

Session 8

The Hinge: Who Do You Say That I Am?

Mark 8:27-9:1 | A Ransom for Many: A Catholic Journey Through the Gospel of Mark

Part 1: Leader Preparation Guide

Session Overview

Discovery Aim: Participants discover the Gospel's hinge: on the road at Caesarea Philippi, Jesus asks the question the whole book has been building, Peter answers with the right title, and then everything turns: the first passion prediction, spoken plainly; Peter's rebuke and the most shocking sentence Jesus ever says to a friend; and the terms of discipleship, a cross before a crown, for the Master and for everyone who follows him. Last week's blurry trees come into focus: right title, wrong meaning, and a second touch still needed.

Catholic Touchstone: The confession of Peter and the necessity of the cross. The Catechism reads this scene exactly as Mark builds it: Jesus accepted Peter's profession of faith and announced the coming Passion, for the meaning of his kingship is revealed in the light of his Passion and Resurrection (CCC 440, 601, 618).

What You Need to Know

Location is theology. Caesarea Philippi sits far north of Galilee at the foot of Mount Hermon: a pagan district built around a grotto sacred to the god Pan, crowned with a gleaming temple to Caesar. The district's famous shrines, the grotto of Pan, the temple to Caesar, make a suggestive historical backdrop for the question. Mark also tells us it happened "on the way" (*en te hodo*, 8:27): the Way vocabulary from 1:2-3 now attaches to the road to Jerusalem, and the great discipleship teachings cluster "on the way" (8:27; 9:33-34; 10:32, 46, 52).

The two questions are a funnel: "Who do MEN say that I am?" collects the crowd's options, John the Baptist back from the dead, Elijah, one of the prophets, all of them large, all of them too small, all of them safely dead men returned rather than something new. Then the question that will not stay in the first century: "But who do YOU say that I am?" Peter: "You are the Christ." After seven sessions of demons gagged and titles deflected, a human being finally speaks a true title out loud. Two precision points for you as leader. First, in Mark, Peter says "the Christ", not "the Son of God." Matthew records the fuller confession ("the Son of the living God") and the blessing and the keys; Mark, which tradition receives as Peter's preaching, characteristically strips Peter's honors and keeps his failures. Watch your group's sealed guesses: some will think this scene resolves them. Point them, without any hint of the future, to the exact wording of their question: the first human to say "Son of God" has not spoken yet. Second, Jesus' response to the correct answer is neither yes nor no: "he CHARGED them to tell no one about him", the Secret at maximum, at the very moment of breakthrough. Why silence a true confession? Because of what happens next.

Verse 31 is the continental divide of this Gospel: "the Son of man MUST suffer many things, and be rejected by the elders and the chief priests and the scribes, and be killed, and after three days rise again." And "he said this PLAINLY." Two words carry the freight. "Must" (*dei*): divine necessity, not tragic accident; the cross is the plan, written in the Scriptures (Isaiah 53 above all, as the Church has always heard it). "Plainly" (*parresia*): the era of veiled speech is ending; about the cross, there are no parables. This is the answer to the Secret the group has been circling for seven weeks: the title "Christ" could not be preached because, without the cross, it would be heard as politics and glory. Now that the cross is on the table, plain speech begins, and the title is still embargoed until the meaning catches up.

Peter's rebuke and Jesus' counter-rebuke must be given full, uncomfortable weight: "Get behind me, Satan! For you are not on the side of God, but of men." The disciple who just spoke the truth becomes, one sentence later, the voice of the tempter, because a Messiah without a cross is, as the fuller temptation accounts of Matthew and Luke let us name it, Satan's own proposal, resumed here in a friend's loving voice, its most dangerous form. Here last week's cliffhanger pays off: the two-stage healing at Bethsaida reads as the parable, and Peter as its meaning. He sees, really sees, but "men like trees, walking": right title, catastrophically wrong content. He will need a second touch, and the Gospel will show it being administered the hard way. Note the tenderness inside the severity: "Get BEHIND me" is not "get away from me"; behind the Master is the disciple's place (the wording is kin to "follow me": disciples walk behind). Peter is not expelled; he is re-positioned.

Then Jesus widens the circle to the crowd (8:34-38): deny self, take up the cross, follow. Do not let the word "cross" stay religious wallpaper: in occupied Palestine it meant one thing, the condemned man carrying his own execution beam through jeering streets. Jesus is describing discipleship as a death march that turns out to be the only road to life: "whoever loses his life for my sake and the gospel's will save it." The paradox is the Gospel's deepest economics, and 8:38 raises the stakes to eternity. Finally 9:1, a famously hard verse: "there are some standing here who will not taste death before they see that the kingdom of God has come with power." Be honest about the difficulty and unbothered by it: a longstanding and common reading in the Church, supported by Mark's own arrangement, hears the first installment six days later on the mountain of the Transfiguration (next session, and note Mark's pointed time-stamp, "after six days," welding 9:1 to what follows), and many readers find further fulfillments in the Resurrection, Pentecost, and the kingdom's explosive spread within that generation. Read this way the verse is a promise with layered fulfillments, not a failed prediction.

Old Testament Roots and Fulfillment

- **Isaiah 53:3-5, 10-12.** "Despised and REJECTED by men... wounded for our transgressions... it was the will of the LORD to bruise him." The vocabulary of the first passion prediction (suffer, be rejected, be killed) is Isaiah's. The "must" of 8:31 has an address: the Servant Songs.
- **Deuteronomy 21:23.** "A hanged man is accursed by God." Load this text for the steelman: Peter's horror at a crucified Messiah was not weak faith but strong Bible; a Messiah on a tree looked like a contradiction in terms. Keep Galatians 3:13 in your pocket as the resolution: he became the curse to exhaust it.
- **Psalms 118:22 (leader background).** "The stone which the builders REJECTED has become the head of the corner." The same verb as 8:31; Jesus will quote it himself at 12:10. Rejection by the builders was in the blueprints.
- **1 Kings 19 and Malachi 4:5 (leader background).** The crowd's guesses (Elijah, a prophet) are the old categories straining to hold something new: they reach for the greatest returning figures they know, and all of them are too small.

Voices of the Church

Voices of the Church: St. Justin Martyr (Dialogue with Trypho 89-96)

In the mid-second century, St. Justin debated Trypho the Jew, who pressed the very objection Peter felt: the Scriptures may foretell a suffering Messiah, but a CRUCIFIED one is impossible, for the Law says the man hanged on a tree is cursed by God. Justin's answer became the Church's: read Isaiah 53 whole, the Servant despised, wounded, and led like a lamb, and you will see that the Christ was to enter his glory precisely through suffering; the curse he bore was ours, taken willingly, and the scandal of the cross is the shape of the rescue. What Peter could not yet see at Caesarea Philippi, the Church was defending with chapter and verse within living memory.

Voices of the Church: St. Leo the Great (Sermon 4, on the faith of Peter)

St. Leo teaches that Peter's confession came from a revelation of the Father and became the rock-solid foundation on which Christ builds his Church, a strength given to Peter, not generated by him. Leo is equally clear-eyed about Peter the man: the strength is Christ's, communicated to the office, so that the Church's stability never depended on the steadiness of Peter's nerves, which the Gospels are honest enough to show failing. The rock is what grace made of him, not what fear could unmake.

Voices of the Church: St. John Chrysostom (Homilies on Matthew, Homily 55)

Preaching on "let him deny himself and take up his cross," St. John Chrysostom refuses to let the words soften: to deny oneself is to treat the old self as a stranger whose claims we no longer recognize, and to take up the cross is to live ready for death daily, carrying it not as punishment but as trophy. And yet, he insists, Christ asks nothing he does not repay absurdly: lose a life that was always leaking away, and receive one that cannot be taken.

Catechism Connection

- **CCC 440:** Jesus accepted Peter's profession of faith that he is the Messiah and announced the coming Passion of the Son of Man: the true meaning of his kingship revealed in the light of the Passion and Resurrection.
- **CCC 601:** The Scriptures had foretold this divine plan of salvation through the death of the righteous Servant; Jesus' redemptive death fulfills Isaiah's prophecy.
- **CCC 618:** Christ calls his disciples to take up their cross and follow him; the cross is the unique sacrifice in which all are invited to share.
- **CCC 890-891 (steelman support):** What infallibility is, a charism protecting the Church's definitive teaching on faith and morals, and, by its precise limits, what it is not: a claim about the personal virtue or judgment of the men who hold the office.

Thread Watch

Thread Watch (leader only)

The Messianic Secret: THE LOGIC REVEALED. The group finally gets the why: the title without the cross is a lie waiting to happen, so confession is embargoed until the meaning arrives. The Secret is not resolved, no human has yet said "Son of God," but its purpose is now visible. Guard the sealed guesses: Peter said "the Christ." If anyone claims their guess is fulfilled, reread their question's wording with them and say only: "keep watching."

The Way (*hodos*): ACTIVATED as the frame: the question is asked "on the way" (8:27), and from here through chapter 10 discipleship happens on the road to Jerusalem. Following him now has a direction and a destination.

The Bread / Torn: Dormant. (Privately: the two-stage healing served its hinge purpose tonight; you may quietly enjoy how well Mark builds.)

Session Goals

1. Participants can narrate the hinge structure: confession, silence command, passion prediction spoken plainly, rebuke, counter-rebuke, terms of discipleship.
2. Participants can explain WHY the Secret existed, from the text: the title is embargoed until the cross defines it.
3. Participants can connect the Bethsaida two-stage healing to Peter's half-sight.
4. Participants can state the "first pope called Satan" objection at full strength and answer it with the office/impeccability distinction and Luke 22:31-32.
5. Each participant answers "Who do you say that I am?" in one written sentence and takes 8:34 personally: names one concrete self-denial.

Time Note (90 Minutes)

Win 15 min | Build 55 min | Send 15 min | Closing prayer 5 min. **Pre-chosen cuts if running long:** compress question 1 (the crowd's guesses) to a leader summary and fold the 9:1 discussion (question 8) into a two-sentence leader note pointing to next week. Do not cut the confession sequence, the Satan rebuke, or the steelman.

Part 2: Discussion Guide

Opening Prayer

Leader: Lord Jesus Christ, tonight you ask us to our faces the question you asked on the road. Give us Peter's courage to answer, and the humility to let you correct what we mean by our answer. We ask this through Christ our Lord. Amen.

Win (15 minutes)

1. Think of a time you were completely right and completely wrong at the same time, right about the fact, wrong about what it meant. What happened?
2. If a stranger asked the people who know you best, "Who is he? Who is she?", what would they say, and would any of it surprise you?

Leader bridge: Last week ended with a man seeing people like trees walking, and I told you Mark put that story where he put it on purpose. Tonight you find out why. This is the hinge of the entire Gospel: everything before it climbs to a question; everything after it descends toward Jerusalem. And this session only works if the question lands on you.

Build (55 minutes)

Read Mark 8:27-9:1 aloud, slowly. It is short. Let it be heavy.

1. **Setting first: Caesarea Philippi, a pagan district built around a grotto of the god Pan, under a temple to Caesar, and Mark says the question came "on the way" (8:27). Why might Jesus choose THIS backdrop and THIS moment, eight chapters in, to ask? And inventory the crowd's answers in verse 28: what do John-raised, Elijah, and "one of the prophets" have in common, and what is missing from all of them?**

ANSWER (share after the discussion)

The district was famous for its shrines, a lineup of rival lords, and against that backdrop Jesus poses the question of his identity: choose your king. The timing: only now, after the loaves, the sea, the crumbs, the opened ears, is there enough evidence on the table for the question to be fair. The crowd's answers are all compliments and all evasions: each one makes Jesus a great RETURNING figure, a rerun of something Israel already had categories for. Notice what every option shares: dead men come back. It is the largest thing the crowd can imagine, and it is too small. People still do this, "great moral teacher," "prophet," "my personal guru": categories that honor him precisely in order to avoid him.

2. **"But who do YOU say that I am?" Peter: "You are the Christ." After seven weeks of silenced demons and deflected titles, a human being finally says a true title out loud. Now the strange part: Jesus' response in verse 30 is neither "yes" nor "well done." What is it, and, given everything your group has theorized about the Secret, why NOW, at the moment of breakthrough?**

ANSWER (share after the discussion)

"He charged them to tell no one about him": the Secret at maximum intensity at the exact moment of maximum truth. And verse 31 is the reason, do not let the group miss that verses 30 and 31 are one thought: he silences the title AND begins teaching the cross, because the title without the cross

is a lie waiting to happen. "Christ" in the streets of first-century Israel meant warrior-king, Roman-exPELLER, throne in Jerusalem; preach that word now and you recruit an army for the wrong war. The title is true and embargoed until its meaning arrives. This is the answer your sealed guesses have been circling, or part of it. And one precision your group needs: check the wording. Peter said "the Christ." He did not say the other title, the one from 1:1 and 1:11, the one the demons kept shouting. In this Gospel, no human being has said it yet. If anyone's guess named Peter at Caesarea Philippi, tell them only this: keep watching.

3. **Verse 31: "the Son of Man MUST suffer many things, and be rejected... and be killed, and after three days rise again. And he said this PLAINLY." Two words to weigh: "must" and "plainly." DISCOVERY: someone read Isaiah 53:3-5 and 10-12 aloud. Where does the "must" come from, and what has changed about HOW Jesus is speaking?**

ANSWER (share after the discussion)

"Must" (*dei*) is the grammar of divine plan: not fate, not bad luck in Jerusalem, but the script of the Scriptures, and Isaiah 53 is the script: despised and REJECTED by men, wounded for our transgressions, an offering for sin, bearing the sin of MANY. The rejection, the death, and the vindication ("he shall see the fruit of the travail of his soul") are all there. The cross is not what interrupts the plan; it IS the plan (CCC 601). And "plainly" (*parresia*) marks the change of era: the parables, the riddles, the veiled titles, all of that ends where the cross begins. About suffering, Jesus does not do mystery. Note the detail everyone skips on first reading: "and after three days rise again." He never once predicts the Passion without the Resurrection. The disciples will hear the dying and miss the rising, every single time.

4. **Peter takes him aside and rebukes him, and receives the most shocking sentence Jesus ever speaks to a friend: "Get behind me, Satan! For you are not on the side of God, but of men" (8:33). How does the man of the great confession become "Satan" in one paragraph? And now cash last week's cliffhanger: why did Mark put the two-stage healing of the blind man immediately before this scene?**

ANSWER (share after the discussion)

Because a Messiah without a cross is, in the light of the fuller temptation accounts, Satan's own proposal: the kingdoms without the obedience, the crown without the thorns, the wilderness temptation resumed, and this time delivered through a loving friend's voice, which is its most dangerous packaging. Peter's theology of glory is not malice; it is affection (Matthew preserves his words: "God forbid, Lord!", 16:22), and that is exactly why it must be named for what it carries. Note the surgical mercy in the rebuke: "Get BEHIND me" is not "get away from me." Behind the Master is the disciple's position; the phrase is nearly identical to "follow me." Peter is not expelled; he is re-positioned, from in front of Jesus, blocking the road to Jerusalem, to behind him, walking it. And the blind man of Bethsaida: first touch, "I see men, but they look like trees, walking"; second touch, clarity. Mark's placement invites us to read it as the parable, and Peter as its meaning. Right title, blurred content: real sight, badly focused. He has had the first touch. The second is coming, and this Gospel will show how much it costs.

5. **STEELMAN, build it strong before you answer it. A sharp Protestant friend says: "You Catholics build the papacy on Peter the rock, and in the very same scene Jesus calls him SATAN. Mark, Peter's own Gospel, does not even include the rock saying or the keys; it keeps only the failure. A man this fallible, who will shortly deny Christ three times, cannot be the infallible foundation of**

a church. The papacy is refuted by its own first holder." Build it at full strength, every fact in it is accurate. Then answer. DISCOVERY: someone look up Luke 22:31-32.

ANSWER (share after the discussion)

Concede the facts cheerfully; they are the Gospel's own. Peter is impulsive, wrong about the cross, and headed for a triple denial, and Mark, preaching Peter's memories, keeps every failure and drops the honors. Now the distinctions the objection collapses. First, infallibility is not IMPECCABILITY: the Catholic claim was never that Peter or his successors are sinless, wise, or brave, but that a specific charism protects the Church's definitive teaching on faith and morals from error (CCC 890-891), a promise about the deposit of faith, not about the man's character. Notice the scene itself makes the distinction: when Peter speaks what "flesh and blood" did not reveal, he is the rock of confession; when he speaks "as men," he is corrected on the spot. The office transmits Christ's truth; it does not upgrade Peter's personality. Second, look up Luke 22:31-32 and watch the grammar: "Satan demanded to have YOU" (plural, all of you) "that he might sift you like wheat, but I have prayed for YOU" (singular, Simon alone) "that YOUR faith may not fail; and when you have turned again, strengthen your brethren." Jesus, knowing the denial in advance, singles Peter out for a protecting prayer and a commission on the far side of failure. The papacy's foundation is not Peter's nerve; it is Christ's prayer. Third, turn the objection around: Mark's brutal honesty about Peter is itself evidence. What institution, inventing its own legitimacy, writes its founder this way? The Gospel of Peter's failures, preached by Peter, preserved by his interpreter, is the papacy's most disarming credential: an office whose first holder's résumé is a warning is an office that never claimed to run on human excellence. The rock was always what grace made of him (St. Leo's point), which is exactly why weak men have never managed to sink it.

6. **Now Jesus turns to the crowd, and to us (8:34-37): "If any man would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me." In occupied Palestine, "take up your cross" was not a metaphor for inconveniences. What did those words picture, and how does the paradox of verse 35 ("whoever loses his life for my sake and the gospel's will save it") actually work?**

ANSWER (share after the discussion)

The picture: a condemned man carrying his own execution beam through jeering streets to the place of death, no appeals left, no return trip. Jesus recruits with the worst image his world had. Deny yourself: not skipping dessert, but revoking the self's claim to be the center, treating the old me, St. John Chrysostom says, as a stranger whose demands I no longer recognize. And the paradox is not poetry; it is economics. The life you "save" by self-protection is a leaking asset, you will lose it anyway, to time if nothing else, so clutching it is the one guaranteed losing trade. The life spent for Christ and the Gospel is the only life placed beyond loss. "What does it profit a man, to gain the whole world and forfeit his life?" is a genuine accounting question, and verse 38 extends the ledger to eternity: what you do with a crucified Messiah now, he will do with you "when he comes in the glory of his Father." The cross is not the fee for discipleship; it is the shape of it, and it is the same road he is walking in front of us. He never sends us anywhere he is not already ahead.

7. **The hard verse (9:1): "there are some standing here who will not taste death before they see that the kingdom of God has come with power." Two thousand years later, how is this not a failed prediction? Be honest, then look at what Mark places immediately after it.**

ANSWER (share after the discussion)

Be honest first: skeptics quote this verse, and pretending it is easy convinces no one. Now read like Mark: the very next sentence is "and after six days," a rare and pointed time-stamp welding 9:1 to the Transfiguration, where exactly "some standing here" (Peter, James, John) see the Son radiant in power before tasting death. That is a longstanding and common reading in the Church, and Mark's own arrangement argues it. And many extend the promise's reach beyond the mountain: the Resurrection, Pentecost, and the kingdom's spread across the empire within that generation, all "with power," all witnessed by men then standing there. What the verse does NOT mean is that Jesus mispredicted the end of the world: he will say plainly in this same Gospel that of that day "no one knows... not even the Son, but only the Father" (13:32), a saying every failed-prediction theory must reckon with. The verse is a promise with a down payment six days out. Come back next week to watch it get paid.

Dig Deeper

The quiet question inside this session: WHY must he suffer, why is "must" the word? Not because the Father delights in pain, and not because God is trapped by a rule bigger than himself. The "must" is the shape love takes in a world like ours: sin is not waved away but borne away, and the Servant of Isaiah 53 carries it willingly, "he makes himself an offering." We named this endpoint back in Session 1 (the beloved Son moving toward the offering of himself, CCC 606, 613), and in two weeks Jesus will state it as his own mission statement in a single sentence that this study is named after. The "must" of Caesarea Philippi is on its way to a definition.

Send (15 minutes)

1. Before anything else: take two minutes of silence and write one sentence, your own answer, tonight, to "Who do you say that I am?" Not the catechism's sentence, yours. (Leaders: invite, do not force, a few to read theirs aloud.)
2. Where are you currently doing what Peter did, following Jesus while quietly editing his plan into one you would have chosen? What would "get behind me," taking the disciple's position instead of the planner's, mean there?

Live It This Week

- Carry your sentence: put your one-line answer to "Who do you say that I am?" somewhere you will see it daily (mirror, phone lock screen), and let it interrogate your week.
- Choose one concrete self-denial for seven days, not for self-improvement, but "for my sake and the gospel's": a comfort surrendered, and the freed time or money given to God or neighbor.
- Pray for the Pope by name this week, the successor of the man who got it right, got it wrong, and was prayed for by Christ himself. If the papacy has ever confused or angered you, pray Luke 22:32 for him.

Closing Prayer

Leader: Lord Jesus, you are the Christ, and we barely know what we mean when we say it. Take our half-sight and touch it again. Put us behind you, where disciples walk, and teach us the arithmetic of the cross: that everything we lose for you is saved, and everything we clutch is already leaking. Through Christ our Lord. Amen. (Together: one Our Father.)

Scripture Memory Verse

"If any man would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me." (Mark 8:34, RSV2CE)

Part 3: Leader Reference Card

Primary text: Mark 8:27-9:1

Every passage used this session, in order:

- Mark 8:27-30 (the two questions; the confession; the charge of silence)
- Mark 8:31-32a (first passion prediction, spoken plainly)
- Isaiah 53:3-5, 10-12 (the suffering Servant)
- Psalm 118:22 (the rejected stone, leader background)
- Mark 8:32b-33 (Peter's rebuke; Get behind me, Satan)
- Mark 8:22-26 (the two-stage healing, paid off from last session)
- Deuteronomy 21:23 with Galatians 3:13 (steelman background: the curse borne)
- Luke 22:31-32 (steelman chain: Christ's prayer for Peter)
- Mark 8:34-38 (the terms of discipleship)
- Mark 9:1 (the kingdom come with power)
- Mark 13:32 (leader background for 9:1 honesty)
- CCC 440, 601, 606, 613, 618, 890-891
- Memory verse: Mark 8:34