

Gathering in

Question

How often do we find the personal pronoun “my/our” used with the word church in the New Testament?

Question

**And I tell you that you are Peter,
and on this rock I will build my
church, and the gates of Hades will
not overcome it.**

Once

Matthew 16:18

Meaning?

- The question immediately arises what did Jesus mean by the word “church”?
- Only found here and in Matthew 18:17 in the gospels
- “tell it to the church” ... “listen even to the church”
- Jesus never uses the word again

Meaning?

- For many commentators leads to doubt if Jesus used these at all
- They are the later church putting the words in Jesus mouth to justify its existence

“Jesus preached the kingdom but what we got was the church”

- Taking scripture as the final authority we need to address this question

Meaning?

- Important that we understand what scripture means by this word
- Also we need to consider the way the word is used today
- A very slippery word – 17 definitions of meaning in the dictionary
- Meaning is all over the place – reason so many had negative thoughts about “the church”

Meaning?

- My/Our church is...
- I am going to church...
- Don't get that much out of the church...
- The church is doing things I don't like
- The pastor/elders/deacons are...
- a club we are belong to
- a place we go to – a ritual we engage in
- organisation that is there for me
- the structure – the clergy

Meaning?

How we talk about the church building:

- The house of the Lord
- The sanctuary

Result?

- **We have little or no concept of the biblical church**
 - it is a thing!
- **Conviction on so many levels is absent**
 - We are disengaged from the church
 - We can get up and move on

The word used

ἐκκλησία

- 115 times in the NT – 62 in the letters of Paul
- A group of people coming together – the Greek city state meeting in assembly
- a gathering of people – Acts 19 Ephesians crowd
- But given its use in NT why this word chosen?

The word used

ἐκκλησία

- Jesus was a man of the OT – turn to that world for it's meaning
- But its Greek not Hebrew – OT of the church tended to be the LXX
- It uses this word to translate the Hebrew “qahal”
- General meaning of a gathering – army for war, (1 Sam 17:47) OR a dangerous crowd (Psalm 26:5)

The word used

ἐκκλησία

- But it comes to have a technical meaning in relation to Israel
- Particularly the gathering of the people at Horeb
- Called “the day of the Assembly” – Deuteronomy 9:10

The word used

ἐκκλησία

- In short it is the day that Israel becomes the covenant people of God
- Jesus meaning here – he will build his people of God
- A central theme of the Scripture we saw last Sunday evening

The PEOPLE of God

- All through the OT God is calling out a people
 - Abraham
 - Moses
- But then we face the failure of the OT people
- Covenant is broken -- exile

The PEOPLE of God

- But in the depths of the exile we hear a voice telling us God is not finished
- Jeremiah 31

The PEOPLE of God

The time is coming,” declares the LORD, “when **I will make a new covenant** with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah. **It will not be like the covenant** I made with their forefathers when I took them by the hand to lead them out of Egypt, **because they broke my covenant**, though I was a husband to them,” declares the LORD. “This is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after that time,” declares the LORD. “I will put my law in their minds and write it on their hearts. I will be their God, and they will be my people. No longer will a man teach his neighbour, or a man his brother, saying, ‘Know the LORD,’ because they will all know me, from the least of them to the greatest,” declares the LORD. “For I will forgive their wickedness and will remember their sins no more.”

The PEOPLE of God

Inner work

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The PEOPLE of God

Know God

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The PEOPLE of God

Forgiveness

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The PEOPLE of God

- **To extend to all people**

“In that day I will restore David’s fallen tent. I will repair its broken places, restore its ruins, and build it as it used to be, so that they may possess the remnant of Edom.” Amos 9:11

The PEOPLE of God

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“After this I will return and rebuild David’s fallen tent. Its ruins I will rebuild, and I will restore it, that the remnant of men may seek the Lord, and all the Gentiles who bear my name, says the Lord, who does these things’ that have been known for ages.”
Acts 15:14-18

The PEOPLE of God

- How do we first meet the people of God in the NT?

- At the birth of Jesus

“...she will give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus, because he will save **his people** from their sins.”

Here is the meaning of the word

The PEOPLE of God

Three things...

1. The PURPOSE of God

Therefore, remember that formerly you who are Gentiles by birth and called “uncircumcised” by those who call themselves “the circumcision” (that done in the body by the hands of men)— remember that at that time you were separate from Christ, excluded from citizenship in Israel and foreigners to the covenants of the promise, without hope and without God in the world. But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far away have been brought near through the blood of Christ.

Ephesians 2:11ff

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1. The PURPOSE of God

Consequently, you are no longer foreigners and aliens, but fellow-citizens with God's people and members of God's household, built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone. In him the whole building is joined together and rises to become a holy temple in the Lord. And in him you too are being built together to become a dwelling in which God lives by his Spirit.

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1. The PURPOSE of God

His purpose was to create in himself one new man out of the two, thus making peace, and in this one body to reconcile both of them to God through the cross, by which he put to death their hostility. He came and preached peace to you who were far away and peace to those who were near.

Ephesians 2:11ff

1. The PURPOSE of God

After this I looked and there before me was a great multitude that no-one could count, from every nation, tribe, people and language, standing before the throne and in front of the Lamb. They were wearing white robes and were holding palm branches in their hands. And they cried out in a loud voice:

“Salvation belongs to our God, who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb.”

Revelation 7:9ff

1. The PURPOSE of God

Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and there was no longer any sea. I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, “Now the dwelling of God is with men, and he will live with them. **They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God.** He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away.”

Revelation 21:1ff

1. The PURPOSE of God

But you have come to Mount Zion, to the heavenly Jerusalem, the city of the living God. You have come to thousands upon thousands of angels in joyful assembly, to the church (**ASSEMBLY**) of the firstborn, whose names are written in heaven. You have come to God, the judge of all men, to the spirits of righteous men made perfect, to Jesus the mediator of a new covenant, and to the sprinkled blood that speaks a better word than the blood of Abel.

Hebrews 12:22ff

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Hebrews 12:22ff

- Note the past tense

1. The PURPOSE of God

That power is like the working of his mighty strength, which he exerted in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly realms, far above all rule and authority, power and dominion, and every title that can be given, not only in the present age but also in the one to come. **And God placed all things under his feet and appointed him to be head over everything for the church**, which is his body, the fulness of him who fills everything in every way.

2. The WORK of God

- This is part of the root idea of ἐκκλησία
- Two words brought together
 - καλεο – to call
 - ἐκ – out
- Separate and distinct group drawn out from the world

2. The WORK of God

God calls out throughout the OT to fulfil his purpose:

- Abraham – Genesis 12
- Moses – Exodus 3
- Israel – Deuteronomy 4:10
- David – 2 Samuel 7

2. The WORK of God

- **In the case of Israel:**
 - Deliver from bondage
 - Brought into relationship
 - For an inheritance
 - To be together

2. The WORK of God

2.1. Deliverance -- 1 Peter 2:9

But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of him **who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light.**

2. The WORK of God

2.1. Deliverance

“who gave himself for our sins to rescue us from the present evil age.” Galatians 1:3

As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins, in which you used to live when you followed the ways of this world and of the ruler of the kingdom of the air, the spirit who is now at work in those who are disobedient. All of us also lived among them at one time, gratifying the cravings of our sinful nature and following its desires and thoughts. Like the rest, we were by nature objects of wrath. But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions. Ephesians 2:1ff

2. The WORK of God

2.2. Relationship

Entered by faith and faith alone -- not by right of birth, nationality or ritual

“...you are receiving the goal of your faith, the salvation of your souls...” – 1 Peter 1:9

“For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith -- and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God -- not by works, so that no-one can boast. For we are God’s workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.” – Ephesians 2:9ff

2. The WORK of God

2.2. Relationship -- 1 Peter 2:9ff

But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, **a people belonging to God**, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light. **Once you were not a people, but now you are the people of God**; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy

Hosea 1 – 2:22

2. The WORK of God

2.3. Inheritance -- 1 Peter 1:4

Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! In his great mercy he has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, and **into an inheritance that can never perish, spoil or fade—kept in heaven for you**, who through faith are shielded by God's power until the coming of the salvation that is ready to be revealed in the last time

2. The WORK of God

2.3. Inheritance – pilgrim journey towards it

- Like Israel of old through the wilderness and the conquest

“...until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, **attaining to the whole measure** of the fulness of Christ.” Ephesians 4:13

2. The WORK of God

2.3. Inheritance – pilgrim journey towards it

“The church is the pilgrim people of God. It is on the move – hastening to the ends of the earth to beseech men and women to be reconciled to God, hastening to the end of time to meet its Lord who will gather us all into one.” (L.Newbegin)

2. The WORK of God

2.3. Inheritance – Revelation 21:3-4

Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and there was no longer any sea. I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, “Now the dwelling of God is with men, and he will live with them. **They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God.** He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away.”

2. The WORK of God

2.4. Together

Here we hit a grammatical problem – the plural “you”

AV’s “thee” singular – “you” plural – but most never learn this!

NT is written to plural “you”

– our “youse” or “youse uns”

2. The WORK of God

2.4. Together

Consider Ephesians – it is to the plural “you” all the way through

We hear it so individualistically but it all of us

Consider again the passage in Ephesians 2

2. The WORK of God

2.4. Together

Consequently, you are no longer foreigners and aliens, but fellow-citizens with God's people and members of God's household, built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone. **In him the whole building is joined together and rises to become a holy temple in the Lord. And in him you too are being built together to become a dwelling in which God lives by his Spirit.**

2. The WORK of God

2.4. Together -- Matthew 18:20

“For where two or three come together in my name, there am I with them.”

- Here is the wonderful privilege of gathering together
- Christ is here like he is no where else!!

2. The WORK of God

2.4. Together

Another question?

How many times does the word “saint” occur in the NT?

- “saints” plural occurs 61 times
- BUT “saint” singular occurs only once
- then it is “greet every saint” Phil 4:21

2. The WORK of God

2.4. Together -- Saints

The idea of the loan ringer saint is foreign to the writers of the NT

Indeed the word means not so much “holy” as

“separated”,

“set apart”,

“wholly devoted to God”

The saints live pure lives because they are his people

2. The WORK of God

2.4. Together

God saves us one by one that we may join his people that we may:

- help one another
- Encourage one another
- Serve one another
- Teach one another
- Admonish one another
- Bear with one another in love
- Be kind and compassionate to one another
- Forgive one another
- Submit to one another
- Speak to one another in psalms, hymns and spiritual songs
- Love one another deeply
- Live in harmony with one another

and together share in the glory of the new heavens and new earth!

3. The GLORY of God

3.1. Ephesians 3:10-11 and 20-21

His intent was that now, through the **people of God** (church), the manifold wisdom of God should be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly realms, according to his eternal purpose which he accomplished in Christ Jesus our Lord.

3. The GLORY of God

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Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us, to him be glory in the **people of God** (church) and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, for ever and ever! Amen.

The Church

The people of God

So when we read in Ephesians 5:25

Husbands, love your wives, **just as Christ loved the people of God and gave himself up for them** to make them holy, cleansing them by the washing with water through the word, and to present them to himself as a radiant people, without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, but holy and blameless.

It is not some “organisation” or “thing” or “it” that Christ loved

The Church

The people of God

- It is people – you and me!
- Remember Galatian 2:20

I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I live in the body, I live by faith in **the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.**

The Church

The people of God

- You cannot say I do not want to be part of the church
- You either belong to Christ and are a member of the church
- or you do not belong Christ and are not a member of the church

The Church

The people of God

- High and the great privilege of bearing his name and being one of his people