



August 23, 2026 | *High Points and Low Points* | Pastor Eddie Eddy

Matthew 16:13-20 New International Version

¹³ When Jesus came to the region of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, “Who do people say the Son of Man is?” ¹⁴ They replied, “Some say John the Baptist; others say Elijah; and still others, Jeremiah or one of the prophets.” ¹⁵ “But what about you?” he asked. “Who do you say I am?” ¹⁶ Simon Peter answered, “You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God.” ¹⁷ Jesus replied, “Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah, for this was not revealed to you by flesh and blood, but by my Father in heaven. ¹⁸ And I tell you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not overcome it. ¹⁹ I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven; whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven.” ²⁰ Then he ordered his disciples not to tell anyone that he was the Messiah.

L: This is the word of God for the people of God. P: Thanks be to God.

“High Points and Low Points”

After hearing today’s Gospel lesson, I want to start with a simple question: **What are some of the high points of being part of this church?**

When you think about Back Roads Church, what comes to mind? I hope worship is one of those things. There is something special about God’s people gathering every week. We come from different towns, different backgrounds, and different stages of life, but God brings us together as a family. We sing together, pray together, laugh together, sometimes cry together, celebrate victories, and carry one another’s burdens. It reminds us that we don’t have to walk through life alone.

But some of the greatest moments of **being** the church don’t happen inside these four walls. They happen after we leave them.

Think about our mission trips. Adults and youth leave the comfort of home to serve people they may have never met. They work, sweat, worship, and laugh together. Houses get repaired and projects get completed, but usually the greatest construction project is what God builds inside the people who went.

Think about our Summer Food Program, where handing a child a meal says, “You matter to God, and you matter to us.” Or Feed My Starving Children, where we stand shoulder to shoulder packing meals for children on the other side of the world whose names we will never know—but God knows every one of them.

Then there’s the food pantry, VBS, growth groups, waffle and pancake suppers, community meals, and everything else we do. We are Methodists, aren’t we? So much of what we do involves feeding people—**physically and spiritually**.

Those are the **high points** of being the church. They remind us that church isn’t just somewhere we go. **It’s something we become.**

But we don’t get to stay on the mountaintop. Every church experiences low points too.

Sometimes it’s a difficult conversation about finances because ministry costs money. Sometimes we pour ourselves into something and hardly anyone shows up. We invite someone to church and they say no. We pray for healing and the diagnosis doesn’t change. We work hard and wonder if any of it is really making a difference.

And then there are the burdens we carry into the church from outside these walls. Every Sunday, people sit in these pews carrying things nobody else knows about. Grief. Test results. Marriage problems. Financial struggles. Worries about children and grandchildren. Some people are smiling on the outside while quietly falling apart on the inside.

Those are the **low points**.

And somewhere between those high points and low points, we may find ourselves asking: **Does what we’re doing really matter? Can one church really make a difference? Can a handful of people scattered through little communities along the back roads of southwest Wisconsin actually impact the Kingdom of God?**

I believe today’s Scripture answers that question with a resounding **yes**.

SHORT PAUSE

But before Peter makes one of the greatest confessions of faith found anywhere in the Bible...before Jesus says those famous words, "Upon this rock I will build My Church"...we need to understand something.

Jesus Himself knew exactly what it felt like to experience both the high points and the low points of ministry.

We often picture Jesus moving from one miracle to the next, surrounded by cheering crowds and grateful people. But Matthew gives us a much more honest picture. Just before today's Scripture, Jesus has experienced one disappointment after another.

To really understand what happens at Caesarea Philippi, we have to back up just a few verses.

PAUSE

Earlier I read the second half of chapter 16 of Matthew for you. To give a little more background, I want to read the first half: So hear this:

16 The Pharisees and Sadducees came to Jesus and tested him by asking him to show them a sign from heaven.

2 He replied, "When evening comes, you say, 'It will be fair weather, for the sky is red,' 3 and in the morning, 'Today it will be stormy, for the sky is red and overcast.' You know how to interpret the appearance of the sky, but you cannot interpret the signs of the times. 4 A wicked and adulterous generation looks for a sign, but none will be given it except the sign of Jonah." Jesus then left them and went away.

5 When they went across the lake, the disciples forgot to take bread. 6 "Be careful," Jesus said to them. "Be on your guard against the yeast of the Pharisees and Sadducees."

7 They discussed this among themselves and said, "It is because we didn't bring any bread."

8 Aware of their discussion, Jesus asked, "You of little faith, why are you talking among yourselves about having no bread? 9 Do you still not understand? Don't you remember the five loaves for the five thousand, and how many basketfuls you gathered? 10 Or the seven loaves for the four thousand, and how many basketfuls you gathered? 11 How is it you don't understand that I was not talking to you about bread? But be on your guard against the yeast of the Pharisees and Sadducees." 12 Then they understood that he was not telling them to guard against the yeast used in bread, but against the **teaching** of the Pharisees and Sadducees.

PAUSE

As our Bible passage opens, Jesus is experiencing some serious low points. The skeptical religious leaders have come to Jesus... just to test him. They have come demanding some kind of a convincing sign from heaven. Jesus shares his disappointment with them. He points out that the leaders can read the signs of the weather with no problem...but they lack the wisdom to discern spiritual things.

They can watch the sky and know when the next day will be clear... and then in the morning, they can tell that a day will be stormy. But they still can't figure out the spiritual forecast that looms for them. They're blind to the significance of Jesus, the Messiah, who walks right there...among them. So...they demand something from him...**They want a sign.**

Instead of giving them what they think they want...Jesus kind of tells them off and he leaves them. The very people who teach about the coming of the awaited Messiah...the ones who feel they have control over all the information that the faithful followers are supposed to receive...you would think that they would have understood who Jesus was, but they wouldn't. And for Jesus...this was a spiritual **low point**.

Pause

It doesn't stop there either. When Jesus and the disciples reach the other side of the Sea of Galilee, the disciples missed the point of Jesus' teaching too. When they get there...they checked their lunch boxes and realize that they haven't brought any bread for the journey...and Jesus uses that opportunity to adjust their attitudes again and warn them about **bad theology**.

Now I don't know if their blood sugar was low or what ...but they think he's talking about actual bread. The stuff they eat. They were oblivious to his metaphorical message about how it's the **bad yeast** that spoils the whole batch of dough. You see...Jesus was warning them about bad spirituality, bad theology creeping into their souls through self-serving religious leaders. And when they hear this lesson...I picture them as though they are looking at Jesus like a deer in the headlights.

SP

So first...the religious leaders, the ones who thought they had all the answers...the ones who should have been the first to recognize Jesus's significance, they don't see him for who he is. And then...His own disciples, the ones who have walked, talked, ate, and camped with him all along...they don't understand his teaching either.

I'm not sure what you think...but should we be surprised that Jesus is feeling a little frustrated. He has experienced not 1...but 2 spiritual low points with these people.

PAUSE

All of that brings us to the gates of Caesarea Philippi. Jesus enters the town and decides to take a poll and find out where he stands in the court of public opinion. Afterall...if the religious leaders have no clue why he is there...does anyone? So, Jesus wants to know what the "word on the street" is about him.

The answers that the disciples gathered from the straw poll are diverse...but the results are basically a **high point**. Some say he is John the Baptist...others think he may be one of the beloved prophets. While these options are not true...the opinions reveal that the people know that God is involved somehow. They think that maybe...maybe God has brought someone back from the dead. The **high point** of the poll is...the people believe that God is doing something new, even if they don't really understand **who** Jesus is yet.

PAUSE

When it comes to the disciple's answer of who Jesus is...it's Peter who gives the A+ answer. "You are the Messiah, the Son of the Living God." The term "Messiah" is a loaded word though. To the Jews of Jesus's time, it meant "the Anointed One," a **king** from the line of David.

But to Christians today, we understand it to mean that Jesus is part of the Trinity, God in human flesh. Jesus is a prophet, but he's more than **just** a prophet. In Jesus, God conquered the power of sin and death. Jesus went before us into resurrection. Jesus is the one who will come in glory as king and judge. Jesus is the bridegroom who will celebrate with us in God's new age. For us...**that is** the most important **high point** of being part of the church.

PAUSE

In words that appear only in Matthew's version of this story, Jesus then instills authority and responsibility on Peter. Jesus says he will build the church on Peter, the rock, the one who saw Jesus with God-given insight.

And here's the thing...Those who see Jesus with the God Given insight that Peter did...share that same authority and responsibility.

Jesus used some very poetic and symbolic language here. He said," I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven." I'm not 100% sure what that phrase actually means, But I would assume that if we are heirs to the kingdom, in a sense, Jesus has handed the work off to Peter and then to us.

PAUSE

Friends...We can safely say this much: the ministry work we do here...is a **high point** in the kingdom. It makes an eternal difference. When we share the gospel, when a Sunday School lesson connects, when the music warms a heart, when someone sits prays with a family that visited the food pantry, when a child...like my own granddaughters did after VBS...makes sure they didn't go to bed without praying for the first time in their lives...that impact is a **high point** in the kingdom.

Sometimes to experience those high points though...we have to endure some low points. We have to have hard conversations, we have to give up control, we have to identify a different purpose that God is calling us to take.

We also have to be willing to march boldly into the uncomfortable spaces in our communities. We have to touch the hearts of those trapped in **low points** in their lives. If we don't...we can't say that our earthly ministry has heavenly consequences. When we fight for justice, when we combat poverty and hunger, when we do any ministry that confronts racism, sexism, ageism, anyism...we identify a high point in the kingdom.

Hearing these words from Matthew can keep us going in the tough times of being the church. When we have to scrape together the budget, when we face conflict, when we try a ministry, but it doesn't succeed, we can draw strength from knowing that Jesus established the church and gave the "keys of the kingdom" to Peter, a man who understood **low points** in life.

Jesus' words here cause us to celebrate with even more joy when our ministries go well. When a mission trip accomplishes its goals, when a visitor becomes a member and their faith leads them toward service and sacrifice, when a child grows up to take their place in the congregation, when we see the fruit of our fundraising beyond just the dollars and cents...then we can take heart that our ministry stretches up into the heavenly realm.

We have the keys to the kingdom of heaven. What we bind on earth or loose on earth will be bound or loosened in heaven. No ministry goes unnoticed. Everything we do makes a difference. Thanks be to God for the high points and the low points of ministry.

To God be the glory, Amen.