

You Are Peter

Matthew 14–16 · A Catholic Journey Through the Gospel of Matthew

Session Overview

Discovery Aim. Participants discover the scene the whole study has been walking toward: at Caesarea Philippi, Jesus asks the question they sealed in an envelope seven weeks ago, Peter answers it, and Jesus answers Peter with a new name, a rock, keys, and a Church. Along the way they watch Jesus feed thousands in the wilderness, walk on the sea speaking God's own name of self-disclosure, and grant a Gentile mother's plea, before the road turns hard toward Jerusalem.

Catholic Touchstone. Peter's confession and Peter's office: the rock, the keys of the kingdom read against Isaiah 22, and binding and loosing. Tonight also honors the full text, including "Get behind me, Satan" five verses later, because the office never rested on Peter's personal perfection, and that is precisely the Catholic point.

What You Need to Know

The feeding of the five thousand (14:13–21) is thick with Exodus memory: a crowd in a lonely place, bread given in the wilderness, and twelve baskets left over, a number that recalls the twelve tribes, the New Israel. Elisha once fed a hundred men with twenty loaves and had some left (2 Kings 4:42–44); Jesus feeds thousands with five. Watch the verbs of verse 19: he took, blessed, broke, and gave. Matthew will use those four verbs in exactly that order one more time, in an upper room. Plant nothing aloud; the group should feel the echo when it comes.

The walking on the sea (14:22–33) escalates everything. The group learned from Psalm 107 in Session 5 that the Lord alone stills storms; Job 9:8 adds that God alone "trampled the waves of the sea." Jesus' word of comfort, "Take heart, it is I," is in Greek ego eimi, I AM, an echo of God's self-disclosure at the burning bush, where the Greek Old Testament reads ego eimi ho on, I am the One who is. Hold the point with a light hand, the phrase can be ordinary self-identification, but Matthew has stacked the scene so that the boat's conclusion is the only sane one: "Truly you are the Son of God." Note also the first Peter cameo: bold enough to step out, human enough to sink, wise enough to pray the Gospel's shortest prayer, "Lord, save me."

The Canaanite woman (15:21–28) is a Son of David thread event of the first order: a Gentile, from the old enemy stock of Canaan, addresses Israel's Messiah by his royal Jewish title and begs for mercy. Jesus' apparent harshness has long been read, with the Fathers, as a testing that draws out and displays her faith; she takes the humble place and reasons from inside it, and Jesus, who marveled at one Gentile centurion, now publicly crowns a Gentile mother: "O woman, great is your faith." The feeding of the four thousand that follows is often read as taking place in largely Gentile territory, a hint drawn from the surrounding itinerary and from the crowd glorifying the God of Israel (15:31); on that reading the two feedings quietly enact bread for Israel and bread for the nations.

Caesarea Philippi (16:13–20) is the Gospel's continental divide. The location matters: a pagan city at the foot of Mount Hermon, built beside a cliff face of shrines, with a cave sometimes associated in the ancient world with the underworld. Against that backdrop of dead gods, Jesus asks the two questions, the crowd-sourced one and the direct one, and Simon confesses: “You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.” Jesus' reply gives him a beatitude, a revelation claim (flesh and blood did not reveal this), a new name, and an office. On the name: Jesus spoke Aramaic, and scholars across traditions reconstruct the underlying sentence as “you are Kepha, and on this kepha I will build my Church”, one word, twice; the Aramaic name is preserved in the New Testament itself as Cephas (John 1:42; Galatians 2:9). Greek is forced to inflect it (*Petros* for the man's name because *petra* is feminine and cannot name a man), which is where tonight's steelman lives. The keys come from Isaiah 22, tonight's crown-jewel discovery: the office of the royal steward in the house of David, an office under the king, over the household, and, crucially, an office that passes from one holder to the next, since Isaiah 22 is itself an oracle about succession in that office.

Do not soften what follows. A few verses after the keys (16:21–23), Peter rebukes the first passion prediction and hears the harshest words Jesus speaks to any disciple: “Get behind me, Satan.” Matthew places rock and stumbling stone side by side deliberately. The office is Christ's gift and Christ's guarantee; the man remains weak, and the Gospel never hides it. This honesty is not a problem for the Catholic reading; it is the Catholic reading: the gates of Hades shall not prevail because of the Builder, not the building material.

Tonight's sealed guess ceremony. Structure the moment carefully. After Build question 3, BEFORE anyone reads Matthew 16, have participants open their sealed sheets from Session 1 and silently reread what they wrote to the question “Who do you say Jesus is, and how will the world come to know him?” Invite two or three volunteers to share. Then have someone read 16:13–17 aloud, and let the room discover that they have spent seven weeks inside Jesus' own question, and that Jesus' response to a right answer is a blessing: flesh and blood has not revealed this. The second half of their guess, how the world will come to know him, is answered in the same breath: “on this rock I will build my Church.” The Church is Christ's own answer to their question. Do not rush this sequence; it is the payoff the study was built around.

Old Testament Roots and Fulfillment

- **2 Kings 4:42–44.** Elisha multiplies loaves with some left over; the pattern Jesus fulfills at a scale no prophet touched.
- **Job 9:8.** God alone tramples the waves of the sea; the walking on the water is a theophany, not a stunt.
- **Exodus 3:14.** I AM: the self-name of God echoed, with a light hand, in “Take heart, it is I.”
- **Isaiah 22:15–25.** The key of the house of David laid on the steward's shoulder: he shall open and none shall shut. The background of the keys of the kingdom, and an office shown in the very act of succession.

Voices of the Church

Voices of the Church: St. Cyprian of Carthage (On the Unity of the Church)

Writing in the third century, Cyprian teaches that the Lord built the Church upon Peter and established one chair, so that the Church's unity would have a visible origin and sign. The other

apostles were what Peter was, endowed with a like fellowship of honor and power, but the beginning proceeds from unity, and the primacy is given to Peter to show the Church is one.

Voices of the Church: St. Leo the Great (Sermons on the Anniversary of His Election)

Leo preaches that the strength Christ conferred on Peter is not extinguished by Peter's death: in Peter's see, Peter's confession and Peter's care continue, for the Lord who made him the rock still upholds through him the whole Church's firmness. The solidity given to Peter is bestowed through Peter on his successors.

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

Chrysostom marvels at the exchange at Caesarea Philippi: the Father reveals the Son to Peter, and the Son in turn declares Peter blessed, renames him, and entrusts him with the keys. He who once could not bear a servant girl's question would become, after grace perfected him, the shepherd Christ set over his flock; the change itself is the proof of what grace can build on weak stone.

Catechism Connection

- **CCC 442.** Peter's confession does not originate in flesh and blood but in the Father's revelation; from the beginning this confession is the Church's foundation stone of faith.
- **CCC 552–553.** Because of the faith he confessed, Peter remains the unshakable rock of the Church; the keys signify authority to govern the house of God, and the power to bind and loose means authority to absolve sins, to pronounce doctrinal judgments, and to make disciplinary decisions in the Church.
- **CCC 881.** The Lord made Simon alone the rock of his Church and gave him the keys; yet this pastoral office of Peter and the other apostles belongs to the Church's very foundation and is continued by the bishops under the primacy of the Pope.

Thread Watch

- **Sealed guess (RESOLVE).** Tonight the envelope opens. Follow the ceremony sequence in What You Need to Know and in the Discussion Guide exactly; the order (open sheets, then read the passage) is what makes the moment land.
- **Peter thread (flower).** “First, Simon” from Session 6 now has its explanation. If the participant who noticed it two weeks ago is present, hand them the moment.
- **Emmanuel thread (develop).** “Take heart, it is I” on the sea, and God-with-us now promising to build and inhabit a Church the gates of Hades cannot beat.
- **Son of David thread (develop).** The Canaanite woman: the first Gentile to use the royal title, and she pairs it, like the blind men, with a cry for mercy. The list is growing; keep it.
- **Bread thread (plant, silently).** Took, blessed, broke, gave. Say nothing. It returns in an upper room.

Session Goals

1. Participants experience the sealed guess resolution and connect their own answer to Peter's confession and to the Church.
2. Participants discover Isaiah 22 and can explain the keys as the transferable office of the steward in the house of David.
3. Participants hear the strongest Protestant reading of "on this rock" and can answer it honestly, including what it gets right.
4. Participants can hold together rock and "Get behind me, Satan": an office guaranteed by Christ, held by weak men.
5. Participants recognize the mounting divine self-disclosure of the feeding and the sea crossing.

Timing for 90 Minutes

Win 12 min · Build 58 min (including 8 minutes reserved for the sealed guess ceremony) · Send and Live It 12 min · Prayer 8 min. If running long, the pre-chosen cuts are, in order: drop Build question 2 on the Canaanite woman to a read-and-comment (saves about 6 minutes), then drop the Dig Deeper on Caesarea Philippi's geography (saves about 4 minutes). Do not cut, rush, or reorder the sealed guess ceremony, the Isaiah 22 discovery, or the steelman chain.

EMMANUEL · SESSION 8 · DISCUSSION GUIDE

You Are Peter

Matthew 14–16 · 90 Minutes

Opening Prayer

Father, seven weeks ago we wrote down our answer to a question we did not yet know was yours. Tonight, ask it of us again. Reveal your Son to us as you revealed him to Simon, not by flesh and blood but by your own gift, and build us into the Church against which the gates of Hades shall not prevail. Through Christ our Lord. Amen.

Win (12 minutes)

1. Has anyone ever given you a new name, a nickname that stuck, and did it change anything about you?
2. Whose opinion of you matters most, and why that person?

Build (58 minutes)

Bread in the Wilderness

1. Read Matthew 14:13–21. What Old Testament scenes does this echo, given everything this study has traced? **Live discovery:** have someone read 2 Kings 4:42–44. What did Elisha do, and at what scale does Jesus do it? Finally, read verse 19 again slowly and list Jesus' four actions with the bread, in order.

ANSWER: share after the discussion

Bread given to a crowd in a lonely place recalls the manna in the wilderness, with twelve baskets left over, a number that recalls the twelve tribes of the New Israel. Elisha fed a hundred with twenty loaves; Jesus feeds five thousand men, besides women and children, with five. The four verbs: he took, blessed, broke, and gave. File that exact sequence away without comment; Matthew is not done with it.

2. Read Matthew 14:22–33. We learned from Psalm 107 who stills storms. **Live discovery:** have someone read Job 9:8. Who alone tramples the waves of the sea? Now listen to Jesus' exact words of comfort in verse 27, and to what the boat concludes in verse 33. And watch Peter: what is admirable in him here, what is human, and what is his prayer when he sinks?

ANSWER: share after the discussion

Job says God alone trampled the waves of the sea; the One walking on them is making a claim with his feet. His comfort, “Take heart, it is I,” is in Greek ego eimi, I AM, echoing the name God speaks from the burning bush, which the Greek Old Testament renders ego eimi ho on. Hold it lightly, the phrase can be ordinary self-identification, but stacked on Psalm 107 and Job 9 the boat draws the only sane conclusion: “Truly you are the Son of God.” And Peter: bold enough to ask, faith enough to walk, human enough to look at the wind and sink, and wise enough to pray the shortest prayer in

the Gospel, “Lord, save me.” Remember tonight that this is the same man about to be handed keys.

3. Read Matthew 15:21–28. Track the woman's words: what title does she use in verse 22, and what does our running list say about who has used it so far? How does she answer the hard saying about the children's bread, and what does Jesus finally declare about her?

ANSWER: share after the discussion

“Have mercy on me, O Lord, Son of David”: a Canaanite, from Israel's oldest enemy stock, is the first Gentile to use the royal title, and like the blind men she pairs it with a plea for mercy. Our list so far: the blind, the desperate crowds, and now a Gentile mother, while the experts stay silent. She takes the humble place under the table and argues from inside it, and Jesus, who marveled at one Gentile centurion, crowns a second Gentile publicly: O woman, great is your faith. The children's bread is already reaching the nations.

The Sealed Guess: Open It Now

Leader, follow this order exactly. First: everyone takes out their sealed Take-Home Sheet 1, opens it, and silently rereads what they wrote seven weeks ago to the question, “Who do you say Jesus is, and how will the world come to know him?” Second: invite two or three volunteers to share what they wrote, with no correction or commentary from anyone. Third, and only then: have someone read Matthew 16:13–17 aloud. Let the room react before you say anything at all.

4. Now talk about what just happened. What two questions does Jesus ask, and why does the second one change the temperature of the conversation? What does Jesus say about where Peter's answer came from? And notice: the second half of your sealed question, how will the world come to know him, is about to be answered in the very next verse.

ANSWER: share after the discussion

The crowd question is safe: John the Baptist, Elijah, Jeremiah, opinions at arm's length. “But who do YOU say that I am” permits no distance; it is the question every session of this study has been sharpening, and it was your sealed question all along. Peter confesses: the Christ, the Son of the living God. Jesus calls him blessed and names the source: flesh and blood has not revealed this, but my Father who is in heaven. Right answers about Jesus are gifts before they are achievements. And how will the world come to know him? Jesus answers that himself, immediately: “on this rock I will build my Church.” The Church is Christ's own plan for how your sealed question gets answered for the world.

Dig Deeper: Why Caesarea Philippi?

Jesus staged this scene in a pagan city at the base of Mount Hermon, beside a cliff of shrines to dead gods and a cave the ancients associated with the underworld. Against that rock face of failed religion he asks who he is, and speaks of a Church against which the gates of Hades, death's own fortress, shall not prevail. The geography is a sermon.

Build Then Press: Is Peter the Rock?

5. Read Matthew 16:18–20 slowly before the steelman.

The Strongest Protestant Reading, Given at Full Strength

The classic Protestant case is textual and serious. In the Greek, Jesus says “you are *Petros*, and on this *petra* I will build my Church”: two different words. *Petros* can mean a stone; *petra* means bedrock. So, the argument runs, Jesus is contrasting Peter the pebble with the true bedrock, which is either Peter's confession of faith or Christ himself, whom Scripture elsewhere calls the rock (1 Corinthians 10:4). Some Church Fathers, including St. Augustine at times, read the rock as Peter's confession or as Christ. And the context seems to agree: five verses later this “rock” is called Satan and a stumbling stone. Would Christ build his indestructible Church on a man who folds at a servant girl's question? Surely the Church stands on the confessed Christ, not on Simon of Galilee. Let this reading stand at its full height; it is careful, biblical, and patristically aware.

6. Now press. Jesus was not speaking Greek in this scene; he was speaking Aramaic, and Simon's new name in Aramaic appears in the New Testament itself: Cephas, *Kepha* (John 1:42; Galatians 2:9). Reconstruct the sentence as Jesus said it. Then ask why Greek could not keep one word for both halves. **Live discovery:** have someone read Isaiah 22:15–25, the only place in the Old Testament where a key of the house of David is laid on a man's shoulder. What is the office described there, whom does the steward serve, over whom does he have authority, and what happens to the office when its holder is removed?

ANSWER: share after the discussion

In Aramaic the sentence would have run “you are Kepha, and on this kepha I will build my Church”: one word, twice, an unmistakable wordplay on the name Jesus solemnly bestows on Simon here, the naming John 1:42 records being promised at their first meeting. Greek is forced to inflect it because *petra* is feminine and cannot serve as a man's name; *Petros* is simply its masculine form, and in first-century Greek the two words no longer carried a firm pebble-versus-bedrock distinction. The grammar of the whole sentence runs one way: you are Rock, and on this rock. Renaming, in Scripture, is never decoration: Abram became Abraham to become the father of nations, and Simon becomes Rock to become a foundation.

Then the keys. Isaiah 22 describes the royal steward of the house of David: an office under the king, with authority over the king's household, the key on his shoulder, what he opens none shall shut. And Isaiah 22 is itself a succession oracle: Shebna is removed from the office and Eliakim is installed in it, because the office outlives its holders. When the Son of David hands a man the keys of the kingdom, a first-century Jew hears an office being filled: not a replacement king, but the king's steward, with real, delegated, transferable authority. That is why the Catholic Church sees in Peter not only a man but a chair.

Now concede what the objection gets right, because it gets real things right. The rock is not Peter apart from his confession: it is Peter confessing, Peter as gifted by the Father, and the Fathers who read the rock as the confession or as Christ are seeing true facets of the same jewel, not contradicting it; Peter matters precisely and only because of whose he is and what he confessed. And yes, five verses later he is called Satan. Matthew put rock and stumbling block side by side on purpose: the office is Christ's gift and carries Christ's guarantee, while the man remains weak,

sinful, and in need of grace, from Simon to every successor since. The gates of Hades shall not prevail: that is a promise about the Builder, not a compliment to the building material. A Church founded on a proven-weak man and still standing twenty centuries later is not an embarrassment to the promise; it is the evidence for it.

The Rock and the Stumbling Stone

7. Read Matthew 16:21–27. What does Jesus begin to teach “from that time,” how does Peter respond, and what does Jesus call him? Why might Matthew place this immediately after the keys? And what does Jesus then say discipleship costs everyone?

ANSWER: share after the discussion

From that time Jesus begins showing them the cross: suffering, death, and on the third day rising. Peter, fresh from his blessing, rebukes the Lord he just confessed, and hears “Get behind me, Satan”: the rock has become a stumbling stone by thinking the thoughts of men. Matthew’s placement is deliberate honesty: the office does not rest on Peter’s perfection, and the Gospel never pretends otherwise. Then the terms for everyone: deny yourself, take up your cross, follow; whoever would save his life will lose it. The Messiah just confessed is a crucified Messiah, and confessing him means walking his road.

Send (12 minutes)

1. Compare what you sealed seven weeks ago with what you would write tonight. What has changed, and what changed it?
2. Jesus’ answer to “how will the world come to know him” is his Church, including the weak stones in this room. Who in your life is waiting, without knowing it, on your confession?

Live It This Week

- Rewrite your answer to the sealed question on the back of your Session 1 sheet, dated tonight. Keep both versions; compare them again when this study ends.
- Pray for the successor of Peter by name this week, and for your bishop: weak stones carrying a guaranteed office deserve the Church’s prayers.
- Pray Peter’s sinking prayer, “Lord, save me,” in the moment this week when you feel the wind.

Closing Prayer

Lord Jesus Christ, Son of the living God, what flesh and blood could not reveal, your Father has given us to see. Thank you for asking us your question before we knew it was yours. Build us into your Church on the rock you chose, guard your servant Peter’s successor, and when we look at the wind and sink, catch us as you caught him. Amen.

Scripture Memory

Matthew 16:16 (RSV2CE): “*You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.*”

EMMANUEL · SESSION 8 · LEADER REFERENCE CARD

Every Passage in Order of Use

You Are Peter · Matthew 14–16

Primary Text

• Matthew 14:13–21 · Matthew 14:22–33 · Matthew 15:21–28 · Matthew 16:13–17 · Matthew 16:18–20 · Matthew 16:21–27

Live Discovery Passages

• 2 Kings 4:42–44 (Elisha's loaves) · Job 9:8 (who tramples the sea) · Isaiah 22:15–25 (the key of the house of David)

Background Passages

• Exodus 3:14 (I AM, held lightly) · Psalm 107:23–30 (recall from Session 5) · John 1:42 and Galatians 2:9 (Cephas / Kepha) · 1 Corinthians 10:4 (for the steelman) · Genesis 17:5 (Abram renamed)

Catechism

• CCC 442 · CCC 552–553 · CCC 881

Memory Verse

• Matthew 16:16

Do Not Forget

• Sealed guess ceremony order: open sheets FIRST, volunteers share, THEN read 16:13–17. Reserve 8 minutes.