

Notes for the Ones Called-Out to Meet

Info: (651) 283-0568 Discipleship Training Ministries, Inc. www.dtminc.org Today's Date: January 3, 2021

What Is The Church For?

by Dan Trygg

“Simon Peter answered, ‘You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God!’ ¹⁷ And Jesus responded, ‘...on this rock I will build My church, and the gates of Hades shall not be strong against it.’”

Matthew 16:16,18

“...If he pays no attention to them, tell the church. But if he doesn't pay attention even to the church, let him be like an unbeliever and a tax collector to you.”

Matthew 18:17

“Therefore, brothers and sisters, by the mercies of God, I urge you to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God; this is your reasonable service.”

Romans 12:1

These two verses in Matthew are the only times in the entire four gospels where Jesus used the word which is now commonly translated as “church”. That’s it! That is all that Jesus had to say about it. **But, wait. Jesus did not speak in a vacuum. There was a whole lot *contained* and *implied* by what He said here.**

The Greek word that Jesus used here was *ekklēsia* (pronounced – “ek-clay-see-ya”). It was a fairly common Greek word for a gathering, or assembly of people. **The word picture behind this term was to “call out” people. They were “called out” from whatever other activities they were doing to “meet for a purpose”.** This was not the term generally used for a social gathering. It was more commonly used for “calling out” people to inform them of something, or for them to work together or to make a decision about something. It would be akin to the use of our word “caucus” in today’s English. **There was usually some kind of business to address at such a gathering.** It was used in the Greek translation of Deuteronomy 4:10, where **God called out the people** of Israel to stand before Him on Mount Sinai, so He could establish a covenant with them, ...**to become their King, and they His people.** This same term was used in Judges 20:2 for the “calling out” of troops to assemble for war. **The word was noticeably *not* a religious word, ...neither in Greek, nor in the OT usages.**

There was *another word* that was more commonly used for the religious gatherings in the Greek translation of the OT, ...“synagogue”. By the time of the NT, this word had come to refer almost exclusively to Jewish religious gatherings, and the buildings they met in. **By choosing to call His people, ...His “called-out-ones”, His *ekklēsia*..., Jesus did two very significant things: First, He *separated* what He was intending to do with His people from the religious model, expectations and practices of the synagogue.** He was *not* making an effort to reform the synagogue system. He was leaving it behind. The “church” was not to be a NT synagogue for Christians. **Secondly, by choosing this relatively undefined term for a “called-out-gathering” or “assembly-for-purpose”, Jesus could supply His own content for what His followers were to do when they met.** At the same time, however, because this word, *ekklēsia*, was used in the Greek translation of the Hebrew scriptures, **Jesus’ usage of this word, however, still gave Him continuity with the covenant people of God from the past, and with prophetic passages about them.**

Well, if the church is not supposed to be primarily a religious gathering, ...what is it all about? What is it for? **There are two very important clues stated in Matthew 16. Peter made the breakthrough confession that Jesus is the Messiah, the King of God’s called out people. Those who hear and respond to the call, come out from their self-directed lives to covenant with Jesus as their God-appointed King. In a very real sense, the church is supposed to be a political entity.** But wait! Our warfare is not *physical* or *human*, ...it is *spiritual*.

Do you see what Jesus said that *the directive* of the church will be? He did not say that we were to take up arms against the Romans, ...or any other human government. **Our focus is to be upon “the gates of Hades”.** This is a powerful word picture. If He had said, that we are to “fight spiritual warfare”, that would have been somewhat nebulous. It would be difficult to see or measure what is being accomplished. **By referring to the “gates” of Hades”, this brings to mind the commonly understood method of warfare of that day.** When an advancing army came into an area, the inhabitants would retreat into fortified places, in hopes that they would remain safe behind the walls and gates of their cities. The advancing army would then lay siege to the city to attempt to break through the defenses and defeat the opposition. The “gates” of a city were generally the weakest point in the city’s defenses, so it was common for the advancing army to focus the attack against the gates to batter them down, and gain access to the city. **The point of Jesus’ comment is that *we*, the called-out people of God, are to be on the offensive, ...coming against the entrenched forces of the enemy, the powers of darkness..., and Jesus’ encouragement to us is that “the gates of Hades will not stand strong against” the called-out people that are allied with Jesus. We should be able to see where and when the enemy is vanquished.** People’s lives will be changed. They will be set free, and be motivated to grow. The rule and reign of God will be extended there in a new and deeper way. The name of Jesus will be lifted up.

What about that other passage from Matthew 18? It is interesting that this is the only other verse where Jesus mentions the *ekklēsia*. This passage is about dealing with people who are offensive, ...people who do not respect you or may even sin against you. Try to address the matter yourself. If the person does not listen to you, bring one or two others, to serve as witnesses of the communication. If the person refuses to listen to this small group, then bring this matter before the “called-out ones”, the group-gathered-together-for-God’s-purpose. The key to understanding this passage is in vs. 17, “...if he refuses to listen to the gathered-group, let him be to you (as an individual) as a Gentile and a tax-collector.” In other words, put some distance between that person and you, because he is not safe for you. It does *not* say here that he is to be put out of the group. (There *is* an appropriate time and situation where that may be required, but it is not here. Cf. 1 Cor. 5.) The point for our study here is that **Jesus assumed and expected every one of His followers to be part of a group of “called-out ones”**. Just to clarify, the groups that Jesus envisioned here were not the large, formalistic church gatherings that we typically experience. **The group dynamic that Jesus was assuming, ...and that the disciples would have understood..., was one similar to their own experience together as disciples.** They spent a lot of time together, ...and they came from some very different backgrounds. You can be sure that there were rough edges, disagreements and squabbles. But they were committed to following Jesus together. In the end, **they were together because He had called-them-out to be together. They were the first *ekklēsia*.** They were being trained together, were learning to work together, and were following and serving Jesus together. They were an informal, interactive, life-related group of individuals, called-together by Jesus to follow Him. **They did not choose each other.** They didn’t even have a vote about who was recruited. **Jesus called-out the group ...to grow together, to build each other up, to help each other mature, and then to go out to recruit others to this same dynamic.**

So, even though Jesus is recorded as only mentioning the word *ekklēsia* in these two passages recorded for us in the gospels, **the disciples certainly grabbed hold of this word-picture as descriptive of what the covenant people of King Jesus were to be all about.** The word occurs another 111 times in the NT, and **we see the apostles incorporate new believers into interactive home meetings right from the beginning, ...from the day of Pentecost on.** The “church” became the predominate way of speaking of Christians. Everyone has their own personal relationship with the Lord, but **it seems quite evident that Jesus generally calls His disciples out from their individual lives, and into interactive communities, where they can instruct, share with, encourage and help one another grow and serve Jesus together.**

It is through the church that the agapē-love of God can be clearly expressed and seen, as we help and serve one another. It is through the “called-out-assembly” that the unusual unity that bears witness of God’s Presence can be made known. It is in the intimate, interactive gatherings of Spirit-filled believers where the spiritual gifts can most often be effectively expressed and recognized. The spiritual gifts are given to serve one another. Each one has received at least one Spirit-empowered gift that he or she is to responsibly use as a steward of the multi-faceted grace of God. As we are directed by Jesus, we can speak or demonstrate the truth in love to build up and help one another grow. **Often, we need a team, ...a team of specialists..., to get the job done. God calls-us-out with that in mind. He knows what He is doing.** We never end up with a group where all have only one gift, ...the *same* gift. No, God knows how to place us where we are supposed to be. **We all have a role to play in the teamwork of the *ekklēsia*. We need to be connected with one another in order for that to happen.** We need “face time”, ...time spent with one another in unhurried conversation, so that we can see into one another’s heart, and appreciate one another, ...and also respectfully address some of those rough edges when they come up.

And so we come to Romans 12:1. **Do you believe God’s hand is on your life? Do you believe He *can* and *is* guiding your steps? Look around, are you in relationship with believers that are seriously following Jesus?** Do you know of a group of believers like that? If not, ask God to lead you to a group of believers that He has called-out to meet together to be about “Kingdom business”. What the apostle wrote in this verse is much more vivid than may appear in English. It says, “I encourage y’all... to stand your bodies alongside, ...to present the bodies of y’all, ...a single, living sacrifice, ...dedicated, devoted, set-apart to God, the reasonable service of y’all.” I don’t know if you caught that, but what it is saying is that **each one of us is to stand ready, ...stand-alongside-others called-out here in this place and time..., to become a living sacrifice together, ...to be dedicated to do something together, ...a holy, special, set-apart work, ...a sacrifice that requires both the death of self so that the life of Jesus can be revealed in the midst of us all, as we operate together.** This is a reasonable response to the wonderful mercies of God, which He has shown us. **God is calling-out His people to be willing to become a team together, ...to covenant with Him and each other to learn how to function effectively as a team.** This requires self-sacrifice and humility, as well as stepping up with boldness at the leading of the Spirit. **It is what the *ekklēsia* is supposed to be, ...something rarely seen in our time and culture. King Jesus is calling-out a team to defeat, dislodge and displace the enemy, ...and to build up disciples to discover and reveal His Kingdom power through His people. Are you up for that?**