

Martin Luther (6):

The Just Shall Live by Faith

Now that one of Martin Luther's duties was to lecture on the Bible at the University of Wittenberg, Luther was growing in his own understanding of Scripture. He began to lecture on Romans in 1515 and struggled especially with this book. How could anyone be saved if God was just in His dealings with all men? All men are sinners. The church of Rome taught that forgiveness came when one confessed his sin enough, visited enough relics, and contributed enough money to the Church. But what was enough? Luther knew he was a faithful monk, but even so, he knew in his heart he could never do enough to be saved. Romans was a book that had much to say about the doctrine of justification, but he still didn't know what it all meant. This was a great dilemma.

"The just shall live by faith." Luther read the words of Romans 1:17 and pondered them. He consulted the Greek translation. How could the just live by faith? How could a righteous God declare a sinful man to be righteous and just?

But God is faithful, and, He imparts faith. Man can't earn his own righteousness. God gives it—because Christ earned it. Christ earned it on the cross in order to give it to His people! It was as if the gates of heaven were opened to the spiritually struggling monk. Luther began to understand. Christ earned it! He, Luther, couldn't earn it at all. "The just shall live by faith" took on a whole new meaning.

All of Scripture took on new meaning. Luther studied the Bible some more. He read Romans again, and the Psalms. Ten years earlier a terrifying bolt of lightning had changed the course of Luther's life from lawyer to monk, but that was just one flash. Now a different sort of light shone upon him in a steady, intensifying beam, effecting a change that was much more profound: he saw and understood.

But as the truth of Scripture became clearer to Luther, so did the truth about the Catholic Church. The Church of Rome was corrupt. Her teachings were false. All the monkery, relic-visiting, and contributing in the world would not save a soul out of hell. Yet this is what men relied upon. This is what Luther himself had tried to do. It wouldn't work. Luther was a preacher as well as a teacher. He had to warn the people of Wittenberg that it wouldn't work. He had to discuss these things with his fellow monks at the university.

Little did he imagine these warnings and discussions could so swiftly pass over the walls of Wittenberg to reach all of Europe and the world.