

EKKLESIA -- NOT CHURCH

A 15-Minute Lesson (Audio Script)

EKKLESIA -- NOT CHURCH. A 15-MINUTE LESSON. AUDIO VERSION.

[START HERE]

SECTION ONE. THE WRONG WORD.

[Pause]

For two thousand years, one mistranslated word has shaped how Christians see themselves.

And tragically, how they have limited themselves.

Jesus said, I will build my ekklesia.

But most of us grew up hearing, I will build my church.

One word. One massive shift.

From a kingdom movement. To a religious institution.

From a people. To a place.

From government. To a gathering.

[Pause]

The problem is not just semantics. It is identity.

When we use the word church, we import seventeen hundred years of institutional baggage.

Baggage that did not exist in the first century.

SECTION TWO. WHAT EKKLESIA ACTUALLY MEANT.

[Pause]

In the Greek and Roman world, ekklesia was not a religious word.

It was political vocabulary.

Every citizen in a Greek city-state knew exactly what it meant.

[Pause]

The Athenian ekklesia was the governing assembly of citizens.

Male citizens over eighteen. Called out from their homes. To the public square.

They did not gather to worship.

They gathered to make laws. Try serious crimes. Elect magistrates. Decide foreign policy.

[Pause]

The meeting place was the ekklesiasterion.

A public building on the Pnyx hill. Central to the city. Open-air.

With a raised platform for speakers.

It was a seat of government. Not a temple.

[Pause]

By the first century, ekklesia had become the standard term across the Greek-speaking eastern Roman empire.

It meant the official assembly of a city's free citizens.

The decision-making body of the city.

The citywide governmental unit of the common people.

[Pause]

Here is the critical distinction.

The ekklesia was not a subset of society.

It was the people exercising authority.

It was not one group among many.

It was the collective citizenry convened to rule.

[Pause]

When Jesus chose the word ekklesia in Matthew chapter sixteen verse eighteen, He was not inventing a new religious term.

He was using the most recognizable political word in the empire.

Every Jew. Every Gentile. Every Roman official knew.

An ekklesia meant a city assembly with governmental authority.

SECTION THREE. THE SMOKING GUN.

[Pause]

The word church comes from an entirely different Greek word.

Compare these two words.

[Pause]

Ekklesia. Meaning assembly of citizens for governance.

Used one hundred fifteen times in the New Testament.

[Pause]

Kuriakos. Meaning belonging to the Lord. Or the Lord's house.

Used exactly zero times to describe the people of God.

[Pause]

Kuriakos appears only twice in the New Testament.

First Corinthians chapter eleven verse twenty. The Lord's supper.

Revelation chapter one verse ten. The Lord's day.

It never refers to the assembly of believers.

[Pause]

The English word church traces back to medieval Greek kuriakon.

Meaning the Lord's house. A building. Not a people.

[Pause]

So here is what happened.

We use an English word derived from one Greek term, kuriakon.

To translate an entirely different Greek term, ekklesia.

This is like translating president as building.

[Pause]

We did not just translate poorly.

We replaced a word about people and power.

With a word about property and place.

SECTION FOUR. THE TYNDALE REBELLION.

[Pause]

William Tyndale knew the truth.

In his English New Testament, fifteen twenty-six and fifteen thirty-four, Tyndale consistently translated ekklesia as congregation.

He knew ekklesia did not mean church.

He wrote, the church is the congregation of all them that believe in Christ.

[Pause]

Why was this dangerous?

If ekklesia meant congregation, a local assembly of believers, then authority belonged to the people.

Not to bishops. Not to popes. Not to institutional hierarchies.

Tyndale's translation threatened the entire power structure.

[Pause]

The cost?

Tyndale was strangled and burned at the stake in fifteen thirty-six.

[Pause]

The King James Bible, sixteen eleven.

King James the First issued fifteen rules to his translators.

Rule number three prohibited changing church to congregation.

The translators were Greek scholars who knew better.

But they were forbidden to translate accurately.

[Pause]

This was not a scholarly mistake.

It was a political decision to preserve institutional power.

And we have been reading it wrong for four hundred years.

SECTION FIVE. THE CONTRAST.

[Pause]

Here is how the first century ekklesia differs from contemporary church.

[Pause]

Ekklesia was a people. Not a place.

Church today is often a building or location.

[Pause]

Ekklesia was citywide. The assembly of all citizens in a geographic area.

Church today is fragmented. Thousands of separate, competing groups.

[Pause]

Ekklesia was governmental. Making binding decisions. Exercising authority.

Church today is religious. Focused on worship services and private spirituality.

[Pause]

Ekklesia was public. Convened in open spaces, forums, and homes.

Church today is private. Meeting in dedicated religious buildings separated from public life.

[Pause]

Ekklesia was one per city. The ekklesia of Corinth. The ekklesia of Thessalonica.

Church today is many per city. Hundreds of denominations and independent congregations.

[Pause]

Ekklesia was self-governing under Christ's authority.

Church today is often hierarchically controlled. By denominational structures or celebrity pastors.

[Pause]

Ekklesia was identity-based. You were the ekklesia because you were under Christ's lordship.

Church today is often attendance-based. You are church because you show up to services.

[Pause]

Early believers met in homes. Romans chapter sixteen verse five. Philemon verse two.

Rented halls. Public spaces.

But the location never defined them.

They were the ekklesia because of their identity under Christ's authority.

Not because of where they gathered.

[Pause]

For nearly three hundred years, Christianity had no specialized religious buildings.

The movement spread precisely because it could not be locked inside sacred structures.

SECTION SIX. THE CHALLENGE.

[Pause]

What would change if we stopped asking, where do you go to church?

And started asking, who is the ekklesia in this city?

[Pause]

Three takeaways.

[Pause]

One. Language shapes reality.

When we use the word church, we reinforce the idea of separate, competing religious institutions.

When we recover ekklesia, we see one people per city under one King.

[Pause]

Two. The ekklesia is not a meeting. It is a governmental reality.

Jesus said, I will give you the keys of the Kingdom.

Whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven.

Matthew chapter sixteen verse nineteen.

Keys are symbols of governmental authority.

Binding and loosing describe legislative power.

[Pause]

Three. We are not a congregation in a building.

We are a city assembly. A colony of heaven's government.

Called out to represent Christ's rule in our communities.

[Pause]

Jesus did not come to establish another religion with better buildings.

He came to establish His ekklesia.

A kingdom people with kingdom authority.

Called out from the world to govern with Him.

[Pause]

The gates of Hades will not prevail against that.

But they might prevail against a church that forgot it was supposed to be an ekklesia.

[END]

[OPTIONAL DISCUSSION QUESTIONS]

[Pause after each question]

Why do you think we cling to the word church even when we know its origins?

What would it look like for believers in your city to function as one ekklesia rather than dozens of separate churches?

How does seeing ourselves as a governing assembly change how we approach our neighborhoods, workplaces, and culture?

[END OF LESSON]