

Session 3: Flesh and Blood Has Not Revealed This

Matthew 16:13-20 | 75 to 90 minutes | Young Adult Inductive Study

PART ONE: LEADER PREPARATION GUIDE

SESSION OVERVIEW

Discovery Aim: The group discovers that saving faith in who Jesus is comes as a gift from the Father, not as a conclusion we assemble ourselves, and that Jesus answers Peter's confession by building something on it: a name made true, keys handed over, a Church founded.

Catholic Touchstone: Faith is a gift of God, a supernatural virtue infused by Him (CCC 153, which cites this very verse). We cooperate with it, profess it, and act on it, but we do not manufacture it. Peter saw the same miracles as the crowds who guessed Elijah; what he had that they lacked was given, not deduced.

WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW

Geography is doing real work in this scene. Caesarea Philippi sits at the far northern edge of Israel, twenty-five miles from the lake, at the foot of Mount Hermon: pagan territory, dominated by a massive rock cliff with a cave sanctuary of the god Pan, ringed by shrines, near a temple built for Caesar. Matthew places the conversation "in the district of Caesarea Philippi" (16:13). The town itself was dominated by that cliff and its shrines; whether or not the group stood within sight of it, Jesus has deliberately brought His disciples into the most pagan corner of the land to ask who He is. He asks in two movements: first the polls ("Who do men say that the Son of man is?"), then the verdict ("But who do you say that I am?"). The crowd's answers are all compliments (John the Baptist, Elijah, Jeremiah, a prophet) and all wrong, because a category is not a confession.

Peter's answer stacks two titles: "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God" (Matthew 16:16). The Christ: the anointed Messiah, the son of David the kingdom was waiting for. The Son of the living God: more than a title of office, and the "living God" lands pointedly in front of Pan's dead grotto. Jesus' response is the interpretive key of the session: "Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jona! For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father who is in heaven" (Matthew 16:17). Peter did not out-reason the crowds. The Father unveiled it. Faith in the identity of Jesus is revelation received, and Peter's greatness in this scene is that he received it and said it out loud.

Then Jesus does what He has been waiting since John 1:42 to do: He makes the name stick. “You are Peter, and on this rock I will build my Church” (Matthew 16:18). In the Aramaic Jesus spoke, the wordplay is seamless: you are *Kepha*, and on this *kepha* I will build. The Fathers read the rock richly: Peter himself, Peter’s confessed faith, and Christ confessed, and these readings complete rather than compete with each other, since Peter matters here precisely as the confessor. The Church cherishes this scene, with the keys and the binding and loosing, as the foundation of Peter’s office (CCC 552-553). This study’s aim is kerygmatic rather than apologetic, so present the office plainly and warmly without mounting a full defense; if your group wants the deeper argument, note it cheerfully as a study for another day and stay on tonight’s rail: the faith beneath the office was a gift.

Last, the strange ending: “Then he strictly charged the disciples to tell no one that he was the Christ” (Matthew 16:20). Hold the tension honestly and do not resolve it tonight; next session resolves it. The likely reason, signaled by what follows immediately (16:21): their word “Christ” still means the wrong thing. Before they may preach the title, they must let Him define it.

OLD TESTAMENT ROOTS AND FULFILLMENT

Isaiah 22:19-23 (the live discovery text; do not preview it). The king of Judah’s palace had a chief steward, an office, not just a man. Isaiah 22 shows one steward (Shebna) removed and another (Eliakim) installed: robed, given authority, and handed “the key of the house of David; he shall open, and none shall shut; and he shall shut, and none shall open” (Isaiah 22:22). Keys in the Davidic kingdom mean a durable office of stewardship under the king. When the Son of David hands Simon “the keys of the kingdom of heaven,” the furniture of the scene comes straight from Isaiah.

2 Samuel 7:12-16. The covenant behind the whole conversation: David’s son will be given an everlasting kingdom, and God says “I will be his father, and he shall be my son.” Peter’s double title, Christ and Son, gathers up the Davidic hope.

VOICES OF THE CHURCH

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St. Leo the Great / *Sermon 3 (on the anniversary of his elevation)*

Preaching on this scene, St. Leo dwells on the source of Peter’s confession: the flesh and blood of human opinion produced only the crowd’s guesses, but the Father’s revelation produced the confession on which everything else in the passage is built. For Leo, the blessing, the name, and the keys all rest on faith that came down from heaven first; Peter is great because he received greatly. What God builds, He builds on what He Himself has given.

VOICES OF THE CHURCH

St. John Chrysostom / *Homilies on the Gospel of St. Matthew, Homily 54*

St. Chrysostom notices that Jesus takes the disciples far from the crowds and from Jewish territory before asking His question, so that they can answer freely, away from every pressure of opinion. And he marvels at Peter’s role: the mouth of the apostles, the one who loves ardently and speaks

first, here speaking not his own cleverness but the Father's disclosure. The same eyes that watched the loaves multiply belonged to thousands; the confession belonged to the one to whom it was revealed.

VOICES OF THE CHURCH

St. Thomas Aquinas / *Summa Theologiae II-II, q. 6, a. 1*

St. Thomas asks where faith comes from and answers with this scene's logic made precise: the assent of faith, in which the whole act consists, cannot rise from human seeing or reasoning alone; it must be given by God, who moves us inwardly by grace. Arguments can clear the road, and witnesses can point, but the act by which a person says "You are the Christ" and stakes his life on it is infused from above. Faith is a gift before it is a decision, and a decision because it is a gift.

CATECHISM CONNECTION

- **CCC 153:** Faith is a gift of God, a supernatural virtue infused by Him; the Catechism quotes Matthew 16:17 directly. When St. Peter confessed Jesus as the Christ, this did not come from flesh and blood.
- **CCC 424:** On the rock of the faith confessed by St. Peter, Christ built His Church.
- **CCC 552-553:** Peter's unique place among the Twelve; the keys, the power to bind and loose, the shepherd's charge.

THE WAY OF SALVATION (STUDY STRAND, LEADER ONLY)

MOVEMENT 3 OF THE KERYGMA: REVELATION, FAITH IN WHO JESUS IS

Movement 1: God acts first. Movement 2: we cannot save ourselves. Tonight: **salvation hangs on who Jesus is, and knowing who He is comes as gift.** The didactic texts behind the scene: Matthew 16:17 itself; 1 Corinthians 12:3 ("no one can say 'Jesus is Lord' except by the Holy Spirit"); Ephesians 2:8-9. The practical edge for your praying this week: the people in your group who do not yet believe cannot be argued across the line; they can be loved, told the truth, and prayed for, because the crossing itself is the Father's gift. Guardrail as always (CCC 2002): gift does not mean puppetry; Peter freely opened his mouth. Do not teach this strand aloud.

THREAD WATCH (LEADER ONLY, NEVER REVEAL)

- **The name lands.** Session 1 planted "You shall be called"; tonight it becomes "You are Peter." The promise is being kept in stages. Watch what happens to the rock five verses later; say nothing tonight.

- **Two confessions compared.** Session 2 ended with “Truly you are the Son of God” gasped after a rescue. Tonight the same content is confessed in cold blood, no storm in sight. If a participant notices, celebrate it; do not point it out yourself.
- **The silence command.** “Tell no one” is next session’s door. Leave it deliberately unresolved tonight.
- **Sealed guess.** Standing reminder at dismissal only: keep the Take-Home 1 sheet safe.

SESSION GOALS

1. The group distinguishes reporting opinions about Jesus from personally confessing Him.
2. The group articulates that Peter’s faith was revealed by the Father, not deduced, and what that means for how anyone comes to faith.
3. The group discovers Isaiah 22 and names what keys mean in the house of David.
4. Each participant drafts, privately, their own present-tense answer to “Who do you say that I am?”
5. Distribute Take-Home 3; remind participants to keep the sealed sheet safe.

TIME NOTE

Core session runs about 75 minutes. If long: cut the second Dig Deeper (The Gates of Hades) and one Win question. **Do not cut** the Isaiah 22 discovery or the Send questions.

PART TWO: DISCUSSION GUIDE

OPENING PRAYER

Father in heaven, no one comes to your Son unless you draw him, and no one calls Jesus the Christ except by your gift. Draw us tonight. Quiet in us the noise of what everyone else says, and let each of us hear the question He asks face to face. Give us the faith you gave the fisherman, and the courage to say it out loud. Through Christ our Lord. Amen.

WIN: OPENING QUESTIONS

Open questions; every answer is welcome. Do not correct or steer.

W1. What is something true about you that almost nobody gets right when they guess? How does it feel to be constantly half-known?

W2. If a stranger asked the people who know you best, “Who is Jesus to them?”, what would they honestly say about you, based on your life this past month?

BUILD: INTO THE TEXT

READ ALOUD: Matthew 16:13-20

1. Jesus walked the Twelve twenty-five miles north to Caesarea Philippi to ask this: a pagan district built around a giant rock cliff crowded with shrines to Pan and a temple to Caesar. Why might He choose enemy territory, in a district famous for its wall of idols, to ask who He is?

ANSWER (SHARE AFTER THE DISCUSSION)

The setting turns the question into a confrontation. Every generation has its wall of options: gods, heroes, emperors, dead prophets, and Jesus stands His friends in front of the whole marketplace and asks where He fits. The location also strips away home-field pressure; far from the crowds and the authorities, the disciples can answer freely. And if the famous cliff was anywhere in view, the scenery preached: a rock face full of dead gods, and Jesus about to name a living rock. He still asks the question in the middle of the marketplace, not the sanctuary; He is not afraid of the competition.

2. Notice the two questions. First: “Who do men say that the Son of man is?” The disciples answer easily and at length. Then: “But who do YOU say that I am?” What is the difference between those two questions, and why is the second one so much harder to answer?

ANSWER (SHARE AFTER THE DISCUSSION)

The first question costs nothing; it is a poll, and you can discuss polls all night without ever being exposed. The second question has no hiding place: it demands the speaker put himself into the answer. Notice, too, that all the crowd's answers are compliments (the Baptist, Elijah, Jeremiah), and all of them are wrong, because a category is not a confession. You can respect Jesus into a category forever and never once answer His actual question. Every person in this room will eventually be asked the second question, and no one can answer it for us.

3. Peter answers: “You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.” And Jesus responds with something surprising: “Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jona! For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father who is in heaven.” Peter watched the same miracles as the crowds who guessed Elijah. So according to Jesus, where did Peter's answer actually come from, and what does that tell us about how anyone comes to believe?

ANSWER (SHARE AFTER THE DISCUSSION)

From the Father. Jesus explicitly rules out flesh and blood: Peter did not out-observe or out-reason the crowds, because the crowds had the same data. Faith in who Jesus is arrives as revelation received, a gift. This has two edges the group should feel. First, humility: if you believe, you did not achieve that; somewhere upstream of your reasons, the Father opened your eyes, so gratitude, not superiority, is the only fitting posture. Second, hope and a job description: the people you love who

do not believe cannot be argued across the line by you. Arguments clear roads; only God gives the gift. So we witness, we love, and above all we pray, because the decisive move belongs to the Father, and He likes to make it. Notice also that Peter still had to open his mouth: gift and courage cooperated.

4. Now Jesus keeps the promise He made at their very first meeting (John 1:42): “You are Peter, and on this rock I will build my Church.” Back in Session 1 the name was future tense: “you shall be called.” What has changed, and what has not changed, about Simon between the promise and this moment?

ANSWER (SHARE AFTER THE DISCUSSION)

What changed: Simon has now received and confessed the Father's revelation. The name lands at the moment of confession, and the wordplay is seamless in Jesus' Aramaic: you are Kepha, and on this kepha I will build. The Fathers read the rock as Peter himself, as his confessed faith, and as Christ confessed, and the readings complete each other, since Peter matters here precisely as the confessor. What has not changed: the man. He is still impulsive, still untested, and the coming sessions will prove it painfully. Jesus builds on confessed faith, not on finished character, which is either alarming or the best news imaginable, depending on whether you think God should wait for us to be reliable first. He does not.

5. Jesus hands Peter “the keys of the kingdom of heaven.” That image is not invented on the spot; it is furniture from Israel's royal palace.

Live discovery: say: “In the kingdom of David, keys meant something specific. Read Isaiah 22:19-23 in pairs: who gets keys, what do keys let him do, and what kind of thing is being handed over, a compliment or something else?” Give them several minutes and let them report before the answer box.

ANSWER (SHARE AFTER THE DISCUSSION)

What the pairs should find: in the house of David there was a chief steward over the palace, and Isaiah 22 shows the office changing hands: Shebna removed, Eliakim installed, robed, given authority, and handed “the key of the house of David; he shall open, and none shall shut; and he shall shut, and none shall open” (Isaiah 22:22). Keys are not a compliment; they are an office of stewardship under the king, and offices outlast their first holders. So when the Son of David hands Simon the keys of the kingdom, with authority to bind and loose, He is not handing out a metaphor for feeling special; He is installing a steward in His kingdom. The Church has always cherished this scene as the foundation of Peter's office and ministry (CCC 552-553). Tonight's point sits underneath the office: the whole structure is built on faith the Father gave. If the group wants the full case for what this means for the Church across the centuries, honor the appetite and name it as a rich study for another day; then return to the rail.

6. Verse 20 is strange: after the greatest confession in the Gospels, Jesus “strictly charged the disciples to tell no one that he was the Christ.” Why on earth would He silence the best news His friends have ever gotten right?

ANSWER (SHARE AFTER THE DISCUSSION)

Let the group wrestle, then deliberately leave this open. The short version to gesture at, and the most likely reason given what follows in 16:21: their word “Christ” is still loaded with the wrong dictionary, a conquering king without a cross, and broadcasting the right title with the wrong meaning would set fire to the wrong hopes. Before they may preach the word, they must let Jesus define it, and His definition begins in the very next verse, which is where we start next week. End the question honestly unresolved: “Hold that itch until next session.”

DIG DEEPER: KEPHA

Jesus almost certainly spoke Aramaic here, and in Aramaic the sentence has one word where our translations have two: you are *Kepha*, and on this *kepha* I will build my Church. St. John preserves the Aramaic name directly as Cephias (John 1:42), and St. Paul uses it routinely in his letters. The Greek text renders the name *Petros* and the rock *petra* for grammatical gender, which has spawned centuries of debate; the underlying Aramaic wordplay is smooth as lake stone.

DIG DEEPER: THE GATES OF HADES

“The powers of death shall not prevail against it” reads literally “the gates of Hades,” the realm of the dead. One rich and ancient reading notes that gates are defensive; gates do not charge. On that view the image is not the Church huddling while hell attacks, but death's stronghold failing to hold out against a Church on the advance. Others hear a simpler promise: death's power will never destroy the Church. Either way, the promise is total. And if the saying was spoken anywhere near Caesarea Philippi's cave, which some pagans associated with the underworld, the scenery would only have sharpened it.

SEND: TAKING IT WITH YOU

S1. Strip away every answer you have inherited, from parents, parish, or culture. In your own words, present tense, this week of your life: who do YOU say that Jesus is? (You will not be asked to share unless you want to.)

S2. Peter's faith was a gift, which means someone in your life who does not believe is waiting on a gift, not an argument. Who is that person for you, and will you commit to praying for them, by name, every day until we finish this study?

LIVE IT THIS WEEK

1. Every morning this week, before your feet do anything important, answer His question out loud in one sentence: “Jesus, I say you are...” Let the sentence change during the week if it wants to.

2. Write your one-sentence confession somewhere you will find it again (journal, phone note, wallet). We are not done with it.

3. Begin praying daily, by name, for the one person you chose in the Send question. One sentence is enough: “Father, reveal your Son to them.”

CLOSING PRAYER

Father, we bless you, Lord of heaven and earth, for what you hid from the wise you have revealed to fishermen, and to us. We confess with Simon Peter: Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the living God. Guard this confession in us when the road turns hard, and give it to those we love who do not yet have it. Through the same Christ our Lord. Amen.

SCRIPTURE MEMORY VERSE

“You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.”

Matthew 16:16 (RSV2CE)

Before you dismiss: hand out Take-Home 3 and give the standing reminder: “Keep your Session 1 sheet safe, guess folded.”

PART THREE: LEADER REFERENCE CARD

EVERY PASSAGE IN THIS SESSION

Primary Text

- Matthew 16:13-20, the two questions, the confession, the name, the keys, the silence

Live Discovery Text

- Isaiah 22:19-23, the steward's office and the key of the house of David

Supporting Texts

- 2 Samuel 7:12-16, the Davidic covenant: kingdom and sonship
- John 1:42, the promise of the name (Session 1 callback)
- Matthew 14:33, the boat confession (Session 2 callback, only if the group surfaces it)

Way of Salvation Strand (leader only)

- Matthew 16:17, flesh and blood has not revealed this
- 1 Corinthians 12:3, no one says Jesus is Lord except by the Spirit
- Ephesians 2:8-9, by grace through faith, the gift of God

Catechism

- CCC 153, faith as infused gift (quotes Matthew 16:17)
- CCC 424, the Church built on confessed faith
- CCC 552-553, Peter's keys and charge
- CCC 2002, free response (strand guardrail)

Memory Verse

- Matthew 16:16, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God."