs new hands." Get new hands by all means! Still it does not run. What is the matter with it? The maker says that it needs a mainspring. There's the seat of the evil—nothing can be right till that is rectified. Set all other matters going, but do not forget that the mainspring is the chief part of the business! Faith supplies the soul with a powerful spring of action. It says to the man, "You are forgiven through the blood of Christ who died for you—how do you feel towards Him?"

The man replies, "I love the Lord for redeeming me." Loving Jesus, the man has now within his soul the seed of every good. He will become a holier and a better being, for he has begun to love, and love is the mother of holiness. Is any service in the world like the service of love? You have a servant in your house, fawning and obsequious, but if you were to reduce his wages, he would show you the rough side of his tongue and seek another employer! You do not expect any more of him than that, but if you did, you would not get it. How different was an old servant I have heard of, who, when his master went down in the world,

was content with half-pay! And when he was sorrowfully told that he must go, for his master could not afford him clothes, he made his old ones last him, for he would not leave his master in his old age.

He would rather have earned bread for his old master than have left him! He was an attached servant worth his weight in gold! There are few such servants nowadays, for there are not many such masters. This kind of service cannot be purchased, but its price is above rubies. When the Lord leads us to believe in Jesus, we become, from then on, His loving servants and serve Him not for reward, but out of gratitude! It is no longer with us so much work and so much pay—we do not fear the threat of Hell for disobedience, nor do we look to Heaven as won by works. No, no, our salvation is a free gift! It is furnished for us through infinite love and supreme compassion and, therefore, we return our heart's warmest affection. Our heart clings to that dear side which was opened for us. We feel a tender love to those dear pierced feet. We could kiss them every day.

Those blessed hands of the Crucified! If they do but touch us, we are strengthened, honored, comforted. Jesus is altogether lovely to us, our bosom Friend and Lord! Faith, instead of being a poor, paltry thing, as some imagine, is the grandest cause of love and so of obedience and holiness. Know, again, that faith puts us into a new relation. We are bound by nature to be the servants of God, but faith whispers in our ear, "Say, 'Our Father,'" and when the heart has received the Spirit of adoption, the aspect of service is entirely changed—mercenary service is succeeded by loving obedience and our spirit is altered! To become an heir of God, a joint-heir with Jesus, is to elevate work into delight, labor into fellowship with God! The Law is no fetter to a child of God—it is his delight! Faith removes from the heart that form of selfishness which before seemed necessary.

So you hope to be saved by what you do, do you? May I ask you, Friend, whom you are serving in all this? I will tell you. You are serving yourself! All that you do is to win happiness for yourself. How, then, are you serving God? You are living a selfish life, though it is tinged with the color of spirituality. What is done by you in the matter of religion has no objective but that you may be saved and go to Heaven. Your most zealous work is all for self. Suppose I say to you, "I know that I am saved. I know that Jesus has put away my sin. I know that He will not permit me to perish"? Why, then,

there is room in my case for the serving of the Lord because of what He has done for me! Now I have not myself to save—I have Christ to serve!

Gratitude is the motive of the Gospel and under its power, unselfish virtue is possible, but not upon the ground of legal service. Pure virtue, it seems to me, is a sheer impossibility till a man is saved because it always must partake, till then, of the low and groveling view of benefiting himself by what he is doing. When once the great transaction is done, and you are saved, then you are lifted up into a nobler sphere and you say—

"Then why O blessed Jesus Christ, Should I not love You well? Not for the hope of winning Heaven, Nor of escaping Hell! Not with the hope of gaining anything, Not seeking a reward, But as You have loved me, O ever-loving Lord, So would I love You, dearest Lord, And in Your praise will sing Solely because You are my God, And my Eternal King."

Therefore faith inspires us with a higher motive than the Law can suggest. Faith soon creates love for man, for, if the Lord Jesus has saved you, my Brothers and Sisters, you will speedily desire that others may be saved, also. You have tasted of this honey and the sweetness upon your own tongue prevails you to invite others to the feast. He who has been brought into the liberty of Free Grace would set free every

captive sinner if he could.

When well worked out, faith means harmony with God. It creates an agreement with the Divine will, so that whatever pleases God pleases us. If the Lord should set the Believer on a dunghill with Job, he would still bless His name. Faith agrees with the Divine Precept which it desires to obey; with the Divine Doctrine which it desires to know and publish. Yes, whatever is of God, Faith says, "It is the Lord, let Him command, teach, or do what seems Him good." I have shown you that faith is not the trifling principle which its deprecators describe as, "Only believe." Oh, that they knew what it is to only believe! It is the setting free of the mind from fetters. It is the dawn of Heaven's own day. It is a lifelong struggle, this "Only believe." It is "the work of God, that you believe on Him whom He has sent."

Brothers and Sisters, I believe that a humble, persevering faith in God is one of the highest forms of adoration that ever reaches the Throne of God. Though cherubim and seraphim salute the Lord with their, "Holy, holy, holy;" though the whole host of shining ones surround the Throne of God with perpetual hallelujahs, there is no more hearty reverence given to God than when a poor sinner, black as night, cries believingly, "Wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow." To believe in the pardon of sin is a wonderful adoration of the mercy and power of God! To believe in a constant Providence is a sweet way of worshipping God in His power and goodness!

When a poor laborer in his cottage, needing bread for his children, kneels down and cries, "Lord, it is written, 'Your bread shall be given you, and your water shall be sure!' I believe Your Word and, therefore, I look to You in my necessity." He renders a homage to the truth and faithfulness of God such as Gabriel could not give, for Gabriel never knew the pinch of hunger. To believe that God will keep us to the end and raise us to His Glory is more honoring to God than all the hymns of the glorified! From us dying sons of earth, when we confide in His promise, there arises up to Heaven incense of a sweet smell, acceptable to God by Jesus Christ.

To my mind there is also this about faith—that it has a marvelous power over God. Do you ask me to retract that expression? Let it stand! I will explain it. Faith overcomes the Highest upon His Throne. Faith in an inferior can hold a superior fast. Some years ago I was walking in the garden, one evening, and I saw a stray dog about whom I had received information that he was in the habit of visiting my grounds and that he did not, in the least, assist the gardener and, therefore, his attentions were not desired. As I walked along one Saturday evening, meditating upon my sermon, I saw this dog busily doing mischief. I threw my stick at him and told him to go home. But what do you think he did? Instead of baring his teeth at me, or hurrying off with a howl, he looked at me very pleasantly, took up my stick in his mouth and brought it to me! And then, wagging his tail, he laid the stick at my feet!

The tears were in my eyes—the dog had beaten me. I said, "Good dog! Good dog, you may come here when you like after that." Why had the dog conquered me? Because he had confidence in me and would not believe that I could mean him any hurt. To turn to grander things—the Lord Himself cannot resist humble confidence. Do you not see how a sinner brings, as it were, the rod of Justice to the Lord, and cries, "If You smite me, I deserve it; but I submit to You." The great God cannot spurn a trustful heart. It is impossible! He were not God if He could cast the soul away that implicitly relies on Him! This is the power of faith, then, and I marvel not that the Lord should have chosen it, for believing is a thing most pleasing to God!

O that you would all trust Him! God lifts His sword against you—run into His arms! He threatens you—grasp His promise! He pursues you—fly to His dear Son! Trust at the foot of the Cross in His full Atonement and you must be saved!

IV. Now, I am going to finish in a way suitable to this Luther memorial. You have heard a great deal about Luther's preaching salvation by faith alone. Now, LET US TURN TO LUTHER'S LIFE and see what Luther himself meant by it. What kind of faith did Luther himself exhibit by which he was justified? First, in Luther's case, faith led him to an open avowal of what he believed. Luther did not mean to go up to Heaven by the back stairs, as many young men hope to do. You wish to be Christians on the sly, so as to escape the offense of the Cross. Luther did not refuse to confess Christ and take up his cross and follow Him. He knew that he, who with his heart believes, must also with his mouth make confession—and he did so right nobly.

He began teaching and preaching the Truth of God which had enlightened his own soul. One of his sermons displeased Duke George of Saxony, but as it saved a lady of high rank, Luther did not fret. He was not the man to conceal the Truth of God because it was dangerous to avow it. Tetzl came with his precious indulgences and his releases for souls in "purgatory." Thousands of good Catholics were indignant, but no one would bell the cat. Luther called Tetzl, "servant of Pope and of the devil," and declared, "As he came among us practicing on the credulity of the people, I could not refrain from protesting against it and opposing his odious career." Without mimicking words, or attempting to speak politely, Luther went at him, fearless of the consequences. He believed in the blessings of Grace, "without money and without price," and he did not conceal his convictions! He nailed his Theses to the Church door where all might read them.

When astronomers require a new constellation in the heavens let it be "the hammer and nails." O you who make no profession, let this man's outspoken faith rebuke you! His dauntless valor for the Truth of God caused him to be greatly hated in his own day with a ferocity which has not yet died out. Luther is still the best hated man in certain quarters. Witness the vile tracts which have been produced, during the last fortnight, to the disgrace of the press which they defile! I can say no worse nor better of them than that they are worthy of the cause in whose interest they are issued. Mention the name of Luther and the bond-slaves of Rome gnash their teeth! This intense ill-feeling proves Luther's power. Young men, I do not know what your ambition may be, but I hope you do not wish to be in this world mere chips in the porridge, giving forth no flavor whatever.

My ambition does not run in that line. I know that if I have no intense haters, I can have no intense lovers—and, by His Grace, I am prepared to have both. When right-hearted men see honest love of the Truth of God in a man, they cry, "He is our Brother. Let him be our champion!" When the wrong-hearted reply, "Down with him!" we thank them for the unconscious homage which they thus pay to decision of character. No child of God should court the world's approbation. Certainly Luther did not. He pleased God and that was enough for him. His faith was of this kind, also—that it moved him to a hearty reverence for what he believed to be Holy Scripture. I am sorry that he was not always wise in his judgment of what the Bible contains, but to him Scripture was the last court of appeal. If any had convinced Luther of error out of that Book, he would gladly have retracted.

But that was not their plan—they simply said, "He is a heretic. Condemn him or make him retract." To this he never yielded for an instant! Alas, in this age numbers of men are setting up to be their own inspired writers. I have been told that every man who is his own lawyer has a fool for his client, and I am inclined to

think that when any man sets up to be his own savior and his own revelation, much the same thing occurs. That conceited idea is in the air at this present time—every man is excogitating his own bible. Not so Luther! He loved the Sacred Book! He fought by its help. It was his battle-ax and his weapon of war. A text of Scripture fired his soul, but the words of tradition he rejected. He would

not yield to Melancthon, or Zwingli, or Calvin or whoever it might be—however learned or pious. He took his own personal faith to the Scripture and, according to his light, he followed the Word of the Lord. May many a Luther be in this place!

The next thing I note was the intense activity of his faith. Luther did not believe in God doing his work, so as to lie by in idleness. Not a bit of it! A disciple once said to Mohammed, "I am going to turn my camel loose and trust in Providence." "No," said Mohammed, "trust in Providence, but tie up your camel carefully." This resembled Oliver Cromwell's Puritan precept, "Trust in God, but keep your powder dry." Luther believed above most men in keeping his powder dry. How he worked! By pen, by mouth, by hand! He was energetic almost beyond belief. He seemed a many-handed man. He did works which would have taxed the strength of hundreds of smaller men. He worked as if everything depended upon his own activity and then he fell back in holy trust upon God as though he had done nothing! This is the kind of faith which saves a man both in this life and in that which is to come.

Again, Luther's faith abounded in prayer. What supplications they were! Those who heard them tell us of his tears, his wrestling, his holy arguments. He would go into his closet, heavy at heart, and remain there an hour or two, and then come forth singing, "I have conquered, I have conquered!" "Ah," he said one day, "I have so much to do today that I cannot get through it with less than three hours' prayer." I thought he was going to say, "I cannot afford to give even a quarter of an hour to prayer"—but he increased his prayer as he increased his labor. This is the faith that saves—a faith that lays hold on God and prevails with Him in private supplication.

His was a faith that delivered him entirely from the fear of man. Duke George is going to stop him. "Is he?" said Luther. "If it were to rain Duke Georges, I would go." He is exhorted not to go to Worms, for he will be in danger. If there were as many devils in Worms as there were tiles on the housetops, he would be there! And he was there, as you all know, playing the man for the Gospel and for his God. He committed himself to no man, but kept his faith in God pure and unmingled! Popes, emperors, doctors, electors were all as nothing to Luther when they stood against the Lord. Be it so with us, also! His was a faith that made him risk all for the Truth of God. There seemed no hope of his ever coming back from Worms alive. He was pretty sure to be burned like John Russ—and the wonder is that he escaped. His very daring brought him safety from peril! He expressed his regret that the crown of martyrdom would, in all probability, be missed by him, but the faith which is prepared to die for Jesus was within him. He, who in such a case saves his life, shall lose it, but he that loses his life for Christ's sake shall find it unto life eternal! This was the faith that made Luther a man among men and saved him from priestly affectations.

I do not know whether you admire what is thought to be very superior religion. It is a thing of beauty, but not of use. It ought always to be kept in a glass case—it is made up for drawing-rooms and religious meetings, but would be out of place in a shop or on a farm. Now, Luther's religion was with him at home—at the table as well as in the pulpit. His religion was part and parcel of his common life and that life was free, open, bold and unrestrained. It is easy to find fault with him from the superfine standpoint, for he lived in an honest fearlessness. My admiration kindles as I think of the hearty openness of the man! I do not wonder that even ungodly Germans revere him, for he is all German, and all man! When he speaks,

he does not take his words out of his mouth to look at them, and to ask Melancthon whether they will do. No, he hits hard and he has spoken a dozen sentences before he has thought whether they are polished or not!

Indeed, he is utterly indifferent to criticism and speaks what he thinks and feels. He is at his ease, for he feels at home. Is he not everywhere in his great Father's house? Has he not a pure and simple intent to speak the Truth of God and do the right? I like Luther with a wife and children. I like to see him with his family and a Christmas tree, making music with little Johnny Luther on his knee. I love to hear him sing a little hymn with the children and tell his pretty boy about the horses in Heaven with golden bridles and silver saddles. Faith had not taken away his manhood, but sanctified it to noblest uses. Luther did not live and move as if he were a mere cleric, but as a brother to our common humanity!

After all, Brothers and Sisters, you must know that the greatest divines have to eat bread and butter like other people. They shut their eyes before they sleep and they open them in the morning, just like other folks! This is matter of fact, though some stilted gentleman might like us to doubt it. They feel and think like other men. Why should they seem as if they did not? Is it not a good thing to eat and drink to the glory of God and show people that common things can be sanctified by the Word of God and prayer? What if we do not wear canonicals and so on? The best canonicals in the world are thorough devotion to the Lord's work! And if a man lives aright, he makes every garment a vestment, every

meal a sacrament and every house a temple! All our hours are canonical! All our days holy days! Every breath is incense, every pulse music for the Most High!

They tell us that Luther ignored good works. It is true he would not allow good works to be spoken of as the means of salvation, but of those who professed faith in Jesus he demanded holy lives! Luther abounded in prayer and charity. What an almsgiver Luther was! I fear he did not, at all times, dimly regard the principles of the Charity Organization Society! As he goes along, if there are beggars, he empties his pockets for them. Two hundred crowns have just come in, and, though he has a family about him, he cries, "Two hundred crowns! God is giving me my portion in this life." "Here," he says to a poor Brother minister, "take half! And where are the poor? Fetch them in. I must be rid of this!" I am afraid that his Catherine was forced, at times, to shake her head at him, for, in truth, he was not always the most economical husband that might be. In almsgiving he was second to none and in all the duties of life he rose far beyond the level of his age. Like all other men, he had his faults, but as his enemies harp on that string and go far beyond the truth, I need not dwell upon his failings. I wish that the detractors of Luther were half as good as he. All the glory of his grand career was unto the Lord, alone!

Lastly, Luther's faith was a faith that helped him under struggles that are seldom spoken of. I suppose that never man had greater soul-conflict than Luther. He was a man of heights and depths. Sometimes he went up to Heaven and he sang his hallelujahs. And then he went down, again, into the abyss with his "Miserere." I am afraid that great, vigorous man that he was, he had a bad liver. He was grievously afflicted in body in ways which I need not mention. And he was sometimes laid aside for months together, being so racked and tortured that he longed to die. His pains were extreme and we wonder how he endured them so well. But always, between the attacks of illness, Luther was up again preaching the Word of God. Those desperate struggles with the devil would have crushed him but for his faith. The devil seems to have been constantly assailing him and he was constantly assailing the devil.

In that tremendous duel he fell back upon his Lord and, trusting in Omnipotence, he put Satan to rout. Young men, I pray that a Luther may spring up from your ranks. How gladly would the faithful welcome him! I, who am more a follower of Calvin than of Luther, and much more a follower of Jesus than of either of them, would be charmed to see another Luther upon this earth! God bless you, Brothers and Sisters, for Christ's sake. Amen.

Source: <https://sermonindex.net/speakers/ch-spurgeon/the-luther-sermon-at-exeter-hall/>

Grow in Your Walk with Christ

Listen and read messages that will stir your heart for Christ and point you to deeper repentance and devotion.

- 50,000+ Sermons from speakers past and present
- 3,900+ Classic Christian Books freely readable online
- 1,200+ Bible Translations and Commentaries
- Over 450k forum posts — Join our vibrant online Christian forum

www.sermonindex.net