

“Going to Church: Being with God and Brothers and Sisters in Christ”
A Bible Study to Help Prepare Minds and Hearts for Worshipping Together Again
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As Christians start returning back to worship services after COVID 19 times of “Stay at Home” orders, it is good to study God’s Word to be reminded of the basics of Christian worship. Our Christian gathering is far more than being able to go back to our favorite restaurant, or hair stylist, sports or hobby store.

Christians gathering together in the name of Father, Son and Holy Spirit are in the presence of the Mighty God, Creator, Redeemer, and the life-giving Holy Spirit. God’s presence and blessings are always in a Christian’s life, but Christian worship is a time of learning, praising God and praying together – all in the presence of God and receiving the blessings of His Word and Sacraments.

I encourage every member of Zion (and others!) to take the time to read and listen along to this Bible study. Ideally all seven lessons can be studied individually before we gather together again for our first worship service on June 7th (Lord willing!). Perhaps study one lesson every two or three days up to June 7th.

God has blessed us with historical records gathered and written by Luke about the early Christians gathering for worship. The basic teaching and Good News is simple and straight forwards! And at the same time the implications and applications of God’s Word are rich and deep, that comfort, teach and empower every human soul in every culture, time and situation. We believe God will comfort, teach and empower us anew!

Outline:

- Lesson 1: Introduction – Acts 2: The Setting of the First Christian Worship
- Lesson 2: Repentance and Baptism: Becoming a Christian

Acts 2:42 – And they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers.

- Lesson 3: Christian Worship Has the Apostles’ Teaching
- Lesson 4: Christian Worship Has Christian Fellowship
- Lesson 5: Christian Worship Has the Lord’s Supper (Part 1)
- Lesson 6: Christian Worship Has the Lord’s Supper (Part 2)
- Lesson 7: Christian Worship Has Prayers

Prayer: Dear Lord Jesus Christ, thank you for loving me and watching over me and my family! So many things seem confusing and mixed up in the world these days. But I don't want to be confused and mixed up about You and my salvation and my church. Please give me the Holy Spirit so I receive Your Word, understand it and share it with others. Amen.

Lesson 1: Introduction – Acts 2: The Setting of the First Christian Worship

The Promised Holy Spirit

The Gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke and John record Jesus' birth, ministry, death, resurrection and the first days after His resurrection. Jesus promised to send the Holy Spirit after He returned to the Father.

Jesus said:

12 "I still have many things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now. 13 When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth, for he will not speak on his own authority, but whatever he hears he will speak, and he will declare to you the things that are to come. 14 He will glorify me, for he will take what is mine and declare it to you. 15 All that the Father has is mine; therefore I said that he will take what is mine and declare it to you. John 16:12-15

What are some things the Holy Spirit would do?

- a. "He will guide you into _____ the _____."
- b. The Holy Spirit will not speak on His own _____, what He _____ He will _____.
- c. The Holy Spirit will _____ Jesus. The Holy Spirit will declare things from _____ to the disciples.
- d. All that is God the _____ 's belongs to Jesus. The Holy Spirit would take from _____ and _____ it to the disciples.

Jesus said that the teachings and guidance from the Holy Spirit will be from the God the Father and God the Son as well. The future teachings of the apostles will be from God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

In these and other promises of Jesus to send the Holy Spirit, Jesus reassured the disciples they would never be left alone, nor would they ever be left without the grace and power of God with them. To be sure, having the Holy Spirit in one's life does not guarantee worldly success and power. In fact, worldly success and power were the exact temptations Satan brought to Jesus to try to get Jesus to deny His Father's will to be the Savior of the world. Jesus taught His disciples that they too would be tempted to follow the world's ideas not God's. But the world's ways do not give peace, Jesus does.

33 I have said these things to you, that in me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation. But take heart; I have overcome the world. John 16:33

Prayer: Dear Lord Jesus, You have promised wisdom and teaching by the power of the Holy Spirit. I ask You to fill my mind and heart with Your Word. You know my many problems which I worry about. Please give me Your peace and give me Your Word. Amen.

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Lesson 2: Repentance and Baptism: Becoming a Christian

Luke, who wrote the Gospel of Luke that focuses on Jesus, also gathered testimony from the opening years of the Christian church and wrote the book called the Acts of the Apostles. Acts chapter 1 starts out with the risen Lord Jesus appearing and teaching the apostles and promising the baptism of the Holy Spirit. 40 days after His resurrection Jesus ascended into heaven and directed His disciples to wait in Jerusalem for the Holy Spirit. While in Jerusalem waiting for the Holy Spirit the eleven apostles chose a fellow disciple, with the guidance of Jesus, to replace Judas who had betrayed Jesus and killed himself.

In Acts 2:1-35 the coming of the Holy Spirit with power is recorded as well as the first sermon of the Church. Peter preached to the people in Jerusalem that Jesus was the Messiah, the Christ, sent by God to forgive people their sins. But instead of believing in Jesus, the people agreed with the Jewish leaders to kill Jesus. The Holy Spirit guided Peter to point out: a) who Jesus is – the promised Messiah, and b) what the people have done, killed the Messiah.

29 "Brothers, I may say to you with confidence about the patriarch David that he both died and was buried, and his tomb is with us to this day. 30 Being therefore a prophet, and knowing that God had sworn with an oath to him that he would set one of his descendants on his throne, 31 he foresaw and spoke about the resurrection of the Christ, that he was not abandoned to Hades, nor did his flesh see corruption. 32 This Jesus God raised up, and of that we all are witnesses. 33 Being therefore exalted at the right hand of God, and having received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, he has poured out this that you yourselves are seeing and hearing. 34 For David did not ascend into the heavens, but he himself says,

"The Lord said to my Lord,

"Sit at my right hand,

35 until I make your enemies your footstool.”

36 Let all the house of Israel therefore know for certain that God has made him both Lord and Christ, this Jesus whom you crucified.”

37 Now when they heard this they were cut to the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, “Brothers, what shall we do?”

Jesus said the Holy Spirit’s work would be to glorify Jesus. (John 16:14) Peter’s sermon led the people to see that they had done a great and terrible sin. They killed the Messiah whom God had sent to save them. Moreover, this Messiah rose from the dead (as prophesied by King David) and He now rules over all things as “Lord and Christ.”

Not only did the people participate in killing the Savior whom God the Father had sent, but also Jesus rose from the dead and now has all power. They are in trouble! “Brothers, what shall we do?”

Peter responded:

38 And Peter said to them, “Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. 39 For the promise is for you and for your children and for all who are far off, everyone whom the Lord our God calls to himself.” 40 And with many other words he bore witness and continued to exhort them, saying, “Save yourselves from this crooked generation.” 41 So those who received his word were baptized, and there were added that day about three thousand souls. (Acts 2:38-41)

Becoming a Christian, a follower of Jesus Christ, involves changes:

1. Upon hearing God’s Word, a person sees his or her terrible situation without God’s forgiveness and love. Or put differently, the person comes to the point of despair and fear because of sin, evil and death in his or her life. “I am doomed. I cannot change this myself. I need help.” This recognition of going the wrong way is repentance that God’s Word brings to the soul, mind and heart.

2. A person receives God’s name, forgiveness, salvation, life and protection by being baptized into the name of the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.

God’s name, forgiveness, salvation, life and protection can only be received, not earned or decided upon. Jesus described new life in God’s kingdom as being born again (or “born from above”) by water and the Holy Spirit. Only God’s Spirit can give new spiritual life to a person. The Holy Spirit uses God’s Law in His Word to show a person they are in deep sin, guilt, shame and trouble. The Holy Spirit also uses the Good News about Jesus in God’s Word to point people to Jesus to know and trust in His forgiveness, grace and truth. Jesus is the only way out of trouble. Baptism puts a person into God’s grace. A person does not decide for God’s power or grace, the Holy Spirit brings these and changes the person.

In John 3:

5 Jesus answered, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God. 6 That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. 7 Do not marvel that I said to you, 'You must be born again.' 8 The wind blows where it wishes, and you hear its sound, but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes. So it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit."

Peter's teaching brought God's Word of Law to the people that first Christian Pentecost day, and they saw their sin and became afraid. Peter's teaching also brought the Good News that God freely forgives in the name of Jesus. One needs the baptism Jesus taught, that is, baptism in the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. (Matthew 28:18-20)

Peter's teaching is clear that children are fully included in the promise of forgiveness and new life in the Holy Spirit. They should not be left out from receiving Holy Baptism and its blessings. It is vital to understand that no sinner can decide to believe in Jesus. Some would say that a baby or small child cannot make a conscious decision and should not be baptized until they can say they believe. This is a mistaken belief and it is completely contrary to the teaching in God's Word.

2 You know that when you were pagans you were led astray to mute idols, however you were led. 3 Therefore I want you to understand that no one speaking in the Spirit of God ever says "Jesus is accursed!" and no one can say "Jesus is Lord" except in the Holy Spirit. (1 Corinthians 12:2-3)

No one with the Holy Spirit can say " _____ is _____."

And, "No one can say _____ is _____ except by the Holy _____."

The Gift is for All People of All Ages and Conditions

A person who says and believes that "Jesus is Lord" *already* has the Holy Spirit and *already* is a disciple of Jesus. No one can make a statement of belief in Jesus without the Holy spirit already active in their life.

1 And you were dead in the trespasses and sins 2 in which you once walked, following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience— 3 among whom we all once lived in the passions of our flesh, carrying out the desires of the body and the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind. 4 But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, 5 even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ—by grace you have been saved— 6 and raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, 7 so that in the coming ages he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness

toward us in Christ Jesus. 8 For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, 9 not a result of works, so that no one may boast. 10 For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them. (Ephesians 2:1-10)

Paul's teaching dismisses any idea that a person chooses to believe in Jesus. Faith in Jesus is a gift from God by the power of the Holy Spirit.

Verses 1-3 – All People's Condition:

All people are _____ in trespasses and _____ .

All people follow the _____ of this world and follow the _____ of the power of the _____ . This is the _____ that works in sons of _____ . (The devil.)

We _____ once lived like this following passions of our _____ , and the _____ of the body and mind. We were all once by nature _____ of _____ , like all of mankind.

In Paul's teaching there is absolutely no possibility for any person to be good before God on their own. There is no possibility one can decide on their own to think, do or say something that is truly good before God. There is no possibility that on its own a baby or small child stands in a good relationship with God because all people are sinners and are by nature under God's wrath. A baby and child depends on its parents for bodily care; so also the baby and child depends on its parents to bring him or her under Jesus' protection and care through Holy Baptism which Jesus commanded.

Some might say a child is born innocent without sin before God. Such a belief does not accord with God's Word. Paul leaves out no one in any condition, all are under God's wrath.

*Verses 4-7 – **God** Acts to Save; God Has Prepared for Us to Live as His Holy People*

_____ **God**, being rich in _____ because of His great _____ with which He _____ us, even when we were _____ in our _____ , **made us** _____ together with Christ.

By _____ we have been saved. **God** raised us up with _____ and _____ us

in heavenly places. This great grace and mercy of God will be seen all the more in coming
_____ .

We are saved by God's _____ , not by our human _____ . We are
saved through _____ . This salvation and every part of it is God's _____ . No one
can say and _____ that they have had any part in their salvation.

God's full intention and plan in our salvation which He gives to us, is that we _____ in our
new life with _____ . God even _____ our good works _____ !

Our Belief and Confession Match God's Word

The Lutheran Reformers clearly understood sinful humanity's complete inability to save themselves, or to decide to be Christian, or to do any good work at all without the power of the Holy Spirit.

From the *Book of Concord*, Formula of Concord, Solid Declaration, Article II:

⁷ We believe that in spiritual and divine things the intellect, heart, and will of unregenerated man cannot by any native or natural powers in any way understand, believe, accept, imagine, will, begin, accomplish, do, effect, or cooperate, but that man is entirely and completely dead and corrupted as far as anything good is concerned. Accordingly, we believe that after the Fall and prior to his conversion not a spark of spiritual powers has remained or exists in man by which he could make himself ready for the grace of God or to accept the proffered grace, nor that he has any capacity for grace by and for himself or can apply himself to it or prepare himself for it, or help, do, effect, or cooperate toward his conversion by his own powers, either altogether or half-way or in the tiniest or smallest degree, "of himself as coming from himself,"⁶ but is a slave of sin (John 8:34), the captive of the devil who drives him (Eph. 2:2; 2 Tim. 2:26). Hence according to its perverse disposition and nature the natural free will is mighty and active only in the direction of that which is displeasing and contrary to God.¹

⁶ 2 Cor. 3:15.

¹ Theodore G. Tappert, ed., *The Book of Concord the Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church*. (Philadelphia: Mühlenberg Press, 1959), 521.

Going to Church Starts with God's Action in Us

From the first time the Holy Spirit was working in us, whether as a baptized baby or later in life, it is God who has drawn us to Himself. It is God who draws us together to worship Him. Unbelieving sinners do not decide to come to church to be converted. God draws sinners to Himself. He forgives and converts sinners and give sinners the righteousness of Jesus.

This is what happened at the time of Peter's sermon in Acts 2 as well as in all times up to today. A Christian's desire to gather with other Christians for worship is the Holy Spirit's power in us. "Reopening" a church service is much more than reopening a restaurant or theater or retail store. The Holy Spirit calls, gathers, enlightens, and sanctifies God's people. Christians are motivated and empowered by the Holy Spirit to gather together to worship God.

In fact, the true Church can never be "closed" or "shut down" because the Church is the people of God saved in Jesus Christ. There is no disease, tragedy, government order, persecution -- not even death -- that can overcome God's love and salvation for His people. We stopped meeting for a while since human medical advice and human government said this was good to do for the sake of one another and for our communities. We remember the Biblical teaching that God is in control even in the midst of disease and chaos. He works through all things for the good of His people. (Romans 8:31-39)

Prayer: Dear Lord Jesus, please bless my days as the patterns of life continue to change. Now businesses are starting up again, people are starting to get out again, our church services will soon begin. Yet the COVID-19 disease is still around. But even worse, the temptations to doubt You or Your Word continue to come against me and other Christians. Give me strong faith and hope in You. Please bless the pastor and leaders of our congregation so that they may do Your will to lead our congregation. In Your name I pray, Amen.

Lessons 3-7 will review some basic truths of our gathering together as the people of God.