

SESSION 4

PETER THE ROCK: THE PRIMACY OF JESUS

INTRODUCTION

There are questions that have the potential to change the course of our lives. “Will you accept our invitation to attend this university?” “Would you consider taking this position with our company?” “Will you marry me?” In this next session, Jesus takes his Apostles to the northernmost area of the Holy Land, to the town of Caesarea Philippi, and there he asks his Apostles a question that will redirect the journey they’ve shared together thus far.

Jesus and the Apostles leave the pagan culture of Bethsaida (removing a blind man from the city so that Jesus can heal him) and travel to a town which is home to a temple dedicated to the worship of Caesar Augustus. This town and its pagan false worship will be the backdrop for Peter’s response to Jesus’ question, “Who do you say that I am?” Peter’s response and Jesus’ ensuing words to Peter will bring about a deeper revelation of the identity and mission of both Peter and Jesus.

And as we take a closer look at Peter’s response, we will also see that Jesus ultimately asks the same question to each of his disciples, including each of us. How we answer will direct the course of our lives.



CONNECT

First review the last session with your group. Can anyone recite the Memory Verse without assistance? Otherwise, look it up (Matthew 14:30) from last week (page 46) and recite it as a group. Then bring up any highlights the group may have regarding the COMMIT section from last session.

1. From last session, what struck you most about how Jesus handled the two different storms on the Sea of Galilee?

Personal responses from participants. Some thoughts might include...

In the first storm Jesus is with the Apostles in the boat, while in the second storm Jesus is not initially with them in the boat and they must trust Jesus’ protection in a new way.

In the first storm Jesus calms the storm immediately upon waking. During the second storm, Jesus’ presence brings calm even before the storm subsides.

In the first storm all the Apostles cry out for Jesus to save them. In the second storm, even in the midst of the storm, Peter has the courage to walk to Jesus (at least a short distance before he starts to sink).

2. What's the most difficult environment you've ever had to work in? How did that environment affect you mentally, emotionally, physically, and spiritually?

Personal responses from participants. This question begins to look at how environment affects us and our faith lives. In this session Jesus will heal a blind man from Bethsaida, but he will take the blind man out of the city for the healing and then tell him not to return to this city, which has such a pagan culture.

3. How or why did your parents choose your given name? How or why did you choose the names of your children? Do you have a special namesake or patron, or a story explaining why you were given the name you have? If you have been confirmed, how or why did you choose the name of your confirmation saint?

Personal answers from participants. This question begins to look at the importance of names. In this session, Jesus will give Peter a new name, which will further reveal Peter's identity and his mission.



Play the video segment, which will last for approximately 45 minutes. The Study Guide provides participants with a brief outline of the topics covered in the video teaching.



DISCUSS

Following are suggested answers to the questions posed in this section.

1. Before healing the blind man in Mark 8, Jesus "led him out of the village" (Mark 8:23). After miraculously restoring the man's sight, Jesus tells him not to go back to the village (Mark 8:26). Why did Jesus say that? How does environment affect us in our lives of faith? How can our growth in virtue be helped or inhibited by a good or bad environment? Why are we often tempted to go back to our former ways of behaving, thinking, and speaking?

Jesus heals the blind man outside the city limits of Bethsaida and then tells him not to return, possibly because its pagan culture was a distraction from living out God's Law faithfully. As Dr. Gray explains, in a bad environment we can become blind to the ways of God.

An environment that can negatively impact our faith might encourage such things as overuse of technology or other material goods that distract us from God or prayer; engaging in friendships that encourage immoral actions; or engaging in conversations that are disparaging to faith or are focused on gossip.

An environment that can encourage us to grow in faith might encourage such things as regular prayer and reception of the sacraments; diligently working on our growth in particular virtues; balancing our use of technology with personal interaction; balancing our pursuit of material goods with serving the needs of others; engaging in friendships and conversations that are virtuous, conducive to faith, and respectful of people.

Former ways are familiar, easy, and comfortable, and so in difficult times we can be tempted to return to what is familiar. Also, our will is like a muscle in the sense that the more we choose what is good and true, the stronger our will becomes and the easier it is to choose goodness and truth. As we first turn away from various sins, our will is still weak, and this makes it seem easier to go back to former ways.

2. When Simon Peter boldly declares to Jesus, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God" (Matthew 16:16), what does he reveal about Jesus' identity and his mission? What do Jesus' words to Peter, "And I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my Church" (Matthew 16:18), reveal about Jesus' identity and his mission.

Peter's words "You are the Christ" reveal Jesus as the promised Messiah who would redeem God's people ("christ" is the Greek translation for the Hebrew word "messiah," which means "anointed one"). These words also proclaim Jesus as King, since in the Old Testament, kings were anointed by oil.

Peter's words "the Son of the living God" proclaim Jesus' divinity and articulate the contrast between the false pagan gods (for example, the worship of Caesar Augustus in the temple in Caesarea Philippi) and the one true God of Israel.

Jesus' words to Peter, "on this rock I will build my Church," reveal Jesus' identity as a new Solomon, and as a wise man who will build on rock.

Peter's words reveal Jesus' mission as Messiah and Son of God to redeem the world. Jesus' words reveal Jesus' mission as King and builder to establish his kingdom and build his Church.

3. What does Jesus' declaration to Peter, "And I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my Church," (Matthew 16:18), reveal about Peter's identity and his mission?

Jesus changes both Peter's first name and his surname: from Simon to Peter, and from bar John to bar Jona (Jonah).

The name Peter (Petros in Greek) reveals Peter's critical role in the building of Christ's Church. Peter is uniquely the "rock" upon which Jesus will build his Church, and against which the gates of hell will never prevail.

The name bar Jona (Jonah) reveals Peter will be as a son or disciple of Jonah, the full weight of which Dr. Gray will teach about in a future session.

As the Catechism of the Catholic Church explains, the act of revealing one's name is the same act as revealing one's own identity, and it makes a person become available to others in a very intimate and personal way (CCC 203).

4. Jesus poses his question, "But who do you say that I am?" (Matthew 16:15), not just to Peter, but to all the Apostles. How does this same question and our answer to it, reveal who we are (our identity) and what we do (our mission)? Do you consider your faith—and how you follow Jesus—an essential part of who you are? If so, how does this impact your life? What mission do you think Jesus is calling you to take on, individually and as a member of his Church?

Personal answers will vary. A couple thoughts to get started might include that if we are baptized and follow Jesus Christ, then we are Christians, literally "anointed ones." As followers of Jesus Christ, we are called to live according to his teaching and to share his gospel with others.

5. At Caesarea Philippi, Peter proclaimed Jesus as the Son of the living God. Peter's conviction about Jesus' identity would direct Peter's future decisions and actions. At the end of his life it would also determine how Peter would die at the hands of the Roman authorities. How does our conviction about Jesus' identity affect our behavior at work, in school, in our neighborhoods, or in our families? Does being identified as a Christian cause you difficulties in any of those arenas? If so, how? How do you respond to those difficulties?
- Personal answers will vary. Be prepared to share your own experiences.*



COMMIT

Following are suggested answers to questions in the daily COMMIT reflections.

COMMIT DAY 1 – JESUS HEALS THE BLIND MAN

Participants will reflect upon Jesus' healing of the blind man outside Bethsaida, and how certain environments can impact our relationship with God.

Does our environment or culture make a difference in how we live out the faith? How does your family, work, or school affect how you live out your Christian life, in positive and negative ways?

Personal responses from participants.

What warnings does Jesus give in the following verses?

Matthew 6:5 – *"And when you pray, you must not be like the hypocrites; for they love to stand and pray in the synagogues and at the street corners, that they may be seen by men..."*

Mark 8:15 – *"And he cautioned them, saying, 'Take heed, beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and the leaven of Herod.'"*

Mark 8:26 – *"He sent him away to his home, saying, 'Do not even enter the village.'"*

What can we do about the kinds of surroundings we can't escape—a negative workplace, a difficult home life, friendships that nudge us away from virtue and faith? Are there practical things we can do to hold on to our faith in these areas? Are there situations we can actively avoid within these places? How can we constructively change negative environments? Are we ever called by God to remove ourselves from environments that we consider essential to our education or livelihoods, even in a painfully sacrificial way?

Personal responses from participants.

What does God provide for his people when temptation comes?

1 Corinthians 10:13 – *"No temptation has overtaken you that is not common to man. God is faithful, and he will not let you be tempted beyond your strength, but with the temptation will also provide the way of escape, that you may be able to endure it."*

It is precisely when we are having difficulty leaving sin behind, or struggling with the temptation to return to sinful habits, that we need the encouragement of other Christians to remain faithful. What does Scripture tell us in the following verses?

Ecclesiastes 4:9-10 – *"Two are better than one, because they have a good reward for their toil. For if they fall, one will lift up his fellow; but woe to him who is alone when he falls and has not another to lift him up."*

Proverbs 27:17 – *"Iron sharpens iron, and one man sharpens another."*

1 Thessalonians 5:11 – *"Therefore encourage one another and build one another up, just as you are doing."*

Hebrews 3:13 – *"But exhort one another every day, as long as it is called 'today,' that none of you may be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin."*

Hebrews 10:24-25 – *"and let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another..."*



COMMIT DAY 2 – CAESAREA PHILIPPI

Participants will learn about the city of Caesarea Philippi and the imperial cult that was located there.

Look up the following passages and note in each passage: (1) What is the test put to God's people? (2) Who is being tested? and (3) What is the outcome of the test?

Daniel 3

Test: The Babylonian king, King Nebuchadnezzar, has erected a golden statue of himself and is requiring all his subjects to bow down and worship the golden statue of the king.

Who is tested: Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego; three youths from the people of Israel who were taken into exile and forced to serve in the Babylonian king's court (Daniel 1:4-5)

What is outcome: Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego refuse the king's command (Daniel 3:16-18) and are thrown into the fiery furnace, but God protects them such that they are unharmed by the flames.

Daniel 6

Test: King Darius is persuaded to issue an ordinance that no petition be made to any god or man except to himself, under threat of being cast into the lion's den (Daniel 6:6-10).

Who is tested: Daniel, a youth from the people of Israel who was taken into exile and forced to serve in the Babylonian king's court

What is outcome: Daniel is found praying to the God of Israel and is cast into the lion's den, but God sends an angel to shut the lions' mouths, and Daniel is unhurt. Additionally, King Darius sends a decree to all lands identifying the God of Israel as the living God.

2 Maccabees 6:18-31

Test: The Greek ruler has required the Jews to go against their law and eat pork.

Who is tested: Eleazar, a scribe of God's people

What is outcome: Eleazar refuses to forsake God's law and suffers death, leaving an example of nobility and courage.

In every age there are Christians who are called to lay down their lives for the faith. Where and how are Christians called to lay down their lives today?

A couple examples include these: In 2014, Christians in Iraq and Syria suffered martyrdom, in particular under the terrorist, self-proclaimed Islamic State (IS or ISIS). Christians in China are forced to practice their faith underground.



COMMIT DAY 3 – JESUS, SON OF THE LIVING GOD

Participants will practice Lectio Divina with Peter's profession of faith in Matthew 16.

Lectio

Where does this conversation take place? According to Dr. Gray's teaching, what was the significance of Caesarea Philippi as a backdrop for Jesus' questions?

This conversation takes place in Caesarea Philippi. Here, Herod the Great had a pagan temple dedicated to Caesar Augustus.

The Apostles respond to Jesus' first question by naming other men. Who are they? What do those men have in common? Why do you think these particular men are named?

The Apostles recount, "some say John the Baptist, others say Elijah, and others Jeremiah or one of the prophets" (Matthew 16:14). These men are all prophets of the Old Covenant. John the Baptist was recently martyred by Herod, so some may wonder if Jesus isn't John the Baptist returned. Elijah was a prophet who was taken up to heaven in a fiery chariot and was to return before the Messiah's coming, so some may wonder if Jesus isn't Elijah. Jeremiah prophesied against the Temple and how God's people had made it a den of thieves (see Jeremiah 7 and 26), and some, having heard similar preaching from Jesus, may wonder if Jeremiah has returned.

What phrase does Peter use to describe God in his response to Jesus? Note the use of this phrase in the following verses from the Old Testament: Jeremiah 10:1-10, Daniel 6:25-27 (in response to earlier edict in Daniel 6:6-9), Hosea 1:10. How does Paul use it in 2 Corinthians 6:16? How does this add meaning to Peter's use of the same phrase?

Jeremiah 10:10 – *"But the LORD is the true God; he is the living God and the everlasting King..."*

Daniel 6:27 – *"...the God of Daniel is to be revered and feared: 'For he is the living God..."*

Hosea 1:10 – *"...it shall be said to them, 'Sons of the living God..."*

2 Corinthians 6:16 – *"...For we are the temple of the living God..."*

In the Old Testament, God was described as the "living God" particularly in contrast to the gods of the pagan peoples around Israel, whose gods were made by men from wood and stone. In 2 Corinthians, Paul shows that it is the desire of the living God to make his dwelling place within each of us. Peter makes this same contrast between the pagan false worship of gods of stone (as is being done in Caesar Augustus' temple in Caesarea Philippi) and Jesus, simply with the use of the word "living."

Meditatio

As we've seen in this study, location can often give us insight into particular passages of Scripture. How might we understand Peter's response in light of the culture and buildings in nearby Caesarea Philippi? *This backdrop of the Caesarea Philippi's temple dedicated to Caesar Augustus adds emphasis to Peter's words that Jesus is the "Son of the living God" because the dead emperor was being worshipped in this area. Peter's point is that Jesus is just not a human man, like Caesar, but the living God.*

The Apostles recount that many think Jesus is just another prophet—a holy man that God may be speaking through, but still just a man. How does Peter's response indicate that Peter understands who Jesus truly is? *While Peter's words that Jesus is "the Christ," the Messiah, might leave open the idea that Jesus is just a human man, a new earthly king who will act as a temporal messiah to restore Israel's earthly kingdom, Peter follows "Christ" with "Son of the living God," which makes it clear that Jesus is not just a man, but the divine Son of God.*

What does this passage tell you about Martha's faith? How are all people throughout history asked to answer the question, "Who do you say that I am?" Take some time to reflect with Pope Francis: "What do we answer?" And pray for the grace to respond with a sincere heart.

Martha's response shows how her faith has grown from her earlier encounter with Jesus when she was "distracted with much serving" (see Luke 10:38-42) to where she is discussing resurrection and eternal life with Jesus and professing him as the Christ and Son of God.



COMMIT DAY 4 – PETER, THE ROCK

Participants will reflect on Peter's name change and what it means.

Scripture tells us that the man who would become the head of the Apostles was first known as Simon:

Luke 4:38 – *"And he arose and left the synagogue, and entered Simon's house..."*

Luke 6:14 – *"Simon, whom he named Peter, and Andrew his brother..."*

Mark 1:16 – *"And passing along by the Sea of Galilee, he saw Simon and Andrew the brother of Simon..."*

And his father's name was John:

John 1:42 – *"He brought him to Jesus. Jesus looked at him and said, 'So you are Simon the son of John? You shall be called Cephas' (which means Peter)."*

John 21:16 – *"...he said to him, 'Simon, son of John, do you love me?'"*

In the Old Testament story, name changes identified individuals who were to play key roles in God's plan of salvation. Whose names are changed in the following passages?

Abram changed to Abraham:

Genesis 17:5 – *"No longer shall your name be Abram, but your name shall be Abraham, for I have made you the father of a multitude of nations."*

Jacob changed to Israel:

Genesis 35:10 – *"And God said to him, 'Your name is Jacob; no longer shall your name be called Jacob, but Israel shall be your name.' So his name was called Israel."*

Look up the following passage. Who is compared to a "rock"?

Isaiah 51:1-2 – *"Hearken to me, you who pursue deliverance, you who seek the LORD; look to the rock from which you were hewn, and to the quarry from which you were digged. Look to Abraham your father and to Sarah who bore you; for when he was but one I called him, and I blessed him and made him many."*

Abraham (Sarah is also included in the reference; however the second verse's use of the singular masculine pronoun indicates that Abraham is the primary reference is referred to as rock.)

Look up Daniel 2:34-35 and 44-45. What happens to the statue, and what becomes of the rock (or stone) in this passage?

The rock is hewn from a mountain that represents Mt. Zion and the Old Covenant. This rock shatters the statue that represented the pagan kingdoms, and it represents the kingdom that the God of heaven will establish, which will fill the earth and never be destroyed—this is the Kingdom of God that Jesus is announcing and establishing.

In the Old Testament there was another builder, Solomon. Let's compare Solomon and Jesus. What does each of the following verses tell you about Solomon and Jesus?

Solomon	Jesus
1 Kings 1:32-33 — <i>son of King David</i>	Matthew 1:1 — <i>Son of David</i>
1 Kings 1:34 — <i>king</i>	Matthew 27:37 — <i>King</i>
1 Kings 3:10-12, 28 — <i>wise man</i>	Matthew 7:28-29 — <i>wisdom, authority</i>
1 Kings 6:1 — <i>builds house of the Lord (temple)</i>	Matthew 16:18 — <i>builds the Church</i>
2 Chronicles 3:1 — <i>built on rock of Mt. Moriah</i>	Matthew 16:18 — <i>built on rock of Peter</i>



COMMIT DAY 5 – TRUTH AND BEAUTY

Participants will reflect on Michelangelo's fresco of the prophet Jonah.

The Bible includes the books of seventeen different prophets. The ceiling of the Sistine Chapel pictures only seven prophets. Can you recall any prophecies of these seven prophets that justify their being counted among those pictured?

Zechariah – Zechariah 12:10 (they will “look on him whom they have pierced”)

Joel – Joel 2:28 (regarding future gift of the Holy Spirit—“I will pour out my spirit on all flesh”)

Isaiah – Isaiah 7:14 (regarding Virgin birth—“a young woman shall conceive and bear a son”)

Ezekiel – Ezekiel 37:26 (regarding New Covenant—“I will make a covenant of peace with them; it shall be an everlasting covenant with them”)

Daniel – Daniel 9:24 (regarding the time of the coming of the Messiah who will bring forgiveness of sin—“Seventy weeks are decreed for your people and for your holy city: Then transgression will stop and sin will end, guilt will be expiated”)

Jeremiah – Jeremiah 31:15 (regarding Herod's killing of the innocents in Bethlehem—“bitter weeping, Rachel is weeping for her children”)

Jonah – Jonah 1:17 (regarding Christ's resurrection—“Jonah was in the belly of the fish three days and three nights”)