

# Lesson 3

## Proper 16

### The Holy Gospel: Matthew 16:13–20

Caesarea Philippi, twenty-five miles north of the Sea of Galilee at the foot of Mount Hermon, was a resort city. It had been enlarged and beautified by Philip, a son of Herod the Great, who ruled the area by Rome's permission. He renamed the city "Caesarea of Philip" in honor of Tiberias Caesar. Jesus took His disciples there to get away, to focus on what lay ahead and prepare them for their calling as His apostles.

Jesus asked about the opinion of others as a way of focusing the disciples' minds on their own convictions. They said some thought of Him as John the Baptist. John was dead, beheaded by Herod Antipas. But because of Jesus' miracles, a superstitious notion held that John had returned from the dead and was working through Jesus. (See Mark 6:14–16.) Elijah—Malachi's prophecy about the Way-Preparer ends our Old Testament Scriptures and was well known. (See Malachi 4:5–6.) In the New Testament, John is identified as that Elijah, first by the angel announcing his coming and then by Jesus Himself. (See Luke 1:17; Matthew 11:11–14.) Jeremiah or one of the prophets—Jeremiah was considered one of the greatest prophets. Moses' words about God raising up a prophet like him may also have been behind this idea. (See Deuteronomy 18:15.)

In the Greek, *humeis*, "you," is the first word and makes Jesus' question very pointed: "You, what about you?" Peter spoke for the group, expressing the faith given to them by the Holy Spirit, and this truth which was revealed "by My Father in heaven" (v. 17). The Greek *Christ* and the Hebrew *Messiah* both mean "the anointed one." Anointing with perfumed olive oil set a person apart for a special task, like the anointing of young David, who later became king of Israel.

30. When did Jesus receive His anointing? (See Acts 10:37–38; Matthew 3:16.)

Jesus generally referred to Himself as "the Son of Man," a less commonly used messianic title. Peter went beyond titles to confess Jesus to be "the Son of the living God." He and the others evidently had absorbed Jesus' teaching about Himself and had accepted the testimony of His miracles. (See John 5:16–27; 14:11.)

In response, Jesus used the formal "Simon Bar-Jonah" ("son of Jonah"), marking the deep importance of the occasion.

31. Why did Jesus say that Peter was blessed to be able to answer as he had?

Jesus then used the nickname He had given Simon in a play on words by which the importance of Peter and his confession of Jesus would be seen in the scheme of things in the Lord's kingdom (and that of his fellow disciples). *Petros* means "rock." Roman Catholics cite this verse to contend

that the pope (“the successor of Peter”) is the vicar of Christ and the foundational authority of the Church. In the Greek text, however, *petra*, in the phrase “on this rock,” is feminine and cannot refer directly back to the masculine *Petros*.

32. On what was Jesus saying He would build His Church, if not the person of Peter?

33. Why will all the forces of hell never be able to overcome Christ’s Church?

Jesus then gave to Peter the Keys of the kingdom of heaven. This was a bestowal of formal authority to represent Jesus in pointed expressions of the Gospel. The same authority was later given to the Twelve and, on Easter Sunday, to all to whom Jesus appeared in the Upper Room. (See Matthew 18:18; John 20:22–23.)

34. What is suggested by Jesus speaking of Keys of the kingdom of heaven?

Freeing the repentant from their sins—“loosing,” “forgiving”—is the happy, primary function of the Church. “Binding” sins to the unrepentant is a necessary counterpart. This unhappy function underscores accountability to Christ, whose way is being rejected, and pointedly calls the unrepentant to repentance. It is not to be used arbitrarily but only as a needed judgment of evident sins of commission or omission on the part of church members—never in judgment of motives or attitudes.

35. How are the Keys of the Kingdom formally used in the life of the Church? How may they be used in private, personal interaction with those around us?

## **The Old Testament Lesson: Isaiah 51:1–6**

Four “songs” in Isaiah are identified as Servant Songs since they point to the messianic Servant who will fulfill God’s plan of salvation for His people: 42:1–9; 49:1–13; 50:4–11; and 52:13–53:12. The first two describe the Lord’s equipping of the Servant for His task; the third and fourth point to the Messiah as the Suffering Servant who gives Himself for the people. This lesson follows the third Servant Song.

36. History. Who is the “rock” from whom those who “pursue righteousness” and “seek the LORD” were cut and hewn? What did the prophet’s pointing to the fact that Abraham was only one when the Lord called him, but was made many, say to the exiles in Babylon and the remnant who returned to rebuild Jerusalem and its temple?

37. Creation. What did the prophet's picturing the desert becoming like the Garden of Eden say to the exiles and the remnant when Jerusalem was lying in ruins? What would be the result in the lives of God's people?

38. Eschatology. What was the prophet foretelling with "I will set My justice for a light to the peoples" and "the coastlands hope for Me, and for My arm they wait"? To what do "the heavens vanish like smoke," "the earth will wear out like a garment," and "they who dwell in it will die in like manner" point? What assurance is given in the face of these descriptions of the temporary nature of this world?

39. How does this Old Testament Lesson tie in with today's Holy Gospel?

### **The Epistle for the Day: Romans 11:33–12:8**

Paul had written in chapters 9–11 about the Church's inclusion of Jews and Gentiles. He had set forth God's choice of Israel as His chosen nation; Israel's unbelief regarding Jesus as the Christ; the believing Jews as the promised remnant; the Gentiles as engrafted branches on Israel's rootstock; and the salvation of all of Israel (believing Jews and believing Gentiles). This led Paul to swing into an exultant expression of praise to God for the mystery of His grace.

Paul exclaimed over "the depth of the \_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_ of God!"

40. How are "wisdom" and "knowledge" distinct from each other, and yet related?

41. Give examples of God's judgments (decisions) and paths that are beyond our searching and tracing out.

42. What progression may be seen in Paul's three Scripture-based questions? How do you answer these questions for yourself?

“From Him and through Him and to Him are all things.”

43. God will have that glory forever. How can you express it also here and now?

In the remaining chapters, Paul provided guidance in the ethics of Christian living and service. His “therefore” attached what was to follow to what he had already written.

44. Why did Paul urge the offering of our bodies and not just our hearts or spirits?

Paul called this *latreia*, the word used in the Greek translation of the Hebrew Old Testament for the sacrifices brought under the ceremonial law. The ceremonial law involved offering \_\_\_\_; in the New Testament, Paul called on Christians to offer \_\_\_\_.

45. “Conformed” deals with outward, evident involvement in a way of life; “transformed” calls for a change from inside out. What did Paul say will produce this transformation in us?

46. *Dokimazein*, “testing” and “discern,” refers to testing coins or metals to prove their genuineness. What does the apostle’s “by testing you may discern what is the will of God” tell us about the Christian’s ongoing transformation process?

47. Why is it important for Christians to have realistic and not exaggerated views of their importance as individuals in the life of the Church? What blessings and responsibilities are ours because we are intimately attached as members of Christ’s Body to other Christians? Why does the Lord bless different Christians with different gifts?

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*Almighty God, whom to know is everlasting life, grant us to know Your Son, Jesus, to be the way, the truth, and the life that we may boldly confess Him to be the Christ and steadfastly walk in the way that leads to life eternal; through the same Jesus Christ, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.*

### **The Holy Gospel: Matthew 16:13–20**

A paraphrase of this incident shows that people still can load their views of Jesus with philosophical freight: Jesus asked at a pastoral conference, “Who do the theologians say I am?” They responded, “Some say you are the Ground of Being, others the Wholly Other, still others the Uncaused Cause.” Jesus, answering, said, “Huuhhh???”

The *humeis* statement emphasizes that Jesus turns to each of us with His question in the same pointed way.

30. Jesus was not anointed with oil but with the Holy Spirit, who came to Him in special measure at the time of His Baptism to empower Him for His mission as representative man.

31. Peter’s conviction about Jesus was not a result of his own human theological thinking but a result of divine revelation. Faith is a gift of grace through the power of the Spirit. Remember Luther’s “I believe that I cannot by my own reason or strength . . .” (Small Catechism: Third Article), which echoes Paul’s words in 1 Corinthians 12:3 and Jesus’ words in John 6:44–45.

32. If Jesus spoke Aramaic to Peter, there was no gender distinction; the word is *cepha* in both instances. But it is Matthew’s Greek that provides us our inspired New Testament Scripture, and it clearly was written to prevent the interpretation that says Jesus would build His Church on the person of Peter. Jesus was pointing to Peter’s clear and explicit confession of faith—and finally to the One whom Peter was confessing as the Son of God, Jesus Himself—as the foundation of the Church. (See 1 Corinthians 3:10–11.)

33. “The gates of hell” refers to all the forces of evil that come through the gates of hell. The forces of hell will not overcome Christ’s Church because “the ruler of this world is judged” (John 16:11). The Creed’s “He descended into hell” is a statement of that victory of our Lord. It says that on rising from the dead, Christ went first to the very camp of the enemy to proclaim His victory (1 Peter 3:18–19).

34. Keys are used to unlock and to lock. It helps to think of a “right-hand key” as the Church’s proper function, opening heaven to the repentant, and a “left-hand key” as an adjunct function by which the Church puts evangelical pressure on unrepentant members. Both focus on a relationship with Jesus as the determining factor in life. (See John 3:16–18; 2 Corinthians 2:14–16.)

35. The Church loves to announce forgiveness to the repentant and makes this activity a formal part of its gathering for worship. The Church also has a responsibility to warn and to exhort

members caught in sins of commission or wandering carelessly from the fellowship of the Church. This is so important that Jesus carefully outlined the steps to be followed in this “church discipline.” (See Matthew 18:15–18.) Unfortunately, the left-hand key is seldom seriously used today, a situation that diminishes the impact of the right-hand key and encourages a “cheap grace” attitude in some. The left-hand key is to be used only in regard to evident sins.

All Christians use the Keys in their personal lives as they share the Word and Christ and forgive or admonish one another in His name. Parents, for example, may tell repentant children, “I forgive you, and Jesus forgives you too.”

## The Old Testament Lesson: Isaiah 51:1–6

36. The prophets frequently referred to the Lord Yahweh as Israel’s Rock. (See 26:4; 44:8.) This may be the case here too—reminding Israel of their roots in the Lord Himself as God’s chosen people. Isaiah’s usage here may refer instead to Abraham, however, for the thought is paralleled by “to Abraham your father and to Sarah who bore you.” To a nation discouraged by the Babylonian exile and the remnant’s prospect of rebuilding Jerusalem and the temple to their former glory, the reminder that Abraham was only one but became many in God’s plan for him said that though they were few and weak, the Lord could work out His will through them.

37. The wilderness being made like Eden and the desert like the garden of the Lord are familiar pictures of God’s blessing of His exiled people and the returning remnant. (See 41:118–19; 58:11.) The picture finds its ultimate fulfillment in the messianic kingdom. The result in the lives of God’s people would be that “joy and gladness will be found in her, thanksgiving and the voice of song.”

38. The prophet’s words point ahead to the New Testament era, in which God’s calling people to Himself and blessing them as His children extends to “the peoples” and includes those on the “coastlands.” This is climactically eschatological in that it prophesies the end of the age. (See 2 Peter 3:11–13.) The Lord’s assurance is this: “My salvation will be forever, and My righteousness will never be dismayed.”

39. This lesson points to the blessings to be brought by the Servant of the Lord. The Holy Gospel identifies Jesus as that promised Servant of the Lord.

## The Epistle for the Day: Romans 11:33–12:8

**Fill-in Answers:** Paul exclaimed over the “depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God!”

40. Knowledge is having information. Wisdom is knowing how to use that information. Wisdom is the needed extension if knowledge is to be useful, but knowledge is the base on which wisdom operates effectively. God is so rich in knowledge and wisdom, of course, that no one can plumb their depths.

41. Examples: the why and the how of God’s creation of all things; the why and the how of God’s creation of man in His own image; the why and the how of God’s determination to give man free will; the why and the how of His determination to reach out and rescue fallen mankind; the why and the how of the readiness of the One who knew no sin to become sin for us; the why and the how of God’s mysterious eternal election by grace of those who will be His own through faith in Christ; the why and the how of the Spirit’s power to turn hearts from rebellion to response through the Gospel; the why and the how of God’s choosing, calling, enlightening, and sanctifying me—and not some others—in Christ; the why and the how of God’s working in everything for the good of those who love Him, those who are called according to His purpose.

42. The progression: We do not know God’s mind or understand His will and ways. That being the case, we surely could never counsel or advise Him as to what He should will or do. In our limited understanding and wisdom (and in our sinfulness), we surely cannot give Him things or service by which we would obligate Him to us. We have to answer Paul’s questions: “We? No way! He is the infinite God; we are His finite creatures. We relate to Him only by faith, and we live in Him only because of His grace and mercy in Christ.”

43. Our praising, glorifying, and serving of God never make Him more glorious than He already is. Yet that is exactly what He wants us to do—for our benefit more than for His. God’s greatest glory is to be seen by us as our loving, forgiving Father through Jesus Christ. We underscore that glory when we “let God be God” and receive Him on the only basis by which we may receive Him—by grace alone—and give Him all the credit and glory in our relationship with Him. The best practical expression of glorifying God involves our public acknowledgment of Him as our Savior and worshiping Him as our Lord, as well as our sharing of the Good News of Jesus Christ by word and deed with those around us. (See 2 Corinthians 4:5–6.)

44. The Greek world’s philosophy of dualism said physical actions and activities did not really matter as long as one’s spirit was right. Paul, however, was asserting that God created, redeemed, and sanctifies the whole person: body, soul, and spirit. He is saying that spirit influences body and body affects spirit.

**Fill-in Answers:** Old Testament *latreia* involved offering dead animals; New Testament *latreia* requires Christians to offer our whole living selves.

45. Paul had offered motivation for transformation with his “by the mercies of God.” Here he said it will be effected through “the renewal of your mind.” (See Colossians 3:1–4.)

46. The process is experiential. By living in the will of God, we experience His truly beneficent nature.

47. God calls us to be no more and no less than He has gifted us to be. Arrogance has no place in the life of a Christian. We are to be content with the blessings we have received, but neither complacent nor boastful about how we use them to praise God and serve our neighbor. That sober evaluation and the attitude that results are needed in relationship with God and in our interactions with brothers and sisters in Christ. Blessings: we may count on the love, service, and forgiveness of others. Responsibilities: they can count on our love, service, and forgiveness. The variety in the Spirit’s gifts to individual Christians provides for all the needs of the Christian community in God’s gracious plan. (See 1 Corinthians 12:14–27.)