

## Lesson 1 • What is Church?

**Theme:** Church: A Gathering of Believers

**Text:** Acts 5:1-11 • Ananias and Sapphira

### *Background*

This story happens during the early days of the Christian Church, not long after Pentecost in Jerusalem. Acts 1-4 details the beginnings of the Church: Ascension, Pentecost, persecution, and growth. Christian love was evident in many ways (Acts 2:42). The sharing of property was a spontaneous, voluntary fruit of faith. The Jerusalem congregation numbered over 5,000 men by this time. The Apostles were in charge of the distribution to those who were needy. Read Acts 4:32-37 in particular.

### *Text Study*

Sapphira conspired with her husband Ananias to tell their lie. In so doing they were guilty of lying in God's name, a sin against the Second Commandment. They wanted the other members of the Jerusalem congregation to think they had given the entire price of the land out of Christian charity. For the Bible's definition of hypocrisy, see Matthew 15:8.

Ananias and Sapphira were infected with the love of money and greed. See I Timothy 6:6-10. They could not reconcile their greed with their desire to maintain an image of generosity. Satan filled their hearts. That is exactly what happens when one is given over to a certain sin. Satan displaces the Holy Spirit in the heart and he gives the directions.

The Holy Spirit revealed the hearts of these two people to Peter. The speed and severity of the judgement that came on Ananias and Sapphira shows us the seriousness of lying, even though most people in the world do not regard it as serious. Since lying is also a common fault of young children, they must be taught there is no such thing as a "little" lie, and that the devil is the father of lies (John 8:44). This is a good opportunity to denounce the widespread morality that a person can do anything they want as long as it does not hurt somebody else. Whom had Ananias and Sapphira hurt by their lie? Yet it was a life and death situation. Indeed, each sin of ours deserves not only temporal but eternal death. Each sin deserves such punishment for the hurt it causes our holy God.

Ezekiel 18:4 says, "The soul who sins shall die." Romans 6:23 tells us, "The wages of sin is death."

*A great fear came upon all* — The members of the Jerusalem congregation received a warning that the devil was very much at work among them and that matters such as these were not to be taken lightly. The people outside the congregation were warned this was not a group they should join merely for the sake of convenience.

This story demonstrates the difference between the visible church and the invisible Holy Christian Church. Ananias and Sapphira were members of the visible church, the congregation at Jerusalem. Because of their unbelief, they were not members of the Holy Christian Church which we call invisible because only God knows who the believers are, for only He can see into the heart.

### *Lesson*

The Church consists only of true believers. There is only one Church as we confess in the Nicene Creed: "I believe one holy Christian and Apostolic Church."

Only the Lord knows who the hypocrites are. Sometimes He makes them known as a warning to the Church and in order to remove their evil influence. A hypocrite is—literally—an actor holding up a mask and hiding his true nature, hence a person who covers up an unbelieving heart with a show of religion (piety). See how Ananias and Sapphira did this. Also note how and why only God can truly know a hypocrite, for by definition, they must fool humans.

## ***Application***

**Defining the concept of church** We have defined church as a gathering of believers. The Greek word for church means to “call out.” Matthew 18:20 tells us, “For where two or three are gathered together in My name, I am there in the midst of them.” Luther's explanation to the Third Article of the Apostolic Creed also helps define the concept of church, especially this sentence: “In like manner as He (the Holy Spirit) *calls*, *gathers*, enlightens, and sanctifies the whole Christian Church on earth, and keeps it with Jesus Christ in the one true faith.”

Use the simple definition of church to teach the children, especially the young ones, that church is not a building or just people. In fact, the style, size, or even the lack of a structure is irrelevant to the definition of church. Also hypocrites and the unrepentant are not members of the Church. Church is a gathering of believers. Visible groups or buildings are called “church” in an extended sense, because of the believers present. (Similarly we use the word “home” almost interchangeably with “house” when properly speaking, home is where a person lives.) Sometimes we try to preserve this distinction by using a capital “C” for the Church proper, the one, invisible Holy Christian Church, and a small “c” for the extended sense of the visible church. We should add here that technically speaking, the Church is defined as a gathering of believers around the means of grace (the Gospel in Word, in Baptism and in the Lord's Supper). This feature of the definition can perhaps be taught to the older students.

Mere church membership without faith in Christ is worthless. The performance of works and giving of offerings out of selfish motives are of no value, but instead are offensive to God. God knows our hearts. We may be able to fool men but not God. Going through the motions of worship without sincerity is displeasing to God. Read Ephesians 4:1-6 for a clear example of what is pleasing to God.

## Lesson 2 • Why do we go to church?

**Theme:** God gives us great blessings - we return worship  
**Text:** Psalm 84

### Background

The author is the Sons of Korah. Date: around 1000 B.C., during the time of David.

### Text Study

LORD (Jehovah, "I AM") means eternal, unchangeable God

God (Elohim) means might

**Verse 1:** *Lovely* = pleasant, not necessarily a physical beauty, but pleasing to an individual.

*Tabernacle* = tents, because the Temple was not yet built.

*Lord of Hosts* = Lord of all in heaven and earth, including all that is visible and invisible. (See Sabaoth, page 26 in *The Lutheran Hymnal*, See also the army of angels in Luke 2:14-15 and Revelation 5:11 and Hymn 467:2-5.)

**Verse 2:** *Longing* = the desire of one's soul, even to the point of fainting (to become pale).

*Cry out* = to exclaim with great joy, to celebrate in shouting. That's a good way to go to church!

Where this spirit is lacking, something is wrong. How do children feel about going to church? (Psalm 122:1)

**Verse 3:** *Swallow* (wild pigeon) or *sparrow* (small bird, twittering) — even birds are at home with the Lord of Hosts; if birds, how much more we! See also Matthew 6:26 and Luke 12:6-7.

**Verse 4:** *Blessed* = happy, privileged, fortunate.

*Selah* = a musical directive to pause for rest in reading, singing, or when an instrument is played. See the Beatitudes in Matthew 5:2-11.

**Verse 5:** *Pilgrimage* = the thought is that every area of our lives is blessed when our strength is in the Lord.

See 2 Corinthians 12:9. The strength of God and man's own strength are mutually exclusive; we must have more of the first and less of the other.

**Verse 6:** *Valley of Baca* = Luther called it "vale of tears." Baca means weeping, hence this is a gloomy; sterile place, the opposite of Zion noted in verse 7. But the desperate condition is changed by Christ in and through the Christian, the desert place becomes an oasis.

*Rain* = early spring rain; an abundant watering of a parched valley.

**Verse 7:** *From strength to strength* = to become stronger, those who go to God for help are helped by God to keep on going to Him.

*Zion* = "Sunny place," the hill on which Jerusalem sat. "Zion" is often used as picture language referring to heaven. Zion is sunny because the God of Light dwells there. See verse 11 where God is referred to as a sun.

*Appears before God* = soon we will appear before God. As for the present, He lives in us and we in Him by means of the Holy Spirit.

**Verse 8:** The Psalmist now writes in the imperative. God of hosts, **listen to me** (even though I am small, sinful, unclean, despised as described in Ps. 119:141).

*God of Jacob* = The Psalmist was a student of the Scriptures, who recognized God as the "Helper of the Past," the God of his forefathers.

**Verse 9:** *Look...O, God* = (Another imperative) "God, see!" It is a blessing when God looks upon us. See also Numbers 6:24-26.

*Shield* = Protector, the defense shield in battle.

*Your Anointed* = this refers to David, king at the time. David fled Jerusalem (probably from Absalom). We, too, should pray for those in authority. See 1 Timothy 2:1-2.

**Verse 10:** One day with the Lord in His house with His Word is better than a thousand of anything else.  
*Doorkeeper* = A person who stands in the doorway, on the threshold. Contrast the difference between the Courts of God and tents of wickedness. All wickedness is temporary and brings spiritual death, while the Courts of God are permanent and bring eternal life.

Leupold (A Lutheran theologian, active during 1920-1960) wrote, "It may seem to be a strong statement to describe those who are disinclined to worship the Lord as being guilty of wickedness. But that is where the root of all wickedness lies, shunning the fellowship of God." See also John 8:47, the third commandment and meaning.

**Verse 11:** *Sun* = Jesus, Light of the world.

*Grace* = (God's undeserved love) the means of grace in the church service; the Gospel in Word and the Sacraments.

*Glory* = The kingdom of glory and the glory which will be given to us at the end of the world. Present glory that we are called the sons of God; sinners made saints, Christ is our Brother.

*Uprightly* = A Christian is one who is sanctified by the Spirit. We do not have our own righteousness but the righteousness that Christ gives us. See also 2 Corinthians 5:21.

**Verse 12:** Trust = To set one's hope and confidence upon anyone, to throw oneself or one's cares on anyone. Also reference Luther's prayers, particularly the phrase "Into Your hands I commend..."

## Lesson

Attending church is very important because God gives us many blessings there and we have the opportunity to worship Him. Review Psalm 84 and see all that God does for us. Explain how the thought that we do God a favor by going to church is the exact opposite of the truth. We do not go to church to earn God's love, or merit His favor, nor do we go only to fulfill the law. God gives to us His grace through the Gospel.

## Application

Discuss reasons for going to church:

- To worship and praise God. This is the duty of creature to Creator. (Psalm 150, Hebrews 13:15, Matthew 4:10).
- To hear His Word and receive all its blessings (Luke 11:28).
- To confess our sins and be assured of forgiveness (Psalm 32:5).
- To encourage one another and be encouraged (Hebrews 10:25).
- To confess Christ publicly (Matthew 10:32).
- To bring our gifts of faith and love for Jesus (II Corinthians 9:7-8).
- To offer our prayers (1 Timothy 2:2).
- To partake of the Lord's Supper in remembrance of our Savior and to receive the assurance of forgiveness of sins and the strengthening of our faith (The means of grace are the Gospel in Word and Sacrament).

**Illustration** Once a man who could neither hear nor see well was asked why he attended church so faithfully, especially since he had such difficulty hearing and could not see well enough to follow the reading of the Scriptures or know what words to sing for an unfamiliar hymn. His response? "I just go to show whose side I'm on."

**Illustration** A congregation member told his pastor: "I don't feel I have to attend church each week; since I can worship God at home by reading the Bible or by listening to a service over the radio." The pastor pointed out passages from the Bible, such as Hebrews 10:25, which speak of "Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together." During the conversation that followed, the pastor walked to the fireplace and stoked the fire. Before he replaced the poker on the rack, he moved the largest and brightest coal from the fire to the side, away from the rest of the coals burning brightly in a heap. The conversation continued for a few minutes. Then the pastor

interrupted by saying, "Look at the coal lying by itself. When I moved it from the other coals in the fire, it glowed with a bright radiance and an intense heat. Now look at it. Gradually it grows dimmer, while the coals in the heap glow and give off heat and light." During the moments that the two men watched in silence, the single coal darkened to a dim glow, to a smoldering ember, and finally to a cold, partly burned cinder. "You see," said the pastor, "as long as that coal remained with the rest, it continued to live and glow. Alone, it cooled and died. So the believer who forsakes the church for pleasure, work, and other worldly interests becomes bound to his habit of neglecting church services, and finally the spark of faith is snuffed out." Worship with fellow Christians enriches our lives and helps to keep our faith alive. —*selected*

We despise preaching and God's Word by

1. not attending church at all;
2. by attending irregularly;
3. by attending and not listening;
4. by attending and listening but not believing;
5. by attending and listening and believing but not doing.

Luther's comments on the third commandment from *The Large Catechism*: "Therefore not only those sin against this commandment who grossly misuse and desecrate the holy day, as those who on account of their greed of frivolity neglect to hear God's Word or lie in taverns and are dead drunk like swine; but also that other crowd, who listen to God's Word as to any other trifle, and only from custom come to preaching, and go away again, and at the end of the year know as little of it as at the beginning. For hitherto the opinion prevailed that you had properly hallowed Sunday when you had heard a mass of the Gospel read; but no one cared for God's Word, as also no one taught it. Now while we have God's Word we nevertheless do not correct the abuse; we suffer ourselves to be preached to and admonished, but we listen without seriousness and care.

Know, therefore, that you must be concerned not only about hearing, but also about learning and retaining it in memory, and do not think that it is optional with you or of no great importance, but that it is God's commandment, who will require of you how you have heard, learned, and honored His Word.

Note: Refer to the whole section on the third commandment in *The Large Catechism*.

### ***Other references***

- Luke 2 — Anna
- Luke 2 — 12-year-old Jesus visiting the Temple
- Acts 17:10-12 — The Bereans

## Lesson 3 • What happens in Church?

**Theme:** We worship God in Spirit and Truth  
**Text:** John 4:5-26 • The Samaritan Woman

### *Background*

This story takes place during the first year of Jesus' ministry and during the last days of John the Baptizer's ministry. The place is Samaria, which is a province between Judea and Galilee. Use a map of Palestine to show the children the location. Jesus had to pass through Samaria to get to Galilee. Also locate Sychar.

Discuss the relationship of Jews and Samaritans, also intermarriage of Jews with heathen who lived in the land during captivity. Jews did not allow Samaritans to help build the temple (Nehemiah 4:1-2). Jews and Samaritans were not on friendly terms. This is why the woman was so surprised when Jesus spoke to her in verse 9. See also the comment of Jesus about the leper who returned to thank Him in Luke 17:11-19, especially verse 18.

Note the missionary skills of Jesus—used earthly things (water) to speak of heavenly things (living water), casually steers conversation in spiritual direction in verses 10-15. He uses this “unspiritual” setting and occasion to talk of the things that matter. See also His use of the law in verses 15-19 and the Gospel in verses 21-26 and 13-14. He saw everyone as a soul to be saved. Note what this single contact led to verses 28-30 and 39-42.

### *Text Study*

**Verse 6:** Jesus “wearyed.” He showed a human trait after a long day's trip.

**Verse 15:** This verse shows the woman's selfish desire.

**Verses 17-18** show the divine nature of Jesus. In His all-knowingness (omniscience), he revealed her family history and present immoral relationship. Jesus is the God-Man.

**Verse 22a** shows Jesus' understanding of our worship.

**Verses 23-24** are key verses. True worshipers worship God “in spirit and in truth.” Samaritans believed in idol worship on Mt. Gerazira (verse 20). Jesus told her it didn't matter where or how, as long as it was done in spirit and in truth. “In spirit” means flowing from a heart filled with faith and being sincere and genuine, not a hypocrite. Recall the story of hypocrites in Acts 5:1-11. “In truth” means to conform with all the teachings of God's Word and not worship anyone other than the True God. (See lesson 5.)

The lesson actually is subdivided into what goes on in church (liturgy, church year) and how that is to benefit us and then how we should act in church (appropriate behavior). Our participation in church should not be meaningless rote but we should know and understand what is happening and let our customs aid us in the worship of God in spirit and truth.

### *Application*

**Forms of worship** Talk to the children about various forms of worship. Remember the Old Testament ceremonial laws (the use of the tabernacle, a “portable church”); during Jesus' day (synagogues); and churches today. Go through our liturgy. It can only “serve” if it is understood. Explain the purpose of each part: hymns, Scripture readings (God speaks to us), confession (we confess our sins) and absolution (Pastor announces God's forgiveness of our sins through Christ), creed (we confess our faith), sermon, offering, prayers, and blessing.

You might want to point out the significance of the way the pastor stands. Facing the congregation, he acts as God's representative to the people, such as during the sermon, Scripture readings, absolution, and benediction. God → us.

Facing the altar, he acts as a spokesman for the congregation to God, such as during confession, prayers, and the offering. Us → God.

One can see how the term *minister* (“to serve”) is appropriate. It might be worthwhile to point out that the minister is “one of us,” a sinner in need of God’s grace, lest we fall into the foolishness of thinking of him as “holier” than us, closer to God, half human-half divine, etc. In his person, he is the same as we are. In his office he serves both us and God.

As you explain the liturgy (page 5 or 15), point out the attitude with which we approach the throne of God—confessing our sins, repentant, fleeing for refuge. Note especially the reason why sin is forgiven—not because we are sorry or ask for forgiveness, but *only and solely* for the sake of Jesus Christ and because of the work He has done on our behalf. See how often this is repeated and so underscores the following passages: Hebrews 9:22 reads, “Without shedding of blood there is no remission.” and I John 1:7 says, “The blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanses us from all sin.”

The creeds (Apostolic, p.12, Nicene, p.22, Athanasian, p. 53) give us the opportunity to stand up before the entire world and declare our beliefs. We need to understand the phrases used and speak with conviction when we recite it.

Having heard the Law and the Gospel in the sermon, the member is really in a position to sing the Spirit-inspired hymn “Create in me ...” from Psalm 51. Note that our offerings follow God’s gifts to us. “We love Him because He first loved us.” We do **not** have to buy or get God’s attention. He blesses us, then we return thanks. Finally what is begun in the name of the Triune God, also ends in His name with His Benediction (blessing) of us.

**Church year** Go through the church year using the chart included in the back of the student workbook. The church year begins with the first of four Sundays in Advent (coming) before Christmas and ends usually with Thanksgiving (or the Sunday before). The church year is divided roughly into two halves. The first part is the festival half: Advent, Christmas, Epiphany, Pre-Lent, Lent, Palm Sunday, Maundy Thursday, Good Friday, Easter, Ascension, Pentecost. The second half is the Trinity Season (sometimes referred to as the Sundays after Pentecost): Reformation, Mission and Harvest festivals, and Thanksgiving fall in the Trinity Season. Your students might enjoy coloring in the colors of the church year while at the same time learning the symbolism involved.

White	Color of the Godhead, symbol of perfection joy and purity—used for Christmas, Epiphany, Easter, Ascension, Trinity Sunday
Red	Color of fire, blood, martyrdom, love—used for Pentecost, Reformation, Thanksgiving
Violet (purple)	Color for royalty and repentance—used for Advent and Lent
Green	Color of growth, life—used for Sundays after Trinity or Sundays after Pentecost
Black	Color of death—used for Good Friday.

**Behavior in church** This is also a good lesson to cover behavior in church. One cannot help but feel that if we had the shaking and trembling of Mt. Sinai, we would have less of a problem in this area, but who in the world wants to trade our Mt. Zion for Sinai as in Hebrews 12:18-24.

“*In spirit and truth*” means reverence for the house of God. The account of Elisha, the she-bears, and the 42 children in 2 Kings 2:23-24 shows what happens when there is a lack of reverence. Church is not a playground or toy-room. It is appropriate to fold your hands, bow your head, close your eyes, kneel, stand, and sit—as ways to concentrate. Children need to be taught and trained. The more unaccustomed, the more unfamiliar, and the more a child won’t know what to expect or how to act. Regular attendance is important for our children.

Ecclesiastes 5:1 tells us, “Walk prudently when you go to the house of God; and draw near to hear rather than to give the sacrifice of fools, for they do not know that they do evil.” Church is not a social club. Visit with God before the service and with your fellow Christians after. Explain the purpose behind and “how to have” pre-service devotions.

An understanding of the liturgy will aid in understanding the importance of being on time to the church service. If you are late, wait and enter during a hymn. It is less distracting to others.

Why would it be a good idea:

- to let families with small children sit in the back?
- not to use the bathroom during church (except in an emergency)?
- to sit near the front of the church?
- not to go to bed too late on Saturday night?

It is important to discuss ways children can also reach out to others. When the woman was “found” by Jesus and brought to faith, she wanted to share that Good News with others. The people in the village believed, not just because of the woman’s testimony, but because of the words of Jesus.



## Lesson 4 • What can we do for Church?

**Theme:** We use God's gifts to us for the Savior  
**Text:** Matthew 25:14-30 • The Parable of the Talents

### Background

This story takes place during Tuesday of Holy Week while Jesus was in Jerusalem.

“A parable is a short narrative of an everyday event by which some spiritual truth is set forth. It is an earthly story with a heavenly meaning! Jesus often spoke in parables in order to make His teachings plain to all His hearers, even to the simplest.

The purpose of our Lord in teaching by parables was twofold—to reveal and to conceal the truth; to reveal the truth to those who really sought the truth and to conceal the truth from those who did not desire such knowledge.” (taken from Rupprecht's *Bible History Reference* Vol. II, p. 152)

### Text Study

**Verse 14** *Deliver* = to hand over for safe keeping

**Verse 24** *Hard man* = the adjective hard is used here in a derogatory sense

**Verse 30** *Unprofitable* = worthless servant, one who has been very negligent with what his Lord has given him.  
*Gnashing* = grinding of teeth; it is common for people in extreme pain to grind their teeth.

“Let none hear you idly saying, ‘There is nothing I can do, While the souls of men are dying and the Master calls for you’”—Hymn 496:4a. This lesson covers some important points for our young people. Each of us has been given gifts by God (no one has been overlooked). Simple, everyday Christian life is a Godly service (don't wait for some big, heroic deed). When we look to the cross and empty tomb how can we say anything but, “Here am I, send me.”

### Application

**Talents** In the story, talents are units of money. As we apply this to our Christian lives, the application is not limited to what we have to offer to the church financially, but also covers our abilities as well. There are many different ways to serve the Lord and His church: preaching, teaching, playing organ or musical instruments, directing or singing in choir, serving on church council or various church boards and committees, helping with building programs (both planning and actual building), cleaning church, etc. This list represents no order of importance—all gifts and talents are needed. These are some of the ways in which people use their talents and extend efforts in service to their Lord. Even more examples could be mentioned.

The point of our lesson is **not** how much we produce, (both faithful servants are told the same thing) but rather **how** we use the gifts the Lord has given us. To whom much has been given, much is expected. Some are capable of doing more than others, yet all are capable of doing something. See Hymn 496 and Colossians 3:17.

“God is not as much concerned with our ability as He is with our availability.” — *selected*

Has God given us what we have just to use it on ourselves or has He something more in mind? God expects that we all use our gifts in service to Him, to the glory of His name, to the benefit of His Church. We are stewards (managers) of God's gifts. When a person takes this to heart and eagerly endeavors to do the same, it is an indication of the saving faith that has been worked in his or her heart. Many and rich are the spiritual blessings in store for this person. Once again, it is important to emphasize that good stewardship is the result of faith, not the cause of faith. Because Jesus has already died for our sins, and now we are on our way to heaven, we return thanks by serving Him as good stewards. We are **not** going to heaven because we are good stewards. Remember the words of Luke 17:10: “So likewise you, when you have done all those things which you are commanded, say, ‘We are unprofitable servants. We have done what was our duty to do.’”

Hymn 377:9: Faith clings to Jesus cross alone And rests in Him unceasing; And by its fruits true faith is known, With love and hope increasing. Yet faith alone doth justify, Works serve thy neighbor and supply Our proof that faith is living.

God supplies different gifts to different people. Many working together will result in a properly functioning unit. Be sure to read 1 Corinthians 12:12-31. If one or two or more withhold the gifts that they have to offer, the entire group suffers. Then some will try to overwork and wear themselves out. Often times the work goes undone and piles up. What would happen if the windshield wipers on the car quit working? What about the headlights? What about the engine? Soon everything grinds to a halt.

We should diligently strive to use the gifts that the Lord has given to us to the glory of His name, and for the benefit of His people. Discuss the children's giving and serving habits.

Have the children look at some of the "stewardship" hymns in *The Lutheran Hymnal* and *The Worship Supplement*. This would also be a good time to review the principles of Christian giving (see 1 Corinthians 16:2). 1) first fruits, not just leftovers; 2) as God blesses us; 3) each child of God regularly.

Underscore the motive: the love of Christ for us. Not the hope of high reward, not the desire to buy forgiveness but the outpouring of a heart moved by the death/life scene on Calvary. It has been said that the reason God loves a cheerful giver is because He Himself is a cheerful Giver. Oh, that the Spirit would make us "like Father, like sons" children who reflect their Father in heaven. Matthew 5:16 tells us, "Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven."

**The offering** You may want to discuss questions related to the offering. Who always sees the amount given? Is it possible to rob God? (Malachi 3:8-10) Why are offering envelopes used? What should a person do if he misses a service? Why should you have your offering ready before church? Where does the offering on the altar go? (directly and indirectly) Does the pastor get to take it home?

Some have thought of receiving the offering after the service (a collection box by the back door or something) so we could avoid all appearance of wanting to get money and so eliminate any confusion about the means of grace and the Gospel being for sale. But this deprives God's children of the privilege of saying thank you publicly and of seeing their offerings brought to the altar. Which way do you prefer? Do you think offerings would stay the same, go up or down if a "private, back door collection" were taken? One cannot leave the subject of "money" without mentioning the widow in Mark 12:41-44. God looks not at the amount given, *but how* it is given!

We must be careful, as always, not to limit stewardship to "money." A steward is a caretaker. We are to take care of all God has given us. Refer to the explanation of the First Article and to the Fourth Petition. See also Hymn 400! We are all given equal amounts of time to take care of. TV in moderation is all right, but don't let it crowd out or overtake Bible study, Catechism, etc. Our children, maybe, don't have the money for church and missions, but they do have time for prayers. What an important tool prayer is as stated in James 5:16! Perhaps you can help them compose prayers for VBS, the pastor, ILC, their neighboring church, the Foreign Missions in Nigeria and India, etc....

How can anyone say "God has given me no talents, no gifts?" Lead your children to see God has given them countless gifts. Explore with them the talents/abilities God has given them: art talents, reason, running, piano, sports, cooking, writing, singing, etc. **Serve God!**

This lesson also affords the opportunity to explain God doesn't expect some big, grandiose work (saving a life, converting thousands of souls, etc.) but we serve Him by single, everyday tasks such as making beds, taking out the garbage, or eating properly, God is also served when we serve one another. A good caretaker takes good care of whatever he has, big or small, much or little.

## Lesson 5 • How do we pick a church?

**Theme:** The True Glory of the Church

**Text:** Haggai 2:1-9

### **Background**

This story takes place shortly after the return from the Babylonian Captivity. To properly understand what has taken place, remember that the nation of the Israelites had become divided into the Northern Kingdom and the Southern Kingdom. The Northern Kingdom was known as Israel, and the Southern Kingdom was known as Judea. The Northern Kingdom fell at the hands of the Assyrians about 721 B.C. The Southern Kingdom, Judah, fell at the hands of the Babylonians about 606 B.C. We are dealing with the return of the Southern Kingdom from captivity in our text. Their captivity had lasted about 70 years. They returned to their homeland in around 536 B.C.

**Our story takes place in Jerusalem** When the Southern Kingdom of Judah had been taken into captivity, Jerusalem was burned, and the Temple was destroyed. In 536 B.C. the people were freed by edict of King Cyrus, and returning to their own land they began to rebuild the Temple. After they had laid the foundation, the work was stopped by their enemy neighbors, the Samaritans. Nothing further was done for 15 years. In the meantime, a new king, Darius, had ascended the Persian throne. He was kindly disposed toward the Jews and under the spiritual leadership of Haggai and Zechariah, work was resumed and the Temple was completed in four years (520-516 B.C.).

Circumstantial details:

- The prophet Isaiah had prophesied about 160 years before that Cyrus would allow the people to return to their homeland to rebuild the Temple.
- It was about 52 years since the first Temple had been destroyed.
- The first Temple must have been one of the great wonders of the world at that time. The gold, precious stones, and the expert craftsmanship that went into the Temple resulted in a splendidly beautiful architectural masterpiece. Externally this was a gloriously beautiful Temple. Internally it had been desecrated by idol worship.
- After work on the Temple had stopped for some time, the people became indifferent (See Haggai 1:4,9; 2:3).
- The finished Temple was dedicated amid great rejoicing. But some 500 years later when the true glory of the Temple, Jesus Christ, came into the world, most of the people received Him not (John 1:11).

### **Text Study**

- Verse 1:** *The word of the Lord came by Haggai* God inspired Haggai to speak (verbal inspiration). There was a misconception concerning the true glory of the Temple.
- Verse 3:** Haggai points out that they are comparing the new Temple with the old one, and they are disappointed because the new Temple will lack the outward splendor of the old. Not only had the Samaritans interrupted the work on the Temple, but the attitudes of the people, as they compared the old and new Temples, caused them to become idle in their indifference.
- Verse 4:** But they are instructed to take courage and work, for the Lord of Hosts was with them in their endeavors. They need not fear the Samaritans, and they need not be disheartened by the apparent lack of outward splendor of the new Temple. The Lord of Hosts was not disheartened by the lack of outward splendor. This was an important lesson for the people to learn concerning the true glory of the Temple.
- V. 6-7** (Read Hebrews 12:26-29) Remove things that can be shaken (outward things) and replace them with that which cannot be shaken (The True Glory Jesus Christ). See also Isaiah 60:4-9. Jesus Christ is the

True Glory of the Temple. (See also Isaiah 60:4-9, Isaiah 9:6-7, Isaiah 66:12, Zechariah 2:5, Ezekiel 43:1-5)

## *Lesson*

A physical appearance is insignificant. Obviously, we should take pride in our building and property and keep it clean, neat, and looking as good as possible. Our glory dare not be in the bricks, stone, boards, siding, furnishing, windows, etc. but in the dwelling of the Triune God through His Word. We cannot pick a church because it is nearby, beautiful, large or small, quaint, convenient, the pastor is nice, the people are friendly or "I was born there," etc. We must look for—we need—Jesus and His presence in the Word and Sacraments. Every departure from the Word of truth threatens that presence and also our faith.

## *Application*

How to pick a church...

- First we might ask what should a church give us? External glory? This is not the true glory of the church we see from our text. It is not important that a church be beautiful. This is not a necessity for true and valid worship. See John 4:10-24.
- The true glory of the church, as with the Temple, is Jesus Christ. Things external can be shaken, but the True Glory, which is Christ, cannot be.
- What do we look for in a church then? We look for a church where Bible doctrine is taught in its truth and purity. For when this is done we come to a true knowledge of that true Glory of the church, Jesus Christ. Christ alone adorns the church in true glory and splendor. Related passages: John 8:31-32; Acts 17:10-11; Romans 16:16-18; 1 Corinthians 1:10; Matthew 28:20; Matthew 18:20; 2 John 9-11.
- Look over the description of the churches in Revelation 2-3. We are told nothing about the buildings or physical structures, but only about the spiritual conditions—and how they stood in comparison with God's Word.
- As time and opportunity allow, one might want to get into the breakdown of churches.
  1. Un-Christian (deny any or all of the following doctrines.)
    - a. Trinity — 3 persons in 1 Godhead
    - b. Deity of Christ — Jesus is true God as well as true man.
    - c. Vicarious Atonement — Jesus is the Substitute for the death penalty for all sinners.
  2. Christian (the above three doctrines are taught)
    - a. Orthodox (straight teaching) — no additions to or subtractions from God's Word. God's Word is taught and the Sacraments are administered, all in their truth and purity,
    - b. Heterodox (other teaching) — another teaching(s) is mixed with the truth of God's Word.

We should look for, join, support and fellowship with only orthodox Christian churches. (See Matthew 7:15; Romans 16:17.) The Biblical pictures of leaven and gangrene demonstrate how poisonous and deadly false doctrine is to the soul. You might want to review the beginning history of your church or others in the CLC where church with Jesus was held in movie theaters, fire stations, schools, town halls, basements and other rented buildings. The key is not where the gathering is held, but that it is gathered around the Savior and His Word!