



ONE CHURCH

Introduction

“Take us to church.” It’s a simple sentence. To one group of Believers it may mean literally “take us to the church house.” To another group of Believers it may mean “make us shout.” The truth is words take on different meanings depending on our knowledge, understanding, and experiences.

This is even more true when translating from one language to another. One wrong translation can mean the difference between war and peace. That’s why people who translate spoken word in real time are called interpreters because their job involves communicating meaning and not merely translating words.

The Word

Matthew 16:17-18 (NIV)

17 Jesus replied, "Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah, for this was not revealed to you by flesh and blood, but by my Father in heaven. 18 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."

Acts 19:23, 35-41 (NIV)

23 About that time there arose a great disturbance about the Way.

35 The city clerk quieted the crowd and said: "Fellow Ephesians, doesn't all the world know that the city of Ephesus is the guardian of the temple of the great Artemis and of her image, which fell from heaven? 36 Therefore, since these facts are undeniable, you ought to calm down and not do anything rash. 37 You have brought these men here, though they have neither robbed temples nor blasphemed our goddess. 38 If, then, Demetrius and his fellow craftsmen have a grievance against anybody, the courts are open and there are proconsuls. They can press charges. 39 If there is anything further you want to bring up, it must be settled in a legal assembly. 40 As it is, we are in danger of being charged with rioting because of what happened today. In that case we would not be able to account for this commotion, since there is no reason for it." 41 After he had said this, he dismissed the assembly.

Breaking it Down

The early Christians looked and acted significantly different than the Christians we often encounter today. Over the years, the practice of Christianity has gone through some evolutions

that may have taken Christians away from understanding the original intentions of Christ.

Peter's original name was Simon.

Although most Believers only refer to him as Peter, Peter's original name was Simon. We see this fact first revealed in Matthew 4:18 when Peter is initially called to follow Christ and again in Matthew 16:17. He's referred to as Peter throughout the gospels because they were written **after** Jesus ascended, not while He was living. So, Peter was the name everyone knew for him. It's in Matthew 16:18 that Jesus appears to give Simon his new name of Peter.

Jesus declared death would not defeat salvation.

Just before Matthew 16:17, Peter had confessed Jesus to be Christ (which means Anointed). His confession meant Peter recognized Jesus as the Jewish savior (Messiah) they had been waiting to see come. As the Messiah, Jesus would save people from death and to life. Hades was known as the place where the dead went and were tormented. Therefore, it was a direct enemy of salvation through Christ Jesus. However, Jesus publicly declared that Hades (or death) would not win the battle over life for those who believed in Him.

Christianity was originally known as the Way.

Scholars are not certain where the name the Way came from but many point to Jesus statement in John 14:6 where He states, "...I am the way, the truth, and the life...". As Believers, they would have received Jesus' teaching that Christ was the only way to the Father and, therefore, considered Him "the Way."

Non-believers hated the Way enough that they caused a great disturbance.

Paul had preached in Ephesus for nearly two years, helping people understand the Way including why there was only one

God. His preaching directly affected the earnings of some Ephesians who benefited from the trade that happened in the renowned city (see Acts 19:23-27). As a result of people's financial concerns, many in Ephesus were outraged and grabbed Paul's companions who taught the Way. They entered a large arena (used for theater) and confronted them. The problem was the Way had done nothing directly to hurt the upset Ephesians. They had only taught a different faith than was popular in Ephesus. Thankfully, a city clerk recognized the error of the upset Ephesians and directed the non-Believers to go formerly to the courts (called the legal assembly) if they wanted to challenge those of the Way.

Ask Yourself

After reading the passage, consider these questions.

Why do you think Jesus called Peter Simon of Jonah first and then referred to Him as Peter?

Why do you think people today rarely call Christianity "the Way"?

What does the story of the non-Believers at Ephesus teach us about being a follower of Christ?

Going Further

Words often lose some of their meaning when translated from one language to another. Studying God's word in its original language can provide a deeper understanding. Take a moment to study the original Greek of this lesson's scripture readings. You can do that using an interlinear Bible, which is widely available online for free.

The word Peter means rock.

Jesus' action of changing Simon of Jonah's name to Peter reveals a deeper meaning when you understand Peter means rock in Greek. When you read Matthew 16:17-18 using the definition of rock instead of Peter, it reads:

17 Jesus replied, "Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah, for this was not revealed to you by flesh and blood, but by my Father in heaven. 18 And I tell you that you are [Rock], and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not overcome it."

Notice the symmetry between Simon's new name and the rock Jesus is saying He will use to build His church. The other 11 disciples would have quickly picked up on that connection.

How do you think the other disciples felt hearing Jesus give Simon a new name in connection with his confession of Jesus as Messiah?

The Greek word translated church actually means assembly.

The Greek word used for church in Matthew 16:18 is the same word used for assembly in Acts 19:41. The word is transliterated into English as *ekklēsia* and its more common form in the New Testament is *ekklēsia*. It technically means “gathering of those summoned” and was a secular term dating back to the 5th century BCE. The word church traces its origins to the Greek word *kyriakon*, which was not invented until around 300 CE.

How does the meaning of Matthew 16:18 change when you exchange the word church for the more accurate word assembly? And I tell you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my assembly, and the gates of Hades will not overcome it.

Applying It In Life

Keeping true to the meaning of God’s word gives us greater clarity to live for Christ. Despite its challenges, the Catholic denomination has worked to preserve Christ’s core teachings – including the original meaning of Matthew 16:18. It calls its local communities of Believers parishes and traditionally reserves the word church for the global body of Christ, which they teach is the focus for service. This focus enables the denomination to do extraordinary things each year. For example, in 2021 it fed more than 12 million people, provided 1.9 million accommodations of emergency shelter, and improved the job skills of more than 20,000 people in the US alone.



Bible Reading Plan

We recommend using the New Living Translation (NLT) or New International Version (NIV) when reading these scriptures each day.

Day One

Acts 19:1-12

Day Two

Acts 19:13-22

Day Three

Acts 19:23-34

Day Four

Acts 24:1-16

Day Five

Acts 24:17-27

Day Six

Romans 12:3-8

Day Seven

Romans 12:9-21